Original Article

Investigating Science Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Practices for Students with Diverse Learning Needs: A Qualitative Approach

Jaymie Rellon [1,*]

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Abstract

This study explores science teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices for students with diverse learning needs, focusing on their beliefs, experiences, and challenges in implementing inclusive education. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, the Tripartite Model of Attitude, and the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework, the research adopted a qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected teachers at Makilala Central Elementary School in the Cotabato Division. The study aims to understand how teachers' self-efficacy, prior training, and contextual factors such as school resources, collaboration, and cultural perceptions influence their attitudes and instructional practices. Findings revealed the complexities of teachers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to inclusion, as well as the barriers they encounter, including limited training and insufficient support systems. The study highlights the critical role of professional development and institutional support in fostering positive attitudes and effective inclusive teaching practices. Ultimately, the research contributes to advancing inclusive science education by providing insights that inform teacher training programs, policy development, and future research.

Keywords: diverse learning needs, inclusive education, inclusive pedagogy, learning needs, North Cotabato, teacher self-efficacy

[1] Central Mindanao Colleges, Kidapawan City, Philippines
* jaymierellon1020@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as an essential component of quality education, yet its implementation presents unique challenges in science classrooms. Unlike many other subject areas, science teaching often involves abstract concepts, inquiry-based learning, experiments, demonstrations, and collaborative activities that require students to engage with materials, processes, and scientific reasoning actively. These instructional demands can become more complex when teachers work with learners with diverse abilities, learning needs, and levels of participation. As classrooms become more inclusive, science teachers are expected not only to deliver content effectively but also to ensure that all learners can meaningfully participate in scientific learning experiences.

International and national educational policies have emphasized the right of every learner to access quality education in inclusive settings. Inclusive education is grounded in principles of equity, participation, and social justice, promoting learning environments where students with diverse needs can learn alongside their peers while receiving appropriate support (UNESCO, 2017; Ainscow, 2020). However, the success of inclusive education depends largely on how it is enacted in everyday classroom practice. Among the factors that influence implementation, teacher attitudes remain particularly important because they shape instructional decisions, classroom interactions, and willingness to adapt teaching strategies for diverse learners. Research consistently shows that teachers who hold positive attitudes toward inclusion are more likely to implement inclusive practices and create supportive learning environments for students with special educational needs (Avramidis et al., 2000; Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Guillemot et al., 2022). However, teacher attitudes do not develop in isolation. A combination of professional beliefs, self-efficacy, training experiences, resource availability, and institutional support systems influences them. Studies have shown that teachers who feel confident in their ability to address diverse learning needs are generally more willing to modify instruction and participate in inclusive practices, whereas limited preparation and inadequate support often contribute to uncertainty and resistance (Sharma et al., 2008; Sharma et al., 2012). Professional development and practical experience in inclusive settings have likewise been associated with stronger confidence and more favorable perceptions of inclusion, highlighting the importance of sustained support for teachers.

These concerns are particularly relevant in science education. Science teachers frequently encounter challenges related to adapting laboratory activities, presenting complex and abstract concepts, facilitating collaborative investigations, and ensuring meaningful participation for learners with varying abilities. Inclusive science teaching requires careful planning, differentiated instructional approaches, and access to appropriate materials and support services. Consequently, science teachers' attitudes toward inclusion may be shaped not only by general beliefs about inclusive education but also by the specific instructional demands of the subject itself. Understanding these attitudes is therefore critical to improving inclusive practices within science

classrooms. Previous studies conducted across different educational contexts suggest that attitudes toward inclusion are highly context-dependent. While many teachers support the principles of inclusion, their confidence and readiness to implement inclusive practices vary depending on the availability of training, resources, specialist assistance, and school-level support. These findings indicate that positive attitudes alone are insufficient; teachers also require practical knowledge, institutional support, and opportunities for professional growth to address diverse learner needs effectively. Collectively, the literature suggests that beliefs, self-efficacy, professional preparation, and contextual conditions interact in shaping how teachers respond to inclusive education.

In the Philippine context, efforts to expand inclusive education have led to more learners with disabilities being educated in mainstream schools. The Department of Education continues to strengthen policies that support inclusive learning environments and improve educational access for diverse learners. Despite these developments, many schools continue to face challenges related to limited resources, insufficient specialized training, and inconsistent support services. Teachers are often expected to address a wide range of learner needs while managing existing instructional demands and implementing inclusive practices, particularly in regular classroom settings. These realities underscore the importance of understanding how teachers perceive and experience inclusion in their daily practice. Although teacher attitudes toward inclusive education have been widely examined, less is known about how elementary science teachers in local Philippine school contexts make sense of inclusion while navigating limited training opportunities, resource constraints, and the subject-specific demands of science instruction. Existing studies have largely focused on general education teachers or broader issues in inclusive education, leaving a need for research that examines the experiences and perspectives of science teachers in more detail. Addressing this gap is important because teachers' attitudes can influence the extent to which inclusive practices are successfully implemented in science classrooms.

Therefore, this study aims to examine elementary science teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and to explore the factors that shape these attitudes within their local school context. By focusing on the realities of science teaching and inclusion, the study seeks to contribute evidence that may inform teacher preparation, professional development initiatives, and school-based support systems for more effective inclusive science education.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, using a phenomenological approach, to explore and understand science teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices for students with diverse learning needs. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study, as it focused on capturing individuals' subjective experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, particularly in a social and educational context.

The research aimed to provide a rich, detailed understanding of how science teachers conceptualized and implemented inclusive practices within their classrooms.

The study used in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method to gather detailed narratives from participating science teachers. These interviews allowed exploration of personal insights, beliefs, and challenges related to inclusive education, providing nuanced insights beyond what quantitative methods could yield. The open-ended, flexible nature of the interview format facilitated the emergence of themes and patterns related to teachers' attitudes and experiences. Additionally, the research incorporated document analysis, including reviews of relevant school policies and teachers' reflective logs, to complement the interview data. The research design aligned with an interpretative phenomenological approach, focusing on understanding the lived experiences of science teachers as they navigated inclusive education practices. This approach supported the goal of uncovering meanings and motivations behind teachers' attitudes, which could inform strategies for professional development and policy-making aimed at fostering inclusive scientific learning environments.

This design section integrated core qualitative research elements, including the rationale for qualitative methods, data collection techniques (interviews and document analysis), and the interpretative phenomenological framework for understanding individual experiences and attitudes in education. If a more detailed or specific design framework was needed, such as grounded theory or ethnography, that could also be incorporated. Robinson and Williams (2024) affirmed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a qualitative methodology gaining traction in educational research. IPA provided a rigorous framework for exploring how individuals made sense of their lived experiences, which fit the focus on understanding science teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices through their personal narratives. According to Smith et al. (2009), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach concerned with exploring how individuals make sense of their major life experiences. The approach enables researchers to examine participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them through detailed, reflective analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Attitudes of Science Teachers toward Implementing Inclusive Practices

The first research question examined the attitudes of science teachers toward implementing inclusive practices for students with diverse learning needs. Based on their responses, three themes emerged namely: (1) Commitment to equal Learning Opportunities, (2) Willingness to Adapt teaching Practices, (3) Feeling of Uncertainty and Need for Support. However, they also recognized that implementing inclusive practices requires significant effort, flexibility, and commitment. While teachers were supportive of inclusive education in principle, some reported feeling uncertain about how to effectively address the wide range of learning needs present in their classrooms.

Theme 1: Commitment to Equal Learning Opportunities

Science teachers strongly believe that all students, regardless of ability or learning differences, deserve equal access to quality science education. Participants emphasized that inclusive education promotes fairness and enables students with diverse learning needs to participate in classroom activities actively. Teachers recognized that inclusion helps students feel valued and supported within the learning environment. Their narratives reflected a commitment to creating classrooms where every learner has the opportunity to engage in scientific learning and develop their potential.

Several teachers shared that inclusive practices help build students' confidence and encourage collaboration among classmates. They also observed that when students with diverse learning needs are included in classroom discussions and activities, it fosters empathy and respect among others. These perspectives show teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusive education and their recognition of its benefits for both students with diverse needs and the entire class. Participants' responses also support this.

> *P2: "... I believe every student should have the chance to learn science even if they have different learning abilities. As teachers, it is our duty to make sure no one is left behind."*
> *P11: "...Inclusive teaching is important because it gives equal opportunity for all students. When students feel accepted in the classroom, they become more confident to participate."*

In support with the response of P11, P3 added:

> *P3:"...Science should be accessible to everyone. Even if students learn differently, we should provide ways for them to understand the lesson."*

Theme 2: Willingness to Adapt Teaching Practices

Another theme that emerged from the responses was teachers' willingness to modify their instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learners. Many teachers acknowledged the need to differentiate instruction, adjust teaching methods, and provide varied learning activities to address different student needs. Participants described inclusive teaching as a dynamic process that requires flexibility, creativity, and continuous reflection. Despite the challenges, teachers demonstrated openness to exploring new approaches that support inclusive learning in the science classroom.

Participants described inclusive teaching as a continuous process of adjustment and creativity. Teachers shared that they often need to simplify explanations, provide additional examples, or give extra support to certain students to ensure that everyone

can follow the lesson. This willingness to adapt demonstrates teachers' commitment to making science learning meaningful and accessible for all learners.

Moreover, teachers recognized that implementing inclusive practices requires patience and openness to new teaching methods. Some participants explained that they regularly reflect on their teaching practices and make adjustments based on their students' needs. These experiences show that teachers are not only aware of the importance of inclusion but are also actively implementing strategies that support diverse learners. In support with that, participants also give their responses.

> *P3: "...Sometimes I need to adjust my teaching strategies because not all students learn in the same way. I try to use different activities so they can understand the lesson better."*
> *P9: "...I usually include group work and visual materials so students who have difficulty understanding the lecture can still participate in the activity."*
> *P14: "...Inclusive teaching requires flexibility. As teachers we need to find ways to make science lessons easier for students who have different learning needs."*

Theme 3: Feelings of Uncertainty and Need for Support

Teachers generally held positive attitudes toward inclusion, but many also expressed uncertainty about their ability to effectively implement inclusive practices. Some participants reported limited training or experience in working with students with diverse learning needs, which affected their confidence in implementing inclusive strategies. Teachers indicated that additional professional development, guidance, and institutional support would help them feel more prepared and capable of addressing the diverse needs of their students.

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3.2 Factors Influence Science Teachers' Perceptions

The second research question observed the factors that influence science teachers' perceptions of their competencies, training, and support in implementing inclusive education. Based on the analysis of the participants' responses, three major themes emerged, namely: (1) Importance of Professional Development and Training, (2) Collaboration and Peer Support among Teachers, and (3) Reliance on Personal Experience and Self-Learning.

Theme 1: Importance of Professional Development Training

Science teachers emphasized that professional development and training are important in improving their competencies in implementing inclusive education. Participants shared that seminars, workshops, and training programs help them develop strategies to address diverse learning needs and increase their confidence in teaching inclusive classrooms. However, some teachers also noted that opportunities for inclusive education training remain limited.

However, several teachers also explained that opportunities for training in inclusive education are limited. Some participants explained that they had minimal exposure to inclusive teaching strategies during their pre-service education or classroom discussions, which affected their confidence in implementing inclusive practices. As a result, teachers expressed a desire for more training programs and seminars that focus specifically on inclusive science education.

P1: "...Attending seminars and training helps me understand how to adjust my teaching strategies for students who have different learning needs."
P2: "...Most of what I know about inclusive education came from workshops organized by the school or the division."
P3: "...During my college years, we did not focus much on inclusive education, so additional training now would really help teachers."
P4: "...Professional development programs give us ideas on how to make lessons more suitable for diverse learners."

Theme 2: Collaboration and Peer Support Among Teachers

Another important factor influencing teachers' competencies is the support they receive from colleagues. Participants emphasized that collaboration with fellow teachers allows them to share strategies, discuss classroom challenges, and learn from

each other's experiences. Teachers reported that informal discussions with colleagues often provide practical solutions for handling students with diverse learning needs. Participants also explained that peer support helps reduce the stress and uncertainty associated with inclusive teaching. By exchanging ideas and resources, teachers can develop more effective strategies for managing diverse classrooms. This collaborative environment encourages continuous learning and professional growth.

> *P6: "...Sometimes I ask advice from my co-teachers about how they handle students with learning difficulties."*
> *P7: "...Sharing experiences with other teachers helps us find better ways to support students with different needs."*
> *P8: "...Collaboration among teachers is very helpful because we can exchange ideas and teaching strategies."*

Theme 3: Reliance on Persona; Experience and Self- Learning.

A third theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the reliance on personal experience and self-learning to develop competencies in inclusive teaching. Due to limited formal training, many teachers reported learning to manage inclusive classrooms through practical teaching experience and independent study. Participants explained that over time, they develop their own strategies for helping students with diverse learning needs. Some teachers mentioned that they search for teaching resources, watch instructional videos, or read educational materials to improve their teaching practices. These efforts reflect teachers' commitment to improving their skills despite the challenges they encountered. The participants' responses when trying to share their experiences.

> *P11: "...Most of my learning about inclusive teaching comes from my experience in the classroom."*
> *P12: "...I try to search online for strategies that can help me support students with different learning needs."*
> *P13: "...Experience is the best teacher. Over the years, I learned how to adjust my teaching based on my students' needs."*

3.3 External Barriers Affecting Science Teachers Willingness to Adopt Inclusive Education Practices

The third research question examined the external barriers, such as resources and school support, that affect science teachers' willingness and ability to adopt inclusive education practices. Based on the analysis of the participants' responses, three major themes emerged, namely: (1) Limited Instructional Resources and Materials, (2) Large Class Size and Time Constraints, and (3) Need for Stronger Institutional and Administrative Support.

Theme 1: Limited Instructional Resources and Materials

One of the most frequently mentioned barriers among participants was the lack of adequate instructional resources to support inclusive education. Teachers explained that implementing inclusive practices often requires specialized learning materials, assistive devices, and adapted instructional tools to meet students' diverse needs.

However, many participants reported that such resources are not always available in their schools. The absence of sufficient materials makes it difficult for teachers to design lessons that accommodate students with varying abilities. Some teachers shared that they often improvise or create their own materials to help students understand science concepts. Despite their efforts, the lack of appropriate resources remains a significant challenge in implementing inclusive education effectively.

P2: "...There are limited resources available for teachers who want to provide specialized support to students."
P4: "...We try to create our own teaching materials, but it would be better if the school could provide more resources."
P4: "...Inclusive education requires different instructional tools, but not all of these are available in our school."

Theme 2: Large Class Size and Time Constraints

Another major barrier identified by the participants is the challenge of managing large class sizes and limited instructional time. Teachers reported that having many students in one classroom makes it difficult to provide individualized attention to those who require additional support. Inclusive teaching often requires extra time to explain lessons, guide students, and monitor their progress.

Participants also noted that the heavy workload and limited class periods restrict their ability to implement inclusive strategies effectively. As a result, some teachers find it challenging to fully address the diverse needs of students during regular classroom instruction.

P7: "...Inclusive teaching requires more time, but our class periods are limited."
P9: "...Providing individual support becomes challenging because of the number of students we handle."
P10: "...Time constraints affect our ability to fully implement inclusive teaching strategies."

Theme 3: Need for Stronger Institutional and Administrative Support

The third theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the need for stronger support from school administration and educational institutions. Teachers emphasized that the successful implementation of inclusive education requires support through policies, training programs, and additional personnel, such as special education specialists. Participants noted that administrative encouragement and clear policies can motivate teachers to adopt inclusive practices more confidently. They also expressed the importance of having access to professional development opportunities and guidance from experts in inclusive education. Without adequate institutional support, teachers may struggle to implement inclusive strategies effectively in their classrooms.

P13: "...Teachers need support from administrators and specialists when handling students with diverse learning needs."
P14: "...Stronger policies and programs for inclusive education would help teachers perform their roles better."
P15: "...If the school provides more support and resources, it would be easier for teachers to practice inclusive education."

4. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that science teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward implementing inclusive practices for students with diverse learning needs. Participants expressed a strong commitment to providing equal learning opportunities and to ensuring that all learners have meaningful access to science education. This finding supports previous research indicating that positive teacher attitudes are fundamental to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Guillemot et al., 2022). Teachers who value inclusion are more likely to adopt instructional practices that encourage participation, engagement, and academic success among diverse learners.

The study further found that teachers were willing to adapt their instructional strategies to accommodate different learning needs. This finding reflects the principles of inclusive pedagogy, which emphasize responding to learner diversity through flexible teaching approaches rather than expecting students to conform to a single instructional method (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In science education, where learning often involves abstract concepts, inquiry-based activities, and collaborative investigations, the ability to modify instruction is particularly important. Teachers' willingness to differentiate instruction suggests a recognition that effective science learning requires multiple pathways for participation and understanding.

Another significant finding was the role of professional development in strengthening teachers' confidence and competence in implementing inclusive practices. Participants emphasized that training opportunities enhanced their

knowledge and provided practical strategies for addressing diverse learning needs. This finding is consistent with the work of Sharma et al. (2008) and Sharma et al. (2012), who found that teachers who receive inclusive education training generally demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy and more positive attitudes toward inclusion. Similarly, Forlin and Chambers (2011) reported that professional development contributes to greater teacher preparedness and confidence when working with students with diverse needs. These findings suggest that ongoing training remains essential to equip science teachers with the skills to implement inclusive practices effectively.

The findings also highlighted the importance of collaboration and peer support among teachers. Participants described how sharing experiences, exchanging teaching strategies, and receiving support from colleagues helped them address challenges related to inclusive instruction. This finding aligns with research suggesting that collaborative professional cultures promote teacher learning and improve inclusive educational practices (Ainscow, 2020). Collaborative relationships provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices, learn from one another, and develop innovative approaches to meeting diverse learner needs. In addition to formal training and collaboration, teachers reported relying on personal experience and self-directed learning to enhance their inclusive teaching practices. This finding suggests that professional growth extends beyond structured professional development programs. As teachers encounter diverse learners in their classrooms, they continuously develop practical knowledge through reflection and experience. Despite their positive attitudes and commitment to inclusion, participants identified several barriers that hinder effective implementation. Limited instructional materials, inadequate resources, large class sizes, and time constraints emerged as major challenges. These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting that insufficient resources and support systems often limit teachers' capacity to provide individualized instruction and meaningful accommodations (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; UNESCO, 2020; Forlin, 2010). In science classrooms, where hands-on activities and specialized materials are often required, resource limitations can make it harder to ensure equitable participation for all learners.

The findings further revealed a perceived need for stronger institutional and administrative support. Teachers emphasized the importance of clear policies, accessible training programs, and adequate resources to facilitate inclusive practice. This finding supports the view that inclusive education is not solely the responsibility of individual teachers but requires systemic support from schools and educational institutions (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2017). When teachers receive sufficient administrative support and access to appropriate resources, they are better positioned to implement inclusive strategies effectively and sustain positive attitudes toward inclusion.

Overall, the findings suggest that the interaction between teacher attitudes, professional competencies, and contextual support systems influences successful inclusive science education. While teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to

inclusive education, their ability to translate positive attitudes into effective classroom practices depends on access to professional development, opportunities for collaboration, adequate resources, and supportive school leadership. These findings reinforce the existing literature, which emphasizes that inclusive education requires both teacher readiness and institutional commitment to create learning environments where all students can participate meaningfully and achieve success in science learning.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes with a deeper understanding of science teachers' attitudes toward implementing inclusive practices for students with diverse learning needs. Through the voices and experiences of participating teachers, the research revealed both the opportunities and challenges of promoting inclusive education in science classrooms. The findings highlight that inclusive education is not only a teaching approach but also a commitment to ensuring that every learner can participate, learn, and succeed regardless of their abilities or learning differences. The experiences shared by teachers revealed the realities of implementing inclusive practices in everyday classroom settings. Teachers expressed positive attitudes and a genuine commitment to providing equal learning opportunities for all students. However, they also acknowledged the challenges brought about by limited resources, large class sizes, and time constraints. These conditions often make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized support for students with diverse learning needs. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability by modifying their teaching strategies and continually seeking ways to support their students better.

At the same time, the findings highlight the important role of professional growth and collaboration in strengthening inclusive education. Teachers emphasized that professional development, peer support, and shared experiences with colleagues significantly improve their competencies in addressing diverse learners. Through continuous learning and reflective practice, teachers gradually develop strategies that enable them to create more inclusive and supportive science learning environments. The study also emphasizes the importance of institutional and administrative support in sustaining inclusive practices in schools. When teachers are provided with adequate resources, training opportunities, and supportive policies, they become more confident and better able to address the needs of all learners. Strong collaboration among teachers, school leaders, and educational stakeholders is essential in building an educational environment that values diversity and promotes inclusive learning.

Ultimately, this study affirms that the successful implementation of inclusive education depends on the collective effort of teachers, school administrators, and the broader educational community. By strengthening professional development, encouraging collaboration, and addressing existing barriers, science education can move toward more inclusive, equitable, and learner-centered practices. The insights gained from this study may serve as a guide for educators and policymakers who aim

to foster classrooms where every student is supported, respected, and empowered to learn.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct, results, or interpretation of the study. The author affirms that the research was conducted objectively and without any personal, professional, or financial bias.

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