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TEACHING STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL SKILLS OF LEARNERS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Learners with special needs are given opportunities to have full access to quality education, enabling them to realize their full potential and contribute to and participate in society. This research assessed the teaching strategies and social skills of learners with intellectual disability at the identified SPED centers in Cebu Province and Bohol Division. This employed a descriptive-correlational design to investigate the relationship between teaching strategies and social skills in learners with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive classroom. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. A checklist and survey questionnaire were utilized to gather data. Results revealed that most of the learners aged 5-9 years old, dominated by males, with parents graduated high school, with 1-2 number of siblings and with 10,000 pesos and below combined monthly family income. Moreover, the teaching strategies of teachers were highly utilized while the level of social skills of the learners with intellectual disability was at a proficient level. On the other hand, correlation analysis showed that there was no significant relationship between the teaching strategies of teachers and social skills of the learners with intellectual disability enrolled in inclusive education. It is concluded that teachers and parents need to discover new approaches in dealing with the learners in an inclusive classroom and monitor their socialization in a way they do not feel forced and limited. It is recommended that the social skills enhancement plan being the output of this study be adopted to improve the teaching-and-learning process and monitoring measures.

KEYWORDS: Special Education, teaching strategies, social skills, descriptive-correlational, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Global and international mandates—most notably UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement (1994) and subsequent United Nations resolutions—have driven a growing global commitment to inclusive education, ensuring that children with diverse abilities access quality basic schooling alongside their peers (Miole, 2024). Countries from India to Argentina, Ghana, Laos, and Ethiopia have enacted policies to mainstream learners with special needs, recognizing that social inclusion and equitable opportunity are essential to realizing each student’s full potential (Ainscow et al., 2025; Misquitta & Joshi, 2024). In the Philippines, both private and public institutions have embraced contextualized, authentic assessment methods and have worked to integrate students with intellectual disabilities into regular classrooms (Cruz, 2024). Yet despite these efforts, many learners on the spectrum continue to struggle with social skills—initiating conversations, interpreting social cues, and forming lasting relationships—due in part to one-size-fits-all teaching approaches and insufficient teacher training in inclusive practices (Jacob et al., 2022; Klefbeck, 2023; Płatos et al., 2023).

Inclusive education (IEP) is regarded as the road towards making a more enabling and meaningful learning environment for children with disabilities. Research has demonstrated that these teaching experiences enhance children's morale by making them feel accepted and valued (Molina Roldán et al., 2021; Rajendran et al., 2020). But successful application of IEP involves more than just the mainstreaming of children with special needs into ordinary classrooms. It requires a whole system ready with adequate resources, teacher training, and institutional support (Cerna et al., 2021; Nilholm, 2021). Critics contend that inclusive education struggles against numerous obstacles, including inadequate financial resources, inflexible curricula, and social myths (Sokal et al., 2022; Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). Such difficulties often deliver a sense of frustration to stakeholders and impede the achieving of goals of inclusivity (Slee, 2018).

In the Philippine setting, even though the country has joined international efforts to promote inclusive education, many children with disabilities still face significant barriers in accessing quality learning. Poverty and the lack of accessible school facilities often stand in their way, leaving them behind their peers (Raguindin et al., 2021). Scholars like Domingo (2020a) and Salamuddin (2021) emphasized that there is no clear and unified approach to truly support inclusive education in the country, making it difficult to create lasting change. For many persons with disabilities—especially women and children—the road to education remains uneven. These individuals are often left with fewer opportunities to attend school or complete their studies, resulting in lower literacy and limited participation in community life (Lopus et al., 2019). It’s a sobering reminder that beyond laws and policies, real inclusion requires action that reaches every learner, regardless of their circumstances.

Despite the promise of inclusive education, bringing it to life in the Philippines is still a work in progress. The system continues to wrestle with deep-rooted challenges—from resource limitations to societal attitudes—that prevent true equality in education. The journey is far from over, but every step taken in the right direction brings hope for a future where no learner is left behind.

To bridge these gaps, educators and researchers advocate targeted interventions: (1) classroom-based strategies that allow teachers to provide real-time support, (2) emotional intelligence training that validates and builds students' emotional awareness, and (3) technology-assisted tools for monitoring and regulating social-emotional well-being. Recognizing the urgent need for pedagogical and psychological support, the present study aims to assess existing teaching strategies and the social skills of learners with intellectual disabilities at selected SPED centers in Cebu and Bohol. Findings will inform the design of a comprehensive social-skill enhancement plan—equipping teachers with specialized training and students with structured opportunities for successful interaction and inclusive participation.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research assessed the teaching strategies and social skills of learners with intellectual disabilities in the identified SPED centers within Cebu Province and the Bohol Division for the school year 2022–2023, serving as the basis for developing Social Skills Enhancement Plans. Specifically, the study aimed to determine the profiles of the learners in terms of age and gender, parents' highest educational attainment, number of siblings, and combined family monthly income. It also sought to identify the extent to which teachers utilized teaching strategies for learners with intellectual disabilities in inclusive classrooms, as well as the levels of social skills demonstrated by these learners. Furthermore, the study examined the significant relationship between the teaching strategies employed and the social skills of learners with intellectual disabilities participating in inclusive education.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study made use of the descriptive-correlational method to better understand how teaching strategies of teachers and social skills of the learners with intellectual disability in an inclusive classroom (Formplus, 2020). This approach focuses on identifying patterns and connections through statistical analysis. As Saro et al. (2023) explained, this method is quite like comparative studies, as it allows researchers to objectively define, measure, and analyze how certain relationships exist. To gather meaningful data, the study used a universal sampling technique, where specific individuals were selected to participate hence, not everyone in the population had an equal chance of being included (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). An adapted survey questionnaire was used to gather the data about the profile of the respondents, extent of utilization of teaching strategies to learners with intellectual disability in inclusive classrooms, level of social skills of the learners, relationship between the teaching strategies and the social skills of the learners with intellectual disability who were enrolled in inclusive education. Gathered data were treated using frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson r .

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the profile of the respondents on the identified research variables.

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

This part presents the profile of the respondents in terms of their age, gender, parents' highest educational attainment, and combined family monthly income.

4.1.1 Age and Gender

Table 1 shows the result of gender and age distribution of the learners.

Table 1. Age and Gender of the Learners

Age (in years)	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	F	%	f	%
15 and above	1	4.55	4	18.18	5	22.73
10 – 14	2	9.09	4	18.18	6	27.27
5 – 9	4	18.18	7	31.82	11	50.00
Total	7	31.82	15	68.18	22	100.00

Table 1 shows that majority (15,68.18 %) of the respondents were males in the age bracket of 5 – 9 years old (11, 50.00%). It is evident in the data that the age and gender distributions only had slight discrepancy, and both male and female respondents followed the appropriate grade level for their age. Nonetheless, there were more male respondents than females who had taken part to the implementation of inclusive education in the identified schools.

These results imply that some learners with intellectual disability entered an inclusive classroom at an older age as expected, influencing the overall teaching-and-learning landscape of the classroom. Moreover, the slightly wide age difference of the learners in the inclusive classroom may affect the dealings of the teachers towards every learner since these learners are integrated with the regular learners.

As per the regional distribution of enrollment in the inclusion program of the Department of Education for 2019-2020, males dominate the enrollment with 57.76 percent of the total population (Best, 2019).

4.1.2 Parents' Highest Educational Attainment

The study considers the parents' educational attainment as one of the variables that clarify the findings of the study. Table 2 presents the total percentage of the parents' education attainment from the three schools during the conduct of the survey.

Table 2. Parents' Highest Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Mother		Father	
	f	%	f	%
College Graduate	5	22.73	5	22.73
College Level	5	22.73	3	13.64
High School Graduate	11	50.00	7	31.82
High School Level	1	4.55	3	13.64
Elementary Graduate	0	0.00	0	0.00
Elementary Level	0	0.00	2	9.09
No Formal Schooling	0	0.00	1	4.55
No Response	0	0.00	1	4.55
Total	22	100.00	22	100.00

Table 2 shows that 11 out of 22 mothers, or 50.00 percent graduated high school while five of them or 22.73 percent graduated with a college degree or reached college level. Among the 22 mothers, one or 4.55 percent reached the high school level. For the respondents' fathers, seven or 31.82 percent of them were high school graduates, while five, or 22.73 percent, had college degrees. On the other hand, three fathers, or 13.64 percent, reached high school and college level respectively. Moreover, two of them or 9.09 only reached elementary level, and one or 4.55 had no formal schooling at all. Lastly, one of the fathers or 4.55 percent sent no response. The heterogeneous results of each educational attainment of the respondents' parents imply different views on education during the years. However, these various data do not significantly influence the academic journey of the respondents. Yet, parental involvement in the respondents' education, relevant to their educational attainment, impacts their children's academic performance and holistic development.

Boonk et al. (2018) expressed that the parent's involvement in their children's education shows promising outcomes. Some of these involvements include reading with their children at home, supporting their children with their school activities, not setting high expectations for their children's academic recognition, and helping them with some of their homework.

4.1.3 Number of Siblings of the Learners

The number of siblings may indicate the kind of support system available at home. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3. Number of Siblings of the Learners

Number of Siblings	F	%
5 and above	2	9.09
3 – 4	6	27.27
1 – 2	12	54.55
None	2	9.09
Total	22	100.00

Table 3 presents the number of siblings of the learners. Twelve (12) out of 22 learners with intellectual disabilities had one to two siblings or 54.55 percent. six learners or 27.27 percent had three to four siblings, and there were two learners or 9.09 percent who had five and above siblings, and another two learners answered no siblings.

The three identified schools presented in the table that majority of the learners with ID had one or two siblings in the family. It was a vivid picture that some learners had experienced limited interactions, encounters, and communications with their other family members or other people nearby. As a result, these students who had trouble interacting with others would typically exhibit hesitations when forming relationships. This scenario considered the assistance their parents and teachers give them. Higher parental involvement resulted in more developed social skills (Dekker & Kamerling, 2017), and children in classrooms with teachers who have positive attitudes toward the education of children with disabilities have more highly developed social skills (Gallego-Ortega & Rodríguez-Fuentes, 2021; Kofidou & Mantzikos, 2017). More positive parental attitudes are related to greater parental involvement with children's education (Wong et al., 2018), healthier family relationships are related to greater parental involvement with children's education (Džurišić & Bunijevac, 2017), and higher parental involvement results in more developed social skills (Sengonul, 2022).

4.1.4 Combined Family Monthly Income

Table 4 presents the results about the combined family income as gathered.

Table 4. Combined Family Monthly Income

Monthly Income (in pesos)	f	%
Above 30,000	1	4.55
25,000-30,000	1	4.55
20,001-25,000	2	9.09
15,001-20,000	0	0.00
10,001-15,000	3	13.64
10,000 and below	15	68.18
Total	22	100.00

In Table 4, 15 families from the 22 identified respondents, or 68.18 percent, earned 10,000 pesos and below. Only three families or 13.64 percent earned 10,001-15,000 pesos, and two families or 9.09 percent earned 20,000-25,000 per month. Also, there was only one family or 4.55 percent that earned 25,000-30,000 Philippines pesos and another one family impressively earned above 30,000 pesos.

Based on the numbers shown in the table, majority of the parents only earned 10,000 pesos and below which greatly affected the support they gave for their children with intellectual disability -- even though these learners were enrolled in public learning institutions. Subsequently, the parents may find it challenging to look for possible remedies when their children further treatment and monitoring to ensure holistic progressive development.

The result of the combined family monthly income implies that most of the family who has chosen to send their children to a public special education institution is influenced by their generated revenue every month. The practicality of the family is commendable, for it is better to continue the education of the children rather than insisting themselves to put their children in a private institution.

In the study of Erdener and Knoepfel (2018) and Gobena (2018) explained that the family's monthly income indicates the family's involvement in their children's education. The more the parents earn a low income, the more they become a part of the educational journey of their learners since they need to work for their daily consumption.

4.2 Extent of Teachers' Utilization of Teaching Strategies to Learners with Intellectual Disability in Inclusive Classrooms

This section presents the extent of the teachers in utilizing different teaching strategies for learners with intellectual disability. Teachers' extent of the utilization of teaching strategies measures holistic approach towards the implementation of inclusive education. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5. Extent to which The Teachers Utilize Teaching Strategies to Learners with Intellectual Disability in Inclusive Classrooms

S/N	Indicators	WM	Verbal Description
1	The teacher displays confidence on how to educate LSEN's.	3.73	Highly Utilized
2	The teacher designs differentiated learning tasks so that the individual needs of students with disabilities are accommodated.	3.59	Highly Utilized
3	The teacher provides varied explanations and simple instructions to learners who are confused.	3.64	Highly Utilized
4	The teacher is resourceful in making learners to work together in pairs or small groups.	3.41	Highly Utilized
5	The teacher offers collaborative learning tasks.	3.68	Highly Utilized
6	The teacher encourages LSEN's full participation in all class activities.	3.68	Highly Utilized
7	The teacher manifests knowledge, affection and flexibility in handling LSEN's.	3.73	Highly Utilized
8	The teacher teaches mind, touches hearts and transforms the lives of LSEN's.	3.59	Highly Utilized
9	The teacher extends instructions through remedial classes.	3.59	Highly Utilized
10	The teacher embraces inclusive education wholeheartedly.	3.77	Highly Utilized
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.64	Highly Utilized

Legend: 3.25-4.00- Highly Utilized; 2.50– 3.24-Utilized; 1.75 – 2.49-Less Utilized; 1.00 – 1.74–Not Utilized

Table 5 shows that all indicators of the survey questionnaire resulted in highly utilized interpretations. All items showed weighted mean that were slightly different from one another. Nevertheless, item number 10 has the greatest weighted mean which says that the teacher embraces inclusive education wholeheartedly. In other words, the teachers expressed appreciation and provided exemplary efforts for the students' welfare.

The result of the teachers' utilization of teaching strategies for inclusive education curriculum showed an impressive highly utilized outcome. This outcome explained the preparedness of the teachers in teaching learners with intellectual disability in one classroom with regular learners. Considering that these data come from three different learning institutions, it is evident that the teachers from this school

demonstrate a unified approach in implementing programs and activities aimed at ensuring the success of inclusive education. Similar results gave a clear indicator that the teachers, indeed, have a repertoire of teaching strategies that they maximize whenever fewer too little complications arise. However, this result does not express the idea that teachers must not aim for improvements and professional growth. Instead, the teachers must be more motivated to do better and be better for the learners who need them the most.

Due to their shortcomings in academic and processing skills, students with intellectual disabilities necessitate the employment of special instructional techniques (Cannella-Malone et al., 2021). Teachers should become familiar with the patterns of strengths and weaknesses of students with intellectual disabilities to ensure that all pupils fully learn the ideas (Weiss et al., 2018).

4.3 Level of Social Skills of the Learners with Intellectual Disability in Inclusive Classrooms

This portion presents the level of social skills of learners with intellectual disability. Learners' social skills serve as the basis for the positive impact of the inclusive education program. Table 6 shows the respondents' level of social skills.

Table 6. Level of Social Skills of the Learners with Intellectual Disability who Enrolled in Inclusive Education

S/N	When he is with other people,he...	WM	Verbal Description
1	shows keen powers of observation; has an eye for important details	2.77	Proficient
2	often displays a questioning attitude, is not hesitant to ask especially elders.	2.64	Proficient
3	participates in discussions, often weird or unexpected with his subject matter	2.68	Proficient
4	is quick to spot errors/ inconsistencies and usually points them out.	2.00	Developing
5	has a large storehouse of information about a variety of topics, which he can recall quickly.	2.18	Developing
6	helps when there is a group task.	2.77	Proficient
7	offers assistance such as carrying things for others, etc.	2.36	Developing
8	interacts well with peers/younger ones.	2.73	Proficient
9	is friendly with visitors/guests	3.14	Proficient
10	finds his own corner in the room/area.	2.41	Developing
Aggregate Weighted Mean		2.57	Proficient

Legend: 3.25-4.00- *Very Proficient*; 2.50– 3.24-*Proficient*; 1.75 – 2.49-*Developing* 1.00 – 1.74-*Beginning*

Table 6 reveals that six out of the ten survey questionnaire items resulted to proficient interpretation, while there were four which showed developing interpretations. Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9 only had slight differences in their weighted means, Similarly, items 4, 5, 7, and 10 showed slight differences among their weighted means. The level of socials of all learners with intellectual disabilities was proficient.

The data explained that all the learners enrolled in the inclusive education curriculum demonstrated appealing social skills among the members of their classroom. However, most of them found it a little difficult to retain information, point out errors, help others, and seek personal space during academic sessions and interpersonal transactions. Thus, teachers and parents must seek efficient and effective ways to solve the current conditions of the learners.

The satisfactory proficient result of the study indicates a seemingly slight positive impact of inclusive education in the social skills of learners with IDs. These results reveal that the background and training of the learners in an inclusive education are enough for them to start dealing with others in a proper manner. With the help of the teachers and parents, the learners with IDs will establish a good rapport among others and live by the values of healthy connections.

It was assumed that if animals could be educated to respond to stimuli and be conditioned, then humans could also be taught to respond to comparable actions. Although using a reward can be successful, conditioning is fairly limited in how it can shape behavior because a response is required. When a reward is given for a certain behavior, this is known as positive operant conditioning (Al-Qahtani & Al-Juda, 2018).

4.4 Relationship Between Teaching Strategies and Social Skills of Learners with Intellectual Disability

This study hypothesized that there was no significant relationship between the teaching strategies and the social skills of learners with intellectual disability. Table 7 shows the results of the gathered data.

Table 7. Table of Relationship Between the Teaching Strategies and The Social Skills of the Learners with Intellectual Disability

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Result
Teaching Strategies and the Social Skills of the Learners	0.011	Negligible Positive	0.962	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

As presented in Table 7, with computed p-value of 0.962, which was greater than 0.05, revealed that there was no significant relationship between teaching strategies and the social skills of the learners with intellectual disability. Hence, there was enough evidence to accept the null hypothesis.

The data indicated that regardless of teachers' preparation in implementing the inclusive education curriculum in their respective schools, the learners with intellectual disability must be conditioned for their integration in the regular classroom and exposure to collaborative activities.

In addition, the key conclusion from their recent research is the importance of strong family functioning for children's social abilities (Bagherabadi et al., 2020; Esteves Villanueva et al., 2020). This shows that family-focused intervention programs would be highly beneficial. However, given that parents express reluctance to engage in initiatives they do not believe will directly benefit their child, care should be made to guarantee that families are fully educated about the advantages before initiatives are put into place.

In connection, some of the factors can be the learners' upbringing at home, exposure to the outside world, and parental involvement to the holistic development of the learners. The finding asserts that a family with one child diagnosed with intellectual disability must provide them with much support, care, and love. The exposure of their child to people also helps them to start understanding the sense of interaction among others in society.

Schwartz et al. (2021) discovered that when evaluating its efficacy in various educational frameworks for students with intellectual disabilities, it was found that the writing, structure, and organization of the educational paper can have a positive impact on these students' performance levels in terms of their spoken language and social organization skills with the aim of achieving their school inclusion. The teaching of social stories improved the students' social behavior.

5. FINDINGS

The researchers arrived at the following findings based on the data results that were gathered and treated statistically.

On the profile of respondents, data showed that, majority were males whose ages range from five to nine years old, parents were high school graduates, with 1-2 siblings and with a combined family monthly income of 10,000 pesos or below. Furthermore, the results revealed that teachers highly utilized various teaching strategies in addressing the needs of learners with intellectual disabilities in inclusive classrooms. This suggests a strong implementation of inclusive practices aimed at supporting diverse learning needs. Additionally, the findings showed that the social skills of learners with intellectual disabilities were at a proficient level, indicating that the teaching strategies employed were effective in enhancing their ability to interact, communicate, and engage positively within the classroom environment. On the other hand, the relationship between teaching strategies and the learners' level of social skills showed that there was no significant relationship between the two variables. This suggests that while teachers may have been using different strategies effectively, these did not appear to directly influence the development of the learners' social skills based on the findings.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that the teachers' utilization of the teaching strategies does not directly and significantly impact the social skills of the learners. Thus, the utilization of the teaching strategies is not the primary reason and factor to improve the learners' social skills, especially in dealing with other learners with intellectual disability. Other factors such as the parental involvement, the exposure to the external context, and the teachers' consistent follow up to the learners' concern support can be looked at thoroughly to determine the effective measures in enhancing the learners' social skills in an inclusive education. Since majority learners had shown a positive result, teachers and parents still need to discover underlying variables that influence the desired outcome when desiring to improve the social skills of the learners through the utilization of different teaching strategies.

In the light of the study's findings, the researchers highly recommended that both public and private special education teachers adopt the social skills enhancement plan crafted to provide active and engaging instructional support, in conducting inclusive education classes to improve the academic and social performance of the learners with intellectual disabilities.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers would like to express their appreciation and thanksgiving to all the respondents who participated this study and to all the concerned offices that gave them the permission to officially conduct this study.

8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Further, the researchers declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

9. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study assessed the teaching strategies and social skills of learners with intellectual disability in inclusive classrooms at selected SPED centers in Cebu Province and Bohol Division, using a descriptive-correlational design with data gathered through checklists and survey questionnaires. Moreover, the study was limited to a specific age group (5–9 years old) and geographic area, with purposive sampling and quantitative tools that may restrict the generalizability and depth of the findings.

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