

Key Stage 1 Teachers' Preparedness in Handling Learners with Special Educational Needs

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has emerged as a global priority, emphasizing equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN). In the Philippines, national policies such as Republic Act 11650 and DepEd Orders 44 and 23 underscore the commitment to inclusive practices. However, the implementation remains challenging, particularly among Key Stage 1 (K1) teachers. This study aimed to assess the level of preparedness of K1 public school teachers in handling learners with special needs in Tagbilaran City Schools Division, Bohol Province, for the school year 2024–2025. Employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, quantitative data were gathered through a validated survey questionnaire, while qualitative insights were obtained via reflexive thematic analysis of interviews. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated a generally positive attitude and moderate skills toward inclusive education but exhibited gaps in knowledge, particularly regarding the use of assistive technologies and individualized education planning. No significant differences were found in preparedness levels across demographic variables such as age, specialization, service length, and educational attainment. Challenges identified included limited training, behavioral management difficulties, resource scarcity, balancing class demands, and inconsistent institutional support. The study concludes that while K1 teachers are motivated, systemic gaps hinder full inclusive practice. An action plan focusing on continuous training, resource enhancement, peer mentoring, and stronger administrative support is proposed to address these challenges. The findings contribute to strengthening inclusive education initiatives, offering policy and practice recommendations applicable to similar urban Philippine contexts and beyond.

Keywords: Special Education, Key Stage 1, Teachers, Preparedness, Learners with Special Educational Needs, Mixed-Methods Research, Tagbilaran City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a global movement aimed at providing equitable learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, socio-economic status, or cultural background. It emphasizes creating an environment where every learner feels valued and supported in achieving their full potential. Central to this vision is the preparedness of teachers, as their ability to adapt instructional methods and classroom management practices to accommodate diverse needs determines the success of inclusive education. Teachers must implement differentiated strategies, effectively balancing the academic and developmental needs of all learners (Sardar & Deb, 2023).

Meanwhile, in the Philippines inclusive education has been enshrined in national policies such as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (RA 10533) and the DepEd's Inclusive Education Policy Framework. These policies mandate schools to provide inclusive learning environments where all students, including those with special needs, have access to quality education. However, despite these efforts, many Filipino teachers face challenges in implementing inclusive practices due to limited training, inadequate resources, and insufficient infrastructure. Studies highlight the need for targeted professional development programs and systemic support to empower teachers in managing the complexities of inclusive classrooms (Taylor et al., 2016).

In the province of Bohol, inclusive education initiatives have gained traction, but several barriers remain, particularly in terms of teacher preparedness. The implementation of inclusive policies varies across schools, with many teachers lacking the necessary skills and resources to address the diverse needs of their students effectively. Infrastructure tailored to learners with disabilities is often lacking, further complicating the delivery of inclusive education. Also, while some training programs exist, they are often insufficient in equipping educators to navigate the challenges posed by inclusive classrooms (Ainley & Carstens, 2018).

In Tagbilaran City, the capital of Bohol, these challenges are particularly pronounced in Key Stage 1 (K1) classrooms. As the foundational stage of learning, K1 plays a critical role in shaping the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young learners. Teachers at this level are tasked with cultivating essential literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills while addressing the unique developmental needs of their students. However, in the context of inclusive education, K1 teachers in Tagbilaran City often struggle with limited access to specialized training, inadequate classroom resources, and the absence of sufficient support systems. These gaps hinder their ability to deliver high-quality instruction to a diverse student population, particularly learners with special needs (Sardar & Deb, 2023).

Along this line, this study aims to examine the challenges faced by Key Stage 1 Teachers in the Tagbilaran City Schools Division, focusing on their preparedness for inclusive education. Specifically, it seeks to identify gaps in training, resources, and facilities while proposing evidence-based recommendations to enhance teachers' capacity to manage diverse learner populations effectively. By addressing these issues, the research aspires to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and supportive educational system in Tagbilaran City, ultimately laying the groundwork for lifelong learning among all young learners.

Legal Basis

This study is also anchored on legal bases such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Goal 4, Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), Republic Act No. 11650 (Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education), DepEd Order 44, s. 2021 (Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program), DepEd Order 23, s. 2022 (Child Find Policy for Learners with Disabilities Towards Inclusive Education).

Notably, Inclusive Education (IE) in the Philippines is anchored in both global commitments and national legal frameworks aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners. The country aligns its policies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable education, and Target 4.5, which focuses on eliminating educational disparities for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. This commitment is reinforced by the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which mandates the state to provide accessible quality education for all and encourages alternative learning systems for diverse learners. These provisions establish a robust foundation for inclusive education as both a right and a priority in the national education agenda.

Complementing these constitutional directives, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533), known as the K-12 Law, integrates inclusivity into the basic education curriculum by making it learner-centered and adaptive to varied needs. Other key legislations, such as the Child and Youth Welfare Code (Presidential Decree No. 603) and the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act (Republic Act No. 7610), emphasize creating safe, supportive, and inclusive educational environments. The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (Republic Act No. 7277, amended by Republic Act No. 9442), explicitly protects the rights of persons with disabilities, mandating their integration into mainstream educational settings, thereby solidifying the country's commitment to inclusive education as a right rather than a privilege.

Republic Act No. 11650: Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education. This law was enacted on March 11, 2022, which establishes a comprehensive framework for inclusive education in the Philippines. It aims to protect the rights of learners with disabilities

by ensuring their access to equitable and quality education. The Act also promotes the creation of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers (ILRCs) nationwide to address the diverse needs of these learners.

RA 11650 outlines the State's commitment to providing free and appropriate public early and basic education to learners with disabilities. It mandates the establishment of ILRCs in every municipality and city, which will offer specialized services, including educational assessments, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and teacher training. The Act incorporates the "whole-of-community" approach, fostering collaboration among schools, families, and other stakeholders to ensure inclusion. It aligns with international conventions like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, emphasizing reasonable accommodations, accessibility, and health services to aid learners in their development. Moreover, the law calls for partnerships between the public and private sectors, incentivizing private entities to support inclusive education initiatives. It also requires the DepEd, DOH, DSWD, and other agencies to provide necessary resources, training, and facilities to ensure effective implementation.

Moreover, under DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, the Department of Education in the Philippines emphasizes the importance of teacher preparation in the successful implementation of inclusive education for learners with disabilities. The order mandates that teachers undergo regular training to equip them with the skills needed to adapt teaching strategies, manage inclusive classrooms, and address the diverse needs of students with disabilities. These capacity-building initiatives focus on practical approaches, such as crafting and implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which are tailored to meet the specific developmental and educational requirements of each learner.

To further support teachers, the policy encourages collaboration with Special Education (SPED) specialists and access to resources that enhance instructional delivery. These partnerships ensure that teachers can provide personalized interventions effectively.

Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 23, s. 2022, known as the "Child Find Policy for Learners with Disabilities Towards Inclusive Education," outlines the Department of Education's commitment to identifying, locating, and evaluating learners with disabilities (LWDs) to ensure their inclusion in the general education system. This policy aligns with the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533) and international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It mandates schools to implement activities such as awareness campaigns, screening, and referrals while collaborating with local government units, health agencies, and non-government organizations.

The policy also emphasizes the use of the Multi-Factored Assessment Tool (MFAT) to identify developmental delays and ensure appropriate educational placement. Furthermore, it upholds the principles of data privacy and modifies previous DepEd issuances to reinforce inclusive education.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are established to ensure effective implementation, reflecting the government's commitment to equitable access to quality education for all learners.

Moreover, the preparedness of Key Stage 1 teachers in handling learners with special educational needs (SEN) is a crucial issue that encompasses various dimensions of teacher training, attitudes, and systemic support. The literature indicates that teacher preparedness is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education practices.

This preparedness is not merely about having the right knowledge but also involves the development of positive attitudes and self-efficacy in dealing with diverse learners.

Research has shown that pre-service teacher training significantly influences teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Qandhi and Kurniawati highlight that training experiences can enhance pre-service teachers' positive attitudes while simultaneously reducing anxiety when interacting with children with special needs (Qandhi & Kurniawati, 2019). This is echoed by Zainalabidin and Ma'Rof, who argue that teachers' readiness to teach in inclusive settings is a critical factor in the success of inclusive education programs (Zainalabidin & Ma'rof, 2021).

The alignment of teacher training with inclusive education principles is essential, as it fosters an environment where teachers feel equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Moreover, the transition of children with special needs into primary school settings presents unique challenges that teachers must navigate. Hacıbrahimoğlu and Kargın emphasize the importance of teachers' education and experience in facilitating this transition, noting that a teacher's perspective on disabilities significantly impacts the support provided to these learners (Hacıbrahimoğlu & Kargın, 2017). This perspective is crucial for creating an inclusive classroom environment where all students can thrive.

The role of continuous professional development cannot be overstated. Desutter and Lemire argue that ongoing training for teachers is vital in promoting effective teaching strategies for students with SEN (DeSutter & LeMire, 2016). This is supported by findings from Knackstedt et al., who suggest that practical experiences in teacher preparation programs are more effective than traditional lecture-based models in fostering teacher efficacy in special education (Knackstedt et al., 2017). The emphasis on hands-on training prepares teachers not only to understand theoretical concepts but also to apply them in real-world classroom settings.

In addition to training, teachers' self-efficacy plays a significant role in their preparedness to handle learners with SEN. Research by Dunst and Bruder indicates that teachers' beliefs in their capabilities directly influence their approach to inclusive practices (Dunst & Bruder, 2013). This self-efficacy can be bolstered through targeted training that focuses on specific strategies for teaching students with diverse needs, thereby enhancing teachers' confidence and effectiveness in the classroom.

The systemic support available to teachers is another critical factor influencing their preparedness. For instance, the implementation of inclusive education policies requires that teachers receive adequate resources and support from their schools. Mlollele's study highlights the necessity of institutional backing in facilitating the inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms (Mlollele, 2023).

Without such support, even the most well-prepared teachers may struggle to implement effective inclusive practices.

Furthermore, the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion are shaped by their educational background and experiences. Research by Mucherah indicates that teachers who have undergone specialized training in special education demonstrate more positive attitudes towards inclusive practices (Mucherah, 2024). However, it is also noted that some teachers may develop negative attitudes despite having received training, suggesting that the quality and relevance of the training are paramount (Frumos, 2018).

The integration of assistive technology in teacher preparation programs is another area that warrants attention. Hau and Rashid discuss the importance of equipping teachers with knowledge about occupational therapy and assistive technologies, which are essential for supporting students with special needs (Hau & Rashid, 2023). This integration not only enhances teachers' preparedness but also ensures that they can effectively utilize available resources to aid their students' learning.

Moreover, the need for collaboration among educators is emphasized in the literature. Walker et al. argue that successful inclusive education relies on the collaboration between special education and general education teachers (Walker et al., 2022). This collaboration fosters a shared understanding of students' needs and promotes a cohesive approach to teaching, which is vital for the success of inclusive practices.

Interestingly, the challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education are complex. Research by Mugweru et al. (2022) highlights that many teachers report feeling unprepared to effectively teach students with various disabilities, indicating a gap in both training and support. This lack of preparedness can lead to feelings of frustration and inadequacy, which may ultimately affect the quality of education provided to students with SEN.

Despite the global and national efforts to promote inclusive education, significant gaps persist in the readiness of Key Stage 1 (K1) teachers within the Tagbilaran City Division to handle learners with special educational

needs (SEN). Research highlights that teacher preparedness is a multifaceted issue encompassing training, attitudes, self-efficacy, and systemic support. However, there is limited exploration of how these factors interplay in local contexts, particularly in urban Philippine schools where inclusive education policies are mandated but often lack robust implementation.

The final synthesis integrates the study's key variables, theoretical foundations, related literature, and legal frameworks to emphasize the multifaceted nature of teacher preparedness in inclusive education. Anchored in critical disability theory, ecological systems theory, and sociocultural theory, the study underscores how social constructs of disability, multi-layered environmental influences, and interactive learning processes collectively shape the effectiveness of inclusion in public schools. These theories provide a robust lens through which the complex interactions among teachers' knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, and systemic support are understood.

The legal mandates, including the Philippine Constitution, RA 10533 (K-12 Law), RA 11650, and DepEd Orders Nos. 44 and 23, establish a strong policy environment that advocates for the rights of learners with disabilities and mandates teacher capacity-building, resource allocation, and systemic collaboration. Related literature corroborates that teacher preparedness extends beyond theoretical understanding to encompass positive dispositions, confidence, continuous professional development, and cooperative teaching models. Despite this, persistent gaps remain in the effective translation of these elements into classroom practice, particularly for Key Stage 1 teachers in the Tagbilaran City Division.

Together, these integrated perspectives highlight that successful inclusion is contingent on dismantling social and institutional barriers, fostering enriched social interactions to support diverse learners, and enabling teachers through comprehensive training and systemic backing. The study's focus on teacher readiness in this specific local context addresses important research and practice gaps, offering evidence-based insights to bridge theory, policy, and implementation. Ultimately, this integration affirms that advancing inclusive education requires a holistic and legally supported framework that empowers teachers and nurtures equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Significance of the Study

The study's aim is to determine the level of preparedness of Key Stage 1 Public School Teachers in handling learners with special needs in Tagbilaran City School Division, Bohol Province, for school year 2024-2025. The results of this research could be beneficial for school administrators, teachers, parents, learners, researcher and future researchers.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the level of preparedness of Key Stage 1 Public School Teachers in handling learners with special needs in Tagbilaran City Schools Division, Bohol Province, for school year 2024-2025 as basis for a proposed action plan.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' profile in terms of:
 - 1.1 age and gender;
 - 1.2 area of specialization;
 - 1.3 length of service;
 - 1.4 highest educational attainment, and
 - 1.5 trainings and seminars attended in inclusive education?

2. What is the respondents' level of preparedness in handling learners with special needs in terms of:
 - 2.1 knowledge;
 - 2.2 attitude;
 - 2.3 skills?
3. Is there a significant difference in the respondents' level of preparedness in handling learners with special needs when grouped according to the identified profile?
4. What are the perceived challenges of the respondents in handling learners with special needs?
5. Based on the findings of the study, what action plan may be proposed?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research design, the study flow, research environment, respondents, research instrument, data gathering procedure, statistical treatment, and scoring procedure that will help achieve the objectives of the study.

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed methods design to evaluate the preparedness of Key Stage 1 public school teachers in handling learners with special needs. In this design, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently but analyzed independently (Katz-Buonincontro, 2024). The quantitative aspect of the study focused on gathering numerical data related to respondents' demographic profiles, their levels of preparedness, and any statistically significant differences among groups.

Meanwhile, the qualitative component aimed to explore the challenges and experiences of teachers in managing learners with special needs through in-depth interviews. This dual approach provided a broader perspective on teacher preparedness, capturing not only measurable trends but also contextual insights.

The convergent parallel design is especially effective in educational research where an understanding of a complex issue such as inclusive education is essential. According to Creswell's framework, this design allows researchers to explore a research problem through two distinct yet complementary lenses: statistical measurement and lived experience (Oliveira et al., 2018; Charli et al., 2022). The independence of data analysis in each strand ensures the integrity of findings, which are then brought together during the interpretation phase. This integration facilitates a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the research question than either method alone could offer (Adhikari & Timsina, 2024).

During the integration phase, the researcher compares and contrasts the two sets of results to identify areas of convergence (where findings support each other), divergence (where they differ), and complementarity (where they add depth to one another). This triangulation strengthens the validity of the conclusions drawn and enhances the utility of the research for policy and practice. Studies employing this design have demonstrated its value in education and health sciences, where both numerical evidence and narrative insights are essential for decision-making (Demir & Pismek, 2018).

Environment

The study was conducted at Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School, located in the Division of Tagbilaran City in Bohol Province. Officially established in the 1920s, the school held its first graduation in March 1940. With a total land area of 14,894.4 square meters, it operates as a complete elementary school from Kindergarten to Grade Six and is identified by School ID 118713. Strategically situated, the school is bounded by M. Torralba Street on the west, F. Rocha Street on the east, Espuelas Street on the north, and B. Inting Street on the south. It primarily serves school-aged children from Poblacion 1, 2, and 3 of Tagbilaran City, but

due to its accessible location, it also accommodates learners from neighboring barangays and towns whose parents are employed in nearby commercial establishments such as Shoppers, Alturas Mall, and BQ Mall.

At present, Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School implements not only the regular K-12 Basic Education Curriculum but also offers the Madrasah Program, the Special Program in Science, and the recently added Special Program in Journalism. The school was purposefully chosen as the primary locale of this study due to its active implementation of inclusive education policies and its notable enrollment of learners with special educational needs (SEN), as indicated in the most recent statistical data from the City Division Office. The presence of a significant number of SEN learners, along with the proximity of the Tagbilaran City SPED Center, provided a rich and relevant context for examining the preparedness of Key Stage 1 teachers.

Moreover, the school's diverse teaching environment, varied instructional practices, and available support systems offered valuable insights into the realities and challenges of inclusive education within an urban public school setting. This selection ensured that the study would yield meaningful findings grounded in actual classroom experiences and reflective of the current state of inclusive education in the division.

Respondents

The participants of this study comprised a total of 32 Key Stage 1 (Grade 1 to Grade 3) public school teachers from Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School. For both the quantitative and qualitative strands, participants were purposively selected based on predefined inclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and meaningfulness of the data collected. The selection criteria required that participants be currently teaching at the Key Stage 1 level, have at least one year of experience handling learners with special educational needs, and have attended at least one seminar or training session related to inclusive education.

All participants provided informed consent, signifying their voluntary participation in the study. This purposive sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of individuals with appropriate qualifications and direct experience in inclusive classroom settings. As a result, the study was able to generate both statistically valid data and rich, contextually grounded insights into teacher preparedness in implementing inclusive education.

Instrument

The primary data collection tool employed in this study was a structured survey-questionnaire, which was patterned after the works of Razalli et al. (2021) on the preparedness of special education teachers in inclusive education and Ecoben (2019) on the readiness of public-school teachers for inclusive education. To establish its suitability for the intended respondents, the instrument underwent pilot testing and validation by experts in the field of inclusive education, after which revisions were made to enhance clarity, reliability, and overall appropriateness.

The questionnaire was composed of three major sections. The first section elicited the **profile of the respondents**, covering their demographic and professional characteristics such as age, gender, area of specialization, length of service in teaching, highest educational attainment, and participation in seminars or trainings related to inclusive education. This portion was designed to contextualize the background of the respondents and to allow subsequent analysis of preparedness levels across subgroups.

The second section measured the **level of preparedness in handling learners with special educational needs** across the domains of knowledge, attitude, and skills. Respondents were asked to evaluate themselves using a five-point Likert scale with the following descriptors: 5 – Always (Highly Prepared), 4 – Often (Prepared), 3 – Sometimes (Moderately Prepared), 2 – Rarely (Less Prepared), and 1 – Never (Not Prepared). The items in this part were designed to capture the extent of teachers' familiarity with inclusive education programs and policies, their attitudes toward inclusion and collaboration, as well as their ability to apply practical strategies such as developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and employing differentiated instruction.

The third section consisted of a **semi-structured interview guide** that sought to probe more deeply into the perceived challenges encountered by teachers in handling learners with special needs. Questions in this section focused on respondents' general experiences, specific instructional and behavioral management difficulties,

adequacy of available support and resources, training and professional preparation, and the emotional and professional impact of working with learners requiring special education services. Probing and follow-up questions were also integrated to allow participants to illustrate their responses through concrete examples and reflections.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study employed three stages in the data gathering procedure to answer the sub-problems.

Pre-Data Gathering Stage. The pre-data gathering stage was devoted to ensuring compliance with institutional requirements and ethical research standards. Formal permission was sought and secured from the Division Superintendent and school principals in the Tagbilaran City Schools Division to establish the legitimacy of the study. Ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for autonomy guided the preparation of all research activities. For the quantitative strand, survey-questionnaires were designed and prepared for distribution to 32 Key Stage 1 teachers. Each prospective participant received an informed consent form, which explicitly described the objectives of the study, the procedures involved, and the rights of respondents, including the option to withdraw from the study without penalty. For the qualitative strand, purposive sampling criteria were established to identify five teachers with substantial experience in handling learners with special needs. These measures ensured that transparency, respect, and participant protection were prioritized before the actual conduct of the study.

Data Gathering Stage. The actual data gathering process was carefully managed to maintain accuracy, confidentiality, and ethical integrity. In the quantitative strand, the survey-questionnaires were distributed both in printed and digital formats to maximize accessibility. Clear instructions were provided, and responses were checked for completeness to ensure reliability of data. Participants' anonymity was strictly observed, with data securely handled and stored. For the qualitative strand, in-depth interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on the preference and convenience of the participants. Prior to the commencement of each interview, explicit consent was obtained for the use of audio recordings to enhance the accuracy of data capture. Throughout the interview process, neutrality and respect were consistently upheld to create a safe environment that encouraged openness and honesty in responses.

Post-Data Gathering Stage. Following the data collection, careful attention was given to data integrity, confidentiality, and responsible reporting. The completed quantitative survey responses were verified, coded, and systematically encoded into statistical software for subsequent analysis. For the qualitative strand, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, anonymized to protect participants' identities, and prepared for reflexive thematic analysis. Each dataset was analyzed separately before being integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the research problem. At all times, the principles of autonomy, respect, and ethical responsibility were maintained. The reporting of findings was carried out with due regard to accuracy, transparency, and research credibility, thereby ensuring that the study adhered to the highest standards of scholarly integrity.

Statistical Treatment

The gathered data from the survey and interview responses were organized and tabulated in a master data sheet. Assistance from a statistician was sought to analyze the results using appropriate statistical tools. The following statistical tools was utilized such as frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Post-hoc Analysis, reflexive thematic analysis.

Ethical Consideration

To ensure the ethical integrity of the study, participants' consent were obtained prior to data collection. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any point without any repercussions. All responses were treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity, and personal identifiers will not be recorded or shared in any part of the report.

The study adhered to data privacy laws and principles, including secure storage of data to prevent unauthorized access. Only authorized personnel were allowed to handle the data, and were used solely for the purposes outlined in the study. After the study's conclusion, all raw data will be securely disposed of to protect participant privacy. A commitment to transparency and respect for participant rights underpinned the entire research process.

RESULTS

This section sequentially presents the analysis and interpretation of the study which aimed to determine the preparedness of Key Stage 1 Public School Teachers in handling learners with special needs in City Central Elementary School, Tagbilaran City Schools Division, Bohol Province, for the school year 2024-2025. The goal is to propose an action plan based on the findings.

RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

This section presents the demographic and background characteristics of the study participants. It includes key information such as age, gender, area of specialization, length of service, highest educational attainment, and attendance at seminars and trainings. These details provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the participants' backgrounds, helping to understand how their experiences may have influenced their responses and ensuring the relevance and accuracy of the study's findings.

Age and Gender

Age refers to the length of time an individual has lived, usually measured in years. Gender encompasses the social and cultural roles, behaviors, and identities associated with being male, female, or other gender categories. Both age and gender are essential for understanding respondents, as they provide critical context regarding participants' backgrounds. Age can reveal generational differences and developmental stages that influence perspectives, while gender highlights the variations in experiences linked to social roles. Together, these factors enhance the accuracy and relevance of study findings. Table 2 presents the distribution of teachers in Tagbilaran City, Bohol: Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School, based on their age and gender.

Table 2 Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age (in years)	Female (f)	Female (%)	Male (f)	Male (%)	Total (f)	Total (%)
61–65	1	3.13	0	0.00	1	3.13
51–60	7	21.88	0	0.00	7	21.88
41–50	9	28.13	0	0.00	9	28.13
31–40	11	34.38	0	0.00	11	34.38
20–30	4	12.50	0	0.00	4	12.50
Total	32	100.00	0	0.00	32	100.00

As shown by table 2, all 32 respondents are female, with no male participants represented in the study. The largest age group falls within the 31–40 years range (34.38%), followed by those aged 41–50 (28.13%) and 51–60 (21.88%). This distribution suggests a predominantly mid-career teaching workforce, with a majority falling within the prime years of professional practice. The absence of male respondents may reflect the gender composition typical of early childhood and elementary education sectors. This demographic context is vital in interpreting other aspects of the study, such as readiness and experience in inclusive education.

Notably, understanding the influence of age and gender on teacher preparedness for inclusive education is critical, as highlighted by recent research. A study by Triviño-Amigo et al. (2022) found that older teachers and those with more years of experience reported lower perceived preparedness for inclusive education, suggesting that age negatively correlates with readiness to address diverse student needs.

Similarly, Adams et al. (2021) emphasized that gender and age significantly influenced teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards inclusive education, reinforcing the importance of demographic profiling in understanding preparedness levels. These findings underscore the relevance of considering demographic factors like age and gender when evaluating and enhancing teacher readiness for inclusive educational practices.

Area of Specialization

Teaching specialization refers to the specific field where educators have formal training and certification, influencing their skills and preparedness to address challenges faced by learners with special needs. Understanding the area of specialization of teachers provides insight into their preparedness in delivering subject-specific instruction, especially when catering to learners with diverse educational needs. Table 3 shows the profile of teachers in Tagbilaran City, Bohol – Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School in terms of specialization.

Table 3 Area of Specialization of the Respondents

Area of Specialization	f	%
Early Childhood Education	5	15.63
General Content	21	65.63
English	2	6.25
Filipino	1	3.13
Values Education	1	3.13
Science	1	3.13
Social Studies	1	3.13
Total	32	100.00

As indicated by table 3, the majority of the respondents (65.63%) specialize in General Content, reflecting a generalist orientation among educators, especially in lower grade levels where integrated teaching is common.

A smaller percentage (15.63%) hold specialization in Early Childhood Education, which is critical in foundational learning stages. Minimal representation in subject-specific areas like English, Filipino, Science, and Social Studies—each accounting for only 3.13% to 6.25%—suggests a potential gap in subject-matter expertise, particularly when specialized interventions are needed for diverse learners.

This calls for targeted professional development programs to broaden teachers' instructional capacity and deepen content mastery across different learning areas.

This study coincides with the findings of Logroño and Gongora (2023), who emphasized that while teachers specializing in general content are generally prepared for inclusive education, there remain noticeable gaps in subject-specific expertise, particularly when specialized interventions are required to meet the needs of diverse learners. Their study highlights the importance of ongoing professional development programs aimed at

deepening instructional competence across various subject areas to ensure more effective inclusive teaching practices.

Length of Service

The respondents' varied service durations demonstrate a range of organizational experience levels. The length of service of educators offers important context about their professional experience, which can influence their classroom management styles, instructional approaches, and openness to educational reforms such as inclusive education. Table 4 shows the profile of teachers in Tagbilaran City, Bohol – Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School in terms of the Number of Years as a Teacher.

Table 4 Length of Service of the Respondents

Length of Service (in years)	f	%
More than 20	9	28.13
16–20	6	18.75
11–15	4	12.50
6–10	7	21.88
1–5	5	15.63
Less than one year	1	3.13
Total	32	100.00

The table indicates that the respondent group is composed of both seasoned and early-career teachers. A combined 46.88% have been in service for more than 15 years, which suggests a strong foundation of teaching experience. Meanwhile, 37.51% have less than 10 years of experience, including a few novice teachers (3.13%) with less than one year of service. This mix presents an opportunity for mentoring and knowledge-sharing within the teaching community. However, the presence of newer teachers also highlights the need for structured induction programs and continuous capacity building to ensure they are well-equipped to meet the demands of inclusive and differentiated instruction.

This study coincides with the findings of Sito (2020), who observed that years of teaching experience significantly influence teachers' familiarity with inclusive education principles, classroom management strategies, and their overall attitudes towards inclusion. Specifically, seasoned teachers exhibited higher efficacy in managing diverse classrooms, but the study also emphasized the need for continued professional development for both veteran and early-career educators to maintain and enhance inclusive teaching practices.

Highest Educational Attainment

The respondents' highest level of education is highlighted in this section. Educational attainment plays a significant role in shaping the competence and confidence of teachers in delivering quality instruction. Advanced degrees often correlate with deeper pedagogical understanding and stronger research-based practices.

Determining teachers' academic credentials provides insight into their professional background and foundational knowledge, which may influence their capacity to apply suitable strategies and interventions for students with special educational needs. Table 5 presents the profile of teachers in Tagbilaran City, Bohol – Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School in terms of highest educational attainment.

Table 5 Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Educational Attainment	f	%
With Doctorate Units	2	6.25
Master's Graduate	2	6.25
With Master's Units	13	40.63
Bachelor's Degree	15	46.88
Total	32	100.00

As revealed by table 5, majority of respondents (87.51%) have not yet completed a master's degree, with 46.88% holding only a bachelor's degree and 40.63% currently pursuing master's studies. Only 12.5% have attained or are pursuing doctoral education. This educational profile suggests a teaching workforce in transition toward professional advancement.

While the pursuit of higher education is evident, the relatively low percentage of completed graduate degrees underscores the need for institutional support and incentives that encourage the completion of advanced studies. Such investments are particularly crucial for teachers handling learners with special educational needs, where specialized knowledge and training are required.

This study coincides with the findings of Englis et al. (2025), who emphasized that while many teachers demonstrate an understanding of inclusive education, those with higher educational attainment exhibited better application of inclusive practices in classroom settings, highlighting the importance of advanced studies in strengthening inclusive education preparedness.

Seminars and Trainings Attended

This segment details the respondents' involvement in training and seminars about inclusive practices or special education. Professional development through seminars and trainings is a key indicator of teachers' exposure to contemporary pedagogical strategies and updates in educational trends, particularly those related to inclusive education. Their readiness is largely determined by their participation in professional development activities, which improve their abilities, competencies, and knowledge in assisting students with special educational needs.

Table 6 presents the profile of teachers in Tagbilaran City, Bohol – Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School in terms of their trainings and seminars attended (past 5 years).

Table 6 Respondents' Attendance to Seminars and Trainings

Attendance to Seminars and Trainings	f	%
Have Attended	32	100.00
Not Attended	0	0.00
Total	32	100.00

As shown in Table 6, all respondents (100%) have attended seminars and trainings, reflecting a culture of continuous professional growth and compliance with mandated learning and development initiatives.

This universal attendance is promising as it suggests that teachers are regularly updated on teaching strategies, innovations, and policies that may affect classroom instruction. However, while participation is commendable, it is equally important to assess the quality, frequency, and relevance of these trainings to ensure that they translate into improved instructional practices and learner outcomes, especially in the context of inclusive and differentiated learning environments.

This study coincides with the findings of Logroño and Gongora (2023), who found that attendance in seminars and training significantly improves teachers' preparedness for inclusive education, highlighting that continuous professional development is essential in equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to support learners with special educational needs.

Level Of Preparedness In Handling Learners With Special Educational Needs

This section outlines the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of Key Stage 1 teachers regarding their readiness to work with students who have special educational needs. It sheds light on how prepared educators are to meet the various needs of these students in the classroom.

Knowledge

Table 7 displays the self-assessed level of preparedness of key stage 1 teachers in handling learners with special needs in Tagbilaran City, Bohol - Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School in terms of their knowledge which includes training background, familiarity with inclusive education programs, policies, and use of assistive technologies.

Table 7 Preparedness in Handling Learners with Special Needs in Terms of Knowledge

Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1. I have received training or courses related to supporting pupils with special education needs in inclusive classrooms.	3.16	1.14	Moderately Prepared
2. I am familiar with different types of programs (e.g., Full or Partial Inclusion) suitable for pupils with special education needs.	3.19	0.86	Moderately Prepared
3. I can identify the characteristics and criteria of pupils who require special education services.	3.13	0.94	Moderately Prepared
4. I know how SPED specialists support teachers through consultations, classroom interventions, and training sessions.	3.66	0.83	Prepared
5. I am knowledgeable about policies and procedures that promote inclusive education in my school.	3.16	0.63	Moderately Prepared
6. I am familiar with assistive technologies and learning apps that can support pupils with special education needs.	2.94	0.95	Moderately Prepared
7. I understand the role of parents in reinforcing inclusive education strategies at home.	3.88	0.79	Prepared
8. I am aware of the impact of administrative support on the implementation of inclusive education.	3.66	0.90	Prepared
Aggregate Mean	3.34		Moderately Prepared
Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.88	

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

The results reveal that the respondents are moderately prepared in terms of knowledge when handling learners with special needs, as indicated by an aggregate weighted mean (WM) of 3.34 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.88.

Among the indicators, the highest-rated item is “I understand the role of parents in reinforcing inclusive education strategies at home” (WM = 3.88), suggesting that respondents recognize the importance of family engagement in supporting inclusive practices. Two other items—knowledge of SPED specialists’ support and awareness of administrative support—both received a rating of 3.66, placing them in the "Prepared" category. This indicates a relatively stronger understanding of systemic and collaborative roles in inclusive education. In contrast, the least rated item is familiarity with assistive technologies and learning apps (WM = 2.94), implying a noticeable gap in technological competence among teachers, which is critical in catering to the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

The pattern suggests that while teachers feel somewhat confident in understanding roles and policy frameworks related to inclusive education, they lack sufficient knowledge and training in more technical and instructional aspects, particularly assistive technology. The consistently "Moderately Prepared" ratings across most indicators reflect a pressing need for professional development programs that focus on hands-on strategies, digital tools, and specialized training.

These findings underscore the importance of providing teachers with targeted and contextually relevant learning experiences to bridge the knowledge gap and support the successful implementation of inclusive education practices in their schools.

The findings run parallel with the study of Saleem et al (2019) which found that most special education schools in Pakistan lacked sufficient training programs for assistive technology, leaving teachers underprepared. Similarly, research from Montenegro indicated that teachers’ use of assistive tools improved only after specific training and support from specialists (Milić, 2021). These studies collectively support the need for continuous, targeted professional development to enhance teachers’ knowledge and competence in inclusive education.

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Attitudes

Table 8 presents an overview of the teachers’ attitudes towards handling learners with special needs in Tagbilaran City, Bohol - Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School. It captures their level of motivation, emotional readiness, stress management, and openness to collaboration and innovation in inclusive education.

Table 8 Level of Preparedness in Handling Learners with Special Needs in terms of Attitudes

Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1. I am happy to support the implementation of strategies for pupils with special education needs in my classroom.	3.97	0.82	Prepared
2. I understand what needs to be done to effectively assist pupils with special education needs.	3.59	0.80	Prepared

3. I feel confident that strategies for addressing special education needs are manageable in a Key Stage 1 setting.	3.31	0.78	Moderately Prepared
4. Supporting pupils with special education needs does not cause me excessive stress.	3.13	0.98	Moderately Prepared
5. I regularly seek out resources and strategies to better support pupils with special education needs.	3.59	0.87	Prepared
6. I feel motivated to overcome institutional barriers to ensure all pupils have equitable learning opportunities.	3.44	0.80	Prepared
7. I am confident that collaboration with SPED specialists improves teaching outcomes for pupils with special education needs.	3.88	0.79	Prepared
8. I believe that using technology and learning apps enhances the effectiveness of inclusive education.	4.03	0.74	Prepared
Aggregate Mean	3.62		Prepared
Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.82	

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

As shown in the table, the respondents are generally 'Prepared' in terms of their attitudes toward handling learners with special needs, evidenced by an aggregate weighted mean of 3.62 and a standard deviation of 0.82. The highest-rated item was “I believe that using technology and learning apps enhances the effectiveness of inclusive education” (WM = 4.03), suggesting strong belief in the transformative power of digital tools in inclusive pedagogy. This is closely followed by positive responses to collaboration with SPED specialists (WM = 3.88) and willingness to support inclusive strategies (WM = 3.97), indicating that teachers exhibit a generally supportive and proactive stance toward inclusive education.

Despite the overall positive attitude, two items received ratings in the 'Moderately Prepared' range, particularly confidence in managing strategies in a Key Stage 1 setting (WM = 3.31) and the perceived stress of supporting pupils with special needs (WM = 3.13). These results suggest that while teachers are positively inclined and motivated, there remain emotional and psychological challenges that could hinder full implementation. Addressing stress and building confidence through mentoring, peer support, and wellness programs may further empower teachers to effectively fulfill their role in inclusive education environments.

Interestingly, the study by Arboiz and Aoanan (2024) coincides with the findings of this research, showing that teachers generally possess a positive attitude toward inclusive education. Their study revealed that educators demonstrated strong motivation, emotional readiness, and openness to collaboration- traits that align with the respondents’ reported preparedness in handling learners with special needs.

Both studies also highlight a shared concern: while teachers support inclusion philosophically and are motivated to implement inclusive practices, they continue to face emotional and psychological challenges such as stress and lack of confidence in some classroom situations. These parallels emphasize the need for ongoing support, such as mentoring and wellness programs, to strengthen teachers’ overall readiness for inclusive education.

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shared concern: while teachers support inclusion philosophically and are motivated to implement inclusive practices, they continue to face emotional and psychological challenges such as stress and lack of confidence in some classroom situations. These parallels emphasize the need for ongoing support, such as mentoring and wellness programs, to strengthen teachers' overall readiness for inclusive education.

Skills

Table 9 shows the teachers' self-assessment of their preparedness in terms of the skills required to effectively handle learners with special education needs in Tagbilaran City, Bohol - Tagbilaran City Central Elementary School. These skills include personalized instruction, development and implementation of IEPs, collaboration with SPED specialists, and the use of differentiated teaching strategies.

Table 9 Level of Preparedness in Handling Learners with Special Needs in terms of Skills

Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1. I develop personal skills such as empathy, patience, and care to better support Key Stage 1 pupils with special education needs.	3.91	0.78	Prepared
2. I demonstrate flexibility in addressing pupils' unique needs, such as accommodating deadlines, absences, and additional support.	3.75	0.80	Prepared
3. I develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) tailored to the needs of Key Stage 1 pupils with special education requirements.	3.22	0.87	Moderately Prepared
4. I implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) throughout the school year to monitor and support the progress of pupils with special education needs.	3.25	0.98	Moderately Prepared
5. I teach and mentor Key Stage 1 pupils through whole-class instruction, small group sessions, and one-on-one support as needed.	3.56	0.91	Prepared
6. I assess Key Stage 1 pupils' skills to identify their needs and develop appropriate teaching plans to address those needs.	3.56	0.80	Prepared
7. I help Key Stage 1 pupils with special education needs transition effectively between year levels and prepare them for future learning stages.	3.53	0.76	Prepared
8. I regularly integrate SPED specialists' recommendations into my lesson planning and teaching practices.	3.16	0.95	Moderately Prepared
9. I use differentiated instruction techniques to meet the needs of diverse learners in my classroom.	3.50	0.76	Prepared
10. I address institutional barriers by advocating for resources and support systems for inclusive education.	3.41	0.84	Prepared
11. I consult with SPED specialists to enhance my strategies for managing pupils with special education needs.	3.50	0.80	Prepared
12. I implement classroom management techniques that promote an inclusive learning environment.	3.69	0.74	Prepared

13. I assess the impact of my teaching strategies on the well-being and academic performance of pupils with special education needs.	3.72	0.73	Prepared
Aggregate Mean	3.52		Prepared
Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.83	

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

As reflected in the table, respondents reported being 'Prepared' in terms of skills with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.52. The highest-rated skill is the development of personal attributes like empathy, patience, and care (WM = 3.91), showing a strong foundation in the affective aspects of teaching.

This is closely followed by the implementation of inclusive teaching practices such as classroom management (WM = 3.69) and collaborative assessment of learners' progress (WM = 3.72). The lower-rated items pertain to the technical aspects of inclusive education, such as developing and implementing IEPs, with weighted means of 3.22 and 3.25 respectively, both categorized under 'Moderately Prepared.'

The findings suggest that while respondents possess favorable instructional attitudes and general classroom strategies, they may require additional training in the more specialized skills of designing and executing individualized education plans. The relatively high scores on collaboration, differentiated instruction, and inclusive practices suggest a readiness to enhance professional practice, provided that teachers receive structured support and continuing education focused on specialized instructional planning for learners with special needs.

The findings corroborate with the study conducted by Buenrostro-Jocson (2024), which highlighted that Filipino special education teachers, particularly those serving as shadow teachers in inclusive classrooms, exhibit strong affective and collaborative skills such as empathy, patience, behavior management, and cooperation with families and colleagues. These competencies align with the respondents' self-reported preparedness in areas like emotional support, differentiated instruction, and inclusive classroom management. However, both studies also identified gaps in technical proficiency, particularly in the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), indicating a shared need for more targeted professional development in specialized instructional planning.

Table 10 presents the overall summary of the respondents' level of preparedness across three major components: knowledge, attitudes, and skills. It provides a snapshot of their perceived competencies in implementing inclusive education in Key Stage 1 classrooms.

Table 10 Summary on the Respondents' Level of Preparedness in Handling Learners with Special Needs

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Knowledge	3.34	0.88	Moderately Prepared
Attitudes	3.62	0.82	Prepared
Skills	3.52	0.83	Prepared
Grand Mean	3.49	0.84	Prepared

Table 10 consolidates the respondents' level of preparedness in handling learners with special needs, with a grand mean of 3.49, categorized as 'Prepared.' Among the three components, attitudes received the highest rating (WM = 3.62), indicating strong emotional commitment and willingness among teachers to embrace inclusive practices. Skills followed closely (WM = 3.52), while knowledge had the lowest rating (WM = 3.34),

classified as 'Moderately Prepared.' This pattern underscores a favorable attitudinal and behavioral disposition towards inclusive education but also highlights a need to strengthen theoretical and conceptual understanding.

The overall findings suggest that teachers are open and motivated to support inclusive education but may benefit from enhanced content knowledge and professional development focusing on specialized instructional strategies. Interventions such as targeted workshops, mentoring, and continuing education can bridge this knowledge gap and align their practical readiness with foundational theoretical competence, ensuring a more holistic preparedness for inclusive teaching.

This study coincides with the findings of Zainalabidin and Ma'rof (2021), who found that teachers generally show moderate levels of preparedness for inclusive education, with attitudes being stronger predictors of readiness compared to knowledge and skills, emphasizing the importance of enhancing theoretical foundations alongside maintaining positive attitudes.

Significant Difference In Respondents' Level Of Preparedness

Age

Table 11 presents the test of significance on the difference in the respondents' level of preparedness in handling learners with special needs when grouped according to age.

Table 11 Test of Difference of Preparedness Level in Handling Learners with Special Needs When Grouped According to Age

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p	Result
Between Groups	0.903	2	0.452	1.114	0.342	Not Significant
Within Groups	11.753	29	0.405			
Total	12.656	31				

The result shows an F-value of 1.114 and a p-value of 0.342, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the respondents' level of preparedness based on their age. Therefore, the age of the teachers does not appear to have a significant influence on how prepared they feel in managing learners with special needs.

Building on these findings, it is also important to note that the absence of significant differences based on age aligns with the study of Triviño-Amigo et al. (2022), who observed that while older teachers sometimes reported slightly lower perceptions of preparedness, age overall was not a strong predictor of readiness for inclusive education.

Field of Specialization

Table 12 shows the analysis of variance results when respondents are grouped by their field of specialization to determine if it influences their level of preparedness.

Table 12 Test of Difference of Preparedness Level in Handling Learner with Special Needs When Grouped According to the Field of Specialization

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Significance
Between Groups	0.007	1	0.007	0.018	0.895	Not Significant
Within Groups	12.649	30	0.422			
Total	12.656	31				

The result in the table indicates that there is no significant difference in the level of preparedness among respondents when grouped according to their field of specialization ($p = 0.895$). This suggests that specialization alone does not influence teachers' confidence or readiness in handling learners with special needs. Regardless of content area, the participants reported similar levels of preparedness, possibly due to shared experiences in general teacher training or school-wide professional development sessions on inclusive education. This finding highlights the importance of providing inclusive education training to all teachers, not just those in specialized subjects.

Similarly, the lack of a significant difference based on the respondents' field of specialization supports the findings of Englis et al. (2025), who emphasized that teachers' preparedness for inclusive education tends to be shaped more by professional development experiences rather than their content area specialization, suggesting that all teachers, regardless of field, can build competencies necessary for inclusion through targeted training.

Length of Service

Table 13 shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results on the perceived level of preparedness in handling learners with special educational needs (LSENs) based on the respondents' length of service. The ANOVA tested whether there were significant differences in preparedness levels across groups with varying years of teaching experience.

Table 13 Test of Difference of Preparedness Level in Handling Learners with Special Needs When Grouped According to the Length of Service

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Significance
Between Groups	1.965	2	0.982	2.665	0.087	Not Significant
Within Groups	10.691	29	0.369			
Total	12.656	31				

The results indicate that the sum of squares between groups was 1.965 ($df = 2$), while the sum of squares within groups was 10.691 ($df = 29$), yielding an F-value of 2.665 and a p-value of .087. Since the p-value (.087) is greater than the alpha level of .05, the result is not statistically significant. This suggests that the length of service does not significantly influence the respondents' perceived level of preparedness in handling LSENs. Regardless of how long teachers have been in the profession, their level of preparedness appears to be relatively similar. This finding implies that other factors, such as specialized training, support systems, or professional development, may play a more critical role in equipping teachers for inclusive education than their years of experience.

In line with these findings, the study by Sito (2020) similarly reported that the length of teaching service does not consistently predict teachers' level of preparedness for inclusive education; instead, it emphasized that ongoing professional development and specific training opportunities are more critical factors influencing teachers' readiness to effectively manage diverse learning environments.

Highest Educational Attainment

Table 14 presents the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results examining whether the respondents' level of preparedness in handling learners with special educational needs (LSENs) significantly differs according to their highest educational attainment.

Table 14 Test of Difference of Preparedness Level in Handling Learners with Special Needs When Grouped According to the Highest Educational Attainment

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Significance
Between Groups	0.750	1	0.750	1.891	0.179	Not Significant

Within Groups	11.906	30	0.397			
Total	12.656	31				

The results show that the sum of squares between groups is 0.750 ($df = 1$), while the sum of squares within groups is 11.906 ($df = 30$), with a total sum of squares of 12.656. The computed F-value is 1.891 with a corresponding p-value of .179.

Given that the p-value (.179) is greater than the set significance level of .05, the result is not statistically significant. This indicates that the respondents' highest educational attainment does not significantly influence their perceived level of preparedness in handling LSENs.

In other words, regardless of whether respondents have earned higher academic qualifications, their preparedness for inclusive education remains relatively the same. This suggests the need to explore other contributing factors such as targeted training programs, hands-on experience, or institutional support in building teacher readiness for inclusive classroom settings.

Extending these findings, Moon (2023) highlighted that highest educational attainment alone does not significantly determine teachers' preparedness for inclusive education; rather, factors such as recent, targeted training and hands-on professional development activities have a greater influence on effective inclusive teaching practices.

Perceived Challenges In Handling Learners With Special Needs

Challenges in Handling Learners with Special Needs

Table 15 presents the thematic grid derived from the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) of the qualitative interview data. This table summarizes the key themes, sub-themes, selected verbatim responses, and corresponding participant profiles that emerged in response to the research question: *“What are the perceived challenges of the respondents in handling learners with special needs?”*

Theme 1: Limited Training and Low Confidence in SPED Handling

A common challenge expressed by all participants was the lack of adequate training to handle learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Many of the respondents admitted to having no background in special education when they were first assigned LSENs, and they often relied on instinct, peer advice, or online resources. While they tried their best, the uncertainty and absence of specialized knowledge left them questioning the appropriateness and effectiveness of their strategies. As one participant said, “I questioned myself—am I really helping the child?” (Participant 5, Tchr Mary Grace, 30, Female, T-I, Grade 3 teacher – Math only, Tagbilaran City Division). This sentiment reflects the recurring concern that short-term INSETs were not sufficient in equipping regular teachers for inclusive education.

Table 15 Perceived Challenges of the Respondents in Handling Learners with Special Needs

Theme	Subthemes	Description of the Theme	Sample Data Extract (Verbatim)
1. Limited Training and Low Confidence in SPED Handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of SPED training- Uncertainty in teaching strategies Need for tailored fit continuous training 	Teachers expressed that their limited preparation and training in SPED left them feeling inadequate and uncertain in handling LSENs. They relied heavily on instinct, informal support, or online sources.	“I questioned myself—am I really helping the child?” (Tchr Mary Grace, 30, Female, T-I, Grade 3 – Math only)
2. Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tantrums and 	Managing behavior-related	“My student with autism

Challenges and Emotional Strain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> physical aggression Emotional exhaustion Guilt and helplessness 	challenges, especially among learners with autism or ADHD, was cited as a major stressor. Teachers experienced classroom disruptions, emotional fatigue, and guilt from not being able to manage behavior effectively.	would suddenly scream or bang on chairs, which sometimes startled the other Grade 1 pupils.” (Tchr Angen, 44, Female, T-III, Grade 1 – All subjects)
3. Scarcity of Resources and Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of assistive tools and Braille materials Improvised teaching aids- Need for manipulatives 	The absence of appropriate learning materials and assistive devices for LSENs posed a major challenge. Teachers had to create their own resources or borrow from others, often without SPED-specific functionality.	“There’s no Braille available, and even if there was, I don’t know how to use it.” (Tchr Eva Ruth, 40, Female, MT, Kindergarten – All subjects)
4. Balancing LSEN Needs and the Whole Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multitasking pressure Divided attention Instructional compromises 	Teachers found it difficult to manage time and attention between LSENs and regular pupils. This led to feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and burnout as they tried to meet varied needs within one classroom setting.	“I had to focus on my regular pupils, my LSENs, and a transferee who also needed support—my preparation was all mixed up.” (Tchr Angen, 44, Female, T-III, Grade 1 – All subjects)
5. Inconsistent Institutional Support and Teacher Burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited admin follow-up Reliance on peer or SPED colleagues High stress levels 	Teachers reported inconsistent administrative support, often relying on peer advice or SPED colleagues. The burden of inclusive teaching without adequate backing led to professional dissatisfaction and high stress.	“Support from the administration? Maybe seven out of ten. But the SPED teachers... are always available.” (Tchr Eva Ruth, 40, Female, MT, Kindergarten – All subjects)

Most participants expressed a desire for consistent, hands-on training in areas such as Braille, sign language, behavioral management, and assistive device usage. They acknowledged that while DepEd offers SPED-related sessions, these are often limited in frequency and depth. One teacher emphasized, “Since we are now embracing inclusive education, having shadow teachers would be a great help because they are well-trained... we are just adopting” (Participant 1, Tchr Eva Ruth, 40, Female, Master Teacher, Kindergarten teacher – all subjects, Tagbilaran City Division). These reflections highlight a significant gap in professional preparation, calling for a structured and sustained training program to build teacher confidence in inclusive classrooms.

Echoing the participants' sentiments, Mandabon (2023) found that while teachers demonstrated high levels of dedication, many still lacked the specialized training necessary to confidently handle learners with special educational needs (LSENs), relying heavily on self-initiated strategies and peer support instead of structured programs. This reinforces the pressing call from participants for more sustained, hands-on professional development efforts to strengthen both their confidence and competence in inclusive education settings.

Theme 2: Behavioral Challenges and Emotional Strain

Managing behavior was one of the most emotionally taxing aspects of teaching LSENs, particularly those with autism or attention-related disorders. Teachers shared how aggressive outbursts, running around the classroom, or loud tantrums disrupted learning and affected other students. These behavioral challenges demanded continuous attention, often leaving teachers exhausted and emotionally drained. A participant recounted, “My

student with autism would suddenly scream or bang on chairs, which startled the other pupils” (Participant 3, Tchr Angen, 44, Female, T-III, Grade 1 teacher – all subjects, Tagbilaran City Division). Such scenarios contributed to heightened anxiety and professional stress among teachers, especially when they felt unprepared or unsupported.

Moreover, these behaviors often led to safety concerns and the need for constant monitoring, which further complicated classroom dynamics. Teachers admitted to moments of guilt and helplessness when they could not address both LSENs and the rest of the class equally. One educator confessed, “Yes, when it comes to managing their behavior, I often question myself—am I truly effective?” (Participant 5, Tchr Mary Grace, 30, Female, T-I, Grade 3 teacher – Math only, Tagbilaran City Division). These emotional struggles illustrate the need for mental health support, crisis-response training, and school-wide collaboration to help teachers cope with the behavioral demands of inclusive education.

Consistent with these narratives, Balgos and Albores (2025) found that general education teachers handling learners with special educational needs often faced significant emotional challenges stemming from behavioral issues, leading to heightened stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion.

Theme 3: Scarcity of Resources and Learning Materials

Another recurring challenge was the lack of instructional materials and assistive devices tailored to the needs of LSENs. Teachers frequently pointed out that they received no specialized tools or resources when learners were mainstreamed into their classrooms. This left them to improvise using regular teaching aids or to print out simplified versions of existing materials. A teacher handling a blind learner shared, “There’s no Braille available, and even if there was, I don’t know how to use it” (Participant 1, Tchr Eva Ruth, 40, Female, Master Teacher, Kindergarten teacher – all subjects, Tagbilaran City Division). This mismatch between learner needs and available materials hindered the delivery of differentiated instruction.

Moreover, most participants reported the absence of manipulatives or visual aids that could support LSENs with attention and learning difficulties. While they tried to accommodate these students through differentiation or modified tasks, the lack of equipment and learning tools became a significant limitation. One participant said, “We really don’t have sufficient resources or suitable materials to cater to LSENs” (Participant 5, Tchr Mary Grace, 30, Female, T-I, Grade 3 teacher – Math only, Tagbilaran City Division). The lack of both physical materials and technical know-how further deepened the inequities in the learning environment for students with special needs.

Further reinforcing these classroom realities, Woolfson (2024) found that despite decades of inclusive education reforms, teachers continue to struggle with a chronic lack of appropriate resources and assistive technologies, often leading to improvised teaching methods and unmet learning needs for students with special educational needs. The study emphasizes the urgent need for systemic resource provision and better support mechanisms to bridge the gap between inclusive policy ideals and actual classroom practice.

Theme 4: Balancing LSENs and the Needs of Regular Learners

Balancing the needs of LSENs and regular learners was a constant struggle for teachers. Many of them described how LSENs required closer supervision, modified activities, and emotional support—resources that were difficult to provide while managing an entire class. This tension led to a sense of inadequacy, as one teacher shared, “I had to focus on my regular pupils, my LSENs, and a regular pupil who also needed extra support—my preparation was all mixed up” (Participant 3, Tchr Angen, 44, Female, T-III, Grade 1 teacher – all subjects, Tagbilaran City Division). Such multitasking scenarios contributed to stress and left some teachers feeling overwhelmed.

Despite their best efforts, participants acknowledged that either group—LSENs or regular students—was at risk of receiving less attention. Several teachers turned to differentiated instruction, teamwork with fellow teachers, or individualized attention during specific times. Yet, they admitted this was not always enough. As one teacher stated, “Yes, it is difficult for me to balance... my SPED learner needs a lot of attention, and I

don't want them left behind" (Participant 1, Tchr Eva Ruth, 40, Female, Master Teacher, Kindergarten teacher – all subjects, Tagbilaran City Division). These balancing acts highlight the need for structural classroom support, such as teaching assistants or co-teaching models, to foster a more inclusive and manageable environment.

Mirroring these experiences, Puspitasari (2019) emphasized that one of the main struggles faced by teachers in inclusive classrooms is balancing the academic and behavioral needs of students with special educational needs alongside regular learners, often leading to feelings of stress, divided attention, and concerns about the quality of education delivered to all students. Her study highlighted the importance of systemic support structures, such as co-teaching and differentiated instruction strategies, to help teachers manage this demanding balance more effectively.

Theme 5: Inconsistent Institutional Support and Rising Teacher Burnout

While there were instances of support from SPED teachers or school heads, most respondents described institutional support as inconsistent or insufficient. Administrative help was often rated as moderate, with some teachers feeling that LSEN-related concerns were not prioritized. One teacher noted, "Support from the administration? Maybe seven out of ten. But the SPED teachers, especially Ma'am Judelyn, are always available when there are problems" (Participant 1, Tchr Eva Ruth, 40, Female, Master Teacher, Kindergarten teacher – all subjects, Tagbilaran City Division). These accounts revealed that much of the support relied on personal networks rather than systematized protocols.

This lack of consistent institutional backing contributed to increased stress and emotional fatigue. Teachers described feeling burned out, with some scoring their stress level at 9 out of 10. Despite these pressures, they coped through peer support, positive mindset, and passion for teaching. A participant shared, "It all comes down to my mindset—I remind myself, 'You can do this.' I also ask Ma'am Jul from SPED for advice; she's been a huge help" (Participant 3, Tchr Angen, 44, Female, T-III, Grade 1 teacher – all subjects, Tagbilaran City Division). These reflections underscore the need for systemic and sustainable forms of institutional support to reduce burnout and strengthen teacher well-being in inclusive classrooms.

Reflecting these lived experiences, Tanasugarn (2019) found that special education teachers facing inconsistent administrative support were significantly more prone to emotional exhaustion, one of the primary dimensions of burnout, particularly in high-demand inclusive settings. Her study underscores that without strong, consistent institutional backing, teachers' resilience is compromised, leading to professional fatigue and a diminished sense of accomplishment, thus reinforcing the urgent need for sustainable support structures in inclusive education environments.

CONCLUSIONS

The following are the salient findings of the study based on the research questions:

Respondents' Profile. All respondents were female, mostly aged 31–40, indicating a mid-career teaching workforce. Most specialized in General Content, with few having backgrounds in Early Childhood or specific subject areas, reflecting limited SPED-relevant training. Nearly half had over 15 years of service, though many were relatively new, highlighting the need for mentoring. While some were pursuing advanced degrees, most held only a bachelor's degree. All attended seminars and training courses, showing a strong commitment to professional development.

Level of Preparedness in Handling Learners with Special Needs. The respondents demonstrated an overall level of preparedness in handling learners with special needs that was generally favorable, particularly in terms of their attitudes and skills. They were moderately prepared in terms of knowledge, showing awareness of the roles of parents, administrators, and SPED specialists, but lacked familiarity with assistive technologies and inclusive instructional tools. In terms of attitudes, they were prepared and showed strong motivation, openness to collaboration, and a positive outlook toward inclusive education, although some experienced stress and uncertainty in applying these practices. For skills, respondents were also prepared, especially in classroom

management and differentiated instruction. However, they expressed only moderate confidence in creating and implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), indicating a need for more specialized training.

Test of Differences. Statistical analysis showed no significant differences in preparedness levels when grouped by age, field of specialization, length of service, and highest educational attainment. This suggests that preparedness may not be solely determined by demographic or academic background, but perhaps by other contextual factors like access to training and school support.

Challenges Encountered in Handling Learners with Special Needs. Teachers handling learners with special educational needs (LSENs) faced five major challenges: (1) limited training and low confidence in SPED strategies, (2) behavioral difficulties and emotional strain, (3) lack of appropriate learning materials and assistive tools, (4) difficulty balancing LSEN needs with the rest of the class, and (5) inconsistent institutional support. Many relied on improvisation, peer help, and personal resilience due to the absence of formal training, proper resources, and administrative follow-through resulting in emotional fatigue, instructional compromises, and high stress levels.

Teacher preparedness in handling learners with special needs goes beyond attending trainings or knowing policies, it involves building confidence, gaining practical skills, and having the right support system in place. While Key Stage 1 teachers show positive attitudes and a willingness to adapt, they often face challenges due to limited training, lack of resources, and inconsistent institutional support. These gaps suggest that inclusive education cannot rely on individual effort alone. For it to truly work, teachers must be equipped not just with knowledge, but with tools, ongoing mentoring, and a school environment that actively supports inclusive practices. It is through shared responsibility and sustained support that inclusive education can thrive in everyday classroom settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the salient findings of the study, an action plan is hereby recommended to enhance preparedness in handling LSENs.

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