

EMPOWERING TEACHERS FOR INCLUSION: AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND COMPETENCE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has become a foundational principle of global and national education systems, yet its implementation relies heavily on teachers' attitudes, self-efficacy, and competence. This study examined the attitudes and competence of Grade 7 teachers toward inclusive education in two public secondary schools in the Division of Carcar City, Philippines. Grounded in the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework, Social Cognitive Theory, Competency-Based Education Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the research utilized a descriptive–correlational design involving 30 teachers. Data were gathered using adapted and validated versions of the Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) and the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) Scale. Findings revealed that teachers had moderately positive attitudes toward inclusion ($M = 3.12\text{--}3.25$) and moderate to high competence levels across three domains: knowledge of inclusive practices ($M = 3.43\text{--}3.44$), instructional skills ($M = 3.16\text{--}3.20$), and classroom management/assessment strategies ($M = 3.06$). However, a weak negative correlation was found between attitudes and competence ($r \approx -0.28$), indicating that positive attitudes were not necessarily matched by stronger technical skills. Teachers reported challenges related to limited training, insufficient resources, and managing students with severe disabilities. Findings suggest that inclusion is widely accepted in principle but difficult to operationalize without systemic support. The study proposes a Strategic Intervention Plan focusing on capacity-building, peer mentoring, collaboration with specialists, and provision of contextualized teaching resources. Strengthening both attitudes and competence is essential to bridge the gap between inclusive policy and classroom practice, ultimately contributing to more equitable learning environments.

Keywords: inclusive education, teacher attitudes, teacher competence, Philippine secondary education, TEIP, MATIES

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a fundamental principle in 21st-century teaching and learning, driven by global commitments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (Lee et al., 2016). At the heart of inclusive education is the belief that every learner—regardless of ability, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, or background—deserves access to meaningful participation and success in a shared educational environment. Globally, the shift from segregated special education to inclusive classrooms represents not only an educational reform but a human rights imperative (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). In the Philippines, this global commitment is mirrored through institutional reforms, particularly under the Department of

Education's policy directions. With the enactment of DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 and subsequent updates, inclusive education has been institutionalized across public and private schools, affirming the country's dedication to educational equity. Recent initiatives such as the MATATAG Agenda and the revised K–12 curriculum further emphasize the Department's thrust toward learner-centered and inclusive instruction. However, implementation across regions remains varied, with many schools grappling with challenges such as insufficient teacher training, limited learning resources, and large class sizes (Perez et al., 2024; De los Reyes et al., 2025). Within this national landscape, the role of teachers becomes critical. As frontliners of classroom-level transformation, their attitudes toward learners with disabilities and their competence in inclusive teaching practices are key determinants of success. Teachers with positive attitudes are more likely to embrace diverse learners, while those equipped with inclusive strategies such as differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and collaboration with special education professionals are better prepared to meet varied student needs (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). Yet, literature reveals gaps in both attitude and preparedness among teachers, often due to a lack of sustained professional development and institutional support (Loreman, 2017).

Focusing on Grade 7 teachers is especially pertinent, as this level marks a critical transition from elementary to secondary education. For learners with disabilities, this shift often brings new academic, behavioral, and social adjustments. The capacity of Grade 7 teachers to manage inclusive classrooms can significantly influence whether these learners succeed or fall behind. Their mindset and teaching approaches serve as a gateway to either inclusion or marginalization. In the local context of Carcar City, a component city in Cebu Province, the situation reflects both opportunities and systemic constraints. While public secondary schools in the city are beginning to integrate inclusive education practices, the actual readiness, attitudes, and competencies of Grade 7 teachers remain underexamined. Given the city's diverse socio-cultural makeup and its evolving educational infrastructure, understanding how inclusive education is implemented on the ground becomes essential. Localized insights are necessary to guide resource allocation, tailor professional development, and support learners with disabilities at this crucial educational juncture.

As the Philippines continues to pursue inclusive education as part of its national agenda, the voices and capacities of teachers must be at the forefront of this transformation. By investigating the attitudes and competencies of Grade 7 teachers in Carcar City, this study contributes to bridging the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that inclusion is not merely aspirational but actionable, effective, and sustainable. This study was therefore conducted to assess the attitudes and competence of Grade 7 teachers toward inclusive education and to utilize these findings to inform the development of a Strategic Intervention Plan that supports more effective and sustainable inclusive practices.

Theoretical Background

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of equitable and sustainable education systems worldwide. Anchored in global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), inclusive education calls for the removal of barriers so that all learners—regardless of ability, background, or socioeconomic circumstance—can access and

thrive in quality education environments (Ydo, 2020). In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) institutionalized this vision through key directives such as DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, emphasizing inclusive, child-friendly, and learner-centered approaches in all public schools. However, the effectiveness of these policies ultimately depends on their classroom-level translation, particularly in secondary education, where departmentalized teaching and subject specialization may restrict flexible pedagogical approaches. At the heart of this transformation are teachers, whose attitudes and competence directly impact the realization of inclusive practices. This study thus examines how empowered Grade 7 teachers in Carcar City interpret and implement inclusion, recognizing them as both agents and gatekeepers of inclusive reform.

Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion. Attitudes represent a composite of beliefs, prior experiences, values, and sociocultural influences that shape how teachers perceive and interact with learners with diverse needs. Research has consistently demonstrated that positive attitudes toward inclusion are correlated with greater willingness to adopt inclusive instructional strategies, use differentiated learning materials, and create supportive classroom climates (Alshammari, 2021). Teachers who believe in the capacity of all students to learn are more likely to embrace flexibility, empathy, and equity in their teaching practices. However, positive attitudes alone are insufficient if not matched with the confidence and support mechanisms to enact inclusive pedagogy. Studies in the Philippine context highlight a growing discrepancy between teacher support for inclusion in principle and their perceived inability to implement inclusive strategies effectively, due to challenges such as large class sizes, lack of training, limited resources, and absence of paraprofessionals (Gumasing et al., 2023; Moon, 2023). This attitude-competence gap becomes particularly pronounced in secondary settings where curricular demands are rigid and inclusive accommodations are often seen as burdensome.

Teacher Competence in Inclusive Practice. Inclusive teaching competence encompasses both technical knowledge—such as curriculum differentiation, classroom management, and assessment—and relational skills such as collaboration with parents and special education professionals. As emphasized by Mtika et al. (2024), competence is not only cognitive but also ethical, requiring teachers to make intentional, equity-focused pedagogical decisions responsive to learner diversity. In the Philippine setting, however, teacher competence is often hindered by limited professional development. Teachers report receiving only sporadic, one-shot seminars with little follow-through or application to actual inclusive classroom contexts (Tambogon & Tabuga, 2017). Most pre-service programs still lack adequate immersion in inclusive classrooms, leaving teachers ill-equipped for the realities of inclusive instruction at the secondary level. Central to teacher competence is the concept of self-efficacy, or the belief in one's capacity to succeed in specific teaching tasks (Agenga, 2023). Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to exhibit persistence, creativity, and openness to new strategies (Pressley & Ha, 2021), all of which are essential for implementing inclusive education. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to teacher burnout, resistance to inclusion, and adverse effects on student engagement—especially for learners with special needs.

Interplay Between Attitudes and Competence. Attitudes and competence are mutually reinforcing. When teachers develop the necessary skills and see success in their practice, their attitudes often shift positively. Conversely, favorable attitudes can drive teachers to seek further learning and apply inclusive methods more consistently. This reciprocal relationship has been documented by Özokcu (2018) and Yuen et al. (2022), who argue that both dimensions must be cultivated together for inclusive education to

take root meaningfully. Challenges in Secondary Schools and Local Context. The unique structure of secondary schools including subject specialization, standardized testing, and time-bound curriculum coverage poses additional challenges for inclusion (Agenga, 2023). Teachers often express that the pressure to cover complex content restricts their flexibility to adapt instruction for learners with disabilities. This challenge is further compounded in settings like Carcar City, where contextual disparities among schools (e.g., infrastructure, administrative support, availability of SPED teachers) influence how inclusion is prioritized and practiced (Ediyanto & Kawai, 2023). Moreover, inclusive education cannot be divorced from its sociocultural context. Cultural perceptions of disability—ranging from pity to stigma—can subtly shape teacher expectations and limit learner opportunities (Yuen, 2022). In the Philippines, traditional views may promote compassion, but not always empowerment, highlighting the need for culturally responsive teacher training that reframes disability in terms of rights and participation.

Toward Empowering Teachers: A Systems Perspective. To truly empower teachers for inclusion, a systems-based approach is essential. Florian (2021) advocate for professional learning communities (PLCs) that integrate theory and practice, while Xu (2024) emphasizes that whole-school inclusion models—with collaborative planning, peer coaching, and reflective practice—are more sustainable than isolated teacher workshops. Empowerment, therefore, must include: Strengthened preservice and in-service training tailored to secondary school realities. Development of inclusive teaching standards rooted in both pedagogy and local culture. Provision of support structures, including school leaders, SPED coordinators, and learning support aides. Enhancement of teacher self-efficacy through coaching, mentoring, and peer-led innovations

The theoretical framework anchors this study in the interconnectedness of teacher attitudes, professional competence, and institutional support, all within the contextual realities of public secondary schools in Carcar City. By analyzing these dimensions specifically among Grade 7 teachers a pivotal stage in student academic transition—the study aims to uncover enablers and barriers to effective inclusion. The findings will inform targeted capacity-building strategies and policy recommendations that not only align with DepEd mandates but also respond to the lived realities of local educators. Ultimately, this framework supports the study's goal of empowering teachers as catalysts of inclusive education—equipping them with the mindsets, skills, and supports necessary to uphold every learner's right to quality, equitable, and participatory education. The empowerment of teachers in teaching Grade 7 students can be understood through various theoretical lenses that emphasize inclusion, self-efficacy, competency, and behavioral intention. Together, these frameworks provide a holistic foundation for enhancing teacher effectiveness and professional growth. The Inclusive Pedagogy Framework developed by Florian (2021) stresses the importance of valuing learner diversity and rejecting practices that marginalize students. For Grade 7 teachers, empowerment begins with the ability to adapt instruction and create an inclusive classroom environment where every learner, regardless of ability or background, is given meaningful opportunities to succeed. This approach builds teacher confidence in designing diverse learning strategies and strengthens their role as facilitators of equitable education. Similarly, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) highlights the role of self-efficacy in shaping human behavior and motivation. Teacher empowerment, in this sense, is rooted in the belief that one's actions can directly influence

student learning outcomes. Grade 7 teachers with high teaching self-efficacy are more willing to experiment with innovative approaches, persist in the face of challenges, and serve as effective role models for their students. In classrooms where both teacher and student behaviors reciprocally influence each other, teachers who feel empowered foster environments that encourage engagement, collaboration, and resilience. Building on this, Spady's Competency-Based Education Theory (1994) emphasizes mastery of learning outcomes as the central goal of education. For Grade 7 teachers, empowerment lies in the ability to align instruction and assessment with specific competencies, ensuring that students progress based on demonstrated mastery rather than seat time. Teachers take on the role of facilitators and assessors of learning, designing performance-based tasks and providing personalized feedback. This strengthens their professional autonomy and reinforces their sense of purpose as educators who prepare students with both academic knowledge and practical skills.

Finally, Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) underscores the significance of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping intentional action. Applied to teacher empowerment, this theory suggests that Grade 7 teachers are more likely to implement effective pedagogical strategies when they hold positive attitudes toward teaching, perceive strong support from peers and administrators, and feel confident in their ability to manage challenges. When schools cultivate a collaborative culture and provide professional development opportunities, teachers are more likely to engage in innovative practices and sustain their motivation.

Taken together, these theories suggest that teacher empowerment is multidimensional. Inclusive pedagogy ensures that instruction is equitable, social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of teacher self-efficacy, competency-based education highlights mastery and professional autonomy, and the theory of planned behavior illustrates how supportive environments shape teachers' willingness to innovate. Empowered Grade 7 teachers are therefore better positioned to create dynamic learning environments that promote student success and foster long-term educational growth.

The empowerment of teachers, particularly those handling Grade 7 students in Carcar City, is anchored on several key legal and policy frameworks of the Philippine education system. One of these is DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, which mandated the adoption of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). The PPST serves as a comprehensive framework that outlines the competencies, practices, and professional engagement expected from teachers across different career stages (Department of Education, 2017). It empowers teachers by providing clear standards of practice and professional development pathways, ensuring that their instructional delivery, assessment methods, and classroom management strategies are aligned with national expectations. For Grade 7 teachers, this framework emphasizes readiness in terms of subject content mastery, effective adolescent pedagogy, and the use of assessment for learning, thereby strengthening both teacher competence and confidence in managing junior high school learners.

Complementing this is the Department of Education's MATATAG Curriculum, which was introduced as part of the 2022–2023 reforms. The MATATAG Curriculum prioritizes foundational skills, values formation, and curriculum decongestion, thus enabling teachers to

focus more on depth rather than breadth of instruction (Department of Education, 2023). For Grade 7, the revised curriculum provides a more streamlined and coherent set of competencies that empower teachers to apply learner-centered pedagogies and targeted interventions without being overwhelmed by overcrowded content. This curriculum reform directly contributes to teacher readiness by requiring them to realign lesson planning, assessment strategies, and remediation programs with the new competency-based framework. Consequently, teacher competencies in curriculum mapping, differentiated instruction, and formative assessment are strengthened, ensuring effective facilitation of learning for diverse groups of junior high school students. In addition, Republic Act No. 4670, or the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, provides the legal foundation for safeguarding the rights, benefits, and welfare of teachers. Enacted in 1966, this law guarantees fair compensation, reasonable teaching loads, professional advancement opportunities, and protection against unjust treatment (Congress of the Philippines, 1966). Such provisions create an enabling environment where teachers can focus on enhancing their professional competence without undue stress from excessive workload or job insecurity. In the context of Grade 7 teaching in Carcar City, the Magna Carta ensures that teachers are accorded the necessary welfare and support systems to fully engage in professional development activities aligned with the PPST and in the effective implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum.

Taken together, these legal bases collectively reinforce teacher empowerment by establishing professional standards, providing relevant curricular reforms, and protecting teachers' welfare. Their integration highlights the interconnection between teacher readiness and competency development, where professional growth is both a responsibility and a right. For Grade 7 teachers in Carcar City, these policies ensure that they are not only competent in delivering instruction aligned with national standards but are also empowered through institutional support that sustains their professional journey.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive–correlational research design was used to determine the attitudes and competence of Grade 7 teachers toward inclusive education and examine the association between these variables. The study was conducted in two public secondary schools in Carcar City: Maximino Noel National High School and Ocana National High School. A total of 30 Grade 7 teachers participated in the study, with 15 respondents from each school. Data collection utilized two standardized instruments. The Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) was employed to measure cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes toward inclusion, while the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) Scale assessed teacher competence in instructional strategies, classroom management, and collaboration. Data were gathered following the acquisition of necessary permissions from school administrators and the City Schools Division Office. Respondents were assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and compliance with ethical standards. Statistical tools used include frequencies and percentages for demographic data, weighted means and standard deviations for attitudes and competence, and Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess the relationship between variables

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Age. Based on the result, the Maximino National High School, the majority of teachers (53%) are aged 41 and above, followed by those aged 31–40 (27%), and a smaller group aged below 30 (20%). In contrast, at Ocana NHS, more than half of the teachers (60%) fall within the 31–40 age range, while 40% are 41 years and above, and none are below 30. This distribution indicates that most Grade 7 teachers in the selected schools belong to the middle-aged and older categories, with a relatively small representation of younger teachers. The predominance of teachers aged 31 and above reflects a teaching force with substantial professional experience. This has important implications for teacher competencies in inclusive education. The result of the study implies that older and more experienced teachers may possess stronger classroom management skills, developed pedagogical expertise, and broader exposure to diverse learners (Cunneen & Anderson, 2024). Such qualities can positively contribute to inclusive practices, especially in managing varied learning needs. However, it is also argued that older teachers may sometimes exhibit more traditional attitudes toward teaching, which may affect their openness to fully embrace inclusive approaches if adequate professional development is not provided (Agenga, 2023).

Meanwhile, the smaller proportion of younger teachers especially noticeable in Ocana NHS where none are below 30 years old could mean fewer teachers who are fresh graduates of teacher education programs. This is relevant because newer teachers are often more exposed to contemporary concepts of inclusive education during their preservice training (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Younger teachers may bring enthusiasm, technological adeptness, and innovative strategies, but their limited classroom experience could challenge their competence in addressing diverse learner needs.

The variation between the two schools is also noteworthy. Maximino NHS shows a broader distribution with younger teachers present, while Ocana NHS has a more mature teaching workforce. This may suggest differences in recruitment trends or teacher retention across schools, which could affect how inclusive practices are implemented. A balanced mix of younger and older teachers could create an environment where experience and new pedagogical insights complement one another.

From the perspective of readiness for inclusive education, the current age distribution implies that interventions should consider differentiated support. Professional development programs may focus on updating older teachers with contemporary inclusive strategies while mentoring systems could be established where experienced teachers support younger colleagues in classroom management and handling diverse learners. This dual approach aligns with the findings of Forlin (2019), who emphasized that both experience and updated knowledge are necessary to effectively implement inclusive education. Furthermore, the data suggests that most Grade 7 teachers in Carcar City's secondary schools are in the 31–40 and 41-above age brackets, bringing with them maturity and experience that could strengthen competence in inclusive practices. However, the limited number of younger teachers raises the need to ensure continuous training for veteran educators while also encouraging recruitment and retention of early-career teachers who may introduce new perspectives on inclusion. These findings highlight the

importance of tailoring intervention plans not only to teachers' competence and attitudes but also to their age-related strengths and challenges in inclusive education.

Gender. The gender distribution of the respondents in Maximino National High School and Ocana National High School reveals that the teaching workforce in Grade 7 classes is predominantly female. Out of 15 teachers from each school, 14 (93%) are female, while only 1 (7%) is male. This trend is consistent with broader patterns in the Philippine teaching profession, where women make up the majority, especially at the basic education level (Briones, 2017; UNESCO, 2020). The dominance of female teachers in the respondents' profile may have significant implications for the implementation of inclusive education. Research indicates that female educators often demonstrate nurturing, empathetic, and supportive dispositions—qualities that are essential in addressing the diverse learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms (Pace, 2017).

However, the limited representation of male teachers raises considerations regarding the diversity of role models and the balance of perspectives in inclusive teaching. While competence in inclusive education is not determined by gender alone, male teachers can contribute to varied approaches in classroom management, student engagement, and instructional delivery. The underrepresentation of men in the sample suggests that inclusivity efforts may rely more heavily on the strengths and preparedness of female teachers, who have historically been at the forefront of implementing child-centered and inclusive practices (Forlin & Sin, 2017).

In terms of readiness and competence, the predominance of female teachers aligns with studies highlighting that female educators often show more positive attitudes toward inclusive education compared to their male counterparts (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016). This favorable orientation could enhance their willingness to adapt instructional strategies, employ differentiated learning approaches, and apply classroom management techniques suited for diverse learners. Nevertheless, ensuring that both male and female teachers are equally provided with training opportunities remains critical, as gender differences should not overshadow the professional competencies required to effectively implement inclusive education.

Furthermore, the gender profile of the respondents underscores a female-dominated teaching force in Grade 7 classrooms within the Division of Carcar City. This composition may strengthen inclusive education efforts due to the positive dispositions often associated with female teachers. At the same time, it highlights the need to address gender imbalances and ensure that all teachers, regardless of sex, are equally equipped with the competencies and readiness needed to foster equitable and effective inclusive practices.

Educational Attainment. In Maximino National High School, the majority of the respondents (53%) are master's degree holders with units earned, followed by bachelor's degree graduates (27%), and a smaller proportion are master's degree graduates (20%). Meanwhile, in Ocana National High School, most of the respondents (67%) have earned units in a master's degree, while 20% have completed a master's degree, and 13% hold units toward a doctoral degree (EdD). Notably, none of the respondents from either school have completed a doctoral degree program. The findings of the study signify that a significant number of teachers are pursuing graduate education, indicating a commitment to professional development. This aligns with the

Department of Education's (DepEd) thrust to encourage teachers to pursue higher studies as a means to enhance their competencies in line with the demands of the K to 12 curriculum and inclusive education (DepEd, 2017). Teachers with postgraduate training are expected to demonstrate stronger theoretical grounding, critical thinking skills, and advanced pedagogical strategies necessary for addressing the diverse needs of Grade 7 learners in inclusive classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The relatively high proportion of teachers with master's units or degrees also reflects readiness in implementing inclusive education. Studies have shown that higher educational attainment is positively correlated with teachers' self-efficacy, professional competence, and openness to inclusive practices (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016). For example, teachers with graduate-level preparation are more likely to adopt differentiated instruction and utilize assessment tools suitable for learners with varying abilities. In contrast, those with only a bachelor's degree may possess foundational knowledge but may require additional training and mentoring to fully adapt inclusive teaching strategies. It is noteworthy that Ocana National High School has teachers with doctoral units, which could further strengthen their instructional leadership in inclusive education. According to Forlin (2019), advanced academic preparation not only improves classroom practice but also equips teachers to serve as resource persons and mentors in implementing inclusive education policies. This academic diversity within the faculty may foster peer learning and support networks that benefit overall school readiness in inclusive practice.

The result of the study signify further that the overall trend indicates that Grade 7 teachers in the selected schools are academically prepared, but continuous professional development remains necessary to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom realities. While many teachers are pursuing higher education, the absence of doctoral degree holders highlights a potential limitation in advanced research-based leadership that could contribute to systematic inclusive education programs. Therefore, strategic interventions such as scholarship opportunities, sustained in-service training, and capacity-building seminars on inclusive education are recommended to strengthen both competence and positive attitudes toward inclusion.

Length of Service. At Maximino National High School, 20% (3 teachers) have less than five years of teaching experience, while the remaining 80% (12 teachers) have more than five years. At Ocana National High School, all respondents (100% or 15 teachers) reported teaching for more than five years. These results show that the majority of the teachers in both schools are relatively experienced, with long exposure to the profession, while only a small fraction, particularly in Maximino National High School, belong to the novice group. The predominance of teachers with more than five years of teaching service suggests a workforce with established professional practice and a deeper understanding of classroom dynamics. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), teaching experience is strongly correlated with improved teacher effectiveness, particularly in addressing the diverse needs of learners. Experienced teachers are often more capable of adapting to challenges in inclusive settings as they have developed stronger pedagogical skills, classroom management techniques, and instructional strategies over time. This implies that teachers in both schools, especially in Ocana National High School, may demonstrate higher competence and readiness in implementing inclusive education compared to less experienced teachers. On the other hand, the small percentage of teachers with less than five years of service highlights potential challenges in teacher preparedness. Novice teachers may

possess updated theoretical knowledge from recent training but often lack the practical competence and confidence required in handling students with diverse needs. Florian (2021) emphasized that readiness for inclusive education does not solely rely on length of service but also on the quality of professional development and exposure to inclusive practices. Hence, while experienced teachers have the advantage of practice-based learning, less experienced teachers might need targeted mentoring and capacity-building programs to strengthen their attitudes and competencies toward inclusive education. Comparing this finding to similar studies, Balibrea (2020) found that teachers with longer teaching service tend to develop more positive attitudes toward inclusive education, as they become more adept at navigating challenges and identifying effective strategies for diverse learners. However, other research, such as Sharma et al. (2018), suggested that experience alone does not guarantee inclusive competence unless accompanied by relevant training. This aligns with the present study's framework, which considers not just experience but also professional development as essential in shaping teachers' competence and attitudes.

The result of the study implies that while the respondents' substantial years of teaching service indicate readiness and resilience in handling inclusive classrooms, continuous training remains crucial. To maximize the benefits of experience, schools in Carcar City Division should implement structured mentoring programs where veteran teachers can guide novices in inclusive practices, while at the same time ensuring that all teachers—regardless of length of service—receive updated training on inclusive pedagogies. This approach supports the study's objective of formulating strategic interventions that enhance both competence and attitudes toward inclusive education.

Numbers of Inclusive Educational training attended. In Maximino National High School, 33% of the teachers reported having no relevant training, another 33% had attended fewer than five training sessions, while the remaining 33% had participated in more than five. A similar distribution was observed in Ocana National High School, though slightly higher proportions were recorded in the categories of no training (27%) and more than five training sessions (40%). These findings indicate a considerable variation in teachers' exposure to professional development opportunities related to inclusive education across the two schools.

The results suggest that while a significant proportion of teachers have participated in multiple training sessions, a notable number have had little to no training. This raises concerns regarding the overall preparedness and competency of teachers to effectively implement inclusive practices. As noted by Forlin and Chambers (2017), professional development through training programs is essential in equipping teachers with both the knowledge and the skills required to handle diverse learners in inclusive classrooms. Without adequate exposure to such training, teachers may rely on limited strategies, potentially hindering their ability to address the wide range of learning needs present in inclusive settings. Moreover, the fact that a substantial number of teachers—particularly those with no training—remain in the system highlights a potential gap in the professional development framework of the Division of Carcar City. Studies have emphasized that teachers who receive consistent and structured training on inclusive education demonstrate higher competence in terms of instructional planning, classroom management, and assessment for diverse learners (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Conversely, teachers with limited or no training are more likely to exhibit lower confidence and readiness, which may negatively affect their

attitudes toward inclusive practices. Comparatively, a study by San Martin et al. (2021) found that teachers with extensive training and experience in inclusive education reported more positive attitudes and higher self-efficacy in implementing inclusive strategies compared to those with minimal training. This aligns with the current findings, wherein teachers who attended more than five training sessions are likely better prepared and more confident in addressing the demands of inclusive classrooms, while those without training may struggle with preparedness and competence. The implication of these findings is clear: professional training serves as a crucial determinant of teachers' competence and readiness for inclusive education. The uneven distribution of training attendance underscores the need for targeted intervention programs to ensure that all teachers, regardless of their current training background, are adequately equipped. Strengthening the professional development opportunities for Grade 7 teachers in the Division of Carcar City would not only enhance their competencies but also foster more positive attitudes, ultimately contributing to the sustainability and effectiveness of inclusive education.

Teacher's attitude towards inclusive education. Overall, the results reveal that teachers hold moderately positive attitudes, with ratings ranging from 2.5 to 3.8 on a five-point Likert scale. The findings suggest that teachers generally acknowledge the benefits of inclusion in terms of academic, social, and emotional development but also highlight reservations related to resources, competencies, and the education of children with severe disabilities. The data show that teachers from both schools agree that inclusive education fosters academic growth for students with and without disabilities, as reflected in the relatively high mean scores (3.5 in Maximino NHS and 3.6 in Ocana NHS). Similarly, they recognize that inclusion positively influences the social and emotional development of students with disabilities, with scores of 3.5 and 3.7, respectively. Teachers also strongly affirmed that inclusion promotes communication, understanding, and acceptance of diversity among students (3.5 and 3.7). These results align with the findings of Sharma and Sokal (2016), who reported that teachers often value inclusion for its socializing benefits and its potential to promote empathy and diversity awareness in classrooms.

However, while teachers support the philosophy of inclusive education, they expressed skepticism about its practical implementation. For instance, the item stating "Inclusion sounds good in theory but does not work well in practice" garnered moderate agreement (2.9 in Maximino NHS and 3.0 in Ocana NHS). Furthermore, low ratings were recorded for statements concerning the availability of supportive resources and professional staff (2.6 in both schools) as well as the teachers' self-assessed skills in educating students with disabilities (2.6 and 2.7). These results reflect findings by Forlin (2019) and Yada and Savolainen (2017), who emphasized that while teachers may value inclusion, their confidence and readiness are hindered by inadequate training and insufficient systemic support. This indicates that while teachers in both schools are open to inclusion, their competence and preparedness remain limited, particularly in resource-constrained contexts.

Interestingly, teachers also showed moderate agreement with the idea that students with severe disabilities or those requiring alternative communication methods should be taught in separate settings, as shown in items 4, 6, and 8 with scores ranging from 3.3 to 3.7. This implies that teachers are more confident in including students with mild to moderate disabilities but prefer specialized interventions for severe cases. This attitude mirrors the findings of Tshangela (2019), who reported that teachers tend to favor mainstreaming for students with manageable needs but

support separate settings for those requiring intensive, specialized support. Thus, teachers in these schools demonstrate conditional readiness, supporting partial inclusion rather than full inclusion. In terms of self-confidence and competence, teachers showed only moderate comfort levels in working with students with disabilities and their parents (3.06 and 3.1) and expressed uncertainty about whether inclusion enhances their teaching effectiveness (2.8 in both schools). This suggests that while they are gradually developing competence, they remain cautious about their ability to implement inclusive strategies effectively. These results are consistent with Kumar (2019), who found that teachers' confidence in handling inclusive classrooms is closely linked to training, exposure, and institutional support.

The results indicate that teachers from Maximino NHS and Ocana NHS hold a positive orientation toward inclusive education, recognizing its benefits for both students with and without disabilities. However, their readiness and preparedness are constrained by limited resources, insufficient training, and uncertainty in handling students with severe disabilities. These findings imply that while attitudes toward inclusion are favorable, teachers' competencies must be further developed through systematic professional development, mentoring, and the provision of adequate resources and support systems. Similar to earlier studies by Sharma and Sokal (2016) and Yada and Savolainen (2017), this study underscores the importance of equipping teachers not only with positive attitudes but also with the necessary skills and institutional support to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Level of Teachers competence in implementing inclusive education

Knowledge of Teachers on inclusive teaching practices. The results revealed that Grade 7 teachers from both Maximino NHS ($M = 3.44$) and Ocana NHS ($M = 3.43$) demonstrate a high level of knowledge on inclusive teaching practices. This suggests that the respondents are generally competent and prepared to implement strategies that cater to learners with diverse needs. The highest-rated item was "I break down complex tasks into smaller, more manageable parts" ($M = 3.6$), which indicates that teachers recognize the importance of scaffolding as a means of supporting learners who may struggle with abstract or multi-step activities. Similarly, the consistent ratings of 3.5 across most items (e.g., use of visual aids, giving clear instructions, adjusting seating, and modifying lessons using local examples) highlight that teachers are adept at employing concrete strategies to facilitate comprehension and engagement among all learners.

Notably, slightly lower ratings were observed in assigning peer buddies ($M = 3.2$), reflecting possible hesitance or lack of systematic training in implementing collaborative learning as a support mechanism for students with disabilities. Likewise, the item on applying techniques from recent trainings ($M = 3.2$ at Maximino NHS; $M = 3.17$ at Ocana NHS) suggests that while teachers have some exposure to inclusive education trainings, these opportunities may be insufficient or not regularly reinforced through professional development. This resonates with findings from Florian (2021), who emphasized that continuous and practice-based professional learning is vital in enabling teachers to apply inclusive strategies effectively. Comparatively, these findings align with the study of Magallon and Tan (2021), which showed that teachers in Philippine public schools exhibit moderate to high knowledge of inclusive practices but often lack confidence in applying more specialized strategies, particularly those requiring collaboration and differentiation. Similarly, in a study by Forlin (2019), teacher competence in inclusive education was found to be closely linked to exposure to quality training and

institutional support, reinforcing the implication that sustaining teacher preparedness requires both systemic and school-level interventions. The overall high mean ratings indicate that the respondents possess a solid foundation of inclusive teaching knowledge, implying readiness to handle the challenges of diverse classrooms in Grade 7. However, the slightly lower scores in peer support and application of training point to areas that need strengthening. This underscores the need for more intensive professional development and continuous mentoring programs focused on practical inclusive strategies. Strengthening these aspects would not only enhance teacher competence but also ensure more equitable participation and learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

Instructional skills for diverse learners. The results revealed that Grade 7 teachers from both Maximino NHS (average = 3.16) and Ocana NHS (average = 3.20) exhibit a **moderate to high level of instructional skills in addressing the needs of diverse learners**, including those with disabilities. The data suggest that teachers are relatively competent in essential practices such as adjusting lessons to accommodate learner diversity (M = 3.40; 3.37) and creating safe and welcoming classroom environments (M = 3.40; 3.36), which indicates their readiness to foster inclusivity in the classroom. However, areas such as referring learners to proper support services (M = 2.97; 2.97) and conducting differentiated instruction under time or resource constraints (M = 3.00; 3.27) received comparatively lower ratings, highlighting challenges in sustaining inclusive practices when structural or systemic support is limited. These findings imply that while teachers are open and willing to implement inclusive education, their full competence is hindered by gaps in specialized skills and access to resources.

The relatively consistent ratings across both schools underscore that the competencies of Grade 7 teachers are fairly aligned, suggesting a common baseline of instructional readiness. Teachers' ability to collaborate with SPED teachers and use available or improvised materials (M = 3.27; 3.27 and M = 3.30; 3.27, respectively) further reflects adaptability, a crucial factor in inclusive settings. However, the lower confidence in assessing learners with disabilities fairly (M = 3.10; 3.07) raises concerns about equitable evaluation, which could impact the effectiveness of inclusive education if not addressed through continuous training and professional development. These findings align with the assertion of Florian (2021) that inclusive pedagogy requires not only positive teacher attitudes but also sustained competence in adapting instruction, assessing fairly, and providing individualized support. Similarly, Tcheimegni (2018) found that while teachers in inclusive classrooms often demonstrate willingness, their skills in differentiated instruction and referral systems are often underdeveloped, limiting the successful implementation of inclusive education. The current study supports this observation, as teachers show strong general competencies but face challenges in areas requiring specialized expertise.

The results of the study implies that **teachers are moderately ready to implement inclusive education in Grade 7**, but their readiness is not absolute; it is constrained by training, time, and resource limitations. This echoes findings by Forlin (2019), who emphasized that professional development is key to bridging the gap between teacher willingness and actual competence in inclusive education. Thus, while the teachers in this study demonstrate a commendable foundation of skills, ongoing support, targeted training, and collaboration with support services are necessary to strengthen their instructional readiness and ensure the effective delivery of inclusive practices in secondary classrooms.

Use of classroom management and assessment strategies appropriate for inclusive settings.

The results indicated that both Maximino NHS and Ocana NHS obtained an overall mean of 3.06, suggesting that teachers are moderately competent in their use of classroom management and assessment strategies appropriate for inclusive settings. This reflects that teacher in the two schools are able to apply essential strategies in handling diverse learners, though their competencies require further strengthening to ensure full preparedness in implementing inclusive education. The highest-rated items show that teachers feel confident in areas such as assisting families to support their children in school (3.21), improving the learning of students who are failing (3.17–3.20), and calming disruptive students (3.10–3.14). These results highlight teachers' practical ability to address challenges related to behavior and academic performance, as well as their willingness to engage parents and families as partners in inclusive learning. The capacity to facilitate collaborative learning (3.17) and to involve parents in school activities (3.07–3.10) further emphasizes the recognition of shared responsibility in the inclusive education process.

On the other hand, consistently lower ratings were observed in aspects that demand specialized knowledge and systemic application, such as adapting assessments for students with disabilities (3.0), collaborating with specialists like speech pathologists (3.0), and informing others about inclusion-related laws and policies (3.0). These findings point to gaps in teachers' confidence and preparedness in areas that extend beyond immediate classroom management. This is consistent with the study of Fuego (2024), which revealed that many Filipino teachers feel inadequately prepared in modifying curriculum and assessments to suit the needs of learners with disabilities. Similarly, Dizon (2019) emphasized that teachers' professional growth is limited when training on inclusive practices is not consistently provided, particularly in addressing specific learning needs and adapting large-scale assessments.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) has emphasized the importance of inclusivity through policies such as DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 (Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children), which mandates the creation of enabling mechanisms to ensure that children with disabilities and other marginalized groups can access quality education. Additionally, DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021 (Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Learning Resources and Services to Learners with Disabilities) underscores the role of teachers in adapting instructional and assessment strategies to support equitable learning opportunities. The moderate competency levels reflected in this study suggest that while teachers are aware of these mandates, there is still a gap between policy and classroom practice.

The result of the study implies further that there is an urgent need for continuous capacity-building programs that focus on differentiated assessment, collaborative planning with specialists, and policy awareness. This would empower teachers to move from moderate to high levels of competency and preparedness in inclusive education. Furthermore, professional development must not only address immediate classroom management but also equip teachers with the skills to design individualized educational plans, adapt assessments to ensure fairness, and fully engage in multi-stakeholder collaboration. The result of the study confirms that teacher competency in inclusive settings is multi-faceted, requiring a balance of instructional, behavioral, and collaborative strategies. Strengthening these areas through training, policy implementation, and

institutional support will help actualize the goals of inclusive education in the Philippine setting, ensuring that no learner is left behind.

Significant relationship between the teachers attitudes and their level of competence in inclusive education

Relationship between teachers' attitude and knowledge towards inclusive learning. The regression line indicates a negative slope with the equation $y = -0.0097x + 3.5021$, while the coefficient of determination is $R^2 = 0.0778$, which corresponds to a weak negative correlation (Figure 1). This means that as teachers' attitude scores increase, their knowledge scores tend to slightly decrease, although the relationship is not strong. The result suggests that having a positive attitude toward inclusive education does not automatically translate into having higher knowledge of inclusive practices, and likewise, those with higher knowledge may not always demonstrate more favorable attitudes. This weak correlation highlights a competency gap among teachers, where openness to inclusion is not always matched by the technical skills and strategies needed for effective implementation. The implication is that teachers may enter inclusive classrooms with willingness and acceptance but may not feel fully prepared to address the diverse needs of learners without further support. Therefore, professional development programs should focus not only on strengthening teachers' knowledge and instructional skills but also on reinforcing their positive attitudes to ensure balanced growth in both dimensions. By addressing this gap, teachers' overall competence and preparedness for inclusive education can be enhanced, enabling them to create more effective and equitable learning environments.

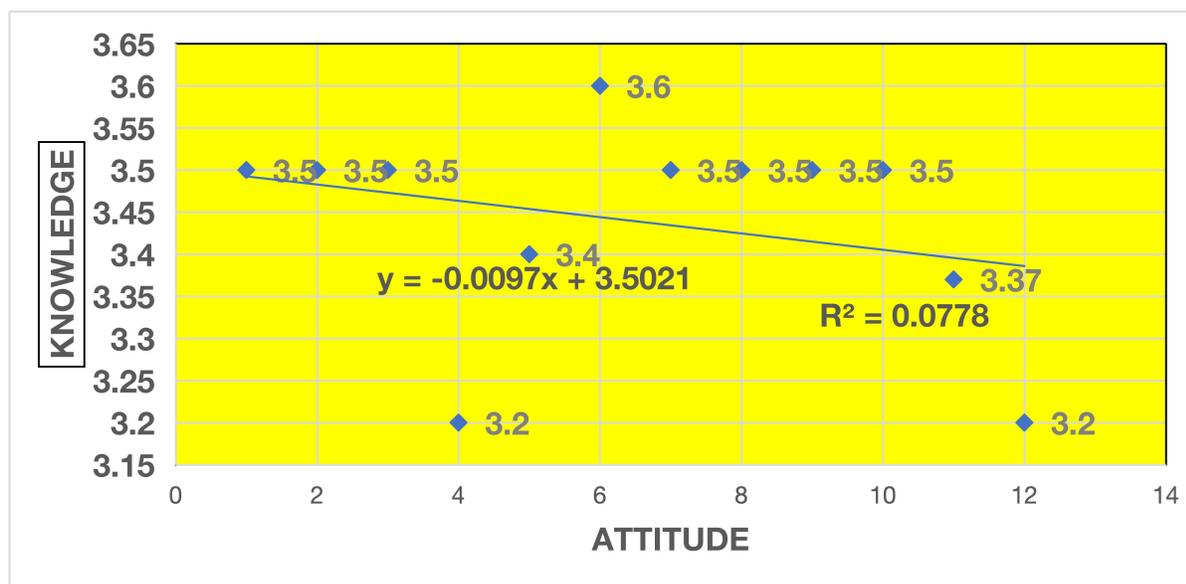


Figure 1. Relationship between teachers' attitude and its knowledge towards inclusive learning

Relationship between teachers' attitude and its instructional skill towards inclusive learning

The regression line indicates a slightly negative slope ($y = -0.0097x + 3.5021$) with a very low coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.0778$), suggesting that there is a weak negative correlation between teachers' attitudes and instructional skills (Figure 2). This means that as teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education become more positive, their instructional skills do not necessarily improve; in fact, the relationship shows a slight decline. The weak correlation implies that attitude alone is not a strong predictor of instructional competence, and other factors such as training, experience, and access to resources may play a more significant role in shaping teachers' instructional practices.

This finding aligns with previous studies which emphasize that while positive attitudes are essential for fostering inclusive classrooms, they do not automatically translate into effective teaching practices without adequate preparation and professional development. For instance, Sharma and Jacobs (2016) noted that teachers may express favorable attitudes toward inclusion, but without proper training in differentiated instruction and adaptive teaching methods, their instructional competence remains limited. Similarly, Florian and Beaton (2018) highlighted that competence in inclusive pedagogy requires more than willingness; it demands practical strategies, sustained support, and reflective practice. The implication of this result is that professional development programs should not only aim to cultivate positive attitudes toward inclusion but also equip teachers with concrete instructional skills necessary for addressing diverse learning needs. In line with the findings of Avramidis and Norwich (2002), successful inclusion requires a balance between attitudes and competencies, where attitudes provide the motivation and openness, while competencies ensure effective classroom practices. Therefore, schools and policymakers must prioritize continuous training, mentorship, and collaborative learning communities to bridge the gap between teachers' attitudes and their instructional performance in inclusive settings.

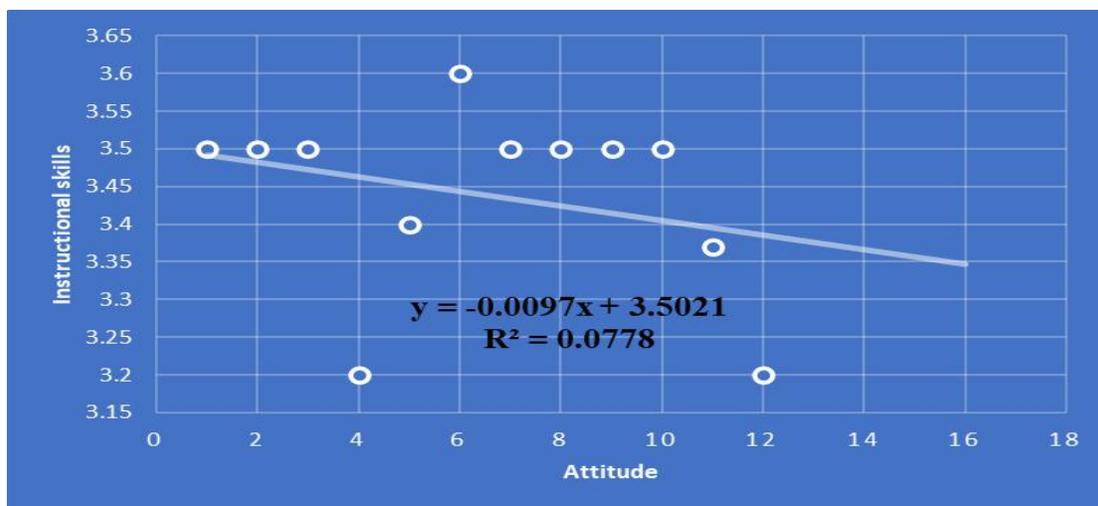


Figure 2. Relationship between teachers' attitude and its instructional skill towards inclusive learning

Relationship between teachers' attitude and the use of classroom management towards inclusive learning

The scatterplot, supported by the regression equation $y = 0.0077x + 2.9939$, and R^2 value of 0.2822 (Figure 3), indicates a weak but positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education improve, their classroom management practices also tend to become more effective, although the relationship is not particularly strong. The slight upward trend shows that positive attitudes may contribute to teachers' ability to manage diverse classrooms, but other factors also influence classroom management competency. This finding has significant implications for teacher competency and preparedness. A positive attitude alone does not guarantee mastery in classroom management; however, it fosters openness to adopt inclusive practices and strategies, which are crucial in handling diverse learners (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Teachers who believe in the value of inclusion are more likely to invest effort in managing behaviors, adapting rules, and fostering supportive environments, all of which enhance inclusive practices (Forlin, 2019). The moderate R^2 value suggests that professional development and experience play an equally important role in shaping classroom management beyond attitude.

Alshammari, K. (2021) emphasized that teachers with favorable attitudes towards inclusion are more likely to engage in effective classroom management and differentiated instruction. Similarly, Elhoweris & Efthymiou (2020) found that positive teacher attitudes contribute to proactive management of challenging behaviors in inclusive classrooms. However, studies such as by Agenga (2023) noted that attitude alone may not translate to competence without sufficient training and support systems. This aligns with the current finding, where attitude explains only part of the variance in classroom management. Fostering positive teacher attitudes is essential but insufficient on its own; it must be complemented with structured training in classroom management strategies for diverse learners. This dual focus enhances both the preparedness and competency of teachers to create inclusive learning environments that cater to all students.

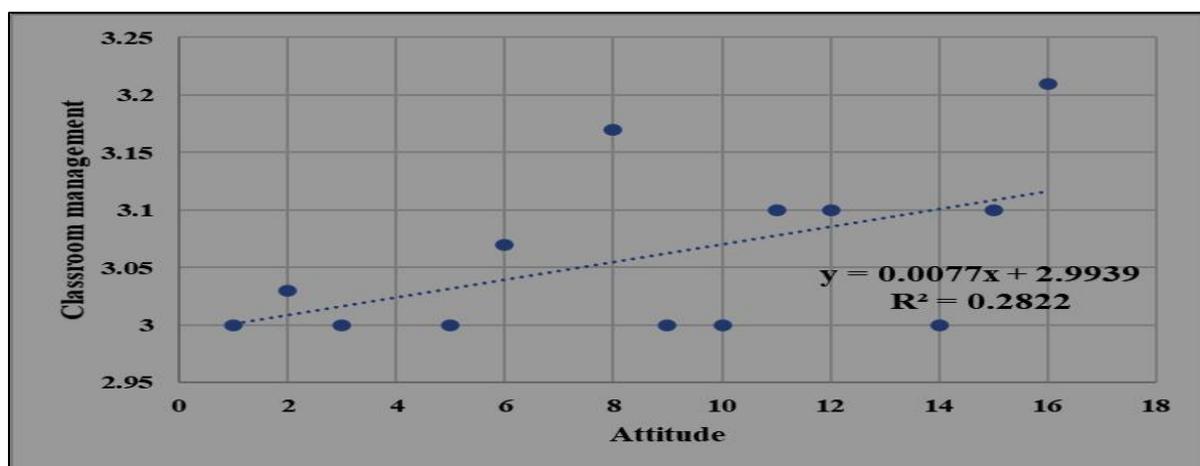


Figure 3. Relationship between teachers' attitude and the use of classroom management towards inclusive learning

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study the Grade 7 teachers in Carcar City demonstrated moderately positive attitudes and moderate to high levels of competence in inclusive education. Despite strong foundational knowledge and classroom management skills, teachers faced challenges in specialized pedagogical areas, particularly differentiated instruction, assessment modification, and collaboration with specialists. These limitations hinder the full realization of inclusive education in the participating schools. The significant correlation between teacher attitudes and competence highlights the importance of enhancing both dimensions for effective and sustainable inclusive practices. The study emphasizes the need for continuous professional development, strengthened school-based support mechanisms, and collaborative structures to ensure meaningful inclusion.

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