

An Analysis on the Relationship Between the Level of Awareness and the Level of Competence of Filipino Novice Teachers in Addressing the Needs of Students of Determination in The Philippine School Dubai, UAE

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the relationship between the awareness and competence of Filipino novice teachers in addressing the educational needs of Students of Determination at The Philippine School, Dubai. A convergent mixed-methods design was used with all 27 eligible Filipino novice teachers through a census approach. Quantitative data were obtained using validated awareness and competence scales, while open-ended responses provided qualitative insights into teachers' experiences and challenges. The instruments underwent expert validation and demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .955). Results showed that teachers were aware of Students of Determination needs ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.85$) and highly competent overall ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.85$). Awareness and competence were very strongly and positively related, $r(25) = .93$, $p < .001$. Qualitative findings identified challenges involving limited pre-service preparation, resource constraints, cultural and linguistic adjustment, specialized planning, assistive technology, and emotional workload. The findings support sustained mentoring, practice-based professional development, resource access, culturally responsive training, and institutional support for inclusive education.*

KEYWORDS - awareness, competence, Filipino novice teachers, inclusive education, Students of Determination

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education extends the right to meaningful participation and appropriate support to learners with disabilities and additional needs. In the United Arab Emirates, Students of Determination are expected to access equitable educational opportunities within increasingly inclusive school systems. International guidance emphasizes that inclusion depends not only on policy, but also on teacher knowledge, classroom adaptation, school support, and sustained professional learning [1]. Within the UAE, teachers have reported continuing challenges in translating inclusion policy into classroom practice, particularly when preparation and access to specialized support are uneven [2], [3].

Filipino teachers form an important part of the expatriate education workforce in the UAE. Their transition into multicultural classrooms requires adjustment to new policy expectations, terminology, learner profiles, and support systems. Previous work cited in the source study indicates that Filipino educators may hold favorable attitudes toward inclusion while still needing stronger familiarity with assistive technologies, behavior support, individualized planning, and context-specific accommodations [4], [5]. For novice teachers, this policy-to-practice gap is especially important because early professional experiences shape both confidence and instructional habits.

The study was anchored in two complementary perspectives. Vygotsky's social constructivism emphasizes learning through social interaction, scaffolding, and collaboration [6], while Schön's reflective practice model explains professional growth through reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action [7]. Together, these perspectives support the view that novice teachers develop inclusive competence through both external guidance and continuous reflection on classroom experience.

Accordingly, this study investigated: (1) the level of Filipino novice teachers' awareness of the needs of Students of Determination; (2) their level of competence in addressing those needs; (3) the relationship between awareness and competence; (4) the challenges they experienced in relation to awareness and competence; and (5) recommendations that may strengthen inclusive practice at The Philippine School, Dubai. The paper condenses the bridging-thesis findings into a journal-article format.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design and Locale

The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same general period, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation. The quantitative strand used a correlational approach to describe awareness and competence and determine their relationship. The qualitative strand used open-ended questions to capture teachers' experiences, challenges, and perceived support needs. The study was conducted at The Philippine School, Dubai, a private K-12 school serving the Filipino expatriate community and implementing inclusive education within the UAE regulatory context.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The target population consisted of Filipino novice teachers at The Philippine School, Dubai who had one to three years of professional teaching experience in the UAE and were working in inclusive classroom contexts. Because the eligible population was manageable, the study used a census approach and included all 27 eligible teachers: 10 from the primary level and 17 from the secondary level.

2.3 Research Instruments and Validation

The quantitative component used a standardized awareness scale covering knowledge of inclusive education policies, understanding of diverse learning needs, and familiarity with classroom strategies and accommodations. A validated competence scale assessed instructional strategies, classroom management, implementation of Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs), and use of assistive technologies. Open-ended prompts elicited qualitative reflections about challenges and adaptive practices. Three expert validators representing school administration, counseling, and inclusive education reviewed the instruments for relevance, clarity, and alignment. Pilot testing produced a Cronbach's alpha of .955, indicating excellent internal consistency.

2.4 Data Analysis and Ethics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize awareness and competence, while Pearson's product-moment correlation tested the relationship between the two variables. Qualitative responses were organized through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across teachers' experiences. Participation was voluntary; informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, secure data storage, and institutional research-ethics requirements were observed throughout the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Level of Awareness

Table 1. Level of Filipino Novice Teachers' Awareness of the Needs of Students of Determination (N = 27)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Knowledge of inclusive education policies	3.41	0.85	Strongly Aware
Understanding of diverse learning needs	3.14	0.79	Aware
Familiarity with classroom strategies and accommodations	3.11	0.90	Aware
Overall	3.22	0.85	Aware

Teachers obtained an overall awareness mean of 3.22 (SD = 0.85), interpreted in the study as aware. Knowledge of inclusive education policies received the highest mean (M = 3.41), while familiarity with classroom strategies and accommodations received the lowest (M = 3.11). The pattern suggests that policy knowledge was more developed than practice-oriented awareness. This distinction is consistent with the broader literature in the source study, which notes that policy familiarity alone does not guarantee effective inclusive practice [4]. Practice-based and differentiated instructional knowledge therefore remains a priority for novice teachers [8].

3.2 Level of Competence

Table 2. Level of Filipino Novice Teachers' Competence in Addressing Student Needs (N = 27)

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Instructional strategies for diverse learners	3.46	0.85	Highly Competent
Classroom management techniques in inclusive settings	3.47	0.86	Highly Competent
Implementation of Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs)	3.39	0.87	Highly Competent
Utilization of assistive technologies	3.22	0.80	Competent
Overall	3.39	0.85	Highly Competent

The overall competence mean was 3.39 (SD = 0.85), interpreted as highly competent. Classroom management received the highest mean (M = 3.47), followed closely by instructional strategies for diverse learners (M = 3.46). The lowest mean was observed for assistive technology use (M = 3.22). Although ILP implementation was rated relatively high (M = 3.39), qualitative responses showed that some teachers still experienced uncertainty in individualized planning and SMART goal development. These results support the need to strengthen specialized competencies in addition to general classroom pedagogy. Teacher self-efficacy and practical preparation are central to effective inclusion [9], while access to assistive resources and training can affect technology use [11].

3.3 Relationship Between Awareness and Competence

Table 3. Correlation Between Teachers' Awareness and Competence

Variables	Mean	SD	r	95% CI	p
Teachers' Awareness	3.22	0.85	0.93	[0.848, 0.967]	< .001
Teachers' Competence	3.39	0.85	0.93	[0.848, 0.967]	< .001

Pearson correlation analysis showed a very strong positive and statistically significant relationship between awareness and competence, $r(25) = .93$, 95% CI [.848, .967], $p < .001$. Within this sample, teachers with higher awareness scores also tended to have higher competence scores. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship was therefore rejected. The finding supports the study's conceptual premise that knowledge and sensitivity to learner needs are closely connected to practical instructional performance. However, because the study used a single-site, correlational design and self-report measures, the relationship should be interpreted as association rather than proof of causation.

3.4 Qualitative Challenges

Table 4. Summary of Qualitative Challenges Reported by Filipino Novice Teachers

Challenge Area	Summary of Findings
Instructional practice and confidence	Teachers used differentiated instruction, visual supports, structured routines, reinforcement, task analysis, multisensory approaches, and behavior strategies, but confidence often developed gradually through practice and mentoring.
Limited knowledge and experience	Participants described difficulty identifying sensory needs, interpreting behavior, developing IEP/ILP goals, and selecting disability-specific interventions.

Challenge Area	Summary of Findings
Systemic and resource barriers	Limited pre-service SPED preparation, generalized CPD, large classes, limited assistive technology and sensory materials, insufficient collaboration time, and inconsistent policy implementation constrained practice.
Cultural and linguistic adjustment	Teachers reported adapting to the UAE cultural and policy context, language barriers with students or families, and possible misinterpretation of behavior across cultures.
Emotional and professional demands	Anxiety, fear of mistakes, workload pressure, documentation requirements, and feelings of helplessness during challenging behavior affected confidence and well-being.
Professional development needs	Teachers requested practical, sustained training in behavior management, differentiated instruction, IEP/ILP development, assistive technology, and disability-specific strategies.

The qualitative findings help explain why high overall competence can coexist with substantial professional challenges. Teachers reported active use of inclusive strategies, but also described a dependence on trial-and-error, mentoring, and informal support. The findings indicate that competence is not simply an individual teacher characteristic; it is influenced by the availability of resources, opportunities for collaboration, school structures, culturally responsive guidance, and emotional support. These concerns echo UAE-focused literature in the source study that identifies institutional support and context as important conditions for sustained inclusion [2], [10].

3.5 Integrated Interpretation and Implications

Across the quantitative and qualitative strands, a consistent pattern emerged. Novice teachers possessed a meaningful foundation of policy awareness and general pedagogical competence, but specialized and context-specific areas remained less secure. The lower mean for classroom strategies and accommodations, the comparatively lower assistive technology score, and teachers' qualitative accounts of difficulty with individualized planning all point to a gap between knowing inclusive principles and implementing them confidently in complex classroom situations.

The strong awareness-competence correlation further suggests that professional learning should develop conceptual and practical dimensions together. In line with the study's theoretical foundations, collaborative mentoring can provide scaffolded learning [6], while reflective practice can help teachers examine classroom decisions and refine future actions [7]. School-level support should therefore combine targeted training with structured mentoring, peer observation, collaboration with specialists, protected planning time, and access to appropriate materials. Such supports are aligned with broader inclusive-education principles that emphasize participation, adaptation, and removal of barriers to learning [1], [4].

Because the investigation was confined to one school and relied substantially on self-report data, the results are context-specific. They provide an evidence base for improvement within The Philippine School, Dubai and may offer insights for comparable Filipino or expatriate school settings, but they should not be generalized automatically to all teachers or schools in the UAE. The UAE policy context nevertheless makes the findings relevant to ongoing efforts to strengthen access and equity for Students of Determination [1], [3].

IV. CONCLUSION

The study found that Filipino novice teachers at The Philippine School, Dubai were aware of the needs of Students of Determination and demonstrated a generally high level of competence in inclusive practice. Their strongest areas were knowledge of inclusive education policies, classroom management, and instructional strategies for diverse learners. Areas requiring further strengthening included practice-oriented awareness of accommodations, individualized planning, disability-specific intervention, and assistive technology use.

Awareness and competence were very strongly and positively associated, indicating that teachers who reported stronger knowledge and sensitivity to inclusive education also tended to report stronger professional competence. Qualitative findings showed, however, that teacher performance was shaped by more than individual

knowledge. Limited pre-service preparation, resources, specialist collaboration, cultural and linguistic adjustment, and emotional workload affected the consistency of practice.

The paper therefore supports a holistic approach to teacher development: sustained mentoring, practical and skills-based professional development, improved access to assistive and instructional resources, culturally responsive preparation, structured collaboration, and teacher well-being support. These measures can help convert policy awareness into consistent classroom practice and strengthen equitable learning opportunities for Students of Determination.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 5. Recommended Actions Based on the Study Findings

Area	Recommended Action
Instructional competence	Provide continuous mentoring, coaching, peer observation, and practical training in differentiation, task analysis, behavior support, ILP/IEP development, and assistive technology.
Institutional support	Improve access to adaptive materials and specialist consultation, provide collaboration time, and strengthen consistent implementation of school inclusion policies.
Cultural responsiveness	Include UAE-context case studies, culturally responsive pedagogy, and communication supports for work with multilingual students and families.
Professional growth	Offer sustained, modular CPD rather than isolated general workshops; connect training to classroom application and reflective practice.
Teacher well-being	Provide peer-support, wellness, and counseling mechanisms that address stress, role demands, and emotional challenges in inclusive classrooms.
Future research	Replicate the study in additional schools and with larger, more diverse samples; evaluate the impact of targeted inclusion training over time.

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