

Optimizing the Teaching Competencies of Special Education Teachers in Individualized Education Program (IEP) Implementation through Professional Development Programs

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of professional development on teaching competencies among Special Education teachers in selected schools in the Division of Cebu Province during School Year 2025-2026. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the research examined teacher demographics, professional development knowledge, effectiveness in implementing Individualized Education Programs, encountered challenges, and the relationship between professional development knowledge and teaching competence. Data collection was conducted through survey questionnaires distributed to educators across six participating institutions, with subsequent analysis performed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings characterized the respondent group as predominantly female, within the 34-38 age range, possessing Master's degrees, specializing in General Special Education, maintaining over a decade of professional experience, and demonstrating consistent participation in division-level training programs. Teachers demonstrated high professional development knowledge and strong IEP implementation effectiveness, particularly in strategy adaptation. Identified challenges included restricted access to competency-focused training and inadequate support systems. The analysis demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation between professional development knowledge and teaching competence, substantiating that increased knowledge directly enhances IEP implementation effectiveness. The study concludes that professional development programs substantially strengthen Special Education teachers' competencies and recommends implementing enhancement plans, sustaining professional development engagement, reinforcing administrative support, and conducting further research on long-term professional development outcomes.

Keywords: Special Education, SPED Teachers, Individualized Education Program (IEP), Descriptive-Correlational, Cebu Province

INTRODUCTION

The success of implementing the Special education program is totally dependent of the teachers. And to make sure that the SPED learners receive the best education, the teachers must be trained and going for a professional development. The Special Education program continues for its improvement, students' needs are increasingly complex, effective Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are important for students with disabilities, but it requires teachers to master a wide range of skills and strategies.

Adibah (2014) conceptualizes the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as a tailored educational framework, specifically constructed to address the distinct learning demands of students with special needs. It outlines the specific ways in which these students learn, considering their strengths, challenges, and preferred learning styles. By specifying customized instructional approaches and necessary adjustments, the Individualized Education Program secures equitable access to learning for every student. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), United States educational institutions are required to the provision of an IEP as a legal entitlement for all eligible students receiving special education services.

The IEP serves as a legally mandated framework that ensures students with disabilities receive an education specifically adapted to their individual needs. Its fundamental aim is to provide a suitable educational experience that enables students to demonstrate substantive progress within the general curriculum, attain individualized learning objectives, and participate in academic and social activities with their peers while minimizing barriers (McKenna et al., 2023).

McKenna et al. established successful Individualized Education Program implementation as fundamental to special education, crucial for delivering customized instruction that addresses the distinctive requirements of students with disabilities. Special education instructors serve as pivotal figures in this process, bearing responsibility for developing, implementing, and assessing IEP effectiveness. However, despite their critical role, many teachers face challenges in fully realizing their potential due to insufficient training, inadequate resources, and a lack of ongoing professional development. These limitations may lead to irregularities in IEP execution and potentially compromise the efficacy of educational support for students receiving special education services

The execution of inclusive learning environment in Indonesia confronts substantial obstacles, characterized by restricted educational accessibility, enduring discriminatory attitudes, and insufficient availability of qualified personnel for successful program implementation. This research investigated the pedagogical strategies employed by elementary school teachers to optimize learning outcomes for students with special needs. Accordingly, the research aimed to gather insights into the approaches teachers employ to maximize the abilities of inclusive students, despite challenges related to teacher competency, curriculum flexibility, and the limited qualifications of educators lacking a special education background (Febriyani et al., 2024).

In light of these constraints, optimizing the expertise of Special Education teachers emerges as an essential priority, especially concerning their effectiveness in IEP implementation. By developing professional development (PD) programs, it can systematically improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and teaching strategies. These frameworks offer a structured approach to addressing gaps in competence by providing targeted professional development, mentorship, and access to evidence-based practices. Through such frameworks, teachers can gain the tools and support necessary to create and implement high-quality IEP that effectively support the academic and functional growth of their students.

Special education teachers are encouraged to engage in continuous learning, adapting their teaching strategies based on student progress and emerging best practices. Collaboration with colleagues, parents, and specialists is also a key component of these frameworks, ensuring that IEP are developed and executed in a holistic and collaborative manner. This cohesive methodology enhances the effectiveness of IEP implementation, maintaining its responsiveness to the evolving requirements of students with disabilities.

A fundamental strategy for advancing educational achievements among students with disabilities in Cebu Province involves the structured development of special education teachers' instructional expertise. Professional development initiatives function as crucial interventions for addressing challenges within Special Education centers. These programs provide educators with essential skills and resources to execute Individualized Education Programs successfully while promoting inclusive educational frameworks. This investment in teacher professional growth benefits students, families, and the wider community. This study will evaluate the impact of such professional development on IEP implementation by SPED teachers in selected Cebu Province schools during the 2025-2026 school year.

Theoretical Background

This study is theoretically grounded in three foundational frameworks: Vygotsky's (1934) Social Constructivism, Mezirow's (1978) Transformational Learning Theory, and Tomlinson's (1999) Differentiated Instruction theory. The Philippine educational landscape is shaped by a robust legal and policy framework grounded to safeguard the rights of learners with disabilities and advance teacher professionalism. This legal framework is constituted through pivotal legislative measures and administrative orders, notably Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities), Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009—establishing inclusive education as an access-expanding strategy—and DepEd Order No. 42,

s. 2017, which institutionalizes the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). Together, these instruments establish a comprehensive national dedication to both inclusive education and the ongoing professional growth of educators.

Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual structure, grounded in three foundational theoretical perspectives. Vygotsky's (1934) Social Constructivism Theory conceptualizes learning as fundamentally social, emerging through interpersonal interaction and collaborative engagement. Within the domain of special education, this conceptual framework holds particular relevance, as it validates the indispensable function of cooperative alliances among educators, families, and support professionals in the effective development and enactment of Individualized Education Programs (IEP). The framework for enhancing teacher competencies can be viewed through this lens, where teachers build their skills by engaging in professional learning communities, participating in mentorship programs, and collaborating with peers to address individual student needs.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes culture and social engagement as fundamental to cognitive development. In contrast to Piaget's framework, Vygotsky maintained that individuals demonstrate not only actualized capacities but also latent potential that can be realized through structured guidance and collaborative interaction. His theoretical contributions have significantly influenced modern educational practices and continue to inform contemporary approaches to teaching and learning.

Similarly to Piaget, Vygotsky recognized the role of innate developmental processes; however, he emphasized that language, written communication, and culturally derived concepts are fundamental in fostering higher-order cognitive development. He posited that social interactions with teachers and more knowledgeable peers play a critical role in enhancing a learner's cognitive growth. In the absence of such interpersonal engagement, Vygotsky argued that learners' intellectual progress would be limited, relying primarily on individual exploration rather than guided learning experiences. Building upon Vygotsky's framework, Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory explains how individuals modify their frames of reference through processes of critical reflection. Mezirow's framework of transformative learning delineates two core dimensions: instrumental and communicative learning. Instrumental learning is characterized by task-oriented problem-solving and the empirical investigation of cause-and-effect relationships. In contrast, communicative learning centers on the interpretation and articulation of feelings, needs, and values. The transformative process necessitates both dimensions; it requires learners to synthesize these distinct forms of understanding and adopt new perspectives—both rational and affective—to critically reflect upon and revise their pre-existing frames of reference.

Consequently, transformational learning promotes a deeper understanding of inclusive education by helping teachers internalize its principles and apply them meaningfully in their classrooms. Critical reflection enables educators to evaluate the congruence of their teaching methods with inclusive principles, thereby facilitating the design of strategies that effectively address the unique profiles of students with disabilities.

This process extends beyond the mere enhancement of teaching skills—it also transforms teachers' perspectives by nurturing empathy, adaptability, and a deeper commitment to promoting equity within the educational environment.

Ultimately, transformational learning empowers special education teachers to make meaningful changes in their instructional practices. As they embrace new perspectives and methodologies, teachers become more confident and competent in implementing IEPs effectively. This professional evolution enhances teacher proficiency in constructing inclusive classrooms, which subsequently promotes enhanced academic and socio-emotional growth for students with disabilities.

In the context of this study, special education teachers can experience transformational learning as they reflect on their teaching practices, recognize areas for growth, and adopt new approaches to IEP implementation. Competency enhancement frameworks can encourage such reflection and transformation, fostering a deeper understanding of inclusive education and empowering teachers to make meaningful changes in their instructional practices.

Moreover, professional development plays a pivotal role in facilitating transformational learning among special education teachers. These frameworks provide structured opportunities for professional growth, including workshops, collaborative learning, and mentoring programs. Through these structured processes, educators are guided in critical self-reflection, the collaborative exchange of professional insights, and the application of formative feedback. This reflective process helps teachers recognize the limitations of their current approaches and motivates them to adopt more effective practices.

This theoretical framework is further advanced by Carol Ann Tomlinson's theory of Differentiated Instruction, which emphasizes the adaptation of instructional content, process, and product to accommodate individual learner profiles. This foundational principle demonstrates a direct and essential alignment with the core objectives of Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation. This theory reinforces the idea that teachers must develop competencies in adapting instruction based on students' unique strengths and challenges. Through competency enhancement frameworks, special education teachers can learn and practice strategies for differentiating instruction and creating personalized learning plans for students, which aligns with the goals of effective IEP implementation.

Finally, the theory outlines four primary areas for differentiation: content, process, product, and learning environment. Differentiating content involves modifying what is taught based on a student's readiness or prior knowledge, such as providing reading materials at varying levels of difficulty or introducing advanced topics for gifted learners. Process differentiation focuses on how students interact with the material, employing diverse strategies like group work, hands-on activities, or digital tools to accommodate various learning styles. Product differentiation allows students to demonstrate their understanding in ways that align with their strengths, such as through creative projects, essays, or presentations. Adjusting the learning environment ensures that the physical and social setting of the classroom accommodates diverse needs, whether by offering quiet spaces for independent study or collaborative areas for teamwork.

While international frameworks governing the enhancement of special education instruction through professional development exhibit considerable diversity, this study specifically examines the relevant legal frameworks and policies within the Philippine context that directly inform the improvement of such instructional practices.

Legal Basis

Republic Act No. 9442 facilitates the social integration of persons with special needs through legislative provisions including a 20% discount on essential services. This builds upon RA 7277's policy of supporting their well-being and societal integration, emphasizing their equal rights and the shared responsibility of families, communities, and organizations to ensure their independence. Crucially, these rights are not to be interpreted as mere welfare provisions, and discrimination is strictly prohibited.

Republic Act No. 10533, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, further solidifies the national commitment to inclusive learning environment by mandating the implementation of differentiated instructional approaches, highlighting the need for enhanced teacher training to support these goals. This act provides the framework within which competency enhancement initiatives are developed.

In this context, Molomolo (2018) critically analyzed RA 10533's labor-related impacts on educators, while Casama (2018) provided historical context for the current educational reforms. These studies offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by the K to 12 programs.

Consequently, Republic Act No. 10533 mandates the adoption of a learner-centered, culturally responsive, and multilingual curriculum, with Section 7 underscoring the importance of continuous professional development to ensure its effective implementation. This curriculum framework has been widely examined and discussed in various scholarly studies.

Moreover, Violon (2024) highlights the transformative impact of RA 10533's K-12 program, acknowledging both its advancements in global competitiveness and the ongoing challenges related to stakeholder engagement

and student readiness. The study underscores the need for continued collaboration and research to ensure the program's success.

DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 institutionalizes a structured system for assessing teacher effectiveness and promoting ongoing professional growth through well-defined benchmarks. Empirical evidence confirms that systematic application of this framework leads to improved student achievement and strengthened teacher capabilities.

Gepila's (2020) research, however, identified a critical disconnect: while teachers reported proficiency in classroom management, significant gaps remained in their ability to address diverse learner needs. This outcome substantiates the requirement for specialized professional development that directly corresponds with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), an empirically validated construct demonstrated to advance educator development and improve instructional methodology.

Nevertheless, Banayo (2021) uncovered challenges in DepEd Order No. 42 implementation, highlighting issues with training and resource allocation. These findings offer crucial recommendations for improving the PPST's effectiveness.

Therefore, Almasa (2020) recommends revising teacher training curricula to better align with the PPST competencies, ensuring that training adequately prepares teachers for the performance standards.

Likewise, DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 formalizes inclusive learning environment as a core mechanism for broadening educational accessibility and engagement, explicitly mandating targeted teacher professional development to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive pedagogical practices.

The directive explicitly endorses specific instructional accommodations, including classroom modifications, the implementation of differentiated instruction, the utilization of assistive technologies, and the cultivation of a supportive learning environment. Furthermore, it champions a collaborative, multi-stakeholder model that integrates the efforts of parents and community organizations.

Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, emphasizes advocacy and awareness-raising to combat stigma and promote inclusion. This holistic approach aims to create an equitable education system for all. This order establishes a foundation for inclusive education by prioritizing teacher development and stakeholder collaboration to ensure equal opportunities for all learners.

Finally, professional development programs serve as a critical mechanism for enhancing instructional quality and improving learner outcomes within the Philippine educational system. While existing research, including the work of Padillo et al. (2021), underscores the necessity of strategic planning and robust implementation, the fundamental emphasis remains on cultivating sustained, participatory learning experiences that demonstrate direct congruence with curricular objectives.

Significance of the Study

This study underscored the critical role of professional development in strengthening educational delivery for learners requiring Individualized Education Programs (IEP). The research analyzed how current professional development initiatives contribute to three key dimensions: the refinement of teaching competencies, the development of educator self-efficacy, and the enhancement of student learning outcomes.

These findings provide an evidence base for designing targeted professional development programs that effectively equip teachers to address diverse learning needs and foster inclusive educational environments. The results of this research could be beneficial for school administrators, teachers, learners, parents, community, the researcher, and future researchers.

Objectives of the Study

This study evaluated the efficacy of professional learning initiatives on instructional practice capabilities of Special Education practitioners, with specific focus on their efficacy in implementing Individualized Education

Programs (IEP). The research was conducted in selected schools offering SPED programs throughout the Division of Cebu Province during the 2025-2026 academic year.

Statement of the Problem

Specifically, this research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the respondents concerning:
 - 1.1 age and gender;
 - 1.2 highest educational attainment;
 - 1.3 field of specialization;
 - 1.4 years of teaching; and
 - 1.5 relevant trainings and seminars attended?
2. What is the level of knowledge of SPED teachers regarding professional development (PD) programs related to the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEP)?
3. How effective are the teaching competencies of the Special Education teachers in IEP implementation?
4. What obstacles do Special Education teachers encounter when applying professional development training to their implementation of Individualized Education Programs?
5. Does a statistically significant relationship exist between Special Education teachers' understanding of professional development programs for Individualized Education Program implementation and their demonstrated effectiveness in executing these competencies during IEP delivery?
6. As evidenced by the study's findings, what enhancement plan can be developed to improve professional practice?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter delineates the methodological components employed in the investigation, comprising the research design, conceptual framework, study locale, participant selection criteria, research instruments, data gathering procedures, and statistical analysis. These elements collectively form the systematic approach adopted to address the research objectives.

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational design, which allows the researcher to describe existing conditions while examining possible associations among variables without manipulating them. This design was appropriate because the investigation focused on identifying whether Special Education (SPED) teachers' participation in professional development (PD) programs is related to their competencies in implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

The descriptive component documented teacher characteristics (age, gender, educational attainment, specialization, years of experience, and PD history) and measured their self-reported competency levels. The correlational component explored relationships between PD engagement, teachers' understanding of PD content, and their demonstrated instructional competencies in IEP implementation.

This design also enabled the study to gather qualitative insights on the challenges SPED teachers face when applying PD learning in real classroom settings.

Environment

This study was conducted at six (6) Special Education Centers of Cebu Province Division, Department of Education, Region VII Central Visayas. These schools serve as the primary providers of specialized services for learners with disabilities in the northern district. To maintain clarity and avoid redundancy, brief descriptions are provided: Daanbantayan Central School, Bantayan Central School, Liloan Central School, Consolacion SPED Center, Carmen Central School, and Medellin Central School.

Daanbantayan Central Elementary School stood as an educational cornerstone in the community, catering to a substantial and diverse student population of 1735 children spanning the kindergarten to Grade Six levels. This commitment to inclusivity expressly encompasses learners with special educational needs, thereby demonstrating the institution's dedication to delivering educational experiences that are responsive to a diverse spectrum of learning profiles and requirements. Guided by a School Principal and supported by a devoted team of 62 teachers, the institution operates as a collaborative hub for academic growth and development.

The student body mirrors the socioeconomic tapestry of the community, embodying a rich diversity that reflects the broader spectrum of backgrounds within the region. Notably, the community's reliance on maritime activities is evident in the backgrounds of many learners, whose families depend on the sea for their livelihoods. Some students' parents engage in occupations such as sikad drivers and market vendors, contributing significantly to the local economy through transportation and trade. The presence of middle-class families further enriches the school community, creating a dynamic microcosm that encapsulates various economic situations.

Bantayan Central Elementary School, situated in Bantayan, Cebu, Philippines, is a public educational institution dedicated to delivering quality education to all learners. The institution implements a comprehensive academic curriculum, incorporating core subjects including Mathematics, Science, English, Filipino, and Social Studies, which is structured to meet the varied educational requirements of its student population. Furthermore, the school operates as a designated Special Education (SPED) center, delivering targeted instructional programs for learners with visual and hearing impairments. This dual role exemplifies the institution's foundational commitment to inclusive education, ensuring equitable access to learning, the provision of tailored support, and the allocation of necessary resources for students with diverse needs.

Liloan Central School, located in Liloan, Cebu, Philippines, is a public educational institution committed to delivering quality education to all learners. The institution maintains a dedicated Special Education (SPED) Center, which delivers specialized instructional programs tailored to address the distinct learning requirements of students with disabilities. This initiative serves as a cornerstone of the school's commitment to cultivating an inclusive educational atmosphere and providing comprehensive support systems for diverse learners. In addition to its academic initiatives, the SPED Center actively participates in community events that promote inclusivity and raise awareness about special education. For instance, on January 19, 2024, the school celebrated its annual fiesta in honor of Señor Santo Niño, featuring a variety of activities that encouraged community engagement and cultural appreciation.

Consolacion Central School, situated in the municipality of Consolacion, Cebu, Philippines, hosts the Consolacion SPED Center. This public institution is committed to delivering quality education tailored for learners with special needs. The center implements specialized educational programs designed to provide for the varied learning profiles of children with special needs, thereby cultivating an educational environment that is inclusive, supportive, and conducive to student empowerment. Beyond its academic initiatives, the school actively participates in community activities that promote inclusivity and awareness. Notably, the Consolacion Central School SPED Team has been recognized for bringing pride and distinction to the Municipality of Consolacion through its exemplary achievements and contributions.

Carmen Central Elementary School, located along Rallos Street in the municipality of Carmen, Cebu, Philippines, is a well-established public educational institution that serves as a vital center of learning within the community. The school plays a significant role in providing quality foundational education to young learners, fostering their academic growth and holistic development.

As a public educational institution, the school maintains a foundational commitment to delivering accessible, high-quality elementary education, ensuring students from varied backgrounds acquire the essential knowledge and competencies required for a robust academic foundation. Its curriculum is thoughtfully designed to promote academic excellence, character formation, and social responsibility, preparing students to thrive in higher levels of education and to become responsible, contributing members of society.

Medellin Central Elementary School, situated in the heart of Poblacion, Medellin, Cebu, Philippines, holds a rich legacy of service to its community since its founding in 1938. As one of the key public educational institutions in the municipality, the school has consistently provided quality elementary education, shaped generations of learners and serving as a cornerstone of Medellin's educational landscape.

Over the years, the school has demonstrated remarkable growth and resilience, as evidenced by the increase in its student enrollment—from 992 pupils in 2012 to 1,117 pupils in 2015. This upward trend highlights the school's reputation within the community as a reliable and trusted institution for foundational education. It also reflects the commitment of its faculty and staff, whose collective efforts to foster a supportive and nurturing learning environment have earned the trust and confidence of parents and guardians.

The consistent growth of the school signifies its commitment to addressing the educational needs of the community. Initiatives such as improvements in facilities, integration of modern teaching methods, and fostering partnerships with stakeholders have likely contributed to its success. Medellin Central Elementary School remains steadfast in its mission to nurture and empower young learners, laying a strong foundation for their future success. The school upholds its commitment to providing quality education within a supportive and inclusive environment, ensuring that every child has equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities.

Respondents

The respondents consisted of 34 SPED teachers assigned to implement IEPs in the six identified SPED Centers. Given the small and well-defined population, the study utilized **universal sampling**, allowing all eligible SPED teachers to participate.

Universal sampling ensured complete representation, eliminated sampling bias, and provided a comprehensive profile of all teachers responsible for implementing individualized instruction within the division.

Instrument

This research sought to investigate the effects of professional development programs on instructional competencies among Special Education teachers, with particular focus on their Individualized Education Program implementation capabilities within selected SPED program schools in Cebu Province during the 2025-2026 academic year. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire composed of four sections

Part 1 Demographic Profile: gathered demographic data, including age, gender, highest educational attainment, specialization, years of experience, and PD activities. Part 2 Level of Knowledge on PD Programs: measured teachers' understanding of PD initiatives, particularly those related to IEP implementation. Part 3 Instructional Competencies in IEP Implementation: measured teachers' understanding of PD initiatives, particularly those related to IEP implementation. Subsequently, Part 4 Challenges in Utilizing PD for IEP Implementation: identified barriers organized into thematic categories (e.g., access to PD, administrative support, instructional resources, teacher-level constraints).

Data Gathering Procedure

Preliminary Stage. Letters of permission were submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent and respective school heads. Upon approval, schedules were coordinated to distribute the questionnaires.

Data Gathering Stage. A short orientation was conducted to clarify the study's purpose and instructions. Questionnaires were distributed personally or electronically, depending on school preferences. Once completed, the forms were retrieved and checked for completeness.

Post Data Gathering Stage. Responses were encoded, categorized, and prepared for statistical analysis. The resulting data were then interpreted to inform and support the formulation of the enhancement framework.

Statistical Treatment

To address the research questions, the following statistical tools were utilized:

Frequency Count & Percentage: To summarize demographic characteristics

Standard Deviation (SD). This measure variability within responses

Weighted Mean. To determine levels of PD knowledge and competency.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient. To identify the relationship between PD program participation and IEP implementation competencies.

Ethical Consideration

The study strictly adhered to established ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were clearly informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by omitting any identifying information and utilizing coded responses for data handling. All procedures complied with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and the guidelines of the National Privacy Commission. Throughout the research process, respect for participants was upheld by treating respondents with dignity and valuing their professional insights.

RESULTS

This chapter presented the analysis of professional development's impact on teaching competencies in IEP implementation among Special Education teachers in selected schools within Cebu Province for School Year 2025-2026. The investigation encompassed demographic profiling of respondents including age, gender, educational qualifications, specialization, teaching experience, and professional development background.

The study further assessed SPED teachers' knowledge levels regarding PD programs in relation to IEP implementation, evaluated the effectiveness of their teaching competencies in this domain, and examined challenges encountered in utilizing professional development for IEP delivery. Finally, the research tested the null hypothesis to determine whether a significant relationship exists between teachers' knowledge of professional development programs and their effectiveness in implementing IEP.

Data were gathered using a survey questionnaire, and the ensuing findings are presented and analyzed in the following section.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

This section delineates the demographic profile of respondents from six (6) Special Education Centers within the Cebu Province Division, Department of Education, Region VII Central Visayas. The profile encompasses age, gender, highest educational attainment, field of specialization, years of teaching experience, and relevant professional development activities. Participating institutions included Daanbantayan Central School, Bantayan Central School, Liloan Central School, Consolacion SPED Center, Carmen Central School, and Medellin Central School.

Age and Gender

This section delineates the demographic composition of the participant cohort with respect to age and gender characteristics. The collected data, systematically organized in the accompanying tables, provide a

comprehensive overview of these demographic variables. Table 2 specifically details the distribution patterns of age and gender across the respondent population.

Table 2 Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age (in years)	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
53 above	1	2.94	0	0	1	2.94
48-52	5	14.71	0	0	5	14.71
44-47	4	11.76	0	0	4	11.76
39-43	5	14.71	0	0	5	14.71
34-38	8	23.53	1	2.94	9	26.47
29-33	6	17.65	0	0	6	17.65
23-28	3	8.82	1	2.94	4	11.76
Total	32	94.00	2	0.06	34	100.00

Based on the results presented in Table 2, the largest proportion of respondents belonged to the 34–38 age group, comprising 26.47% of the total, with 23.53% female and 2.94% male. This was followed by the 29–33 age group at 17.65%, entirely composed of females. The 39–43 and 48–52 age brackets each accounted for 14.71% of respondents, both consisting solely of females.

The 23–28 and 44–47 groups each represented 11.76% of the total, with the former having 8.82% female and 2.94% male, and the latter entirely female. The smallest representation came from the 53 and above age group, comprising only 2.94%, all of whom were female. Overall, the majority of respondents were female (94%), with males making up only 6% of the total population.

The data implied a strong gender imbalance among the respondents, with females overwhelmingly participating in the study, particularly in the 34-38 age groups. The lack of male respondents, especially in the 39-43 and above 53 age categories, suggests that males may be underrepresented in the sample, potentially due to factors like limited availability or engagement in the study's subject matter.

Ganji et al. (2022) determined that demographic and professional variables—including age, teaching context, professional experience, and academic qualification—demonstrated no statistically significant relationship with teachers' classroom management approaches. Their research did, however, identify meaningful distinctions in management strategies between male and female educators. These gender-based variations suggest that inherent or socially constructed attributes associated with gender may play a more crucial role in shaping classroom management styles than professional experience or qualifications. Further research is required to explore the specific manifestations of these variations and to understand the underlying factors that contribute to the distinct classroom management behaviors exhibited by male and female teachers. Such investigations could delve into areas such as communication styles, authority dynamics, and perceptions of student needs, ultimately providing valuable insights for teacher training and professional development.

Highest Educational Attainment

This section initiates a comprehensive examination regarding highest educational attainment of respondents from the six (6) Special Education Centers of Cebu Province Division, Department of Education, Region VII Central Visayas.

Table 3 Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Educational Attainment	F	%
Doctorate Graduate	2	5.88
Doctorate Level	9	26.47
Master's Graduate	5	14.71
Master's Level	15	44.12
College Graduate	3	8.82
TOTAL	34	100.00

Table 3 presented the highest academic qualifications attained by the 34 study participants. The data indicate that a plurality of respondents (n=15, 44.12%) had reached the Master's Level. This was followed by participants at the Doctorate Level (n=9, 26.47%), Master's Graduates (n=5, 14.71%), and College Graduates (n=3, 8.82%). Doctorate Graduates constituted the smallest cohort (n=2, 5.88%).

The data implied that the respondents are predominantly highly educated, with a majority pursuing studies beyond the undergraduate level. The strong representation of individuals with Master's-level education likely reflects the professional or academic focus of the group, indicating a value placed on advanced knowledge and skills.

Teachers with advanced educational qualifications often demonstrate both a well-developed base of human capital and a strong aptitude for learning, motivation, and cognitive processing. These qualities tend to translate into more skillful instruction, better classroom management, and a greater capacity to create engaging learning experiences (Liu, 2021).

Field of Specialization

Specialization within special education constitutes a core competency in teacher preparation, equipping educators with the expertise and methodological skills necessary to address the unique learning profiles of students with disabilities. Proficiency in a specialized area enables teachers to deliver instruction that is carefully tailored to individual needs, implement evidence-based interventions, and cultivate inclusive learning environments that promote holistic student development, encompassing both academic success and personal growth.

Table 4 Field of Specialization of the Respondents

Field of Specialization	F	%
General Special Education	29	85.29
General Education	4	11.76
Subject Specialization	1	2.94
TOTAL	34	100.00

The table illustrates the respondents' field of specialization, revealing that the vast majority of respondents, 85.29%, indicated their field of specialization as General Special Education. A significantly smaller portion, 11.76%, specialized in General Education. The smallest group, at just 2.94%, identified their expertise as Subject Specialization.

The data implied a strong focus on inclusive education practices among the respondents. The overwhelming prevalence of General Special Education as a field of specialization implies that the educators surveyed are primarily equipped to support students with diverse learning needs within a general classroom setting.

Teacher specialization, while often intended to enhance expertise, can sometimes undermine instructional efficacy in core subjects like math and reading. This is particularly evident when specialized teachers focus narrowly on their subject area without fully addressing the broader learning needs of their students. The negative impact becomes more pronounced when working with learners who are already at risk of academic difficulties, such as those with learning disabilities, limited foundational skills, or language barriers. In these cases, a specialized approach may overlook the need for integrated teaching strategies that connect different subject areas, build basic skills, and provide personalized support (Hwang, et al., 2021).

Years of Teaching

The influence of SPED teachers' years of experience is reflected in their capacity to positively affect student outcomes. Educators with extensive teaching experience are often more adept at fostering inclusive learning environments, implementing effective interventions, and promoting holistic student development. The distribution of the participants' teaching experience is shown in the following table.

Table 5 Years of Teaching of the Respondents

Years of Teaching	F	%
10 years and above	20	58.82
7 – 9 years	5	14.71
4 – 6 years	4	11.76
1 – 3 years	5	14.71
TOTAL	34	100.00

Based on the data in Table 5, the largest proportion of respondents, accounting for 58.82%, have been teaching for 10 years and above. This is followed by those with 7–9 years and 1–3 years of teaching experience, each comprising 14.71% of the respondents. The smallest group, representing 11.76%, have 4–6 years of teaching experience.

The data implied that most respondents are highly experienced SPED teachers, which may contribute to greater instructional effectiveness, classroom management, and the ability to address diverse learner needs. The relatively small proportion of teachers with fewer years of experience suggests a stable and seasoned workforce, potentially leading to consistent delivery of specialized educational services, though it may also indicate limited entry of new educators into the field.

The statistically significant, yet negative, relationship observed between teaching experience and teacher attitudes underscores a critical need for enhanced practical training within teacher education programs. While experience is generally valued, this finding suggests that time in the classroom alone is insufficient to cultivate consistently positive attitudes towards inclusive practices.

To address this concern, teacher education programs at the college level should place greater emphasis on practical teaching experiences. This includes integrating additional coursework that focuses on effective strategies for instructing students with special needs, as well as providing extended student teaching placements in diverse special education settings (Di Maggio, 2020).

Relevant Training and Seminar Attended

For Special Education practitioners, the continual acquisition and refinement of expertise within their designated fields is essential to maintaining effective and responsive teaching practices. In recognition of this need, educational institutions systematically encourage—and in many cases, require—participation in structured professional development initiatives, including workshops, training programs, specialized seminars, and certification courses. Such initiatives are designed not only to enhance instructional competencies and expand pedagogical knowledge but also to provide teachers with practical strategies and insights that can be directly applied in classroom settings.

These professional development experiences are particularly important in special education, where teachers must address diverse and complex learning needs, implement individualized interventions, and foster inclusive environments that promote holistic student growth. The data presented in Table [X] illustrate the specific trainings and professional development activities attended by SPED teachers from the selected schools within the Cebu Province Division, providing a clear picture of their exposure to ongoing skill enhancement and capacity-building initiatives.

Table 6 Relevant Training and Seminars Attended of the Respondents

Relevant Training	f	%
International Level	4	11.76
National Level	3	8.82
Regional Level	6	17.65
Division Level	18	52.94
School Level	3	8.82
TOTAL	34	100.00

The data revealed a clear hierarchy in access to professional development opportunities. As Table 6 illustrates, a majority of respondents (52.94%) reported attending relevant training programs at the division level. Participation in regional-level training was less frequent, with 17.65% of respondents indicating attendance. A small proportion of respondents (11.76%) had engaged in international training, indicating some exposure to global best practices. Notably, both national-level and school-level training opportunities were the least prevalent, each accounting for only 8.82% of respondents.

This data implied that while division-level trainings are the most accessible, opportunities for teachers to engage in more localized, school-based initiatives or broader, national and international professional development activities are comparatively limited. Further investigation is warranted to explore the reasons for this disparity and its potential impact on teacher effectiveness and program implementation.

Comprehensive teacher preparation and sustained professional development are fundamental to augmenting the efficacy of special education practitioners and advancing student achievement. This analysis aggregates and evaluates prevailing academic literature to situate the research question within the impact of diverse professional development initiatives within special education, with particular focus on their effects on instructional methodologies, educator attitudes, and professional knowledge, as well as subsequent student academic performance and socio-emotional growth. The analysis encompasses various developmental formats—including workshops, instructional coaching, digital courses, and virtual professional learning communities—while examining how program architecture, organizational support, and administrative leadership collectively determine program efficacy (Kumar, 2023).

Level of Knowledge of Sped Teachers Regarding Professional Development (Pd) Programs Related to the Implementation of Individualized Education Programs (Ieps)

This section presented the level of knowledge of SPED teachers regarding professional development (PD) programs related to the execution of Individualized Education Programs (IEP) from the six (6) schools of the Division of Cebu Province, School Year 2025-2026. This construct comprises 10 statements, with corresponding indicators detailed in the tables below.

Table 7 Level of Knowledge of SPED Teachers Regarding Professional Development (PD) Programs Related to the Implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPS)

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Knowledge of the basic principles of competency professional development in IEP implementation.	3.41	0.80	High
2	Understanding of how competency professional development align with IEP goals.	3.53	0.78	High
3	Awareness of the key components of competency professional development for SPED teachers.	3.68	0.86	High
4	Familiarity with strategies for integrating competency professional development into teaching practices.	3.62	0.76	High
5	Understanding the role of this professional development in improving student outcomes.	3.79	0.80	High
6	Knowledge of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of competency professional development	3.62	0.76	High
7	Awareness of resources and tools available for competency professional development in SPED.	3.71	0.73	High
8	Familiarity with professional development opportunities related to competency professional development	3.62	0.76	High
9	Knowledge of policies and guidelines supporting competency professional development for SPED teachers.	3.62	0.72	High
10	Understanding of how these professional development support inclusive education practices.	3.76	0.78	High
	Aggregate Mean	3.64		High
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.78	
Legend: 4.21-5.00 – Very High; 3.41-4.20- High; 2.61-3.40- Moderate; 1.81- 2.60 – Low; 1.00 – 1.80 – Very Low				

The data in Table 7 revealed that SPED teachers possess a high level of knowledge regarding professional development (PD) programs related to the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Specifically, SPED teachers demonstrated the highest level of understanding regarding the function of professional development in improving student outcomes (WM = 3.79), followed closely by awareness of resources and tools available for competency professional development in SPED (WM = 3.71). Understanding of how these professional development supports inclusive education practices (WM = 3.76) and awareness of the key components of competency professional development for SPED teachers (WM = 3.68) also ranked

highly.

Familiarity with strategies for integrating competency professional development into teaching practices (WM = 3.62), knowledge of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of competency professional development (WM = 3.62), familiarity with professional development opportunities related to competency professional development (WM = 3.62), knowledge of policies and guidelines supporting competency professional development for SPED teachers (WM = 3.62), and knowledge of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of competency professional development (WM = 3.62) all shared the same weighted mean.

Furthermore, knowledge of the basic principles of competency professional development in IEP implementation received the lowest rating among the indicators, though still representing a high level of knowledge (WM = 3.41). The computed aggregate mean of 3.64 reflects a generally elevated level of knowledge among respondents in this domain.

Furthermore, the aggregate standard deviation of 0.78 suggests that the responses were relatively consistent across the different indicators, reflecting a shared understanding among the participants. The data implies a solid base for implementing individualized education, reflecting successful prior professional development in conveying the purpose, resources, and principles of competency-based PD. However, a slightly lower understanding of basic principles implies a need to reinforce these foundational concepts to ensure consistent application and maximize the efficacy of PD on student results.

Teacher preparation and professional development initiatives can be enhanced through the implementation of a sustained learning framework encompassing three critical areas. First, general education practitioners require development in utilizing assessment data to guide instructional decisions and effectively implement these strategies. Second, educators must cultivate greater awareness and comprehension of the particular circumstances faced by learners with special needs. Third, teachers need to strengthen collaborative communication skills with all stakeholders, both within and beyond the school environment, who support the comprehensive development of students with special needs (David & Melina, 2020).

Effectiveness of the Teaching Competencies of the Sped Teachers in Individualized Education Program (Iep) Implementation

The effective implementation of Individualized Education Programs requires specialized instructional competencies to respond to the diverse needs of students with special needs. Evaluating the efficacy of these competencies is essential for ensuring successful attainment of IEP objectives and for delivering high-quality, individualized instruction that responds to students' unique learning requirements.

Table 8 Effectiveness of the Teaching Competencies of the SPED Teachers in Individualized Education Program (IEP) Implementation

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Effectiveness in assessing students' individual needs to develop appropriate IEP goals.	4.00	0.70	High
2	Skill in creating IEPs that align with curriculum standards and student needs.	3.68	0.74	High
3	Competence in collaborating with parents and other professionals during the IEP process.	3.76	0.74	High
4	Ability to adapt teaching strategies to meet the unique requirements of each student.	4.06	0.68	High

5	Effectiveness in monitoring and evaluating students' progress towards IEP goals.	3.71	0.73	High
6	Competence in managing classroom activities while implementing IEPs.	3.79	0.72	High
7	Proficiency in using assistive technologies or specialized tools to support students.	3.71	0.85	High
8	Ability to align instructional goals with the accommodations outlined in the IEP.	3.71	0.73	High
9	Effectiveness in fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.	3.82	0.70	High
10	Skill in handling challenges during the implementation of IEPs.	3.65	0.75	High
	Aggregate Mean	3.79		High
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.73	
Legend: 4.21-5.00 – Very Effective; 3.41-4.20- Effective; 2.61-3.40- Moderately Effective; 1.81- 2.60 – Less Effective; 1.00 – 1.80 – Ineffective				

Table 8 indicates that SPED teachers are generally perceived as highly effective in their teaching competencies related to Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation. The highest-rated competency was the ability to adapt teaching strategies to meet the unique requirements of each student (WM = 4.06), closely followed by effectiveness in assessing students' individual needs to develop appropriate IEP goals (WM = 4.00). Educators demonstrated considerable effectiveness in cultivating an inclusive and supportive learning environment (WM = 3.82), while also exhibiting strong capabilities in managing classroom activities during IEP implementation (WM = 3.79).

Competence in collaborating with parents and other professionals during the IEP process (WM = 3.76), effectiveness in monitoring and evaluating students' progress towards IEP goals (WM = 3.71), proficiency in using assistive technologies or specialized tools to support students (WM = 3.71), and ability to align instructional goals with the accommodations outlined in the IEP (WM = 3.71) all received the same weighted mean. Skill in creating IEPs that align with curriculum standards and student needs (WM = 3.68) and skill in handling challenges during the implementation of IEPs (WM = 3.65) received the lowest ratings among the indicators, though these still indicate a high level of effectiveness.

The aggregate mean of 3.79 confirms an overall high level of effectiveness, with an aggregate standard deviation of 0.73 suggesting relatively consistent ratings across the different competencies. This finding suggests that SPED teachers, as a collective group, exhibit a high and relatively consistent level of effectiveness in implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEP).

This suggests that current professional development and support mechanisms are effectively preparing educators with the requisite skills to accommodate the spectrum of student learning needs with Individualized Education Programs. However, further analysis of individual competency ratings could reveal specific areas where targeted professional development could further enhance teacher effectiveness.

Odom et al. (2020) affirm the profound impact of Individualized Education Programs (IEP) in guaranteeing that instructional approaches are precisely tailored to meet the distinct needs of every learner. More than merely serving as a tool for setting individualized goals, the authors advocate for a collaborative approach that actively involves educators, parents, and specialists. They contend that such collaboration is fundamental to establishing

supportive and effective learning environments that promote the holistic development of learners with special needs.

Challenges Do Sped Teachers Face In Utilizing Professional Development For The Implementation Of Individualized Education Programs (Iep)

Special Education (SPED) teachers serve as fundamental facilitators in the successful execution of Individualized Education Programs (IEP). However, they often face a range of challenges that hinder their ability to fully maximize professional development opportunities. Identifying and understanding these challenges is essential to improving support systems, enhancing teacher competencies, and strengthening the effective and inclusive implementation of IEPs. This section presents the specific challenges encountered by SPED teachers in utilizing professional development initiatives related to IEP implementation.

Table 9 Challenges Face by SPED Teachers in Utilizing Professional Development for the Implementation of Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Challenges	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Rank
Difficulty accessing training programs focused on competency	30	88.24	
Lack of time to participate in professional development activities due to existing teaching responsibilities.	26	76.47	
Insufficient support or resources from school administration to implement competency professional development effectively.	30	88.24	
Challenges in understanding and applying the key components of competency professional development in teaching practices.	30	88.24	
Limited access of available pertinent information regarding Professional Development Program for Inclusive/ Special Education teachers.	27	79.41	
Limited collaboration opportunities with colleagues or specialists to discuss and improve IEP implementation.	29	85.29	
Insufficient access to tools, materials, or technologies required to implement competency professional development.	28	82.35	
Lack of clear guidelines or policies on utilizing competency professional development in the context of IEPs.	25	73.53	
Difficulty evaluating the effectiveness of competency professional development in achieving student-specific IEP goals.	29	85.29	
Resistance to change or hesitation among teachers to adopt new practices from competency professional development.	30	88.24	

Table 9 reveals several significant challenges faced by SPED teachers in utilizing professional development for IEP implementation. The most prominent challenges, each reported by 88.24% of respondents, include: difficulty accessing training programs focused on competency, insufficient support/resources from school administration, challenges in understanding and applying key components of competency professional development, and resistance to change among teachers.

Limited collaboration opportunities and difficulty evaluating the effectiveness of competency professional development were also substantial obstacles, cited by 85.29% of respondents. Insufficient access to tools, materials, or technologies presented a challenge for 82.35% of teachers. A lack of access to information about relevant professional development programs was reported by 79.41%. Time constraints due to existing teaching responsibilities were a challenge for 76.47% of respondents. Finally, a lack of clear guidelines or policies was the least cited challenge, though still substantial at 73.53%.

The findings implied that while SPED teachers recognize the importance of professional development for effective IEP implementation, systemic barriers such as limited access, inadequate support, and resistance to change hinder their full participation. The resolution of these challenges through enhanced administrative support, improved resource accessibility, and more definitive policy frameworks holds considerable potential for advancing teacher competencies and subsequently improving educational results for learners requiring specialized support.

Significant barriers persist in the effective implementation of specialized educational programs. A primary obstacle involves insufficient professional development opportunities, which constrains educators' capacity to develop the specialized instructional techniques necessary for addressing diverse learning requirements. Another pressing issue is the insufficiency of facilities and learning resources, making it difficult to provide an environment that supports inclusive and individualized learning. Teachers also face difficulties in fostering positive relationships among classmates, as peer acceptance and social interaction are critical yet often overlooked aspects of inclusion (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024).

Test Of Relationship Between Sped Teacher Pd Knowledge and Effectiveness of Iep Implementation

The relationship between Special Education teachers' professional development knowledge and their effectiveness in IEP implementation was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient, with statistical significance determined at the 0.05 level.

Table 10 Test of Relationship Between the SPED Teachers PD Knowledge and Effectiveness of IEP Implementation

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
SPED Teacher PD Knowledge and Effectiveness of IEP Implementation	0.772	High Positive	0.001	Reject Ho	Significant
*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)					

As illustrated in Table 10, a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.772$) exists between Special Education teachers' professional development knowledge and their effectiveness in implementing IEP. The statistical significance of this relationship ($p = 0.001$) necessitates the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that enhanced knowledge of professional development corresponds with improved effectiveness in IEP implementation. The findings suggest that ongoing, well-structured professional development is vital in enhancing the capacity of SPED teachers to implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) effectively. By strengthening training opportunities and establishing robust support systems, schools can promote more effective individualized interventions, ultimately leading to improved educational experiences and learning outcomes for students with special needs.

The strong positive correlation between educator knowledge and classroom implementation highlights the critical importance of sustained, high-quality professional development. These findings suggest that to enhance IEP preparation and implementation, schools should prioritize structured training programs that directly translate into classroom application, ensure robust administrative support for teachers implementing new strategies, and foster collaborative mechanisms for sharing best practices and addressing challenges. Through strategic investment in these essential domains, educational institutions can enable teachers to elevate

instructional quality and foster enhanced educational results for learners with special needs (Concepcion et al., 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the effect of professional development programs on SPED teachers' instructional efficacy in implementing IEPs across selected schools in Cebu Province during the 2025–2026 academic year. Findings confirmed that teachers possessed substantial knowledge of PD programs, as reflected in the aggregate mean of 3.64 and the consistency of responses across indicators.

SPED teachers also demonstrated high levels of competency in IEP implementation, particularly in modifying instructional approaches for diverse learners.

However, several challenges continue to hinder optimal PD utilization. These include limited access to competency-based training, inadequate administrative support, insufficient understanding of essential PD components, and resistance to change.

The analysis further established a strong positive correlation between PD knowledge and IEP implementation effectiveness. This affirms that increased understanding of professional development directly enhances instructional performance. Collectively, the results emphasize the vital importance of sustained, high-quality professional development in strengthening SPED practitioners' capabilities and improving IEP execution, ultimately leading to better student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the data indicate, SPED teachers are encouraged to utilize the proposed enhancement plan and actively participate in professional development programs to strengthen their competencies in implementing IEPs. School administrators are advised to provide stronger support by ensuring adequate instructional resources, teaching materials, and logistical assistance to enhance the application of professional development in classroom practice. Policy and program developers should establish clearer guidelines and design structured competency-based professional development programs to promote consistent and effective IEP implementation across institutions. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the long-term effects of professional training on SPED teacher competencies and student outcomes, including longitudinal, mixed-methods, and competency-based PD evaluations to inform broader implementation efforts.

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