

Epistemological Beliefs of De La Salle-Lipa Integrated School Teachers Towards Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in the Regular Classroom

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Introduction

Inclusive education has been widely advocated in many countries around the world with the purpose of promoting maximum involvement of children with special needs in education. According to UNESCO,² the dearth in information coupled with prejudiced attitudes towards persons with disabilities are among the numerous hindrances that contribute to the continual disregard of their right to learning.

One of the factors that affect implementation of inclusion, which is the main focus of this study, is the teachers' beliefs about inclusive education. In order to address the varied needs of a wide range of students in regular classes, teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills in accommodating and simplifying instruction. Rosenzweig³ stresses the responsibility of general education teachers to be engaged in and find resolutions to difficulties encountered by students through adaptations and curriculum modifications.

General education teachers play the most crucial role in inclusion programs and an important predictor of successful integration of students with disabilities in the regular classroom is the positive attitude of teachers. Building an accommodating school community and cultivating the spirit of belongingness in all students are key points in inclusive education which are challenging for many regular teachers.⁴ Therefore, it is important for teachers to develop deeper understanding and authentic concern for children with special needs and for them to minimize the barriers to the learning of these pupils and the difficulties which they might encounter in inclusive classrooms.

Objectives of the Study

This study intends to look into the epistemological beliefs of De La Salle Lipa Integrated School Teachers concerning inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of respondents in terms of:
 - a. Gender
 - b. Age
 - c. Educational Attainment
 - d. Length of Service in Teaching
 - e. Class Level of students being handled?

2. What are the teachers' knowledge, skills or training on educating children with special needs, if any?
3. What are the barriers to training that the teachers experience, if any?
4. What are the teachers' beliefs toward inclusion of children with special needs?
5. Is there a relationship between the teachers' profile and their beliefs toward inclusion of children with special needs?
6. Is there a relationship between the respondents' profile and their knowledge about children with special needs?
7. Is there a relationship between beliefs and knowledge?

Literature Review

Creating a climate and designing instruction that supports learning for all students in the general education classroom is a major function of the teacher. Kennedy, Banks & Grandin⁵ suggest some effective practices for CSN including differentiated instruction through accommodations, modifications, and individualized adaptations focusing on their strengths and opportunities for achieving their maximum potential.

One of the recognized impediments to inclusion is the feeling of most general education teachers that the abilities to meet the wide range of learning difficulties in the regular classroom they possess is insufficient. Results of the study conducted by Greenwood, et.al⁶ showed that student teachers from St. Mary's and MIC came to an agreement that pupils with ASD should be included in mainstream primary school and they felt competent to handle these pupils as a result of their time spent on school experience.

Makoelle⁷ recommended that teachers should be engaged in the development process. As they enhance their skills in probing, critiquing, and reflecting on how inclusive they are in their practices, they discover and acquire innovative ways to be more inclusive, which in turn could bring about a shift in their beliefs and attitudes about inclusion.

The study conducted by Khamis⁸ has revealed that there is a relationship between teachers' beliefs in inclusive education and their practices. But contextual realities such as societal perception and inadequate government support have an impact on the relationship. On the other hand, Stauble⁹ mentioned in her study that there was no significance found for the impact of teacher training and length of service on teachers' beliefs concerning inclusive education.

According to Garriott et al.,¹⁰ in order to reduce the preservice teachers' erroneous beliefs about inclusive education and their qualms about their ability to handle students with special needs, training should be conducted for them. Through training, they will be afforded the know-how and competencies to be confident to effectively address the learning needs of varied students.

Sansosti, et al.¹¹ discussed the roles of educators and student support services personnel as key stakeholders in the consultation and collaboration efforts toward successful inclusion. They said, School-based practitioners have long recognized the importance of assuming an ecological approach to the education and treatment of children with special needs...when engaging in collaborative problem solving, including both general and special educators in the process may

be most beneficial to CSN because they most likely will receive instruction in a general classroom with additional supports and/or modifications.

Dizon, et al.¹² mentioned in their basic handbook on inclusive education, the importance of preparing the teachers and other support service providers for inclusion. They said,

Negative attitudes toward inclusion are natural by-products of the lack of correct information about inclusion, the lack of clear direction in its implementation and premature, ineffective inclusive education practice. Oftentimes, school owners get into inclusion without fully understanding its demands. Teachers and staff need professional and socio-emotional preparation for inclusion. Beliefs and expectations have to be levelled-off before they can be expected to become its chief implementers. Training in differentiated instruction and collaboration are core to inclusive education practice.

Results of the research presented in the review all point to the inevitable need for general education teachers to equip themselves with the necessary skills to appropriately instruct and involve CSN in the regular classroom for inclusion in order to be meaningful and successful.

Theoretical Background

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the study of the nature and scope of knowledge and justified belief. As such, it covers issues concerning creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry.

Researchers have measured epistemological beliefs in distinct ways and for varied reasons. In this study, the researcher looked into the attitudes and beliefs of the integrated school teachers toward handling children with special needs based on their knowledge or perception about the nature of these types of learners.

This study was guided by Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, which identifies attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control as factors that serve as direct determinants of the strength of an individual's intention to carry out a certain behavior. Specifically, this research focused on the teachers' attitudes/beliefs as factors in determining the strength of their intentions or willingness to handle children with special needs.

Following is the research framework for the study:

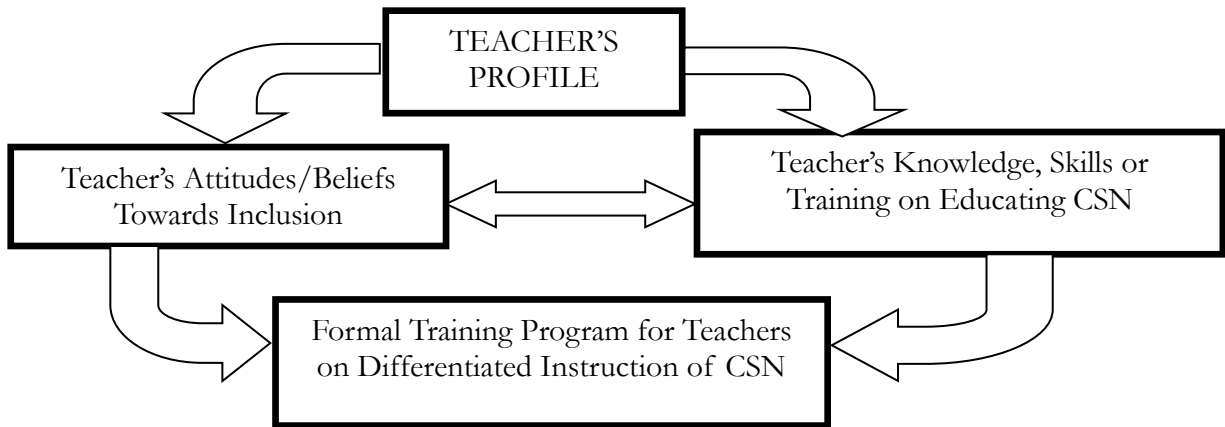


Figure 1. Epistemological Beliefs of IS Teachers

Methods

Collection of data was done through administering a questionnaire and conducting focus groups. The two-page questionnaire, intended to draw responses from the teachers, was administered to discover the degree to which they facilitate meeting the needs of CSN.

The questionnaire has two parts; the first one focused on the profile of the teachers while the second delved into their beliefs about inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classroom. It was pilot tested with a group of elementary teachers from two private schools in Lipa City and was validated having a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.854.

For a more comprehensive and precise analysis of data, focus group discussions were carried out with the teachers using a coordinated interview which was video-recorded and transliterated. Interviews with personnel from Children's Developmental and Intervention Center, Inc. (CDIC), a private institution in Lipa City which offers Individualized Education Program for children with special needs were also conducted.

Results and Discussions

The majority of the faculty respondents are female ages 32- 43 years who have been teaching in the institution for sixteen to twenty years. Most of them are teaching in the high school and hold Bachelor's degrees.

Table 1**Teachers' Profile**

Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Years of teaching	Below 5	31	26.3
	6-10	9	7.6
	11-15	19	16.1
	16-20	32	27.1
	21-25	18	15.3
	26-30	6	5.1
	Above 30	3	2.5
Age	20 – 31	29	24.6
	32 – 43	59	50.0
	44 – 55	30	25.4
Gender	Male	16	13.6
	Female	102	86.4
Education Attainment	BS	65	55.1
	MA/MS units	17	14.4
	MA/M	34	28.8
	PhD units	2	1.7
Level of Students Handled	Pre-elementary	9	7.6
	Elementary	47	39.8
	High School	62	52.5
	TOTAL	118	100.0

Out of the 118 respondents, 30 or 25.4% signified that they did not have any training or seminars related to teaching students with special needs. Time and scheduling, as well as unavailability of expertise in the field of special education and limited seminars offered in terms of needs of CSN, were identified as the main barriers for the teachers' non-attendance to training/seminars.

Table 2**Barriers to Training**

Barriers	Frequency	Rank
Time	58	2
Cost	28	4
Scheduling	62	1
Expertise Unavailable	40	3
Limited Technology	12	5
None	10	
Others	5	

On the other hand, 88 teachers or 74.6% signified that they have participated in trainings/seminars and Table 3 shows that these are mostly in the form of lectures and workshops which included topics focusing on academic instruction, social skills, assessment or evaluation, and differentiated instruction.

Table 3 **Trainings Attended**

Training	Frequency	Rank	Topics	Frequency	Rank
Workshops	26	2	Academic Instruction	33	1
Lectures	75	1	Social Skills	24	2
Mentoring/Coaching	4	7	Assessment/Evaluation	23	3
Video Instruction	4	7	Discrete Trial Training	1	10
On-line	10	4	Communication	4	7
Advocacy Organizations	4	7	Assistive Technology	4	7
Province-wide Conferences	0	11	Differentiated Instruction	22	4
National Conferences	1	10	Family-School Partnerships	17	5
College/University Courses	6	5	Community Collaboration	2	9
Journal, Newspapers, Magazines, TV	21	3	Inclusion Strategies	4	7
Others	3	9	Others	4	
None	30				

Table 4 shows that the respondents generally had a positive attitude toward inclusion of children with special needs as reflected by the mean responses of 3.865. Furthermore, they greatly affirm that the inclusion of students with special needs is the communal responsibility of all stakeholders including teachers and their assistants, school administrators and district consultants, and parents. They are also in strong agreement about the importance of gaining knowledge about different learning disabilities, for them to be able to differentiate instruction to address various learning styles and ability levels of the students. Likewise, they strongly agree that inclusion requires additional planning and training since the extent and nature of inclusion is defined by the strong points and needs of the individual student.

This is further supported by the responses of the teachers during the focus group discussion, wherein they expressed the great need for a training program centered on developing their skills in differentiating instruction by way of accommodation and modification, to cater to CSN included in their classes.

Table 4**Teachers' beliefs concerning inclusion of CSN**

Questions	Mean	Interpretation
1. Students with disabilities should be included in the general curriculum as much as possible.	2.873	Undecided
2. One of the most effective ways teachers can prepare for the inclusion of a student with special needs is to develop an understanding about their condition by obtaining accurate information.	4.475	Strongly Agree
3. It is necessary to differentiate instruction to address various learning styles and ability levels.	4.530	Strongly Agree
4. Inclusion requires additional planning and training.	4.576	Strongly Agree
5. The amount and type of inclusion are determined by the strengths and needs of the individual student.	4.475	Strongly Agree
6. The inclusion of students with special needs is the collective responsibility of teachers, teacher assistants, school administrators, school district consultants and parents.	4.559	Strongly Agree
7. Typical and special needs students are able to benefit from inclusionary practices.	3.568	Agree
8. General education students are accepting of their peers who have special needs.	3.551	Agree
9. Having access to accurate information fosters understanding and facilitates a positive attitude toward the challenge of including students with special needs.	4.051	Agree
10. The number of students with special needs included in the general curriculum is increasing.	3.517	Agree
11. It is important to gain knowledge through reading, seeking professional development and by talking to or observing teachers with experience teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings.	4.271	Strongly Agree
12. General education teachers need not only to be knowledgeable and confident about different learning disabilities, learning needs and instructional strategies. They also need to understand and be prepared to utilize the different types of adaptation and modification needed to assist students with special needs in the inclusive setting.	4.390	Strongly Agree
13. I know how to recognize the characteristics of children with special needs in my class.	3.525	Agree
14. I am aware of strategies to address the needs of children with special needs.	3.085	Undecided
15. I know how to meet the needs of my students with special needs.	3.017	Undecided
16. I could be inclusive in my approach if I had a student with special needs in my class.	3.373	Undecided
Mean	3.865	Agree

Chi-square test was used to determine if the teachers' profile is associated with their attitude toward inclusion of children with special needs as shown in Table 5. Results indicate no significant association between the two variables.

Table 5 Teachers' profile and their beliefs concerning inclusion of CSN

Profile	Belief		
	chi-square	p-value	Interpretation
Educational Attainment	9.379 ^a	.403	Not Significant
Class Level	7.555 ^a	.273	Not Significant

When grouped according to their profile, no significant difference was noted between male and female teachers and whether or not they attended seminars/trainings. However, there was a significant difference between the teachers handling children with special needs in their class and those who have none as shown in Table 6. This implies that those teachers handling CSN tend to have positive attitude toward inclusion. Likewise, a significant difference is also noted in the teachers' perception with respect to the length of their service.

Table 6 Attitudes of Teachers toward inclusion of children with special needs when grouped according to their profile

Profile	Belief		
	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Gender	-1.103	.272	Not Significant
Seminar/Training	-.521	.603	Not Significant
With CSN	2.082	.040	Significant

Profile	Belief		
	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Educational Attainment	1.520	.213	Not Significant
AGE	.868	.546	Not Significant
Unit	1.424	.245	Not Significant
Length of service	2.427	.030	Significant

Pearson Correlation was also used to determine if the teachers' knowledge is associated with their attitudes toward children with special needs as shown in Table 7. Results indicated low correlation between the two variables but is not significant. On the other hand, there is a negative low correlation between the knowledge of those handling CSN in class and their beliefs about inclusion is significant indicating that as the teachers grow old in the profession, they tend to have negative attitudes about inclusion. This could be attributed to the fact that over the years, they have become accustomed to the traditional way of instructing their students and they tend to resist change when asked to differentiate their instruction for the sake of CSN included in the regular classes.

Table 7 Respondents’ knowledge and their attitude toward children with special needs

Profile	Belief			
	r-value	Interpretation	p-value	Interpretation
Gender	.089	Negligible correlation	.338	Not Significant
AGE	-.124	Negligible correlation	.181	Not Significant
Length of Service	-0.078	Negligible correlation	0.402	Not Significant
Handling CSN in class	-.270**	Low correlation	0.003	Significant
Seminar	0.126	Low correlation	0.172	Not Significant

Conclusions and Recommendations

General education teachers can safely assume that they will have one or more children with special needs in their classroom at some point, whether or not these students have been formally identified. Creating and maintaining a safe, nurturing, yet challenging environment is fundamental to supporting the needs of CSN.¹³

As a formidable institution offering a Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Special Education, De La Salle Lipa envisions itself to be in the forefront of teacher training and an institution that upholds its mission of providing holistic education for all. Analysis of data for this study revealed that the majority of the Integrated School teachers have a positive attitude about inclusion of CSN in the regular classroom, although some of them feel ill-equipped to handle these students due to lack of proper training and seminars on how to differentiate their instruction.

Through this study, a formal program for training teachers in the Integrated School was proposed to enable them to recognize modified instruction by giving them detailed approaches and procedures which can be employed for different kinds of students mainstreamed in the regular classroom set up.

Dr. Jerry W. Whitworth’s “A Model for Inclusive Teacher Preparation” became the basis of the proposed program for training the teachers in the Integrated School.

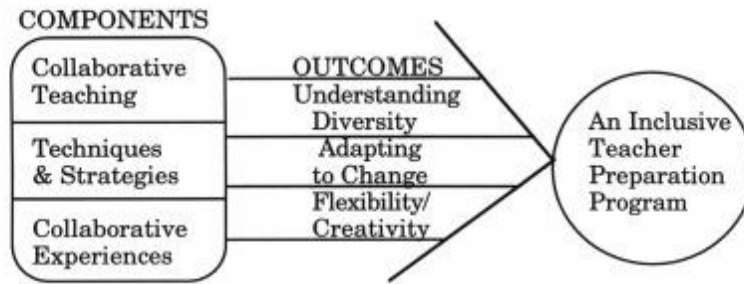


Figure One: An Inclusive Teacher Preparation Model

The central idea for this model is a structure for creating and executing an in-service training program that will equip teachers to teach in inclusive educational settings which consists of two major dimensions. The outcomes of the model will be discussed in one dimension while the specific program components shall be dealt with in the other.

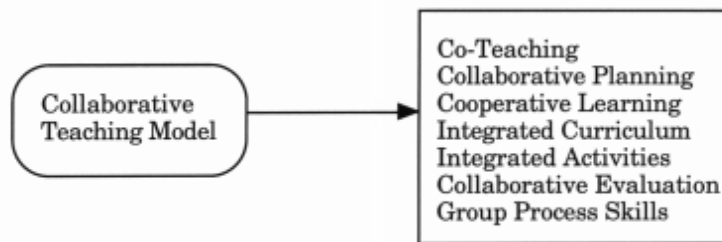


Figure Two: Using the Collaborative Teaching Model

Figure One shows the three major components that comprise scaffolds for this model wherein instructional methodologies used in the classroom are looked into as collaborative teaching, while Figure Two stipulates the number of ways this can be accomplished.

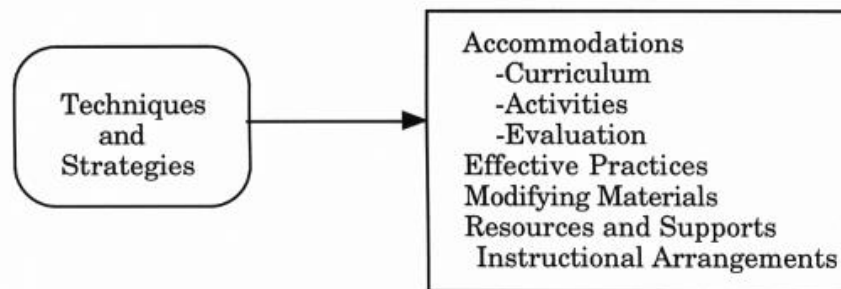


Figure Three: Techniques and Strategies for Inclusive Education

Collaborative experiences constitute the third component of an inclusive teacher preparation model. This component relates to the fieldbased experiences of the in-service teachers, whereas the two previous components apply primarily to the classroom.

APPENDIX



DE LA SALLE LIPA
College of Education, Arts and Sciences
Education Department



EPISTEMOLOGICAL BELIEFS OF DLSL-IS TEACHERS TOWARDS INCLUSION SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

The undersigned is currently working on a research entitled “Epistemological Beliefs of De La Salle Lipa Integrated School Teachers Towards Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in the Regular Classroom”. May I request your active participation in this study by answering the questionnaire below? Rest assured that your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Your valuable cooperation is highly appreciated. Thank you!

Respectfully yours,

Maria Theresa B. Kalaw, PhD
Researcher

Part I: TEACHER PROFILE

NAME: _____

Highest Educational Attainment: _____

Age: _____ Gender (Check one option): Male Female

Unit (Check one option): Pre-School Elementary High School

Years in Current Role (Please check one)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 0 – 5 | <input type="radio"/> 21 - 25 |
| <input type="radio"/> 6 – 10 | <input type="radio"/> 26 - 30 |
| <input type="radio"/> 11 – 15 | <input type="radio"/> Over30 |
| <input type="radio"/> 16 – 20 | |

At present, are there any children with special needs included in your class?

- yes no

If you answered yes to the previous question, what is the child’s age?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 4 – 5 | <input type="radio"/> 10 - 11 |
| <input type="radio"/> 6 – 7 | <input type="radio"/> 11 - 12 |
| <input type="radio"/> 8 – 9 | <input type="radio"/> over 12 |

Part III. For Focus Group Interview

1. What has been your experience, if any, of teaching students with special needs? What kinds of disability did the children have?
2. For those of you who had a child with special needs, how was the experience?
 - Was the child in mainstream, special unit, class?
 - Did the child have a Classroom Assistant?
 - Do you think the child was included in classroom activities?
3. Has your school experience about meeting the needs of pupils with special needs contributed to your learning in terms of strategies, working with classroom assistants, pupil behavior, and social skills? Please describe.
4. How prepared did you feel for this experience of teaching pupils with special needs?
5. What are your concerns regarding the inclusion of students with special needs in the general curriculum?
6. Have you received any individual or group training regarding the inclusion of students with special needs? Please describe.
7. Have you implemented any relevant strategies gained through professional development activities in the inclusive setting? Please describe.
8. Please identify (if there is any) apprehensions you might have as to the inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classroom setting.
9. How confident do you feel about teaching students with special needs in the future?
10. If the school would decide on implementing a program for training teachers on how to handle students with special needs, would you support it? Why? Why not?

Endnotes

1. Maria Theresa B. Kalaw, PhD is a fulltime faculty member and researcher in the education and mathematics departments at De La Salle Lipa in Lipa City, Philippines.

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5. Kennedy, D., Banks, R. S. & Grandin, T., *Bright Not Broken: Gifted Kids, ADHD and Autism*. (Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint. San Francisco, CA (2011) 183-208.

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