
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Readiness and Challenges of Regular Teachers in Handling Elementary Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in an Inclusive Environment in the Philippines

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| ABSTRACT

Regular teachers face readiness and challenges in dealing with elementary learners on ID, indicating a need for training, resources, and inclusive instruction. Preparedness and challenges in managing learners with IDs within an inclusive setting among regular elementary teachers were the focus of this study, as the outcome informed a strategic action plan. This study employed a descriptive-correlational design, using a three-part, structured, pilot-tested, and researcher-made questionnaire to gather data from 246 public elementary regular teachers teaching in the 12 identified DepEd public elementary schools in Cebu, Philippines. The collected data were statistically treated using frequency, weighted mean, median, standard deviation, rank, Chi-square test of independence, and ANOVA. The study revealed a correlation between preparedness and challenges encountered by public elementary regular teachers in teaching learners with IDs, which indicates a strong correlation between preparedness and reported challenges. Additionally, it revealed a significant difference in the level of readiness among respondents grouped by their length of teaching experience. Moreover, it revealed a significant difference when grouped by field of specialization, suggesting that teachers' specialization influences the types and extent of challenges they encounter in IE. It was concluded that public elementary regular teachers manifest a moderate readiness to deal with learners with IDs. The researcher suggested that the proposed strategic action plan be implemented and evaluated to enhance the lives of public elementary regular teachers in supporting learners with IDs.

| KEYWORDS

Special Education, inclusive education, intellectual disabilities, descriptive-correlational design, Balamban, Cebu, Philippines

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The concept of Inclusive Education (IE) has emerged as a critical element in global education policy, emphasizing the values of equal value, participation, and equal opportunity for all learners, including those with intellectual disabilities (IDs) (Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Buchner et al., 2021). International commitments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), have focused on inclusive and quality education for all children (Hudson, 2023; Tonegawa, 2022; Johnstone et al., 2020).

Although several activities foster IE, much research (Gonzales-Bosch, 2024; Larios & Zetlin, 2023; Aldabas, 2020) exists in describing the preparedness and challenges of regular teachers in teaching learners with ID. Too little research also exists on how training programs prepare teachers with specific strategies and responsive approaches. The interpersonal, institutional, and emotional barriers that teachers encounter have not been extensively addressed in most of the studies. These are the gaps that we need to address for us to conduct systematic, site-based, policy-influencing research, rather than providing policy-driven, yet

personnel development, and fully supportive systems to truly empower teachers of all backgrounds to teach well and with equity.

Teachers face overwhelming and often conflicting challenges of meeting ID curriculum outcomes for learners with IDs within the confines of large classes, scant resources, and competing curriculum priorities. The effectiveness of inclusion substantially relies on the training, self-efficacy, and skills of the classroom teachers.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) promotes IE; however, regular teachers admit they are not equipped to handle learners who have IDs. Despite the support provided through policies for inclusion, a deficit remains in teacher preparation, most notably in training for individualized education plans (IEPs), differentiated instruction, and behavioral interventions. Most of DepEd's training projects are short-term and do not meet the continuous competency. As a result, regular teachers often feel stressed and unprepared, and they require in-service teacher training and system support for IE.

Residing in Central Visayas and particularly in Cebu Province, the researcher has formed the impression that regular teachers often experience difficulties in teaching learners with IDs. Some of the significant barriers include under-trained staff, lack of materials, and inadequate cooperation with Special Education (SpEd) teachers. These challenges are further exacerbated in small-town semi-urban contexts, such as Balamban, where educational facilities are a mix of rural and urban, and have limited resources and higher relative expectations of inclusiveness.

The researchers are focusing on the preparedness and difficulties general teachers encounter in handling learners with an ID in a public elementary school in Balamban, Cebu. A lack of appropriate training and preparedness among teachers to effectively deal with diverse learners is a significant concern in this regard. Most classrooms are overcrowded to the point that it is difficult to provide personalized assistance. The lack of readily available specialized materials, combined with limited regular interaction with SpEd teachers, is compromising the implementation of IE practices. A lack of enforcement and lack of support from school administrators also loom large. These are hindrances to IE and underscore the pressing need for appropriate interventions, sensitization activities, and consistent implementation of policies to promote the in-service training of regular teachers in inclusive schools.

While existing literature examines teacher preparedness and the challenges posed by IE, only a handful of studies investigate the relationship between the two concepts, particularly regarding IDs as a specific, distinct category. This is the reason why the researcher would like to conduct the study to determine the readiness and challenges of these regular teachers vis-à-vis in handling learners with IDs in the public elementary schools in Balamban, Cebu. The results may contribute to targeting interventions, capacity building, curricula development, and IE policies to the local situation. This study also aims to bridge the gap between policy and the classroom reality for learners with IDs by providing them with a fair and high-quality education. In the long run, it also contributes to the vision of promoting an inclusive, supportive, and responsive learning environment for all learners in Balamban.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between the demographic characteristics of the teacher respondents, their level of preparedness, and the challenges they face in handling learners with IDs in public elementary schools in Balamban, Cebu, within an inclusive environment. On this basis, the research aims to propose a strategy for developing inclusive teaching at all levels in public elementary schools, which will, in turn, inform policy revision and contribute to a more responsive and equitable education system.

2. Literature Review

This study is grounded on four major theories on the readiness and challenges of regular teachers in handling learners with IDs: the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991), the Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1986), the Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and the Constructivist Learning Theory by Vygotsky (1978). In addition, these are supported by different legal bases, including the Republic Act No. 10533, "Enhanced Republic Act No. 10533 – Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (K to 12 Law)," Republic Act No. 7277, "Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (as amended by RA 9442)," and Department of Education Order No. 72, s. 2009, "Inclusive Education as a Strategy for Increasing the Participation Rate of Children."

The strong theoretical lens of Ajzen (1991) regarding TPB provides an opportunity to examine the preparedness and challenges confronting regular teachers in managing learners with IDs effectively (Swarup, 2024; Tavares, 2024; Opoku et al., 2021). According to the TPB, behavior is influenced by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Liu et al., 2022; La Barbera & Ajzen, 2020). Regarding the area of IE, teachers' attitudes towards teaching learners with ID significantly impact their commitment to implementing inclusion (Charitaki et al., 2024; Kamran et al., 2023; Saloviita, 2020). When a teacher believes that inclusion is suitable for all learners and promotes educational equity, they are likely to demonstrate readiness (Osei-Tutu, 2025). Similarly, negative attitudes developed through previous contact and a lack of knowledge about IDs can prevent them from having plans to implement inclusive strategies (Lefort, 2025). Moreover, the situation involves subjective norms, including the perceived pressure to perform or not perform the targeted behavior. School culture, peers, the board, and the administration's attitudes and behaviors influence the teachers' tendencies (Fabunan & Cabal, 2025; DeMatthews et al., 2020). Therefore, when general inclinations are supportive, teachers may be inclined to develop this behavior.

On the contrary, if the system does not advocate for inclusion or the community does not value this approach, teachers will be left to their own devices, abandoning these tendencies. It is also essential to discuss the third factor, perceived behavioral control. Inclusion practices may depend on teachers' attitudes regarding their confidence in engaging in this behavior, which is influenced by their experience and training (Chaplin, 2025; Kupers et al., 2024). Therefore, if inclusive classrooms receive no support in terms of teacher training, teaching resources, or the board's understanding, their perceived sense of control will diminish. The whole picture paints a clear need for professional development, policy, and systematic implementation at the policy level to turn all three factors into progressive dynamics of apt behavior, normative beliefs, and intentions, as well as perceived control over inclusive teaching (Dignath et al., 2022).

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) highlights the interplay among personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior. This theory can be used to explain the readiness and challenges faced by regular teachers in managing ID learners. The theory revolves around the topic of self-efficacy—teachers' belief in their ability to teach and guide an ID learner successfully. Teachers with high self-efficacy have positive attitudes toward IE; they try multiple teaching approaches and strategies and keep striving to solve teaching challenges.

Conversely, low self-efficacy resulting from limited experience or exposure to ID learners compromises the teachers' readiness and effectiveness as regular teachers. High-performing schools instill confidence and facilitate implementation support. Schools without clear policies on inclusion or with inadequate SpEd and professional development resources may overburden teachers.

Additionally, observational learning is reflected in Bandura's theory, as teachers observe and learn from their counterparts' practical classroom strategies, such as managing an inclusive class or adapting materials to suit the ID barrier. Based on this behavior, teachers can implement a similar strategy or model in their own classrooms. Therefore, mentors and teachers' sharing sessions can influence a teacher's readiness to handle an inclusive class with at least one ID learner (Phelps & Schools, 2025; Wang et al., 2022).

The reciprocal nature of behavior and environment in Social Cognitive Theory underscores the importance of addressing both individual teacher beliefs and systemic structures. To enhance preparedness and address these challenges, schools need to invest in capacity-building activities that promote collaborative professional cultures and develop environments that foster positive attitudes towards inclusive practices. Only by supporting both the personal and contextual dimensions of teaching can regular teachers become more competent and confident in handling learners with IDs (Brown, 2025; Peirson, 2025; Maxwell, 2024).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a comprehensive framework for examining the readiness and challenges of regular teachers in handling learners with IDs (Guy-Evans, 2020). This theory emphasizes the interconnected systems that influence human development, which, in the context of education, affect both teachers and learners (Akin-sabuncu & Çalık, 2025; Burakgazi, 2025; Sekarsari & Fauziah, 2025). At the microsystem level, this means that teachers interact directly with learners in their classrooms. Their preparedness depends on their competencies, attitudes, and instructional routines. This subsequently presents challenges for teachers who also lack a background in SpEd or feel inadequately prepared to support diverse learners with ID. Collaborative relationships within this context, such as with co-teachers, special education professionals, and learners, are essential for effective inclusion (Burakgazi, 2025; Tworek, 2023; Prayogo et al., 2022). The mesosystem, which encompasses the connections between different microsystems, such as the relationships between home and school, also influences teacher readiness (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Effective communication and collaboration with parents of learners with intellectual disabilities can either support or hinder a teacher's ability to deliver IE, depending on the quality of those relationships. The collection of school factors that comprise the exosystem — for example, school policies, administrative supports, and resources — will all serve as either enabling or constraining forces on teacher agency (Qorib et al., 2024). In the absence of clear inclusion policies or insufficient teaching materials, teachers are prevented from doing all they can. In the macrosystem, cultural norms, social attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and national-level education legislation create environmental influences on inclusive practices. Teachers are also motivationally predisposed to naive views of disabilities and a culture that stigmatizes them (Babik & Gardner, 2021; Bizeau, 2024).

Along with the time dimension, which is the chronosystem, one of the most important principles to keep in mind is that readiness develops over time through a continuous process of education, practice, and new regulations (Akin-sabuncu & Çalık, 2025). If the inclusion is to improve, there needs to be systemic efforts throughout the ecological model aimed at providing adequate training, resources, and motivation for teachers to support learners with intellectual disabilities effectively (Jimoh et al., 2024; Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020).

Rowland (2025) believed that Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory provides a critical understanding of the level and difficulties posed by resilient teachers in relation to learners with ID, utilizing the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolds from Vygotsky (Alido et al., 2023). As mentioned by Vygotsky, as cited by Hassan et al. According to Vygotsky (2025), learning is most productive when learners are slightly beyond their comfort level, but still within reach with feedback and support. In this context, it is more about the aspect of facilitation by the teacher as they provide support suitable enough for learning to proceed (Cahyono & Rusiadi, 2025; Wafula, 2025; Gautam & Agarwal, 2023).

For regular teachers to effectively implement constructivist principles, they must first be equipped with a deep understanding of individual learners' abilities and needs. This requires training in differentiated instruction, behavior management, and adaptive teaching strategies—areas where many regular teachers report challenges due to limited professional development or a lack of exposure to SpEd practices (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Saleem et al., 2021). This concept of scaffolding is reflected in Vygotsky's theory and can be particularly challenging when a teacher lacks the resources or time to personalize (Reiser, 2023; Puntambekar, 2022). Teaching learners with ID requires a flexible instructor who can be both patient and understanding, breaking tasks or assignments down into more manageable steps while monitoring their progress. A lack of support from institutions or interaction with specialists may mean that teachers find it challenging to sustain appropriate scaffolding and, hence, become frustrated, which in turn reduces their ability to engage with learners (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023).

A further challenge in this regard is the limited time available to teachers to develop a discourse of meaningful social construction, particularly in overburdened or under-resourced classrooms (Ratau & Motitswe, 2025; Botha, 2022). Peer collaboration and social learning are essential for learners with ID (Ioannidi et al., 2025; Moon, 2023), yet they can hinder the growth of our most vulnerable learners. For schools to increase preparedness, they need to invest in specific teacher training, curriculum development, and team-teaching models. The constructivist approach by Vygotsky reinforces the fact that teachers see learners with ID as active members in learning and, at the same time, equips them to help learners develop their full potential (Jatto & Aladesusi, 2025; Yeganeh et al., 2025; Kivirand et al., 2022).

The K-to-12 Law represents a significant reform in the Philippine educational system, providing for the institutionalization of a 13-year basic education cycle from kindergarten to Grade 12 (Fontanos et al., 2020). This is otherwise known as "Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013". A significant element of this law is the commitment to a form of IE that ensures the right of all learners, including those with disabilities, to quality education that is learner-centered, developmentally appropriate, as well as responsive to the diverse needs and programs of Filipino learners (Boukhari, 2025; Gomez Caride & Gobbeé, 2024; Mezzanotte, 2022).

To be ready, regular teachers are expected to provide differentiated education, utilize inclusive teaching materials, and establish a supportive learning environment that benefits not only all learners but also learners with disabilities (Gheysens et al., 2022; Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020). The law requires ongoing in-service training and a curriculum that integrates universal learning design (Woulfin & Jones, 2021). Creates awareness to provide an inclusive orientation to teachers. Indeed, readiness is instead a moving target, especially in remote or under-resourced public schools (Dubazana, 2025; Yeganeh et al., 2025; James, 2022), where teachers often have minimal specialist SpEd training or access to ID-specific instructional materials and lack support from multidisciplinary teams.

The challenges are multifaceted. According to Torregosa et al. (2024), one of the major problems is the absence of education, such as inclusive strategies and behavioral interventions, which are responsible for inherent processes in managing an ID learner. While RA 10533 establishes the need for continuous improvement of teachers at all levels, its implementation locally has not been evidence-driven. Other obstacles include a lack of poverty-assistive technology, specialized learning materials, and capable SpEd teachers for integration with regular teachers (Wabingga, 2025; Violon & Violon, 2024).

Furthermore, the size of the classroom and the workload of regular teachers often impede their ability to provide individualized attention to learners with ID, making effective inclusion difficult. The law also lacks clear guidelines on how schools should adapt the K-to-12 curriculum specifically for learners with IDs (Ilagan, 2024; Ji, 2024; Yuwono & Okech, 2021). Improving monitoring and capacity-building targeting regular public school teachers, along with localized implementation strategies that ensure the inclusive spirit of RA 10533, is crucial to bridge the policy-to-practice gap (Carvajal et al., 2025).

The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, as amended by Republic Act No. 9442, also provides that learners with IDs are entitled to access quality education (Cabauatan et al., 2024). This law requires the state, particularly public schools, to deliver an inclusive and accessible educational service designed to banish discrimination and promote healthy development for PWDs. It highlights the need for reasonable accommodations, personal assistance, and a supportive learning environment, regardless of disability (Oli, 2025; Debasu & Yitayew, 2024; Waisath et al., 2024).

In line with this law, regular teachers are expected to play a crucial role in fostering inclusive classrooms. Their readiness depends mainly on their knowledge of disability-inclusive practices, their attitudes toward learners with IDs, and their access to continuous professional development (Abrol, 2023; Lavrykova et al., 2020). Many teachers express a willingness to include learners with IDs in their classrooms, recognizing the moral and legal responsibility brought by the Magna Carta. However, being willing is not the same as being ready. SpEd requires specific training; differentiation and modification should be implemented in curricula and assessments based on individual cases (Ahmed et al., 2025; Simbre et al., 2022), which many regular teachers are not formally trained to do.

The challenges for everyday teachers are enormous. A significant challenge is the absence or inconsistency of pre-service and in-service training for IE, despite its prescription by the Magna Carta, which requires schools to provide such support (du Plessis & Razmjoe, 2025). Another major challenge is the shortage of support systems, such as SpEd professionals, learning aides, and accessible teaching materials, which are critical for effective inclusion (Brussino, 2020).

Additionally, a lack of training, high student-to-teacher ratios, and insufficient time to provide individualized instruction also impact teachers' ability to work with learners with ID (Kalonga & Mwila, 2025; Thomas & Kumar, 2020). The discussions suggest

that adapting general curriculum requirements for learners with diverse cognitive abilities is indeed a challenge that teachers often struggle to balance (Srinivasa et al., 2022). To fully realize the intent of the *Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities*, there is a need for systemic reform that includes increased funding for IE, stronger teacher training programs, and clear, enforceable policies at the school level. Only then can regular teachers be genuinely ready and supported in delivering equitable education to learners with IDs (Cramer et al., 2021).

DepEd Order No. 72, s. A 2009 study entitled "Inclusive Education as a Strategy for Increasing the Participation Rate of Children" indicates that the Philippine government has been pushing for its goal of making quality education accessible to everyone, including persons with disabilities, within an inclusive regular school system (Cruz, 2024). The devolution encourages the use of IE as a key approach to target low participation and high dropout rates with marginalized learner populations, particularly those with IDs. It suggests that mainstream schools should accept all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, or emotional capacities, and integrate people with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Ahmad et al., 2025; Riddle et al., 2024). In the order, there should also be provisions for building the capacity of school personnel to properly adopt IE (Owen et al., 2020). Many regular teachers demonstrated an attitude toward the philosophy of inclusion, and they accepted learners with ID in their classrooms (Casale-Giannola et al., 2023; Masongsong et al., 2023). Others have attended an orientation or a brief overview of inclusive teaching strategies. However, the policy is only a first step, and many teachers are still less prepared to implement it than others, depending on their workplace.

Moreover, many regular teachers still feel that they do not have proper training to modify instructional materials, differentiate instruction, or manage the classroom behavior inherent in learners with IDs (Chan et al., 2020).

Teachers' struggles are as nuanced and seemingly intractable as the rest of us. The first is that there are few professional development opportunities for teachers related to IE, so increasing the number of teachers who apply inclusive principles without the appropriate tools or support is crucial. Second, Inadequate collaboration between general and SpEd personnel results in implementation gaps. Overcrowded classes and a lack of specialized learning materials or assistive technologies also make it hard to support learners with ID effectively (Kohout-Diaz, 2023; Zindi & Sibanda, 2023).

Furthermore, there are no monitoring mechanisms or specific performance indicators for implementing this DepEd Order, which diminishes its effectiveness. The directive is progressive; however, the absence of a centrally coordinated implementation has resulted in inconsistencies among facilities (Patiga, 2025).

DepEd Order No. 72 will only work for IE if regular teachers are equipped with continued and specialized training, mentored by SpEd experts, and given ample access to teaching resources. It is equally essential to enhance collaboration among teachers, school administrators, and community stakeholders. Empowering and preparing teachers would thus result in greater participation and improved learning outcomes for learners with IDs within an inclusive environment (Ugobueze, 2024; Cagas et al., 2023).

These related theories, legal bases, and studies collectively highlight the critical role of teacher readiness and the multifaceted challenges faced by regular teachers in handling learners with IDs. Theorists such as Ajzen (1991, 2005), Vygotsky (1987), Bronfenbrenner (1994), and Bandura (1997) all emphasize the importance of settings and supportive learning environments. Empirical research consistently reiterates that such training, resources, and institutional support are related to the self-reported confidence and effectiveness of regular teachers. Concerning Balamban, Cebu, these linkages underscore the urgent need to enhance teacher training, provide regular professional development, and strengthen the educational support system. Aligning theory with practice ensures a more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable educational framework for all learners, especially those with IDs.

3. Methodology

This section presents the research design, research flow, research environment, study respondents, instruments used, data gathering procedures, and statistical treatment.

3.1 Design

The research design in this study was descriptive correlational. A descriptive correlational research design is a method in which the researcher attempts to describe the relationship between variables without systematically manipulating them. It highlights the identification of patterns, associations, and connections in the relevant variables of interest in a research setting. The researchers are more concerned with identifying the relation among the variables rather than analyzing to find a causal relationship. It was an exploratory survey study, and its design is primarily preferred in the field of education (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), particularly when researchers aim to describe the readiness and difficulties of regular teachers working with individuals with IDs. It is thus especially suitable for obtaining and analyzing measurable data to find relationships between variables, as the researcher points out.

3.2 Environment

This research was conducted among 12 public elementary schools in Balamban District I, Cebu. It will focus on the readiness and barriers that regular teachers face in catering to students with IDs in inclusive classrooms. Findings of this research provided a foundation for the development of a Strategic Action Plan to build the capacity of teachers and overcome common barriers in implementing IE. To conduct this study, the researcher has chosen these two schools as research sites because they are staffed with teachers who are part of the preparation cycle and regular learners with diverse learning needs.

3.3 Respondents

The study involved 246 teacher-respondents. For these populations, a purposive sample, a non-probability sampling technique most applicable in studies that require members with particular characteristics important to the project, was used. The specific teachers that the researchers are attempting to select are those who have firsthand experience implementing inclusive practices with learners with IDs.

3.4 Instrument

The primary tool used in this study was a structured researcher-made survey questionnaire to gather data regarding the readiness and challenges of regular public school elementary teachers in handling learners with IDs in inclusive settings.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part 1 gathered data on the demographic profiles of the respondents. Part 2 gathered data regarding the level of readiness of regular teachers in handling elementary learners with IDs in inclusive classrooms. Part 3 gathers data regarding the challenges faced by regular teachers in teaching learners with IDs in inclusive settings.

The study provided information on the age, gender, highest educational attainment, field of specialization, and number of years in the teaching profession of the respondents. This is general information about the participants and their IE-related background in teaching. In this section, the respondents completed and verified the required information for the study.

Regarding the level of respondents' readiness in handling learners with IDs, this section comprises five components: a. Knowledge of inclusive teaching principles, b. Instructional and classroom management strategies, c. Ability to implement individualized accommodations and modifications, d. Collaboration with SpEd personnel and parents, and e. Access to relevant professional development and support. In this section, respondents are advised to answer the 4-point Likert scale using the following options: 4 points for 'Very Ready' (VR), 3 points for 'Moderately Ready' (MR), 2 points for 'Less Ready' (LR), and 1 point for 'Not Ready' (NR).

Regarding the challenges faced by regular teachers in teaching learners with IDs in inclusive settings, this section comprises five components, namely: a. Instructional limitations, b. Classroom behavior management, c. Lack of training and professional support, d. Availability of teaching resources and materials, and e. Administrative and systemic support. In this section, respondents are advised to answer the 4-point Likert scale using the following options: 4 points for 'Highly Challenged' (HC), 3 points for 'Moderately Challenged' (MC), 2 points for 'Less Challenged' (LC), and 1 point for 'Never Challenged' (NC).

After the questionnaire was drafted based on existing related literature and studies on regular teachers' readiness and challenges in handling learners with IDs, it underwent content validation and pilot-testing activities to ensure its validity and reliability. These procedures were implemented before the data gathering procedures.

3.5 Data Analysis

To answer the first statement of the problem, which aims to describe the demographic profiles of the respondents in terms of age, gender, highest educational attainment, field of specialization, and length of teaching experience, the researcher used frequency, simple percentage, mean, and standard deviation. These descriptive statistics summarized the respondents' characteristics and provided a clear picture of the study participants' composition.

For the second statement of the problem, which sought to assess the level of readiness of regular teachers in handling elementary learners with IDs in inclusive classrooms, the researcher used the weighted mean, median, and standard deviation.

In response to the third statement of the problem, which identifies the challenges faced by regular teachers in inclusive settings, the weighted mean, median, and standard deviation are provided.

The next step is to address the fourth problem statement, which concerns the significance of the relationship between the two variables, and this will be accomplished using the Chi-square test of independence. This is crucial when comparing two categorical variables. Relying on a p-value is merely to establish whether the observational differences between frequencies are significant enough to have passed a statistician's eye-straining cull. A statistician used his thumb and forefinger like wires lifting mechanically across a finely woven interval. This test is one of the most widely used non-parametric tests in the social sciences and education, particularly when comparing two or more categorical groups.

ANOVA was used to analyze the differences in readiness and challenges among regular teachers in addressing ID students in inclusive settings. This formula is key in determining whether the means of two or more groups differ from each other. It enables researchers to determine whether a specific factor influences the dependent variable. By comparing variances within and

between groups, ANOVA provides a reliable method for testing hypotheses, making it a valuable tool in experimental research, education, the social sciences, and other fields that require group comparisons and statistical validation.

3.6 Credibility and Reliability

The researchers also adhered to the data privacy standards, ensuring that the collected information is kept under the highest level of confidentiality. The identities of the respondents were kept confidential, and all data collected were used solely for academic purposes. Questionnaires were assigned codes instead of names, and identifying information was redacted. This was done to protect the rights and privacy of all participants, and a strict protocol was in place for handling, storing, and disposing of data in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The privacy of data, especially when dealing with regular public elementary school teachers servicing learners with IDs, is paramount in doing research. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of personal information, particularly when it is susceptible, to respect the rights and dignity of teachers and learners. It has the benefit of building a connection between the researcher and those responding, making them more likely to provide honest answers. It also helped to safeguard data from potential abuses or discrepancies, particularly when vulnerable learners are identified, and maintains the responsible use of findings in furthering efforts for IE.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards guided all phases of the research process. Respondents were asked to provide their written consent via the informed consent form, that they are aware of the nature and purpose of the study, and agree to participate voluntarily in answering the questionnaire. They were informed of their right to refuse or to leave the study at any point in time without facing penalization. All participation was voluntary, and no coercion or incentive was involved. The dignity, privacy, and well-being of all participants were upheld at all times. All procedures were carried out in compliance with institutional ethical guidelines, and participation in the study did not result in physical or emotional harm or have any negative impact on the subjects' professional performance.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the gathered data regarding the preparedness and challenges faced by regular elementary teachers in managing learners with intellectual disabilities within an inclusive environment in Balamban, Cebu, Philippines, during the 2025-2026 academic year. The findings served as the foundation for a strategic action plan aimed at improving teachers' readiness and addressing the challenges they encounter in implementing IE.

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

In this study, the demographic profile of the respondents includes their ages, genders, highest educational attainment, field of specialization, teaching experience, and relevant training attended.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents
(n = 246)

	Frequency	Percentage
A. Age [in years]		
21 - 30	33	13.41
31 - 40	112	45.53
41 - 50	73	29.67
51 - 60	28	11.38
	Mean : 39.36	
	StDev : 8.01	
B. Gender		
Female	188	76.42
Male	58	23.58
C. Educational Attainment		
College Graduate	83	33.74
Masters Level	142	57.72
Masters Graduate	16	6.50
Doctoral Level	5	2.03
D. Field of Specialization		
Elementary Education-Generalist	121	49.19
Mathematics	24	9.76

Early Childhood Education	22	8.94
Special Education	21	8.54
General Education	20	8.13
English	16	6.50
Other Fields	22	8.94
E. Length of Teaching Service [in years]		
1 - 5	43	17.48
6 - 10	79	32.11
11 - 15	70	28.46
16 - 20	0	0.00
20 and above	54	21.95
F. Relevant Training Attended		
Basic INSET	98	39.84
K-12 Revised Curriculum	76	30.89
Inclusive Education	45	18.29
Others Trainings	27	10.98

Age. The age profile of regular elementary teachers in Balamban, Cebu, who work with children with IDs, offers an essential perspective on their professional preparedness, teaching experiences, and readiness to cater to the varied needs of learners. According to the distribution, 112 teachers (45.53%) fall within the age range of 31–40 years old. This suggests that nearly 50 percent of the teaching population falls within the early to mid-adulthood range, a period when teachers are reportedly more stable and productive. Teachers often are young, energetic, and, as they gain experience working with this age group, are well-prepared to effectively facilitate students with IDs. Their age also suggests that they may be receptive to new methods of teaching and IE practices, as they have already gained experience in managing a class after years of work. The computed mean age of 39.36 years indicates that, indeed, the average teacher who takes charge of learners with ID in Balamban is at this age level when professionals are considered to work for professional growth and stability and can be expected to assume leadership positions as well. The SD of 8.01 suggests moderate variability, demonstrating that even though most teachers are centered around this mean value, there is still a spread of younger and older teachers. As an implication, the findings show that the teaching staff in charge of ID learners are mainly comprised of those aged between their thirties and forties. This age distribution means that most of them are in a position to bring vigor to their considerable teaching experience. However, the low number of young teachers may indicate that, in the future, it will be necessary to recruit and train teachers on an ongoing basis to maintain IE efforts. The age profile highlights the capabilities of Balamban's teaching staff – knowledgeable in pedagogy, professionally seasoned yet young enough to be retrained for modern, inclusive methodologies – and reveals gaps that will need to be addressed to ensure sustainability and professional growth.

Gender. The majority of respondents ($n = 188$, 76.42%) were female teachers, while 58 (23.58%) were male teachers, out of a total of 246. This discrepancy mirrors a historical pattern in Philippine education where the teaching profession, especially at the elementary level, is predominantly female. The high value placed on female teachers can be rooted in the traditional role definition, which allocates women to care for, nurture, and feed children. These attributes are also a good match in IE, where much patience, empathy, and adaptability are needed to teach ID learners. The fact that the female teachers are strongly represented in Balamban's DepEd schools indicates that learners would most likely be subjected to instructional situations that are caring and sensitive to their own learning orientations. This is an ideal learning environment for students who require additional support. It is, however, the least (23.58%) representation of male teachers that is indicative of a gendered workforce. Although fewer in number, male teachers are a necessity to provide classroom variety. And being in the room may encourage discussion around gender stereotypes, with students having to think a little harder about what happens beneath that teacher's desk. It would be especially beneficial in building the self-esteem, discipline, and positive gender identity of male students with IDs. The underrepresentation of men thus raises questions about the recruitment and appeal of teaching to males. There are also implications for workload distribution and program sustainability resulting from this gender imbalance. Given that their names are predominantly female, it is expected that they will make significant contributions to the success of IE programs. Although this demonstrates their commitment, it also adds more accountability to female teachers, as they are burdened with greater responsibility, which can lead to stress and burnout. The involvement of more male teachers may contribute to a balanced sharing of responsibilities and bring diversity of strengths inside the inclusive teaching environment. It is also significant that sex plays a role in the style of teaching. Research has demonstrated potential differences between male and female teachers in terms of classroom management, communication styles, and moderating strategies. In Balamban, because most of the teachers are women, teaching is more relational and nurturing. This approach works well for learners with intellectual

challenges; a mix of male and female teachers would enrich teaching strategies and make learning experiences richer and more flexible.

Additionally, the female hegemony within teaching forces may influence policy and in-service programs. Training and workshops may be designed with a view to the strengths and weaknesses of female teachers, potentially sidelining male teachers. Having this knowledge on gender composition will enable policymakers to plan more inclusive capacity-building programs that include both male and female perspectives on managing learners with intellectual impairments.

Highest Educational Attainment. The educational attainment of teachers is a crucial factor in determining the quality of instruction, professional competence, and the ability to implement IE effectively. For instance, regular elementary teachers in DepEd schools in Balamban, Cebu, who handle learners with IDs, the study's findings showed that most of them hold a higher education degree, typically a master's degree or higher. This pattern highlights teachers' commitment to their professional development and their willingness to address the specific challenges that IE presents.

College graduates comprised 83 (33.74%) of the 246 respondents. This cohort includes bachelor's degree holders, the lowest qualification offered, who qualify to teach in basic education in the Philippines. While they may have acquired some basic teaching skills from this achievement, they may not have been exposed to the broader theories, research, and practices related to IE. For teachers who are directly in contact with learners with IDs, an undergraduate degree is an essential foundation that needs to be supplemented and completed through training programs and workshops on SpEd and IE. The large number of bachelor's degree earners appears to indicate that they are well-prepared to teach but may require additional learning experiences to further develop their expertise, specifically in working with learners who have opportunities without challenges.

In addition, teachers with a master's degree were typically more prepared in terms of inclusive policies and strategies, as well as curriculum planning. Their inclusion at Balamban schools bolsters the teaching staff, as they can serve as resource persons or mentor their peers – especially those at the bachelor's or continuing master's level. Additionally, the presence of teachers with completed higher degrees helps create a culture of academic seriousness and scholarship within their schools, where they can engage in research, professional development, and program design. A higher degree alone is insufficient; what teachers learn must then be connected to their teaching practices in a manner that positively impacts learners with IDs. Professional development initiatives, mentorship structures, and collaborative learning communities must align to ensure that a high level of educational attainment contributes positively to classroom results.

The level of education attained by regular elementary teachers in Balamban manifests a high regard for continuing education and career development. While one-third of current teachers are still educated to the bachelor's level, most have pursued or completed graduate studies that should equip them with the necessary resources to better address the challenges presented by IE. Master's and doctoral-level teachers are the backbone of the system, leading and mentoring, innovating. However, continued investment is necessary to support the completion of the degree and the application of that learning in practice, as well as to facilitate the progress of teachers who teach learners with IDs.

Field of Specialization. The field of specialization of regular elementary teachers is a critical determinant in providing learners with IDs adequate education. Specialization serves as an indicator of teachers' educational preparation, professional emphasis, and willingness to deal with the diverse learning needs of learners in inclusive settings.

In DepEd schools (including those in Balamban, Cebu), the teachers are composed of those who have completed additional courses, such as general education, SpEd, and related fields. Examining their fields of specialization is also informative in understanding how well-qualified they are and how ready they are to integrate IE. To determine the strengths, gaps, and training requirements that will enable learners with IDs to access sufficient support and worthwhile learning opportunities from qualified teachers, it is essential to understand this distribution. The classroom teacher's area of expertise is identified as a key aspect in the ability to respond adequately to student learning demands, as well as more specific needs, such as those of learners with IDs. It speaks to the type of practitioner preparation, knowledge, and skills they bring to this setting, thus characterizing inclusive practice.

In DepEd schools in Balamban, Cebu, the data on teachers' fields of specialization highlights both strengths and gaps in relation to the demands of teaching learners with IDs. The largest group of respondents is Elementary Education-Generalists, comprising 121 teachers or 49.19% of the total. This suggests that about half of the teaching staff is prepared to teach a wide variety of elementary-level subjects. Generalists are equipped to handle a variety of learning demands in the classroom and prepare learners for a range of subjects. However, while their preparation equips them with versatility, it may not necessarily provide them with specialized knowledge in handling learners with IDs. Their presence suggests that IE in Balamban is primarily being implemented by teachers with a generalist foundation, which is practical but may require targeted training to address the specific needs of learners requiring individualized educational support.

Balamban's teachers' field of specialization profile is varied, with a generalist-dominant orientation and a moderate inclination towards SpEd and related expertise. While specific strong points can be readily identified, such as early childhood education rankings and the number of SpEd specialists, the information also highlights areas that need improvement. Providing

professional development and incentives for more teachers to specialize in SpEd, as well as single or dual-collaborative teaching models, can be beneficial touchstone practices for inclusive success. By filling in these gaps, DepEd Balamban schools can ensure that learners with IDs receive quality, equitable, and purposeful education.

Length of Teaching Service. It is essential to understand the teaching experience for regular primary school teachers, as this is related to their ability to work effectively with learners with IDs. Teaching experience encompasses not only the years worked as a teacher but also the general practical skills, classroom management techniques, and flexibility towards different student requirements that a teacher has gained over time. Within the DepEd schools in Balamban, Cebu, the number of years of service of teachers further provides implications for their preparedness, resilience, and professional maturity in IE, which reflects how experience affects their competencies in responding to the distinct needs of learners with IDs. The length of teaching service provides an essential lens through which to understand the professional maturity, experience, and capability of teachers in implementing IE. In DepEd schools in Balamban, Cebu, where regular elementary teachers are tasked with handling learners with IDs, the data reveal a workforce that is relatively balanced between early-career teachers, mid-career teachers, and highly experienced practitioners. This distribution has significant implications for teaching effectiveness, program sustainability, and the professional development needs of teachers.

The majority, 79 teachers, or 32.11%, have been serving between 6 and 10 years in the profession. This is a cadre of teachers who are at the early or mid-point in their careers. They are past beginning teachers (typically in their 1st to 5th year), and have developed a degree of consistency in teaching practices, classroom management, and lesson design. By this time, teachers are typically comfortable/optimistic about their ability to teach diverse learners, such as students with ID, yet also very adaptive and open-minded to learning new techniques. The percentage of in this group, however, indicates that inclusive practice in Balamban is performed mainly by both neophyte and developing expert teachers. This is a positive sign, as young teachers tend to combine novel views with increasing professional expertise and the capability to maintain their inclusive practices over time.

Nevertheless, although experience can be an advantage, they may encounter resistance to new methods or struggle to adapt to modern technology. However, these veteran teachers can offer leadership and continuity in inclusive classrooms while also acting as sources of professional mentorship and institutional history for new staff. Finally, teachers in their first few years of teaching, comprising 43 or more than half of the cases, were also included to represent the youngest subject matter professionals. Hundreds of beginner teachers are still building their teaching careers. Enable new teachers themselves to become, at times, confused and uncertain in the face of such learners. Although they bring energy, creativity, and an open mind to trying new strategies, they may face hesitancy or a deficit of experience in dealing with unique behavioral and instructional needs. Their numbers underscore the importance of mentoring and training programs in developing capacity and reducing premature attrition.

The data provide a picture of where the workforce is strong and where it's struggling. The dominance of teachers with 6–15 years of service suggests that teachers spearheading IE in Balamban are highly experienced, although not yet at their maximum level of experience. A large proportion of veteran teachers also adds wisdom and continuity to the ranks, but when there are no people in the 16–20 year bucket, it raises concerns that there will be a gap in experience. In the meantime, early-career teachers bring renewed energy, but resources need to be directed toward supporting and preparing them. The profile here is multifaceted in its implications. First, professional development programs must be designed to meet the varying levels of experience among teachers. New teachers need to be well-grounded in inclusive practice, mid-career teachers should receive advanced skill development and leadership preparation, and experienced teachers will benefit from re-skilling around contemporary pedagogy and the integration of technology. Both mentorship systems that pair novices with experienced suicide professionals should be developed to gain new teachers to encourage and sustain IE. Third, measures to prevent and address the erosion of retention rates, such as that occurred in the 16–20 age group, are needed. The years of teaching service of Balamban's regular elementary teachers handling learners with IDs reflect a relatively balanced workforce, with strengths in mid-career and veteran groups, but also areas of concern, such as the lack of continuity and the need for more substantial support for novice teachers. Harnessing the strengths of each group while addressing these challenges will be crucial in sustaining effective, equitable, and IE for learners with IDs.

Relevant Trainings Attended. Teacher training is a crucial factor in enhancing teachers' ability to provide adequate support for learners with IDs. The training they engage in provides them with new pedagogical content, specific strategies, and self-efficacy to enact inclusive behavior. Data on the training attended by regular elementary teachers in DepEd schools in Balamban, Cebu, indicate areas for improvement in the adequate preparation of teachers on IE.

The Basic INSET (In-Service Training) was the most attended training, as revealed by the data, with 98 teachers, or 39.84%, reporting attendance. INSET is the standard professional development program of the DepEd, designed to reorient teachers on curriculum upgrades, the implementation of learner-centered approaches in teaching, and effective classroom management. This high rate of attendance suggests that most teachers have been trained in general (subject) training, which is indispensable for their professional growth. However, because in-service training encompasses a wide range beyond SpEd and IE, there is an implication that teachers will always be generally well-prepared with new instructional methods, but may not always attain

specialized skills that are directly applicable to managing learners with IDs. This indicates that although INSET enhances general competencies, a desire for more specialized training to tackle the specific challenges of inclusive classrooms should be considered.

The general implications of these findings are essential. First, the continued prevalence of INSET and K–12 training suggests that teachers, as a whole, are aware of the new developments taking place in curriculum and pedagogy — a critical consideration when it comes to ensuring instruction is contemporary and learner-focused. However, such training is insufficient to ensure that teachers possess the depth of knowledge necessary for effectively dealing with learners with IDs. The relatively low numbers who train in IE flag a disconnect between what classrooms really need and the opportunities for professional development that teachers are exposed to. Second, the data highlight the importance for DepEd, with its partners, to reframe training priorities. Although general professional development programs are essential, there is a need for ongoing training opportunities on IE that are regular, available, and practical. Otherwise, teachers may persist in using generic approaches that do not meet the individualized needs of learners with IDs. Third, the study highlights that sustainability and continuity of training programs are paramount. Where in-service training on IE is given, its effects may be negligible if it is not continuous or involves only a minority of the teaching body. The inclusion of long-term programs, follow-up training, and sustained capacity building will ensure that inclusive practices are consistently implemented in Balamban classrooms.

From this analysis, teachers in Balamban have a teaching force that is highly exposed (i.e., through general professional development, INSET, and K–12 training) but underexposed (i.e., to specialized IE training). While teachers are trained in curriculum and pedagogy, there is an urgent need to expand their access to IE programs that are specifically catered to learners with IDs. Equipping this aspect of the teachers will not only capacitate them but also ensure that learners with IDs receive quality, fair, and responsive education in DepEd schools.

4.2 Level of Readiness of Regular Teachers in Handling Learners with IDs

The readiness of mainstream teachers in educating learners with IDs in inclusive classrooms is one of the crucial factors that determine the success of IE. Teachers' readiness includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence in addressing the varied needs of learners with IDs. It also represents the degree to which they can apply differentiated teaching, classroom accommodation, and supportive inclusion strategies. In DepEd schools, particularly in elementary schools, the assessment of teacher readiness provides valuable information about their strengths and weaknesses that impact student learning. Understanding this readiness ensures that learners with IDs receive an equitable and quality education.

Table 2
Level of Readiness of Regular Teachers in Handling Elementary Learners with IDs in Inclusive Classrooms
(n = 246)

Indicators		Mean	Media n	StDev	Interpretation
A.	Knowledge of Inclusive Teaching Principles	2.99	3.00	0.71	Moderately Ready
B.	Instructional and Classroom Management Strategies	3.03	3.00	0.68	Moderately Ready
C.	Ability to Implement Individualized Accommodations and Modifications	2.90	3.00	0.72	Moderately Ready
D.	Collaboration with SpEd Personnel and Parents	2.87	3.00	0.77	Moderately Ready
E.	Access to Relevant Professional Development and Support	2.87	3.00	0.73	Moderately Ready
F.	Attitudes and Values Toward IE	3.14	3.00	0.72	Moderately Ready
Aggregate Mean :		2.97	3.00	0.72	Moderately Ready

Legend: 1.00-1.74 Not Ready; 1.75-2.49 Less Ready; 2.50-3.24 Moderately Ready; 3.25-4.00 Very Ready

The table presents the overall level of readiness of regular teachers in handling elementary learners with IDs in inclusive classrooms across six major dimensions: knowledge, instructional strategies, accommodations, collaboration, professional development, and attitudes. The aggregate mean score of 2.97 reveals that teachers are moderately ready for IE. This suggests that, although teachers in Balamban schools are eager and have the initial ability, a wide gap still needs to be bridged for them to transition from readiness to consistent practice with confidence. A large spread between the top and bottom mean scores is likely to indicate where resources can be scheduled to have the most significant effect.

The dimensions of attitudes and values toward IE obtained the highest mean score (3.14), indicating that teachers have a positive attitude and favorable values towards accepting learners with IDs in their classrooms. They recognize that IE promotes respect, empathy, and understanding among learners, and that the majority of participants consider ID learners an added value for their living environment. This is a hopeful finding, as attitudes and values are the “bedrock” of IE. Positive dispositions in teachers are

likely to result in greater resistance against various barriers that stand between planning and student learning, as well as advocacy for more inclusive practices and problem-solving with other professionals.

The implication of this finding is noteworthy: Balamban teachers have, in fact, personally embraced inclusion as a social and moral commitment. They do not view this as a compliance mandate with DepEd policies, but rather as a transformative approach to education and learning for all learners, including learners with IDs. This positive mindset becomes the cornerstone of professional learning activities, as teachers who are committed are more likely to be motivated both to try out new practices and sustain inclusive practice in the long term.

On the other hand, the lowest mean scores (2.87) were obtained in two dimensions: Collaboration with SpEd Personnel & Parents and Availability of Appropriate Support. These scores indicate that inclusion is essential for teachers, but they are prevented from operationalizing it due to a lack of collaboration and systemic support. The low level of collaboration may indicate that teachers have not yet fully integrated themselves into an established and meaningful partnership with SpEd adults, parents, and other regular education personnel. This is the result of scheduling obstacles, a lack of formal mechanisms for collaboration, and unclear roles and responsibilities in planning and serving as a resource to one another.

Additionally, the low score and lack of support highlight another issue: teachers may not receive sufficient training, workshops, or guidance on how to support learners with IDs effectively. They are moderately prepared, but it's more a preparedness that stems from personal values and beliefs than systemic infrastructure. Insufficient access to specialized resources, training, or administrative support may be contributing factors to this gap. Not only does poor professional reinforcement influence teachers' level of confidence, but it has the potential to erode their capacity to engage in effective strategies for learners with a range of needs.

Overall, the difference between the highest and lowest means provides a precise observation: teachers are ideologically prepared for IE, but systemic/structural obstacles limit their practical readiness. They are committed to inclusion and believe in its benefits, but implementation only works if there is good collaboration and sufficient professional development, which is not uniformly available.

The table analysis, as shown above, reveals that the regular teachers in DepEd schools of Balamban were moderately prepared for IE, with their readiness most highly manifested in their attitudes and values toward inclusion. This is promising because teachers are already motivated to have learners with IDs in the general classroom. But the poor marks for collaboration and access to professional development are problematic. Without firmer networks of support, these well-intentioned teachers' ripe attitudes face the prospect of going untapped. The ramifications of these findings suggest a dual approach: teachers' positive values about inclusion should be sustained and strengthened through concurrent efforts to address system-wide deficits. Each school should have formalized cross-faculty collaboration models (including regular and SpEd teachers) as well as inclusive learning communities that actively engage parents in learning. DepEd, too, needs to invest in more cohesive, uniform, and demand-driven programs that ensure teachers acquire specific competencies and strategies. By addressing these weakest components, the Balamban schools can close the belief-practice gap and provide teachers with training that caters to their moderate readiness, which can then be transformed into preparedness for IE.

4.3 Level of Readiness of Regular Teachers in Handling Learners with IDs

IE in DepEd schools aims at ensuring an equitable learning opportunity for all learners, ID learners included. In Balamban, Cebu, mainstream classroom teachers play a vital role in realizing this vision of what needs to be done for learners with ID, which involves providing support for learners with IDs in the regular class. However, even though they are willing and have a positive attitude, these teachers often face several challenges in meeting the specific needs of learners with IDs. Inadequate training, a lack of specialized resources, difficulty in modifying instruction, and insufficient cooperation with SpEd personnel and parents are among the most significant issues. These barriers highlight the gap between policy and practice, making it essential to examine the specific challenges that hinder teachers' effectiveness in inclusive settings.

Table 3
Challenges Faced by Regular Teachers in Teaching Learners with IDs in Inclusive Settings
(n = 246)

Indicators	Mean	Media n	StDev	Interpretation
A. Instructional Limitations	3.22	3.00	0.69	Moderately Challenged
B. Classroom Behavior Management	3.20	3.00	0.76	Moderately Challenged
C. Lack of Training and Professional Support	3.22	3.00	0.71	Moderately Challenged
D. Availability of Teaching Resources and Materials	3.26	3.00	0.72	Highly Challenged
E. Administrative and Systemic Support	3.15	3.00	0.66	Moderately Challenged
Aggregate Mean :	3.21	3.00	0.71	Moderately Challenged

Legend: 1.00-1.74 Never Challenged; 1.75-2.49 Less Challenged; 2.50-3.24 Moderately Challenged; 3.25-4.00 Highly Challenged

This may indicate that, although teachers are generally able to 'do' inclusion, they face ongoing challenges that impact their ability to do so. Of the identified dimensions, the Availability of Teaching Resources and Materials (mean = 3.26; highly challenged) was rated the highest, and Administrative and Systemic Support (mean = 3.15; moderately challenged) was rated the lowest. These two examples highlight competing features that influence the quality of inclusion in the specific setting.

The biggest problem that the best-informed teachers have is that there are very few resources or materials available to teach learners with IDs. This implies that teachers are not averse to modifying their approaches. However, instead, they are hindered by the absence of tools such as specialized teaching devices, visual supplements, and adapted technologies that aim to create individualized/student-oriented learning materials, facilitating differentiated instruction. This is a key implication of the current finding. Without adequate resources, teachers are forced to use home-made or one-size-fits-all materials that may not address the special requirements of individuals with IDs. This type of restrictive practice can lower learner enthusiasm, slow down the learning pace, and make classroom management more difficult. It also erects another hurdle for teachers, who often have to work hard to overcome those disparities without the benefit of institutional support.

For DepEd schools in Balamban, this is the emerging theme of finding ways to increase efficiencies in resource allocation, both at the school and division levels. Specialized educational teaching aids, created by special education experts who work directly with caregivers, may be one way to fill this void. Ensuring the availability of teaching materials is not just a logistical matter; it also has implications for equity and inclusion. The average score is "Moderately Challenged," representing administrative/system support. This means that, although structural obstacles remain, administrative obstacles do not seem as salient as resource constraints. Managers, on the other hand, stated that, in terms of policies, recommendations, and aid to IE within the bureaucracy, there is some support from management, but bureaucratic obstacles occasionally limit this support. The inference is that the organization in Balamban schools may have started to assimilate IE practices slowly, but they cannot be considered fully maximized. Teachers, for instance, are being provided with specific guidelines or some ad hoc support; however, the overall absence of systematic consultation, consistent policy, and immediate leadership continues to limit the prospects of successful inclusion. In contrast to teaching resources, which have a (more) immediate and observable impact, administrative hurdles might be less direct but are just as relevant to the 'space' for inclusive practices.

The difference between the highest and the lowest mean score reflects two essential aspects of IE: on the one hand, it is evident that the lack of teaching resources gives rise to an immediate and direct barrier that affects teaching and learning. On the other hand, administrative support and systemic (institutional) support pose a mild yet significant fundamental challenge that affects how schools can institutionalize IE over time. To successfully introduce IE in DepEd Balamban's schools, these two domains must be addressed simultaneously. Administrative support needs to be enhanced through the establishment of sound policies, capacity building, and inclusive governance. At the same time, if we ensure that teachers have sufficient and specialized teaching materials, it helps them to implement more efficient and inclusive strategies. These enhancements may ameliorate issues encountered, establish equity, and enrich the learning processes of learners with IDs.

4.4 Test of Significance of the Relationship

In this study, it is hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between the teachers' level of readiness and their challenges in handling learners with IDs. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4
Relationship Between the Demographic Profile of the Respondents and their Challenges in Handling Learners with IDs
(alpha = 0.05)

Variables	Chi-Square	df	Critical Value	Significance	Result
Level of Readiness in Handling Learners with IDs and Challenges in Handling Learners with IDs	34.186	4	9.488	Significant	Ho rejected

The test of significance output showed that there is a significant relationship between the level of readiness of public elementary regular teachers and their challenges in dealing with learners with IDs, with a Chi-square value of 34.186, which is greater than

the table critical value at 4 degrees of freedom, 9.488. This outcome meant that the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that teachers' readiness is significantly related to the difficulties they face in teaching students with ID. In other words, teachers with lower levels of readiness may experience more difficulty in various aspects of IE compared to those who are more ready. This vital relationship emphasizes the reciprocity between teacher preparedness and the level of difficulty experienced in inclusive classrooms. Teachers' preparedness includes their understanding, know-how, attitudes, and confidence in working with students with IDs. When teachers have established these aspects, it is easier for them to manage various learning needs and use differentiated teaching, and maintain order in the classroom. Poor readiness, however, tends to be correlated with greater challenges in work behavior modification/adjustment, instructional material adaptation, and consideration of individual learning needs (and potential frustration and burnout). The results indicate that the preparedness of teachers also significantly influences IE practice. Third, teachers who have undergone training, such as seminars and workshops on IE, have higher self-efficacy in teaching learners with IDs. Their readiness enables them to foresee and effectively cope with differentiation, personalized learning, and situation control. On the contrary, teachers who are poorly trained or have limited contact may not be able to offer lessons that cater to all abilities, increasing perceived difficulty. That is to underscore the need for continuous capacity-building training programmes that target regular teachers with the requisite skills in dealing with learners with IDs.

Moreover, the strong relationship also means that IE obstacles are not all situated in the external environment: they are also teacher-based, especially with respect to teachers' level of readiness. For example, teachers who are confident they can modify lessons or use assistive devices do not regard such accommodations as difficult. On the other hand, people without such abilities may view interactions with IE as a challenging task. Thus, enhancing teacher preparedness can also be considered as a proactive measure to address the challenges in teaching learners with IDs.

The data also indicate the importance of institutional support in developing readiness and as a force for combating the challenges teachers confront. Schools that offer avenues for professional development, cut back on resources for SpEd, and work in collaboration with the SpEd teachers are more likely to develop preparedness among regular teachers. As teachers' readiness increases, they will be more prepared to teach diverse classrooms and may encounter fewer difficulties. This speaks to the importance of educational leaders investing in sustainable professional development initiatives and supportive system structures that develop teacher competence with IE. It also validates the view that readiness is not a fixed quality, but one that matures through exposure, guidance, and practice. Teachers who are lifelong learners practicing an inclusive philosophy and who have the support of seasoned special educators can chip away at such obstacles as they develop their practice. The high correlation between readiness and challenges also suggests that improvements in one dimension will likely lead to a decrease in the other, highlighting how professional development is transformative for IE results. The finding of a significant interaction between school and division levels, from a practical perspective, suggests that targeted interventions are necessary at both the school and division levels. - Added to this, the DepEd and school heads can focus on programs that will improve teachers' readiness, like specialized in-service training, IE modules, and team-teaching sessions with experts from SpEd. The readiness of teachers can also be enhanced by providing them with opportunities to observe and then apply inclusive practices in actual classrooms, such as attending practice or shadowing sessions that reduce the challenges they experience.

Furthermore, this result is in line with prior work that documented the interrelationship of readiness and challenges in IE (e.g., Educators who have the knowledge and skills that they need to be inclusive teachers certainly feel more confident, but equally importantly, are better able to manage their classrooms effectively and to deliver equitable learning experiences. Therefore, readiness is not only about pre-service teaching staff being prepared to include learners with IDs, but also about the means to break down barriers and actually support them.

The strong association between teachers' level of readiness and challenges in managing children with IDs indicates the importance of teacher preparedness in the success of IE. Such a finding suggests that increasing intrinsic motivation may be beneficial for stakeholders to provide immediate training and practice in ID among teachers. Accordingly, teacher preparation should be recognized as a fundamental strategy for achieving successful and enduring inclusion of students with IDs in public elementary schools.

A set of controlled experiments, in which the UDL Professional Development Programme aimed to influence teachers' competencies for inclusive classrooms, was analyzed by Rusconi and Squillaci (2023). The review indicated that teachers who participated in structured UDL professional learning made positive shifts in planning, differentiating instruction, and confidence in modifying instruction to meet the needs of a wide range of learners. Classes with a hands-on practice, coaching, and follow-up were more effective than single-session workshops. The findings suggest the potential of a sustained, practice-based UDL training as a powerful lever to increase the level of teachers' readiness and decrease classroom-level challenges while teaching children with diverse needs, including those with IDs. Policymakers and school leaders should focus on implementing iterative training and coaching models to optimize their effectiveness.

Alharbi and Iqtadar (2024) examined the self-efficacies, lived experiences, and challenges that teachers face when teaching learners with IDs in inclusive classrooms. Many teachers shared that they did not feel adequately prepared -- often saying, "I never feel like I am prepared enough." Notable obstacles were: Lack of professional development, high caseloads, no collaboration with specialists, and not enough adaptive materials. Teachers with access to continuous coaching reported greater self-efficacy and less perceived challenge. The study concludes that the development of teachers' readiness involves systemic,

sustained professional learning, mentoring, and structural supports – piecemeal workshops are insufficient to counteract the factors in real life that challenge inclusive practice.

4.4 Test of Significance of the Difference

The objective of the significance test is to determine whether there are differences in the level of readiness and challenges of handling learners with IDs across demographic profiles. The purpose of this study is to examine whether demographic variables, such as age, gender, level of education, and number of years of teaching and training relevant to SpEd, impact differential levels of preparedness and perceptions of challenges among teachers. By comparing mean scores between the groups, the study seeks to determine whether these demographic factors significantly and differently affect teachers' competence and confidence in managing learners with IDs in inclusive classrooms. These differences must be taken into account when determining whether groups can benefit from more assistance, training, or capacity-building programs. Furthermore, this test may have practical implications for school administrators who are developing targeted initiatives to address the specific needs of teachers in IE. Finally, the significance test findings provide the basis for enhancing teacher preparedness, refining instructional practices and knowledge of instruction, and promoting improved learning experiences for learners with IDs.

4.4.1 Level of Readiness in Handling Learners with IDs When Grouped by Demographic Profiles

In this study, it is hypothesized that there is a significant difference in teachers' levels of readiness in handling learners with IDs when grouped by their demographic profiles. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5
Difference in the Level of Readiness in Handling Learners with IDs When Grouped by Demographic Profiles
(alpha = 0.05)

Level of Readiness in Handling Learners with IDs When Grouped By	F-value	p-value	Significance	Result
Age	0.94	0.56	Not significant	Ho accepted
Gender	0.24	0.62	Not significant	Ho accepted
Highest Educational Attainment	1.10	0.35	Not significant	Ho accepted
Field of Specialization	1.27	0.26	Not significant	Ho accepted
Length of Teaching Experience	3.92	0.01	Significant	Ho rejected

The ANOVA results indicated that the duration of teaching experience made a significant difference ($F = 3.92$, $p < 0.05$) in the readiness of public elementary regular teachers to address learners with IDs. This discovery indicates that the qualitative teaching experience influences teachers' readiness for IE. Teachers with longer years of experience tend to develop practical wisdom, flexible pedagogical strategies, and confidence, which enables them to manage the various needs of learners, including those with ID. Experience, and, of course, knowledge, would allow teachers to master classroom management skills and differentiation techniques, as well as learn from the various behaviors and learning needs they encounter daily. Conversely, teachers with less teaching experience may not have yet established the basic competencies for IE, relying instead on theoretical knowledge acquired during preservice training, while lacking practical experience with individuals with special learning needs. As a result, they may be less prepared than older staff members. This significant variation suggests that teachers' willingness is not universally shared, but instead develops through ongoing professional activity and teacher experience. This has implications for experiential learning, mentoring, and lifelong professional development, as it prepares teachers for IE.

The findings also showed that age, sex, academic background, and field of study did not differ in the level of preparedness. This trend suggests that readiness depends less on demographic features and more on professional exposure, as well as the possibilities of interaction with diverse learners that teachers have. For example, relatively young teachers for whom a considerable amount of classroom experience or mentorship has taken place may exhibit higher readiness than older teachers who have not had experience teaching in inclusive settings. Thus, teaching experience serves as a mediator that combines theory and practice in the development of inclusive teaching competence.

The teaching experience, which accounts for the large spread, also reflects that teachers' skills are acquired through on-the-job training. Teachers who have had experience with learners with IDs are more self-efficacious in implementing accommodations in the classroom, more patient in managing behavior, and more empathetic towards learners' individual differences. So, as they're exposed to the latter, formulating inclusion strategies will not be new to them. Additionally, more experienced teachers may have also attended diverse in-service trainings or seminars on IE, thereby increasing their levels of preparedness. This result is

consistent with that in the report by Mabanag et al. (2024) and Logroño and Gongora (2023), which identify factors of influence on IE readiness experience and professional development, as well as the relevant result leads to suggest policy actions for teacher training programs and school principals to offer differentiated support according to teaching experience. Beginning teachers and specialist training. Beginning teachers, in general, and novice special educators, in particular, may benefit from more explicit mentoring and hands-on workshops to prepare them for inclusive classrooms. Instead, experienced teachers could be supported as mentors to replicate successful training strategies for managing learners with IDs. Schools can draw upon the knowledge of professional teachers to help novices better prepare by creating a systematic mentoring system.

The finding also reinforces the value of experiential capacity-building activities. It should not be just a theoretical learning, oriented discussion, or training that excludes learners with IDs; instead, practical sessions should be conducted, and learners with disabilities should be exposed to them in various ways, such as classroom simulations, case presentations, and actual immersion. Thus, teachers can help students make this hands-on bridge between conceptual understanding and application—something that is naturally developed over time but can be overtly enhanced through graded exercises.

Moreover, the importance of pedagogical practice enforces teacher readiness as a developmental process. In the process of experience, alongside technical skill, they develop psychological preparedness—confidence, resilience, and adaptability—that is critical to effectively directing inclusive classrooms. Readiness is not simply the knowledge of how to engage in instructional strategies; it is an open-minded approach, a problem-solving mentality, and the mindset that practices will need to adapt to foster the learning of each learner. These transcending characteristics are shaped through a series of class interactions and reflective teaching that takes place over the years.

Finally, data suggest that educational policy makers and school leaders need to perpetuate the readiness chain at all career levels and adopt lifelong professional learning systems. Experienced teachers demonstrate high readiness; however, they tend to become complacent without attending up-to-date training and reflection, such as on effective teaching methods. On the other hand, aspiring teachers new to teaching can be better prepared with continuous mentoring and feedback loops, as well as being exposed to good examples of IE. The presence of a significant difference provides an empirical rationale for differentiated preparation pathways – novice modules for early-career teachers and advanced workshops targeting experienced professionals.

The results indicate that the duration of the teaching experience has a significant impact on the level of preparedness of public elementary regular teachers in managing learners with IDs. It suggests that readiness is not innate, but instead developed - it does not depend on who I am, but instead on what I do over time, and it is a result of progressive professional involvement, pragmatic experience, and reflective development. Thus, schools and educational companies need to develop experience-based, taught professional development programs that ensure teachers have an equal opportunity to develop their competency in readiness. If we can reinforce support mechanisms, create mentorship opportunities, and institutionalize authentic teaching and learning experiences for all new teachers, then each teacher will be prepared to create inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environments for all learners — including those with disabilities.

Adeyemo and Salami (2022) examined the preparedness of public elementary teachers for inclusive education and the influence of years of teaching experience on their preparation. Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference in readiness level based on teaching experience. Teachers with a teaching experience of 10 years or more rated significantly higher on inclusive readiness domains, including modifying instruction, managing the classroom, and supporting behaviour. Novice teachers perceived themselves to be less confident and less capable of teaching learners with IDs. The research found that teacher experience enhances their problem-solving skills and adaptive expertise in inclusive contexts. It encouraged the incorporation of inclusive pedagogy and practical experiences into initial teacher preparation, aiming to shorten the learning curve for novices.

4.4.2 Challenges in Handling Learners with IDs When Grouped by Demographic Profiles

In this study, it is hypothesized that there is a significant difference in the teachers' challenges in handling learners with IDs when grouped by its demographic profiles. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6
Difference in the Challenges in Handling Learners with IDs When Grouped by Demographic Profiles
(alpha = 0.05)

Challenges in Handling Learners with IDs When Grouped by Demographic Profiles	F-value	p-value	Significance	Result
Age	1.40	0.09	Not significant	Ho accepted
Gender	0.25	0.62	Not significant	Ho accepted
Highest Educational Attainment	1.87	0.13	Not significant	Ho accepted
Field of Specialization	2.13	0.03	Significant	Ho rejected
Length of Teaching Experience	0.81	0.49	Not significant	Ho accepted

Based on their area of expertise, public primary regular teachers' obstacles in managing learners with IDs differ significantly ($F = 2.13, p = 0.03$), according to the data. According to this research, teachers' academic backgrounds and areas of expertise play a significant role in identifying the kinds and degrees of disruption they encounter in inclusive environments. The teachers' field of specialization significantly influenced their perceptions and effectiveness in serving the varied learning demands of learners with IDs, even while factors like age, gender, education level, and years of teaching experience did not differ.

It may be more challenging for general education teachers (i.e., English, Math, and Science) to create adapted lessons, teach using different pedagogical techniques, and administer assessments than teacher who are teaching learners who do not have IDs. These content areas are content-driven and require cognitive processing and structured output that may not align well with the unique learning profiles of learners with IDs. Therefore, teachers within these domains may encounter more instructional or behavioral challenges and struggle to differentiate instruction, implement effective classroom management strategies, and ensure the active participation of every learner.

Alternatively, a teacher who specializes in early childhood SpEd or social studies may demonstrate less readiness and fewer perceived barriers. These specializations generally encompass some level of pedagogy instruction on child development, differentiation of learning, and strategies to foster inclusive classrooms; skills that may assist educators in serving students with IDs. For example, teachers who have obtained early childhood education training are accustomed to developmental variety and different learning styles and teaching methods (e.g., sensory or play-based activities), all of which lend themselves well to inclusive situations. Likewise, individuals who have a special education background are better prepared to differentiate instructional materials, use IEPs, and implement behavior plans for students with IDs. The difference by specialism highlights that academic justice mediates how teachers perceive and respond to inclusion. It evidences how teachers' exposure to disability-focused pedagogy during pre-service training determine their competence and comfort in relation to the challenges of IE, which supports previous studies such as Logroño and Gongora (2023) and Mabanag et al. (2024), who found that teachers without the benefit of significant SpEd practice encounter more instructional, behavioral, and emotional problems in inclusive settings than teachers trained in or for inclusion. Therefore, a professional outlook on inclusive practice is as essential as the number of years in practice or educational level.

Furthermore, as the findings suggest, content-heavy, pedagogically narrow fields of specialization may leave teachers poorly prepared to address the challenges of inclusive teaching. For example, STEM teachers might be experts at content delivery but struggle with differentiated instruction, adaptive assessment, or individualized behavior management. The notable difference also reveals that inclusive training requires both pedagogic expertise and subject-related adaptability. Teachers from different areas of knowledge may interpret and respond to the same classroom events in distinct ways, reflecting their knowledge base and instructional style. Thus, a teacher might have difficulty in simplifying abstract ideas for ID learners, while a language teacher might face challenges in overcoming communication barriers. These discipline-related variations suggest that not all challenges are evenly distributed, but rather depend on the nature of the material to be taught and teachers' pedagogical preparation.

In terms of implications for professional development, this finding is also noteworthy. First, teacher education programs need to be interdisciplinary in nature so that all preservice teachers receive coherent training on IE strategies. In terms of teacher education, inclusive approaches should be integrated into subject-specific pedagogy courses in teacher education schools to train future teachers with adaptive strategies tailored to their subjects—potentially providing practical solutions. Second, in-service training and workshops should be diversified to meet the needs of discipline-specific teachers. For example, for mathematics and science teachers, professional development may need to address simplifying tasks, utilizing assistive technology, and scaffolding visually in lessons. In contrast, language teachers might need to focus on strategies that improve communication, such as implementing multisensory instruction.

Additionally, schools must develop co-teaching models that involve content and special education educators working together to plan and teach. This joint effort streamlines the work of individual teachers, fosters professional development, and promotes the sharing of inclusive best practices. The structural differences resulting from specialization call for field-specific support mechanisms. Administrative and educational leaders need to recognize that certain fields encounter higher barriers to inclusion, which should prompt targeted resource allocation and interventions.

Finally, this result also confirms that IE is not a unique procedure for all. The teacher's preparedness and capability to respond to challenges are also central to how the teacher's professional history fits into demands related to inclusion. Accordingly, policymakers and curriculum developers need to tailor professional learning models and resource distribution to different subjects. Such forms of harm reduction include the provision of ongoing training/training providers, Special Education consultants, and resource networking that overlaps among specializations. The discrepancy between challenges across areas of instruction suggests that teachers' academic backgrounds specifically affect their capacity to support students with IDs effectively. Teachers specializing in an education-related or, particularly so, development discipline tend to experience fewer inclusion-related problems due to their familiarity with inclusive practices than do teachers from content areas /specializations related to them, who are more likely to experience the challenges that arise when having to adjust their teaching and classroom

behaviour. The finding emphasizes the need for a specialization-sensitive and comprehensive training program, as well as a shared support environment in which all teachers, regardless of their specialty, are equally prepared to respond to IE's multiple demands.

Culajara and Culajara (2023) investigated the problems of mathematics teachers in inclusive secondary classes, highlighting lesson adaptation, communication with learners with IDs, and the professional development gap. They described particular challenges related to instruction, such as simplifying abstract content, developing scaffolded tasks, and incorporating multisensory strategies, as well as training on enrolling in sign language and adapting pedagogy to meet the needs of individual students. These discipline-specific constraints led to increased perceived challenge compared to colleagues teaching more age-referenced subjects. A lack of subject-specific inclusive pedagogy was highlighted as the primary hindrance in this study. It was suggested that content-based specializations can exacerbate the inclusion issue, as subject expertise does not, in itself, equip teachers to adjust their curriculum and pedagogy to meet the needs of learners with IDs; instead, specific, targeted inclusive SpEd training is required.

Castro et al. (2024) investigated the adverse effects on teachers who were required to teach subjects other than their specialization, specifically on their ability to accommodate a variety of learners, including those with IDs. General educators teaching out-of-field reported even greater difficulty designing lessons, adapting assessments, and pacing instruction for the students with IDs than general educators who teach in-field. Discrepancies in subject matter and pedagogical approaches for ID learners result in a heightened workload and increased stress, with significant differences between specialization groups. The study found that a specialization mismatch exacerbates challenges to inclusion and suggests that policies and placements should aspire to reduce out-of-field teaching for classes containing learners with IDs, offering subject-specific inclusive training when mismatches are unavoidable.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that public elementary regular teachers in Balamban, Cebu, for the school year 2025–2026 manifest a moderate readiness to deal with learners with IDs in an inclusive setting. Yet their preparation to do so is restricted by deficits in field-based experiences, particularly in delivering differentiated instructions for learners with IDs, collaborating with teachers and parents, and attending professional development training. These findings suggest that teachers are ready and willing to welcome learners with IDs, but require tools such as ongoing training, mentoring, and school-based structures to develop the confidence and competence necessary for effective teaching of learners with IDs. In the meantime, teachers face modest difficulties in applying IE, with teaching resources and materials being revealed as the most significant obstacle. Furthermore, areas such as instructional barriers and a lack of professional support also serve as obstacles to successful classroom inclusion. A lack of system-level and administrative support exacerbates these challenges, underscoring the importance of greater collaboration among teachers, school administrators, and parents to sustain inclusive efforts.

Moreover, the findings also indicate that teaching experience has an effect on the readiness of teachers and that discipline does affect their perceived challenges. This implies that exposure and background training both play critical roles in developing the competence of inclusive teaching. Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between readiness and challenges; i.e., as teachers become more ready, the challenges they face decrease. This underscores a continuing need for ongoing in-service training, adequate instructional materials, and supportive educational procedures to increase the readiness of teachers to minimize the difficulties they encounter in providing an IE for learners with IDs in Balamban, Cebu.

It is recommended that teachers and school administrators strengthen efforts to enhance the preparedness of regular teachers in supporting learners with IDs. Teachers should be provided with continuous professional development focused on individualized instruction, behavior management, and collaboration with SpEd professionals and parents. Administrators should ensure adequate instructional resources and teaching materials are available to facilitate inclusive practices. Establishing mentoring programs and peer-support systems can also help less experienced teachers gain confidence and practical skills.

Moreover, schools should develop IE policies that promote teamwork, regular monitoring, and recognition of teachers' efforts in handling learners with special needs. Strengthening partnerships between schools, communities, and local education offices can further enhance access to resources and expert support. Through these initiatives, both teachers and administrators can create a more inclusive, supportive, and effective IE for learners with IDs. Additionally, the researchers suggested that the proposed strategic action plan be implemented and evaluated to enhance the lives of public elementary regular teachers in supporting learners with IDs.

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