

Training Gaps in Handling Learners with Special Needs: Its Correlation to Teacher Competence

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education requires teachers to possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and competence to effectively support learners with special needs. However, gaps in training may affect teachers' preparedness in implementing inclusive practices. This study determined the extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs and examined its relationship with teacher competence in the Daet North and South Districts, Schools Division Office of Camarines Norte. It also identified teachers' coping mechanisms and proposed an intervention program based on the findings. This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive-correlational research design. The respondents were 124 Junior High School teachers currently handling learners with special needs. A researcher-made questionnaire, adapted from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2020) and Phor et al. (2025), was utilized to gather data. Weighted mean was used to determine the extent of training gaps and the level of teacher competence, while the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient (ρ) determined the significant relationship between the variables at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that teachers experienced a moderate extent of training gaps in knowledge of disabilities, individualized instruction, behavior management, and collaboration, while participation in inclusivity training was rated low extent. Despite these gaps, teacher competence was rated competent across all domains, including teaching strategies, expository teaching, encouraging independent thinking, probing-inquiry teaching, and communication skills. A significant positive relationship was found between training gaps and teacher competence, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Teachers also demonstrated positive coping mechanisms, particularly in maintaining resilience, while participation in professional learning groups received the lowest rating. The study concludes that although training gaps remain, teachers demonstrate competence in handling learners with special needs. Continuous professional development, structured mentoring, collaborative learning through School Learning Action Cells (SLAC), and the implementation of the proposed INCLUSIVE-READY intervention program are recommended to strengthen teachers' competence and support inclusive education.

Keywords: Training gaps, teacher competence, knowledge of disabilities and needs, skills in individualized instruction, behavior management challenges, collaborating with parents and support staff, teaching strategies and skills

INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of education is increasingly focused on creating inclusive learning environments where every student, regardless of their unique needs, can thrive. However, a significant obstacle to achieving this vision is the lack of adequate training for teachers in handling Learners with special needs. This gap in teacher preparation is a widespread concern, affecting educational systems worldwide. Studies have shown that a lack of specialized training can lead to teachers feeling unprepared and overwhelmed, which in turn can negatively impact student outcomes. Ainscow (2020) highlights that for inclusive education to be successful, it is crucial for teachers to have the necessary skills and confidence to address the diverse learning needs of all Learners.

Similarly, Mitchell (2021) emphasizes that continuous professional development is essential for equipping educators with the tools to implement effective inclusive practices. Without proper training, teachers may struggle to manage challenging behaviors, adapt their teaching methods, and collaborate effectively with support

staff and parents, ultimately hindering the progress of Learners with special needs.

In the Philippines, the commitment to inclusive education is enshrined in national laws and policies. The 1987 Constitution provides the foundational right to quality education for all citizens. This principle is further solidified by Republic Act (RA) No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (K to 12 Law). This landmark legislation expanded the basic education cycle and, importantly, mandated that the system be learner-oriented and responsive to the needs, cognitive and cultural capacity, the circumstances and diversity of learners, schools and communities. A key part of this law is its explicit inclusion of learners with special needs, making their education a central component of the national curriculum.

This commitment has been continually reinforced by the Department of Education (DepEd) through various orders. A particularly relevant one is the DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, which outlines the Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program. This order serves as a comprehensive guide for schools to organize, manage, and implement educational programs and interventions for Learners with disabilities. It emphasizes the need for a Child Find System to identify and enroll learners with disabilities, the creation of individualized education plans (IEPs), and the provision of appropriate support services. The order also recognizes the crucial role of teachers and administrators, stressing the need to train and equip them with the capabilities to address the unique needs of these Learners.

Despite the increasing support and national policies for inclusive education, the implementation at the local level often faces significant challenges. There is a noticeable gap between policy and practice, particularly in providing specialized training for teachers in supporting inclusive education (Masongsong et al., 2023). In Daet North District under the Schools Division Office of Camarines Norte, three secondary schools are currently implementing the Special Needs Education (SNED) program, with a total of 124 receiving teachers responsible for catering to learners with diverse educational needs. These teachers handle the diverse learning needs of learners with special needs, leading to a disconnect between their training and the actual demands of their classrooms. This felt need for specialized training is evident in the difficulties teachers face daily, such as limited knowledge of different disabilities, challenges in creating individualized instruction plans, and struggles with managing classroom behaviors. Some teachers may experience uncertainty when addressing the unique needs of learners with special needs, which can present challenges in providing the most appropriate learning support.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to describe the extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs and to determine its correlation with their level of competence. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current situation and to identify specific areas where teachers need support. It determines the diverse coping mechanisms employed by educators to navigate the complexities of inclusive classrooms despite existing professional voids. The findings serve as bases for proposing an intervention, which is a training program that aims at strengthening teachers' competence and ultimately improving the educational intervention for learners with special needs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive-correlational research design. The respondents were 124 Junior High School teachers handling learners with special needs in the Daet North District, selected through total enumeration. Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire adapted from the Council for Exceptional Children (2020) and Phor et al. (2025), and were analyzed using weighted mean and the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient (ρ) at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Extent of Training Gaps among Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs as Perceived by the Respondents. This section provides a detailed discussion of the extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs as perceived by the respondents along knowledge of disabilities and

needs, skills in individualized instruction, behavior management challenges, participation in inclusivity training, and collaborating with parents and support staff.

Knowledge of Disabilities and Needs. Table 1 shows the perceived extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs along knowledge of disabilities and needs which obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.74, interpreted as moderate extent. The highest weighted mean of 2.99, interpreted as moderate extent, is obtained by the indicator the respondents have a clear understanding of how exceptionalities may interact with a student’s development and learning. This implies that teachers are generally aware that disabilities influence students’ learning processes. This suggests that teachers recognize the importance of adjusting instruction for learners with special needs. The lowest weighted mean of 2.40, interpreted as low extent, is obtained by the indicator the receiving teacher received sufficient training to respond effectively to the individual learning differences of learners with special needs, indicating that many teachers feel they have not received enough formal training. This implies that although teachers understand the concept of disabilities, they may lack the professional preparation needed to apply effective strategies in real classroom situations. The finding was corroborated by Ayson-Reyes (2024), which noted that many Filipino teachers still lack sufficient formal training and resources to fully address the diverse requirements of learners with disabilities. The study confirmed that teachers globally continue to report concerns regarding insufficient knowledge when working with special needs learners, which fosters a persistent gap in their professional competence. The moderate gap suggests that while teachers are not entirely without knowledge, there is a clear need for more structured and specialized preparation to move beyond basic awareness toward mastery.

Table 1 Perceived Extent of Training Gaps among Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Knowledge of Disabilities and Needs

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. I have a clear understanding of how exceptionalities may interact with a student’s development and learning.	2.99	ME
2. I am aware of how language, culture, and family background impact the learning needs of learners with disabilities	2.98	ME
3. I have received sufficient training to respond effectively to the individual learning differences of learners with special needs.	2.40	LE
4. I am able to recognize the ways in which disability affects participation in classroom activities and learning experiences.	2.79	ME
5. I have sufficient background knowledge to provide meaningful learning experiences tailored for exceptional learners.	2.51	ME
Overall Weighted Mean	2.74	ME

Rating Scale:	Descriptive Interpretation:
3.25 – 4.00	- High Extent (HE)
2.50 – 3.24	- Moderate Extent (ME)
1.75 – 2.49	- Low Extent (LE)
1.00 – 1.74	- Very Low Extent (VLE)

Skills in Individualized Instruction. This section presents the use of individualized education plans (IEPs), differentiated strategies, and personalized assessments. Table 2 shows that the perceived extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs along skills in individualized instruction obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.64, interpreted as moderate extent. This suggests that teachers can modify activities and learning tasks to some degree, but they may still encounter challenges in designing comprehensive individualized learning plans. The highest weighted mean of 2.70, interpreted as moderate extent, is receiving teacher able to develop learning experiences that consider learners’ individual interests, abilities, and backgrounds with the support available to me. This implies that teachers are capable of adjusting learning activities based on the characteristics of their learners. The lowest weighted mean of 2.50, interpreted as moderate extent, is receiving teacher are familiar with using a variety of specialized curricula, such as social, emotional, or independence curricula, for learners with special needs. This implies that teachers have

limited familiarity with specialized learning programs designed for learners with disabilities. This means that teachers know how to modify lessons but not yet fully trained in implementing specialized programs that focus on social skills, emotional development, or independent living skills. The finding was corroborated by Alviar (2021) who found that teachers' competence in individualized instruction improves when they receive continuous training and mentoring. The study emphasized that teachers often develop better strategies for addressing diverse learning needs when they participate in regular coaching and professional learning programs. This supports the present study because it shows that while teachers can implement individualized strategies, additional training is still needed to strengthen their skills. Similarly, the findings were conformed by Ayson-Reyes (2024), which revealed that many teachers in the Philippines still struggle with adapting instruction for learners with disabilities due to limited training and resources. His study explained that teachers often depend on personal teaching experience rather than structured training programs to modify instruction. This observation aligns with the present study, which also identified moderate gaps in teachers' skills in individualized instruction.

Table 2 Perceived Extent of Training Gaps among Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Skills in Individualized Instruction

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. I am able to individualize instructional plans effectively for learners with exceptionalities.	2.68	ME
2. I can modify general and specialized curricula to make them accessible for all learners.	2.67	ME
3. I have adequate skills in adapting lessons or instructional materials to address the unique needs of each student with a disability.	2.64	ME
4. I am able to develop learning experiences that consider learners' individual interests, abilities, and backgrounds with the support available to me.	2.70	ME
5. I am familiar with using a variety of specialized curricula, such as social, emotional, or independence curricula, for learners with special needs.	2.50	ME
Overall Weighted Mean	2.64	ME

Rating Scale:

Descriptive Interpretation:

3.25 – 4.00

- High Extent (HE)

2.50 – 3.24

- Moderate Extent (ME)

1.75 – 2.49

- Low Extent (LE)

1.00 – 1.74

- Very Low Extent (VLE)

Behavior Management Challenges. This section presents the teachers' self-assessment of their ability to identify, address, and reduce disruptive behaviors through techniques such as reinforcement, individualized interventions, and classroom routines. Table 3 shows that the perceived extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs along behavior management challenges obtained an overall weighted mean 2.61, interpreted as moderate extent. The highest weighted mean of 2.77, interpreted as moderate extent, the receiving teacher was able to use motivational and instructional interventions that help learners adapt to classroom expectations. This implies that teachers are capable of motivating learners and encouraging positive behavior through instructional strategies. The lowest weighted mean of 2.40, interpreted as low extent, the receiving teachers are well-trained in creating safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environments. This implies that teachers understand the importance of maintaining order in the classroom but do not have sufficient training on how to design learning environments that fully support the diverse cultural, emotional, and behavioral needs of learners with disabilities. The findings were confirmed by Herrera (2024) which revealed that many teachers in the Philippine context still need improvement in behavior management strategies, particularly when handling learners with special needs. The study pointed out that teachers frequently rely on traditional classroom discipline techniques that may not always be effective for learners

with disabilities. This observation supports the present study's finding that training gaps still exist in managing behavior in inclusive classrooms.

Table 3 Perceived Extent of Training Gaps among Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Behavior Management Challenges

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. I am well-trained in creating safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environments.	2.40	LE
2. I am able to use motivational and instructional interventions that help learners adapt to classroom expectations.	2.77	ME
3. I am confident in intervening appropriately with learners with exceptionalities during behavioral crises.	2.56	ME
4. I am well-prepared to maintain positive social interactions and promote the emotional well-being of learners with disabilities	2.69	ME
5. I am able to manage disruptive behaviors and maintain discipline in a diverse classroom setting.	2.65	ME
Overall Weighted Mean	2.61	ME

<i>Rating Scale:</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>
3.25 – 4.00	- High Extent (HE)
2.50 – 3.24	- Moderate Extent (ME)
1.75 – 2.49	- Low Extent (LE)
1.00 – 1.74	- Very Low Extent (VLE)

Participation in Inclusivity Training. This section discusses the number of inclusivity-focused trainings attended and perceived relevance to practice. Table 4 shows that the perceived extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs along participation in inclusivity training obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.43, interpreted as low extent. This implies that teachers have limited participation in inclusivity-focused training programs. The highest weighted mean of 2.49, interpreted as low extent, is they regularly participate in professional development about inclusive education for learners with special needs. This implies that some teachers still participate in professional development activities related to inclusive education, although such opportunities may not occur frequently. The lowest weighted mean of 2.31, interpreted as low extent, they have substantial exposure to current professional standards and ethical practices for working with learners with disabilities. This indicates that teachers have limited familiarity with updated professional standards related to inclusive education. This implies that teachers were not always aware of the latest policies, ethical guidelines, and professional practices in supporting learners with disabilities. The findings were corroborated by Miguel et al. (2025) who explained that teacher preparation programs and in-service training opportunities sometimes fail to provide continuous professional development related to inclusive education. Because of this, teachers may lack updated knowledge and practical strategies for teaching students with disabilities. This indicates that teachers have limited exposure to inclusivity-focused professional development activities.

Table 4 Perceived Extent of Training Gaps among Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Participation in Inclusivity Training

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. I regularly participate in professional development about inclusive education for learners with special needs.	2.49	LE
2. My school offers ample opportunities for hands-on training or workshops about inclusive education practices.	2.46	LE
3. I actively engage in lifelong learning activities focused on	2.46	LE

inclusivity or special education.		
4. I am familiar with current issues and best practices in special education and inclusive classrooms.	2.42	LE
5. I have substantial exposure to current professional standards and ethical practices for working with learners with disabilities.	2.31	LE
Overall Weighted Mean	2.43	LE

Rating Scale:

Descriptive Interpretation:

3.25 – 4.00

- High Extent (HE)

2.50 – 3.24

- Moderate Extent (ME)

1.75 – 2.49

- Low Extent (LE)

1.00 – 1.74

- Very Low Extent (VLE)

Collaborating with Parents and Support Staff. This section presents the involvement of parents and multidisciplinary teams in IEP meetings, frequent communication, and execution of jointly developed intervention plans. Table 5 shows that the perceived extent of training gaps among teachers in handling learners with special needs along collaborating with parents and support staff, with overall weighted mean of 2.56, interpreted as moderate extent. The highest weighted mean of 2.58, interpreted as moderate extent, is shared by three indicators, they have substantial experience collaborating with families of learners with exceptionalities to make educational decisions, they were able to build effective partnerships with special education and general education colleagues, and they are confident serving as a collaborative resource to colleagues, parents, and community agencies. This indicates that teachers feel more confident in building relationships and participating in collaboration. This suggests that teachers are comfortable communicating and engaging with parents and colleagues. The lowest weighted mean of 2.52, interpreted as moderate extent, they were able to coordinate individualized learning plans and support services among various team members (teachers, SPED staff, parents). This implies that teachers struggle in aligning the roles of different stakeholders such as SPED teachers, parents, and support staff. The finding was corroborated by Odeh and Lach (2024) who found that limited collaboration with parents and support systems restricts teacher effectiveness in inclusive education. This supports the present finding by showing that collaboration is a global concern, not only a local issue. Likewise, Kimhi and Bar Nir (2025) emphasized that lack of structured training reduces teachers' ability to collaborate effectively, which again confirms the moderate training gap observed.

Table 5 Perceived Extent of Training Gaps among Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Collaborating with Parents and Support Staff

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. I have substantial experience collaborating with families of learners with exceptionalities to make educational decisions.	2.58	ME
2. I am able to build effective partnerships with special education and general education colleagues.	2.58	ME
3. I am confident serving as a collaborative resource to colleagues, parents, and community agencies.	2.58	ME
4. I am well-guided on effective communication and collaboration strategies when supporting learners with special needs.	2.55	ME
5. I am able to coordinate individualized learning plans and support services among various team members (teachers, SPED staff, parents).	2.52	ME
Overall Weighted Mean	2.56	ME

Rating Scale:

Descriptive Interpretation:

3.25 – 4.00

- High Extent (HE)

2.50 – 3.24

- Moderate Extent (ME)

1.75 – 2.49

- Low Extent (LE)

1.00 – 1.74

- Very Low Extent (VLE)

Level of Teacher Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs as Perceived by the Respondents. This section discusses the level of teacher competence in handling learners with special needs along, teaching strategies and skills, expository teaching, encouraging independent thinking, probing-inquiry style of teaching, and communication skills.

Teaching Strategies and Skills. This part presents the observations of varied instructional approaches and responsiveness to individual requirements. Table 6 shows that the level of teacher competence in handling learners with special needs along teaching strategies and skills, had an overall weighted mean of 2.77, interpreted as competent. The highest weighted mean of 2.85, interpreted as competent, is Modifies lesson plans to accommodate the unique needs of learners with special needs in the classroom. This suggests that teachers are flexible and responsive to learners' needs. The lowest weighted mean of 2.60, interpreted as competent, is Effectively utilizes available resources and assistive technologies to enhance learning for learners with special needs. This implies that teachers are not fully equipped to use tools such as visual aids, digital applications, or assistive devices. The findings were corroborated by Yuwono and Okech (2021) who found that limited technical training and resources reduce teachers' effectiveness in inclusive classrooms. This confirms the present finding, particularly the lower rating in the use of assistive technologies. However, Cutajar et al. (2025) suggested that when teachers are given access to experiential training and tools, their competence significantly improves. This slightly refutes the present limitation, implying that the issue is not teacher ability but lack of support and training opportunities.

Table 6 Level of Teachers Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Teaching Strategies and Skills

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Modifies lesson plans to accommodate the unique needs of learners with special needs in the classroom.	2.85	C
2. Uses varied instructional techniques designed to address multiple learning styles and abilities of learners with special needs.	2.77	C
3. Proactive in implementing individualized supports to ensure the participation of learners with special needs in all activities.	2.81	C
4. Consistently monitors and adjusts teaching approaches based on the progress and feedback of learners with special needs.	2.83	C
5. Effectively utilizes available resources and assistive technologies to enhance learning for learners with special needs.	2.60	C
Overall Weighted Mean	2.77	C

<i>Rating Scale:</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>
3.25 – 4.00	- Highly Competent (HC)
2.50 – 3.24	- Competent (C)
1.75 – 2.49	- Slightly Competent (SC)
1.00 – 1.74	- Not Competent (NC)

Expository Teaching. This section illustrates the quality of lectures, explanations, demonstrations, and structured presentations as reported by teachers for students with special needs. Table 7 shows that the level of teacher competence in handling learners with special needs along expository teaching, had an overall weighted mean of 2.81, interpreted as competent. This implies that teachers are generally effective in delivering lessons through explanations and structured presentations. The highest weighted mean of 2.87, interpreted as competent, is Explains lesson content clearly and at an appropriate pace for learners with special needs to understand. This suggests that teachers are sensitive to the learning needs of learners and can adjust their delivery accordingly. The lowest weighted mean of 2.74, interpreted as competent, is Organizes and presents information in logical, manageable steps for learners with special needs. This suggests that while teachers can explain well, the flow of the lesson is not always clear or structured for learners with special needs. The

findings were corroborated by Herrera (2024) who found that many teachers still rely on traditional teaching approaches such as lectures and direct instruction. This conforms the present finding, suggesting that teachers are comfortable and competent in expository teaching because it is a commonly used method. Similarly, Brownell et al. (2020) emphasized that teachers with adequate pedagogical preparation demonstrate better instructional delivery, including clear explanations, which supports the present result.

Table 7 Level of Teachers Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Expository Teaching

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Explains lesson content clearly and at an appropriate pace for learners with special needs to understand.	2.87	C
2. Uses examples and illustrations tailored to the learning requirements of learners with special needs.	2.79	C
3. Regularly checks for understanding and reteaches concepts when learners with special needs experience difficulty.	2.85	C
4. Organizes and presents information in logical, manageable steps for learners with special needs.	2.74	C
5. Breaks down complex topics into simpler elements, ensuring no student with special needs is left behind.	2.77	C
Overall Weighted Mean	2.81	C

<i>Rating Scale:</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>
3.25 – 4.00	- Highly Competent (HC)
2.50 – 3.24	- Competent (C)
1.75 – 2.49	- Slightly Competent (SC)
1.00 – 1.74	- Not Competent (NC)

Encouraging Independent Thinking. This section measures the teachers' use of strategies such as student-led activities, open-ended questions, problem-solving projects, and opportunities for self-directed learning. Table 8 shows the level of teacher competence in handling learners with special needs along encouraging independent thinking, with an overall weighted mean of 2.83, interpreted as competence. The highest weighted mean of 2.90, interpreted as competent, is Respects and values diverse viewpoints expressed by learners with special needs. This suggests that teachers create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. The lowest weighted mean of 2.78, interpreted as competent, is Encourages learners with special needs to think critically and express original ideas during class. This implies that while teachers allow participation, they do not consistently challenge learners to think deeply or independently. The findings were corroborated by Phor et al. (2025), which identified encouraging independent thinking as a core dimension of teacher competence. Their study supports the idea that teachers play a key role in developing learners' critical and creative thinking skills. Also, Calandri et al. (2025) emphasized that teachers' emotional competence, including empathy and respect, is essential in inclusive classrooms. This conforms the present finding, as valuing learners' perspectives creates a supportive environment where students feel confident to participate. They highlighted that promoting independent thinking requires a safe and respectful classroom climate, which corroborates the result.

Table 8 Level of Teachers Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Encouraging Independent Thinking

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Encourages learners with special needs to think critically and express original ideas during class.	2.78	C
2. Fosters an environment where learners with special needs are supported in problem-solving tasks independently.	2.80	C
3. Gives learners with special needs choices in completing	2.84	C

assignments and projects.		
4. Promotes exploration and creativity among learners with special needs.	2.83	C
5. Respects and values diverse viewpoints expressed by learners with special needs.	2.90	C
Overall Weighted Mean	2.83	C

<i>Rating Scale:</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>
3.25 – 4.00	- Highly Competent (HC)
2.50 – 3.24	- Competent (C)
1.75 – 2.49	- Slightly Competent (SC)
1.00 – 1.74	- Not Competent (NC)

Probing-inquiry Style of Teaching. This section discusses the evidence by follow-up questions, guided investigations, or problem-based learning scenarios. Table 9 shows that the level of teacher competence in handling learners with special needs along probing-inquiry style of teaching, had an overall weighted mean 2.75, interpreted as competent. This implies that teachers are generally capable of using probing and inquiry strategies in teaching learners with special needs. The highest weighted mean of 2.88, interpreted as competent, is Encourages learners with special needs to share their reasoning and thought processes aloud. This suggests that teachers promote verbal expression and participation. The lowest weighted mean of 2.64, interpreted as competent, is Facilitates inquiry-based activities that engage learners with special needs in hands-on exploration. It suggests that while teachers can guide thinking through questions, they do not provide enough opportunities for learners to explore concepts through actual activities. The finding was corroborated by Phor et al. (2025), which identified probing-inquiry teaching as a key dimension of teacher competence. The study supports the idea that teachers play an important role in guiding learners to think through questions and explanations. Similarly, Garcia and Esguerra (2023) found that teachers who apply inclusive strategies encourage student participation and explanation, which corroborates this strength.

Table 9 Level of Teachers Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Probing-Inquiry Style of Teaching

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Poses open-ended questions that prompt learners with special needs to think deeply about subject matter.	2.82	C
2. Encourages learners with special needs to share their reasoning and thought processes aloud.	2.88	C
3. Facilitates inquiry-based activities that engage learners with special needs in hands-on exploration.	2.64	C
4. Helps learners with special needs learn how to ask questions and seek answers beyond basic facts.	2.77	C
5. Creates opportunities for learners with special needs to conduct investigations and draw conclusions.	2.66	C
Overall Weighted Mean	2.75	C

<i>Rating Scale:</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>
3.25 – 4.00	- Highly Competent (HC)
2.50 – 3.24	- Competent (C)
1.75 – 2.49	- Slightly Competent (SC)
1.00 – 1.74	- Not Competent (NC)

Communication Skills. This section assessed teacher self-reports on giving clear instructions, facilitating discussion, using appropriate verbal/non-verbal cues, and adapting messages to meet the diverse needs of students with special needs. Table 10 shows that the level of teacher competence in handling learners with special needs along communication skills, got an overall weighted mean of 2.93, interpreted as competent.

This implies that teachers are highly capable of communicating effectively in inclusive classrooms. This means that teachers can explain lessons, interact with learners, and maintain communication with parents and support staff. The highest weighted mean of 2.98, interpreted as competent, is Maintains open communication with learners with special needs and their families to support their learning needs. This indicates that teachers are strongest in maintaining open communication with learners and their families. This suggests that teachers recognize the importance of partnership in supporting learners with special needs. The lowest weighted mean of 2.88, interpreted as competent, is Communicates directions and expectations in clear language accessible to learners with special needs. It suggests that while teachers are good at maintaining communication, they may not always adjust their language to match the comprehension level of learners with special needs. The finding was corroborated by Phor et al. (2025), which identified communication skills as a core dimension of teacher competence. The study supports the idea that effective communication is essential in inclusive education. Similarly, Ayson-Reyes (2024) found that collaboration and communication with stakeholders are essential but often underdeveloped, which in this case corroborates the strength of the present study.

Table 10 Level of Teachers Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs along Communication Skills

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Communicates directions and expectations in clear language accessible to learners with special needs.	2.88	C
2. Listens actively to concerns raised by learners with special needs and responds respectfully.	2.94	C
3. Provides feedback that helps learners with special needs improve their performance and confidence	2.94	C
4. Checks often to ensure learners with special needs understand instructions and classroom discussions.	2.92	C
5. Maintains open communication with learners with special needs and their families to support their learning needs.	2.98	C
Overall Weighted Mean	2.93	C

Rating Scale:	Descriptive Interpretation:
3.25 – 4.00	- Highly Competent (HC)
2.50 – 3.24	- Competent (C)
1.75 – 2.49	- Slightly Competent (SC)
1.00 – 1.74	- Not Competent (NC)

Relationship between the Extent of Training Gaps and the Level of Teacher Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs. The results presented in Table 11 indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the extent of training gaps and the level of teacher competence in handling learners with special needs. Since the data failed to meet the assumption of normality as revealed by the Shapiro–Wilk test, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient (ρ) was employed as a non-parametric measure of association. This statistical approach is appropriate as it determines the strength and direction of a monotonic relationship between variables measured on ordinal or non-normally distributed scales.

The findings reveal that all computed correlation coefficients are positive and significant, with p-values less than 0.01 in all cases. The correlation coefficients range from low to moderately high ($\rho = .235$ to $.673$), indicating varying degrees of association across the different variables of teacher competence. Among these, the strongest relationships were observed in collaborating with parents and support staff, behavior management challenges, and skills in individualized instruction. These results suggest that the extent of training gaps is closely linked to teachers' ability to effectively perform critical functions required in inclusive classroom settings.

The positive direction of the correlations implies that the variables move in a consistent pattern. In the context of this study, this suggests that training gaps are significantly associated with variations in teacher competence.

Specifically, greater training gaps may correspond to lower levels of competence, while reduced gaps may be associated with improved teaching capabilities. This pattern highlights the crucial role of professional preparation and continuous training in equipping teachers with the necessary competencies to address the diverse needs of learners with special needs.

A closer examination of the results shows that competence related to teaching strategies and skills has significant relationships along the training gaps in knowledge of disabilities and needs ($\rho=.419$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); skills in individualized instruction ($\rho=.602$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); behavior management challenge ($\rho=.611$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); participation in inclusivity training ($\rho=.491$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); and collaborating with parents and support staff ($\rho=.673$, $p\text{-value}<.01$). This indicates that instructional practices, such as individualized instruction and probing-inquiry teaching, exhibit moderate to strong correlations with training gaps. This indicates further that modifying lesson plans to accommodate the unique needs of learners with special needs in the classroom is directly related to the training gaps across all variables. This is evident in the statements that collectively reflect a well-rounded level of teacher competence in inclusive education, characterized by a clear understanding of how exceptionalities influence student development and learning, the ability to design responsive and individualized learning experiences, and active engagement in continuous professional development. These competencies are further strengthened by a strong capacity for collaboration, enabling the teacher to work effectively with various stakeholders.

Table 11 Test for Significant Relationship between the Extent of Training Gaps and the Level of Teacher Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs

Level of Teacher Competence	Extent of Training Gaps									
	Knowledge of Disabilities and Needs		Skills in Individualized Instruction		Behavior Management Challenge		Participation in Inclusivity Training		Collaborating with Parents and Support Staff	
	ρ	$p\text{-value}$	ρ	$p\text{-value}$	ρ	$p\text{-value}$	ρ	$p\text{-value}$	ρ	$p\text{-value}$
Teaching Strategies and Skills	.419**	.000	.602**	.000	.611**	.000	.491**	.000	.673**	.000
Expository Teaching	.319**	.000	.549**	.000	.541**	.000	.362**	.000	.555**	.000
Encouraging Independent Teaching	.466**	.000	.599**	.000	.594**	.000	.412**	.000	.586**	.000
Probing-Inquiry Style of Teaching	.467**	.000	.575**	.000	.647**	.000	.412**	.000	.539**	.000
Communication Skills	.303**	.000	.374**	.000	.472**	.000	.235**	.009	.370**	.000

****Correlation is significant @ 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

***Correlation is significant @ 0.05 level (2-tailed)**

Similarly, the relationship observed in expository teaching particularly in explaining the lesson content clearly and at an appropriate pace for learners with special needs to understand is significantly associated with the training gaps across all variables such as knowledge of disabilities and needs ($\rho=.319$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); skills in individualized instruction ($\rho=.549$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); behavior management challenge ($\rho=.541$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); participation in inclusivity training ($\rho=.362$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); and collaborating with parents and support staff ($\rho=.555$, $p\text{-value}<.01$).

The findings imply that teachers' effectiveness in expository teaching, particularly in delivering clear and appropriately paced instruction for learners with special needs, is strongly influenced by the presence of training gaps across multiple domains. The significant relationships suggest that limitations in knowledge of disabilities, skills in individualized instruction, behavior management, participation in inclusivity training, and collaboration with stakeholders may hinder teachers' ability to present content in ways that are accessible and responsive to diverse learners. A teacher adjusts the pacing and explanation of a lesson according to the

learner's ability. When discussing a mathematics concept, the teacher may provide step-by-step explanations and additional examples for a learner with a learning disability, while also allowing more time for the learner to process the information. This individualized approach helps the learner understand the lesson more effectively.

Moreover, encouraging independent teaching, specifically along respects and values diverse viewpoints expressed by learners with special needs is significantly correlated along the training gaps such as knowledge of disabilities and needs ($\rho=.466$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); skills in individualized instruction ($\rho=.599$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); behavior management challenge ($\rho=.594$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); participation in inclusivity training ($\rho=.412$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); and collaborating with parents and support staff ($\rho=.586$, $p\text{-value}<.01$). The results imply that teachers' ability to promote independent learning, particularly in fostering respect for and appreciation of diverse viewpoints among learners with special needs, is closely tied to existing training gaps across key competency areas. The significant correlations indicate that deficiencies in knowledge of disabilities, individualized instruction, behavior management, participation in inclusivity training, and collaboration with stakeholders may limit teachers' capacity to create an inclusive environment that empowers Learners to express themselves confidently and think independently.

Further, the level of competency along probing-inquiry style of teaching, particularly on encouraging learners with special needs to share their reasoning and thought processes aloud is significantly correlated to the training along the different variables such as, ($\rho=.467$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); skills in individualized instruction ($\rho=.575$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); behavior management challenge ($\rho=.647$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); participation in inclusivity training ($\rho=.412$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); and collaborating with parents and support staff ($\rho=.539$, $p\text{-value}<.01$). The findings imply that teachers' competence in employing a probing-inquiry teaching style, particularly in encouraging learners with special needs to articulate their reasoning and thought processes, is significantly influenced by existing training gaps across critical domains. The strong correlations, especially in behavior management and individualized instruction, suggest that without sufficient preparation in these areas, teachers may struggle to create supportive and responsive classroom environments that foster open dialogue and higher-order thinking. Additionally, gaps in inclusivity training and collaboration with parents and support staff limit the consistency and reinforcement of inquiry-based practices beyond the classroom.

Finally, teacher competence on communication skills particularly maintaining open communication with learners with special needs and their families to support their learning needs obtained significant relationship with the training gaps of teacher across all variables such as, ($\rho=.303$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); skills in individualized instruction ($\rho=.374$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); behavior management challenge ($\rho=.472$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); participation in inclusivity training ($\rho=.235$, $p\text{-value}<.01$); and collaborating with parents and support staff ($\rho=.370$, $p\text{-value}<.01$). The findings imply that teachers' competence in communication, particularly in maintaining open and consistent interaction with learners with special needs and their families, is significantly shaped by existing training gaps across key areas. Although the correlations range from low to moderate, their significance indicates that limitations in knowledge of disabilities, individualized instruction, behavior management, participation in inclusivity training, and collaboration skills can collectively affect the quality and effectiveness of communication practices. This suggests that communication is not an isolated skill but one that is reinforced by broader professional competencies.

The findings were corroborated by Garcia and Esguerra (2023) who found that teachers who participated in targeted training programs showed improved competence and confidence in inclusive teaching. This confirms the present result, showing that reducing training gaps enhances teaching performance. Similarly, Alviar (2021) emphasized that continuous mentoring and training improve teachers' ability to implement individualized instruction, which aligns with the strong correlations found in the present study.

Coping Mechanisms of the Respondents in Handling Learners with Special Needs

This section discusses the coping mechanism of the receiving teachers in handling learners with special needs. Table 12 shows the overall weighted mean of 3.00, interpreted as agree. This indicates that teachers generally possess functional coping mechanisms in managing the demands of inclusive classrooms. This suggests that

despite the presence of training gaps, teachers are able to sustain their instructional roles through adaptive behaviors and personal strategies. However, this also implies that coping is largely compensatory rather than developmental meaning teachers manage challenges but may not necessarily overcome or eliminate them. A teacher handling a learner with attention deficit or behavioral difficulties may continue teaching effectively by adjusting classroom routines, showing patience, and maintaining emotional control. While this ensures continuity of instruction, it may not fully address the learner's needs if not supported by structured interventions. Thus, coping mechanisms help maintain classroom stability but may not always lead to optimal learning outcomes without proper training support.

The highest weighted mean of 3.09, interpreted as agree, is I maintain a positive attitude and resilience when faced with difficult circumstances in the classroom. This highlights teachers' strong reliance on positive attitude and resilience. This reflects a high level of emotional competence and professional commitment, which is critical in inclusive education where challenges are frequent and complex. This finding implies that teachers are able to self-regulate emotions, remain motivated, and persist despite difficulties, which prevents burnout and promotes a supportive classroom climate. A teacher encounters a learner with repeated behavioral outbursts or slow academic progress. Instead of becoming discouraged, the teacher remains patient, continues to provide encouragement, and adjusts expectations. This resilience fosters a psychologically safe environment for learners with special needs. However, while resilience sustains performance, it also masks systemic issues, such as lack of training or resources, because teachers continue to function despite these deficiencies.

The lowest weighted mean of 2.88, interpreted as agree, is I actively join school-led initiatives, peer groups, or communities of practice related to inclusive education. This reveals limited engagement in school-led initiatives, peer collaboration, and communities of practice, which has more critical implications. This suggests that coping mechanisms are largely individualized rather than collaborative, indicating a gap in institutional and professional support systems. A teacher independently handles difficulties in implementing an IEP or managing a learner with autism without consulting SPED specialists or participating in professional discussions. This isolated approach can lead to inconsistent strategies, slower skill development, and increased workload, as the teacher is not benefiting from shared expertise or collective problem-solving.

The finding was corroborated by Miguel et al. (2025), which emphasized that teacher resilience is a key factor in maintaining competence and effectiveness in inclusive classrooms. Their study supports the present finding that teachers rely on positive attitudes and adaptability to cope with difficulties. Similarly, Dalanon and Matsuka (2020) found that teachers often experience anxiety when handling learners with special needs but overcome these challenges through resilience and support systems. This conforms to the present finding, as teachers develop coping strategies to remain effective despite limited training.

Table 12 Coping Mechanism of the Respondents in Handling Learners with Special Needs

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. I seek support and advice from colleagues and other professionals when faced with classroom challenges.	3.06	A
2. I communicate regularly with parents or guardians to coordinate support for Learners with special needs.	3.06	A
3. I engage in professional development activities to improve my capacity for inclusive education	2.92	A
4. I utilize stress management and self-care strategies to maintain my well-being	3.02	A
5. I adapt my teaching strategies and classroom routines to the diverse needs of my Learners	3.01	A
6. I collaborate with support staff and specialists (such as SPED coordinators, counselors, or therapists) to provide appropriate interventions.	2.90	A
7. I maintain a positive attitude and resilience when faced with difficult circumstances in the classroom.	3.09	A

8. I reflect on and adjust my own practices to address behavioral and learning challenges effectively.	3.06	A
9. I actively join school-led initiatives, peer groups, or communities of practice related to inclusive education.	2.88	A
10. I use available resources and materials to create a supportive learning environment for all Learners.	2.98	A
Overall Weighted Mean	3.00	A

<i>Rating Scale:</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>
3.25 – 4.00	- Strongly Agree (SA)
2.50 – 3.24	- Agree (A)
1.75 – 2.49	- Disagree (D)
1.00 – 1.74	- Strongly Disagree (SD)

Proposed Intervention to Strengthen Teachers' Competence in Handling Learners with Special Needs

The proposed intervention, titled The INCLUSIVE-READY (Refining Educator Ability, Diversity, and Yield), (see appendix G) is a specialized professional development program designed to be integrated into the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC). This intervention directly targets the findings presented in Table 4: Participation in Inclusivity Training, which identified a low extent of engagement, with an overall weighted mean of 2.43 in professional development and communities of practice. By institutionalizing this intervention within the SLAC, the school transitions from a reliance on individual resilience as noted in the study's findings on coping mechanisms to a structured, collaborative, and institutionalized support system. This shift is critical because the study confirms a significant positive correlation between training gaps and teacher competence; by systematically reducing these gaps through the INCLUSIVE-READY sessions, teacher performance in instructional strategies and communication is expected to rise proportionately.

The integration of the INCLUSIVE-READY intervention into the SLAC will prioritize the specific indicators in Table 4 that received the lowest ratings, particularly current professional standards and ethical practices (2.31) and school-led initiatives (2.34). During monthly SLAC sessions, teachers will engage in Standards Update Seminars and Ethical Case Studies to ensure they are no longer operating with limited familiarity with inclusive policies. By using the SLAC as a platform, the intervention transforms participation from a passive, infrequent activity into a consistent professional habit. This addressing of the participation gap is the yield component of the intervention ensuring that the investment in training results in a measurable increase in classroom effectiveness and teacher confidence.

Furthermore, the INCLUSIVE-READY intervention utilizes the collaborative nature of SLAC to bridge gaps in Knowledge of Disabilities, Individualized Instruction, and Behavior Management. Since the study found that knowledge of disabilities is significantly linked to teaching competence, the SLAC-integrated sessions will feature Technical Skill-Building modules where teachers collaborate on creating Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and practicing Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). This addresses the finding that teachers currently have a moderate understanding but lack the full sufficiency required for complex inclusive settings. By moving these technical skills into the SLAC, the intervention replaces isolated coping with Multidisciplinary Circles, allowing general education teachers to learn directly from SPED coordinators and peers within their own school context.

Finally, the framework emphasizes the Diversity and Ability components by focusing on Collaborating with Parents and Support Staff, a variable that showed the strongest correlation with teaching strategies ($\rho = .673$). The SLAC sessions will serve as a laboratory for improving communication skills and collaborative planning, ensuring that the support provided to learners with special needs is no longer fragmented but unified. By adopting the INCLUSIVE-READY Framework within the School Learning Action Cell, the district provides a sustainable solution to the low extent of training participation, directly strengthening teacher competence and ensuring a more equitable and responsive learning environment for all students.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that teachers experience a moderate extent of training gaps in handling learners with special needs, particularly in participation in inclusivity training. Despite these gaps, teachers remain generally competent in delivering instruction, managing classrooms, and communicating effectively, suggesting that their experience and existing knowledge support inclusive teaching practices. Furthermore, the findings confirm that training gaps have a significant relationship with teacher competence, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Teachers also demonstrate positive coping mechanisms, especially in maintaining resilience, although greater participation in collaborative and professional learning activities is needed. Overall, the proposed INCLUSIVE-READY intervention is an appropriate response to the identified training needs, as it provides structured professional development and collaborative learning opportunities to further strengthen teachers' competence in handling learners with special needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that school heads implement continuous and targeted professional development programs to strengthen teachers' competence in inclusive education, particularly in areas with limited participation in inclusivity training. School heads and master teachers should also provide sustained coaching, mentoring, and classroom-based support while conducting regular training needs assessments to ensure that professional development activities address teachers' actual needs. Collaborative learning opportunities, such as School Learning Action Cells (SLAC) and peer support groups, should be strengthened to encourage the sharing of effective practices and enhance teachers' coping mechanisms. Furthermore, the proposed INCLUSIVE-READY intervention program may be adopted and regularly monitored to address identified training gaps and improve teachers' competence in handling learners with special needs. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to investigate other factors that may influence teacher competence in inclusive education and conduct similar studies in different settings to validate and expand the findings of this study.

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