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Understanding Teacher Support in Inclusive Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the relationship between the level of support teachers receive and learners' academic performance in English, Mathematics, and Science. The profile of 30 teachers was analyzed, revealing a predominantly female workforce, with most teachers having mid-level experience and advanced education, including Master's Degree holder. Teachers participated in in-service training and inclusive education seminars, though fewer attended subject-specific training. The study found that while teacher support systems encompassing accessibility of guidance, school leadership, and administrative encouragement are generally positive, they do not directly influence learners' academic performance. Statistical analyses showed no significant relationship between teacher support and student outcomes across all subjects, with weak correlations observed for various constructs. The findings suggest that student achievement is influenced more by targeted teaching strategies, student engagement, and subject-specific interventions rather than generalized teacher support. The study highlights the need for enhancing professional development programs, improving instructional quality, and implementing personalized interventions for struggling students. Recommendations include aligning teacher support systems with measurable academic goals, providing subject-focused training, fostering collaboration among educators, and introducing innovative, learner-centered approaches to boost engagement. The results underscore the importance of combining teacher support with strategic actions tailored to improve academic outcomes. This study contributes to the understanding of how teacher support can be optimized to foster better student performance while addressing gaps in professional development and instructional practices.*

Key words*: Inclusive Education, Inclusive learning environment, Special Education, Teacher Support.*

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education is an educational approach that promotes equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or diverse backgrounds (Cerna et al., 2021). According to Ainscow (2020) its purpose is to foster participation and progress for all students, ensuring no one is excluded from educational experiences due to differences. Inclusive education aligns with sustainable education objectives by emphasizing universal access to quality education and providing meaningful participation for all learners (Medina-García et al., 2020). Moreover, integrating inclusive practices, schools contribute to a just and equitable society that values diversity and promotes the agency of every child (Oskarsdottir et al., 2020; Robellos et al., 2024).

The evolution of inclusive education has been supported by international frameworks, including the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). These frameworks emphasize the right of all students, particularly those with disabilities, to participate in mainstream education alongside their peers. The UNCRPD, for instance, urges nations to ensure inclusive educational access on equal terms for people with disabilities (Bombardelli, 2020). The Salamanca Statement highlighted the need for inclusive policy reforms worldwide to prevent segregation and promote inclusive learning environments (Tripathi & Kapri, 2019).

Inclusive education is vital for fostering a supportive and accepting environment that celebrates diversity. It helps in building a culture of respect and understanding, which contributes to the holistic development of students, enabling them to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically (Qian & Rong, 2023). Valuing diversity, inclusive education reinforces a positive school climate that helps students appreciate different perspectives and backgrounds (Haug, 2017).

Inclusive education promotes the development of essential social-emotional skills, encouraging empathy and cooperation among students (Mihic et al., 2024; Kyamko et al., 2024). Additionally, it contributes to academic growth by fostering collaborative learning environments where students of all abilities can succeed. Inclusivity also prepares students for life in diverse societies, teaching them to embrace and adapt to varied perspectives (Volker et al., 2023). This approach reduces prejudice, promoting a more tolerant and cohesive community within and beyond school settings (Ashman, 2008).

Research indicates that a lack of accessible guidance, insufficient leadership support, and limited administrative commitment are major barriers to creating inclusive environments that benefit all students, particularly those with disabilities and special educational needs (Medina-García et al., 2020). The study seeks to fill gaps in understanding how these areas impact teachers' ability to implement inclusive education practices effectively. Exploring these dimensions, this study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to enhance support systems and foster an environment that is truly inclusive, meeting the needs of diverse learners and improving educational outcomes for all students.

The objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of school support structures in promoting inclusive education, focusing specifically on three key areas such as accessibility of guidance for teachers, support from school leadership, and administrative encouragement for inclusive initiatives. Despite the global emphasis on inclusive education policies, many schools face significant challenges in implementing these practices effectively. Conducting this study at Zapatera Elementary School in Cebu City holds particular significance for its students, teachers, and community. The findings could offer valuable insights into how inclusive practices benefit students with special needs and provide guidance for educators to foster more inclusive environments, ultimately promoting positive outcomes for all learners.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Accessibility of Guidance for Teachers in Inclusive Education

Accessibility to guidance is a crucial factor in ensuring teachers feel supported in implementing inclusive education. Research indicates that teachers with access to consultation services from special education professionals, such as school psychologists and special educators, feel better equipped to manage inclusive classrooms (Ironside, 2002). Additionally, training programs that focus on inclusive pedagogy and strategies significantly contribute to teachers' confidence in handling students with disabilities (Desombre, Delaval, & Jury, 2021). Teachers who receive guidance in the form of ongoing professional development and collaborative support from peers demonstrate more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Caputo & Langher, 2015). However, studies highlight gaps in the availability of such guidance, with teachers often feeling underprepared due to inadequate access to resources and training (Gathumbi et al., 2015).

2.2. The Role of School Leadership in Inclusive Education

School leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive learning environment. Research suggests that school principals' support enhances teachers' professional skills and commitment to inclusive teaching (Wang & Zhang, 2021). Effective leadership contributes to the implementation of school-wide inclusive practices and positively influences teacher agency, thereby improving instructional support (White, 2017). Additionally, principals who prioritize professional development and mentorship programs facilitate better teacher preparedness in inclusive classrooms (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022). However, lack of administrative

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encouragement can lead to teacher burnout and reluctance to adopt inclusive teaching strategies (Otto & Arnold, 2005).

2.3. Administrative Encouragement for Inclusive Education

Administrative encouragement is a determining factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Studies indicate that when school administrators actively provide support, teachers are more likely to develop inclusive teaching practices (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014). A supportive administration ensures that teachers have access to necessary resources, training, and collaboration opportunities (Erten, 2013). Furthermore, policies that promote school-wide inclusion create a culture where teachers feel encouraged to develop innovative instructional strategies for students with disabilities (Noreen, Intizar, & Gulzar, 2019). However, research also highlights inconsistencies in administrative encouragement, where many teachers report feeling isolated in their efforts to implement inclusive education due to a lack of structured administrative support (Singh, 2013).

2.4. Academic Performance of Learners in Inclusive Education

The impact of inclusive education on academic performance is widely debated. Studies show that inclusive education positively influences student engagement and social development, leading to better academic outcomes (Febrian & Kurniawati, 2020). Teachers' self-efficacy and instructional support play crucial roles in ensuring that students with special needs can perform at comparable levels to their peers (Bheenaveni, 2016). Moreover, inclusive teaching strategies that emphasize adaptive learning and differentiated instruction contribute to improved student outcomes (Uli & Kurniawati, 2019). However, challenges remain in ensuring that all students benefit equally. Some studies highlight disparities in academic performance, where students with disabilities may struggle due to inadequate teacher training and lack of individualized instructional support (Valle-Flórez et al., 2021). Additionally, while inclusive education aims to promote equality, some students still experience marginalization due to limited classroom accommodations and teacher preparedness (Aiello et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the level of support received by teachers in inclusive education and its relationship with learners' academic performance. This approach was chosen to describe and analyze the existing relationship between these variables without any experimental manipulation. The INPUT-PROCESS-OUTPUT framework was utilized to systematically assess how support mechanisms influence academic outcomes. Data were collected at a single point in time, using descriptive statistics such as means and frequency distributions, to provide a clear understanding of the support system available to teachers and the academic achievements of students. The study was conducted at Zapatera Elementary School SPED Center, an educational institution dedicated to supporting students with special educational needs or disabilities. The respondents were teachers, selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure that participants could provide valuable insights into inclusive education practices. The primary research instrument was a questionnaire adapted from López-López et al. (2021) and Vidovich & Lombard (1998), which assessed institutional support, leadership, and administrative initiatives in inclusive education. To determine the relationship between the level of support provided to teachers and students' academic performance, the study utilized the correlation coefficient as a statistical tool. The level of support was measured using a five-point Likert scale, where ratings ranged from "Strongly Agree" (4.21-5.00), indicating highly effective support, to "Strongly Not Agree" (1.00-1.80), representing a lack of effective support. Through this methodology, the study aimed to provide empirical insights into how institutional support impacts the academic success of learners in an inclusive education setting.

Results and Discussion

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Table 1. Accessibility of Guidance.

Accessibility of Guidance	Mean	VD
Availability of well-defined policies on inclusion that teachers can easily access and understand.	4.03	A
Regularity with which teachers can obtain updated resources, teaching materials, and strategies for inclusive practices.	4.10	A
Access to specialists (e.g., special education coordinators, inclusion consultants) who can offer timely guidance and support.	4.07	A
Ease and speed of obtaining answers or assistance from designated support staff regarding inclusive education questions.	3.93	A
Ease of accessing and understanding guidelines for developing, implementing, and adjusting IEPs.	3.97	A
Grand Mean	4.02	A

Table 1 presents data on the accessibility of guidance for teachers, specifically in the context of inclusive education. All measured indicators fall within the "Agree" (A) category, with mean scores ranging from 3.93 to 4.10 and a grand mean of 4.02. The highest-rated aspect is the regularity with which teachers can obtain updated resources, teaching materials, and strategies for inclusive practices (mean = 4.10), followed closely by access to specialists who provide timely guidance and support (mean = 4.07). The lowest-rated aspect is the ease and speed of obtaining assistance from designated support staff regarding questions on inclusive education (mean = 3.93). These findings indicate that teachers generally find guidance accessible, particularly in terms of resource availability and specialist support. However, the slightly lower score for immediate assistance highlights an area for improvement in response efficiency. The data suggest that while schools are making considerable efforts to provide accessible guidance, enhancing the speed and clarity of support processes can further empower teachers to implement inclusive practices effectively.

Table 2. School Leadership.

School Leadership	Mean	VD
The principal or school leaders actively participate and show interest in inclusive education activities or meetings.	4.27	SA
Teachers feel they can easily approach school leaders for discussions or feedback on inclusion-related matters.	4.27	SA
Leadership facilitates regular meetings or check-ins focused on addressing inclusive education practices and challenges.	4.10	A
School leaders promote and fund professional development opportunities specifically targeting inclusive education.	4.07	A
School leaders actively advocate for and allocate resources necessary for effective inclusive practices.	4.07	A
Grand Mean	4.16	A

Table 2 highlights the role of school leadership in supporting inclusive education. The data reveal a generally high level of leadership involvement, with a grand mean of 4.16, corresponding to the "Agree" category overall. The highest-rated indicators are the active participation of principals or school leaders in inclusive education activities and their approachability for discussions or feedback, both with a mean of 4.27, categorized as "Strongly Agree". Other aspects, such as leadership's facilitation of meetings (mean = 4.10) and promotion of professional development and resource allocation for inclusion both with a mean of 4.07, received slightly lower but still positive ratings in the "Agree" category. These findings suggest that school leadership is perceived as supportive and engaged in fostering inclusive education. However, there is room for further improvement in resource allocation and the frequency of professional development opportunities. Strengthening these areas can enhance the overall effectiveness of inclusive practices and solidify leadership's role in creating a supportive school environment.

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Table 3. Administrative Encouragement.

Administrative Encouragement	Mean	VD
Teachers' efforts in inclusive practices are formally acknowledged or celebrated by the administration.	3.83	A
Provision of rewards, bonuses, or other incentives for teachers who engage in or innovate within inclusive teaching.	3.70	A
Administration fosters collaboration between general education and special education departments to support inclusivity.	3.50	A
School administration allocates specific funds to support inclusive education, such as for resources, adaptive technology, or specialized training.	3.50	A
Administration encourages a culture where inclusion is viewed as a core value, promoting events or activities that reflect and reinforce this mindset.	4.10	A
Grand Mean	3.76	A

Table 3 examines the level of administrative encouragement provided to teachers in fostering inclusive education. The data indicate an overall positive perception, with a grand mean of 3.76, falling within the "Agree" category. The highest-rated indicator is the administration's promotion of inclusion as a core value through events and activities (mean = 4.10). Teachers also feel that their efforts in inclusive practices are acknowledged or celebrated (mean = 3.83). However, indicators related to the provision of rewards and incentives (mean = 3.70) and fostering collaboration between general and special education departments (mean = 3.50) are rated lower, alongside the allocation of specific funds for inclusive education (mean = 3.50). These findings suggest that while the administration is making efforts to encourage inclusion, there is significant room for improvement in tangible support mechanisms, such as financial backing, structured collaboration, and incentives for teachers. Addressing these areas can enhance motivation and equip teachers with the necessary resources to effectively implement inclusive practices.

Table 4. Learners Academic Performance.

Subject	Grade	VD
English	87	Very Satisfactory
Mathematics	85	Very Satisfactory
Science	85	Very Satisfactory

Table 4 provides an overview of learners' academic performance across three core subjects. The grades indicate a consistent level of achievement, with English having the highest grade at 87, followed by Math and Science, both scoring 85. All subjects fall within the "Very Satisfactory" category, demonstrating strong overall academic performance among learners. These results suggest that learners are achieving commendable outcomes across critical subject areas, reflecting effective teaching strategies and possibly adequate support systems. However, to further elevate performance, targeted interventions in specific areas of each subject could help move learners toward an "Outstanding" level.

Table 5. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Support Received and Learners English Performance.

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Accessibility of Guidance	0.268	0.921	0.377	Not significant	Do not reject
Support from School Leadership	-0.152	-0.420	0.631	Not significant	Do not reject
Administrative Encouragement	0.306	1.069	0.328	Not significant	Do not reject

The data in Table 5 indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of support teachers receive and learners' performance in English across the constructs of accessibility of guidance (P = 0.377), support from school leadership (P = 0.631), and administrative encouragement (P = 0.328). While weak positive correlations were observed for accessibility of guidance (r = 0.268) and administrative encouragement (r = 0.306), and a weak negative correlation for school leadership (r = -0.152),

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these relationships were not significant. These findings suggest that while teacher support systems may influence instructional quality, they do not directly translate into measurable improvements in learners' English performance in this context.

Research supports the complexity of factors influencing academic performance, emphasizing that student outcomes are often shaped by a combination of teacher effectiveness, student engagement, socio-economic background, and parental involvement, rather than isolated variables like teacher support alone (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Furthermore, the role of student-centered approaches and direct interventions in language learning might have a stronger impact on English performance than broader institutional support mechanisms (Hattie, 2009). These findings underline the need for holistic strategies that address multiple determinants of student success.

Table 6. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Support Received and Learners Mathematics Performance.

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Accessibility of Guidance	-0.525	-1.914	0.180	Not significant	Do not reject
Support from School Leadership	-0.351	-1.675	0.082	Not significant	Do not reject
Administrative Encouragement	-0.326	-1.156	0.273	Not significant	Do not reject

Table 6 illustrates the relationship between the level of support teachers receive and learners' performance in Mathematics. The analysis reveals no statistically significant relationship for any of the constructs. For Accessibility of Guidance, the r-value of -0.525 and a P-value of 0.180 indicate a moderate negative correlation, but it is not statistically significant. Similarly, Support from School Leadership shows a weak negative correlation (r = -0.351) with a P-value of 0.082, and Administrative Encouragement demonstrates a weaker negative correlation (r = -0.326) with a P-value of 0.273. These results all fail to reach significance (P > 0.05), leading to the conclusion that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. These findings suggest that the level of support teachers receive, including guidance, leadership, and administrative encouragement, does not directly influence learners' Mathematics performance in this context. This aligns with research indicating that academic performance in Mathematics often depends more heavily on factors such as instructional quality, student motivation, and individualized interventions rather than generalized teacher support. For instance, Jiang (2024) found that teacher support impacts learning indirectly through factors like student engagement and resilience rather than directly influencing performance (Jiang, 2024). These results highlight the need for targeted strategies, such as specific pedagogical approaches and student-focused interventions, to improve Mathematics outcomes.

Table 7. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Support Received and Learners Science Performance.

Constructs	r-value	t-value	P value	Remarks	Decision
Accessibility of Guidance	0.055	0.175	0.855	Not significant	Do not reject
Support from School Leadership	-0.315	-1.251	0.185	Not significant	Do not reject
Administrative Encouragement	-0.460	-1.262	0.223	Not significant	Do not reject

Table 7 examines the relationship between the level of support teachers receive and learners' performance in science. The analysis reveals no statistically significant relationship across the measured constructs. For Accessibility of Guidance, the r-value is 0.055 with a P-value of 0.855, indicating a negligible positive correlation that is not significant. Support from School Leadership shows a weak negative correlation (r = -0.315) with a P-value of 0.185, while Administrative Encouragement also demonstrates a moderate negative correlation (r = -0.460) with a P-value of 0.223. Since all P-values exceed the significance threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The results indicate that teacher support, in terms of guidance, leadership, and administrative encouragement, does not have a significant direct impact on learners' Science performance. This finding aligns with existing literature that suggests student academic outcomes in subjects like science are often influenced more by direct instructional practices, student engagement, and subject-specific interventions than by generalized teacher support mechanisms. For example, studies such as Tao et al. (2022) highlight that teacher support positively affects student engagement and emotional well-being, which may indirectly influence academic outcomes but not always directly correlate with subject performance (Tao et al.,

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2022). These findings emphasize the importance of combining teacher support with targeted educational strategies to enhance learning in science.

4. Discussion

The support teachers receive in fostering inclusive education is generally positive but shows areas for improvement. Teachers find guidance accessible, with strong ratings for access to resources and specialists, though timely assistance from staff could be improved. School leadership is highly supportive, with principals and leaders actively participating in and promoting inclusive practices, though more frequent professional development and resource allocation are needed. Administrative encouragement is rated positively, particularly for promoting inclusion as a core value and acknowledging teachers' efforts. However, areas like providing rewards, fostering collaboration between departments, and allocating specific funds for inclusivity need more attention. Overall, while support is present, enhancing efficiency, financial backing, and structured collaboration could further empower teachers. The data show that the level of support teachers received, including guidance, school leadership, and administrative encouragement, does not have a direct and significant impact on students' performance in English, Mathematics, or Science. In English, there were weak positive and negative correlations for various support factors, but none were significant. This suggests that other factors like teaching methods or student engagement might have a greater influence. Similarly, in Mathematics, the analysis showed moderate to weak negative correlations for all support factors, but again, they were not significant. This highlights that student performance in Math likely depends more on specific teaching strategies and individual interventions than on general support for teachers. In Science, the results also indicated no significant relationship between teacher support and student performance. While there were weak or moderate correlations, they were not meaningful. This reflects that factors like direct instructional practices and subject-specific strategies might play a more critical role.

5. Conclusion

The results show that the support teachers receive, including guidance, leadership, and administrative encouragement, does not have a direct impact on students' performance in English, Mathematics, or Science. This means that while support helps create a positive teaching environment, it alone is not enough to improve student grades. Other factors, like teaching strategies, student motivation, and subject-specific interventions, play a bigger role in academic success. Schools should focus on combining teacher support with targeted approaches to help students perform better in these subjects.

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