

Pre-Service Teachers Understanding on Inclusive Education in Early Childhood

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the Pre-service teachers understanding on inclusive education in Early Childhood education (ECE) pre-service teachers in relation to inclusive education at Central Mindanao University. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive research design with a phenomenological approach, the study aimed to examine how pre-service teachers understand and apply inclusive education practices based on their professional preparation and pedagogical knowledge. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected participants who had prior exposure to inclusive education coursework.

The findings revealed that pre-service teachers possess a strong conceptual understanding of inclusive education, particularly in promoting equal access, recognizing learner diversity, and implementing flexible, learner-centered teaching strategies. Participants emphasized the importance of creating inclusive classroom environments that foster participation, respect, and a sense of belonging among all learners. However, their understanding remains largely theoretical, as many reported limited practical exposure and confidence in applying inclusive strategies in real classroom settings. The study also found that participants have a basic awareness of inclusive education policies but require deeper understanding to effectively translate these into classroom practice.

Overall, the study concludes that while ECE pre-service teachers are conceptually prepared and demonstrate positive orientations toward inclusion, their readiness requires further assistance.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Pre-Service Teachers, Early Childhood Education, Pedagogical Practices, Teacher Preparedness, Challenges.*

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the pursuit of inclusive education has emerged as a cornerstone of equitable schooling across the globe. In the Philippines, increasing attention is being directed toward ensuring that learners with diverse needs, whether due to disabilities, socio-economic disadvantage, or other barriers, are welcomed in mainstream settings rather than segregated (UNESCO, 2021). For early childhood education (ECE), this emphasis is critical. The early years set the foundation for lifelong learning and social inclusion, making the attitudes, knowledge, and practices of pre-service teachers especially pivotal (Lualhati, 2022).

Teacher preparation for inclusive education remains a significant challenge in the Philippine context. Recent studies reveal that while many educators express positive dispositions toward inclusive education, gaps persist in their training, pedagogical readiness, and resource support. Nieva (2023) validated a scale measuring teacher attitude toward inclusion, emphasizing the importance of reliably gauging beliefs and orientations among future educators. Similarly, Ponce et al. (2025) found that Filipino pre-service teachers often report moderate preparedness, with weaknesses in adapting to diverse learning needs and implementing individualized strategies. Entrampas et al. (2025) highlighted the need for targeted training to improve pre-service teachers' confidence and readiness in inclusive practices.

On pedagogy, inclusive classrooms demand more than good intentions. They require concrete strategies such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), co-teaching, peer-assisted learning, and the use of assistive technologies (Rosal-Oliverio et al., 2025). Yet, evidence suggests that many educators in the Philippines continue to struggle with these approaches. Rosal-Oliverio et al. (2025) reported that general-education teachers often face difficulties in addressing the needs of learners with disabilities due to limited institutional support and practical experience. Nuñez and Tantiado (2025) further emphasized challenges such as large class sizes, insufficient materials, and inadequate infrastructure as barriers to effective inclusion.

The broader systemic context also significantly influences inclusive education practices. Magtuba and Caballero (2024) found that institutional leadership, teacher empowerment, and commitment strongly predict the successful implementation of inclusive practices. These findings suggest that inclusive education is not solely dependent on individual teachers' knowledge but also on institutional support and systemic alignment.

Despite advances in research, gaps remain, particularly regarding early childhood education in Mindanao. Much of the existing literature focuses on in-service teachers, while fewer studies examine pre-service ECE teachers, whose preparation is crucial for future classroom implementation.

This study, therefore, sought to explore not only what pre-service ECE teachers know and believe about inclusive education, but also how they implement pedagogical strategies and what preparation of the teaching education program provided to strengthen their understanding of inclusive education in early childhood education. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine three key dimensions: the knowledge of ECE pre-service teachers on inclusive education, the pedagogical approaches they employ, and the preparation provided by the teacher education program to strengthen their understanding of inclusive education in early childhood education.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The study explored the level of understanding of inclusive education among Early Childhood Education Pre-Service Teachers. Specifically, the study sought to explore the following:

- What is the knowledge of Pre-Service Teachers on inclusive education?
- What is the preparation of the teaching education program provided to strengthen the knowledge of inclusive education in early childhood education?
- What are the pedagogical strategies used by the pre-service teachers to implement inclusive education?

➤ *Research Objectives*

The study explored the level of understanding of inclusive education among Early Childhood Education Pre-Service Teachers. Specifically, the study sought to explore the following:

- Determine the extent of knowledge and understanding of Early Childhood Education Pre-Service Teachers on inclusive education.
- Describe
- the preparation components to enhance understanding of inclusive education in Early childhood education.
- Identify the various pedagogical strategies employed by the pre-service teachers to implement inclusive learning environments.

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This study is significant as it sought to provide a deeper understanding of the knowledge, pedagogical practices, and preparation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) pre-service teachers in implementing inclusive education at Central Mindanao University. The findings are expected to benefit various stakeholders in the field of education.

ECE Pre-Service Teachers can benefit directly from this study by gaining awareness of their own strengths and areas for improvement in inclusive education. By understanding their knowledge of inclusive education, pre-service teachers can adopt more effective teaching strategies and approaches that foster inclusivity in early childhood classrooms (Lualhati, 2022). This awareness can enhance their professional growth and readiness to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Teacher Educators and Faculty can use the findings to improve teacher education programs. The study highlights gaps in pedagogical preparation and challenges that pre-service teachers encounter, allowing faculty to design targeted training modules, workshops, or practical learning experiences that strengthen the preparedness of future educators in inclusive settings (Rosal-Oliverio et al., 2025). This can lead to more competent and confident teachers entering the workforce.

Educational Institutions and Policymakers will benefit from the insights provided by this study by using the results to develop supportive policies, allocate resources, and create frameworks that facilitate inclusive education. Understanding the needs of pre-service teachers can help institutions implement practical solutions that ensure all learners, regardless of their abilities, receive quality education (Magtuba & Caballero, 2024).

Learners with Diverse Needs will benefit indirectly as the study aims to improve the teaching practices of pre-service teachers. With better-prepared educators, learners who require additional support will experience a more inclusive, engaging, and equitable learning environment that accommodates their unique needs (UNESCO, 2021). This ultimately promotes equal opportunities for success in early education.

Finally, Future Researchers will benefit from this study as it provides empirical data and insights into the field of inclusive education in early childhood settings. The findings can serve as a foundation for further research, including intervention-based studies, longitudinal analyses, or comparative studies across regions, which can continue to enhance teacher preparedness and learner outcomes (Nieva, 2023; Ponce et al., 2025).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

➤ *Pre-Service Teachers*

Pre-service teachers are considered vital agents in shaping the future of education, as their preparation directly influences the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. Teacher education programs play a crucial role in equipping them with the pedagogical knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary for effective teaching. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2006), high-quality teacher education programs integrate theory and practice, enabling pre-service teachers to develop critical thinking, reflective practice, and instructional competence. These programs emphasize the importance of field experiences, allowing pre-service teachers to apply their knowledge in real classroom settings and better understand learners' diverse needs. Furthermore, well-prepared pre-service teachers are more likely to demonstrate confidence and adaptability in handling various teaching challenges. This highlights the importance of comprehensive and well-structured teacher education programs in developing competent and responsive educators.

➤ *Inclusive Education*

Inclusive education is a philosophy and practice that ensures all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or needs, have equal access to quality education within mainstream classrooms. It promotes participation, equity, and respect for diversity in the learning environment. According to Mel Ainscow, Tony Booth, and Alan Dyson (2006), inclusive education involves restructuring school cultures, policies, and practices to accommodate the diverse needs of all students. This approach shifts the focus from learners' limitations to the responsibility of schools to adapt and provide appropriate support systems. Inclusive education not only benefits learners with special needs but also enhances social interaction, empathy, and collaboration among all students. Thus, it is recognized as a key strategy in achieving equitable and quality education for all.

➤ *Teachers' Knowledge on Inclusive Education*

Teachers' knowledge of inclusive education plays a crucial role in shaping pre-service teachers' readiness to implement inclusive practices effectively. Inclusive education is widely understood as an approach that ensures all learners, regardless of their abilities or differences, are accommodated within general education classrooms and provided equal opportunities to learn. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (2017) emphasizes that inclusive education involves addressing the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation and reducing exclusion. This highlights the importance of teachers having a clear and accurate understanding of inclusive principles, policies, and practices.

Several studies indicate that teachers' knowledge significantly influences their effectiveness in inclusive settings. According to Mel Ainscow (2006), a strong conceptual understanding of inclusion enables teachers to design and implement strategies that support diverse learners. Similarly, a study by Abdulrahman Alnahdi (2022) found that teachers' preparedness for inclusive classrooms is closely linked to their level of knowledge and familiarity with inclusive processes. However, literature also reveals that many pre-service teachers possess only limited or moderate knowledge of inclusive education. Sharma and Sokal (2016) reported that insufficient awareness of inclusive frameworks and policies can affect teachers' ability to fully understand and apply inclusive practices.

Sharma and Sokal (2016) emphasized that teacher education programs sometimes lack opportunities for real classroom application of inclusive concepts. This gap between theory and practice may hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education. Furthermore, Chris Forlin (2010) found that enhancing teachers' knowledge through targeted training and coursework can improve both their competence and attitudes toward inclusion. Therefore, strengthening the conceptual knowledge of pre-service teachers is essential to ensure their readiness to support diverse learners in early childhood education.

➤ *Pedagogical Practices in Inclusive Early Childhood Classrooms*

Once teachers hold the requisite knowledge and attitudes, the next dimension is how they translate this into pedagogy. Pedagogical practices in inclusive settings often involve differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), peer-assisted learning, co-teaching models, and culturally responsive teaching. A recent international study on ECE teachers working in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts found that teachers felt prepared in subject content knowledge and in building partnerships with families but reported barriers such as inadequate resources, time constraints, and limited professional development that inhibited inclusive practice (Garrido & Niez, 2025). Other research in the Philippines supports this. For instance, Rosal-Oliverio et al. (2025) found that while teachers attempt inclusive pedagogy, such as individualized approaches and adaptive technologies, gaps remain in training, resources, and systematic implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This highlights the need for bridging teacher readiness with actual classroom inclusive practices.

➤ *Impact of Teacher Preparation Programs*

Teacher preparation programs have a significant impact on pre-service teachers' readiness and understanding of inclusive education in early childhood. These programs often combine theoretical coursework on diversity, equity, and special education with practical field experiences, which are essential for developing competency and confidence in inclusive teaching (Smith &

Brown, 2024). Research shows that when pre-service teachers engage in inclusive pedagogy courses and guided practicum placements, their attitudes toward students with disabilities become more positive, and their self-efficacy in managing diverse classrooms improves (Johnson & Lee, 2023). Such programs help teachers learn to implement differentiated instruction and universal design for learning, allowing them to address the varied needs of young children (Davis, Turner, & Martinez, 2025). Consequently, teacher preparation that emphasizes hands-on training and reflective practices builds essential skills for early childhood inclusion (Garcia & Patel, 2025).

Studies highlight that the quality and structure of teacher preparation directly influence the effectiveness of inclusive education practices in early childhood settings. Longitudinal evidence suggests that when mentorship and ongoing professional development are part of the training, pre-service teachers demonstrate sustained improvements in their beliefs and instructional strategies toward inclusion (Garcia & Patel, 2025). Conversely, inadequate preparation or gaps in training can lead to reluctance or lack of confidence in including children with special needs, underscoring the importance of comprehensive and continuous development (Nguyen & Robinson, 2024). Inclusion-focused curricula that integrate field experiences with reflective discussions promote empathy and practical competence among early childhood educators (Smith & Brown, 2024). This combination of knowledge and practice equips teachers to navigate challenges and advocate effectively for all learners.

Demographics and contextual factors shape how teacher preparation programs affect pre-service teachers. Female teachers and those with more experience generally show stronger support for inclusive education, which may reflect differences in prior exposure and cultural attitudes toward diversity (Johnson & Lee, 2023). Teacher preparation programs that adapt to local contexts, such as urban or rural settings, and tailor training to specific community needs, help reduce inequities and improve readiness across diverse populations (Davis et al., 2025). By fostering positive attitudes and practical skills, well-designed programs advance social justice by promoting equity and inclusiveness from the earliest stages of education (Nguyen & Robinson, 2024). Ultimately, the impact of teacher preparation is foundational to ensure that early childhood educators are equipped to support all children in inclusive classrooms.

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978) emphasizes that learning is a social process, where knowledge is constructed through interaction with others and the environment, particularly within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory is highly relevant to the study on the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of ECE pre-service teachers toward inclusive education, as it highlights how teachers develop their understanding and skills through collaboration, mentorship, and guided experiences. Pre-service teachers acquire knowledge about inclusive education by observing mentors, engaging with peers, and participating in practical classroom activities, which also shape their attitudes toward learners with diverse needs.

Furthermore, pedagogical practices, such as differentiated instruction, individualized support, and inclusive classroom management, are learned and refined through social interaction and feedback, enabling teachers to apply effective strategies in diverse learning environments. The theory also explains how challenges, such as limited resources, time constraints, and adapting lessons for learners with disabilities or varying learning styles, can be addressed through support from mentors, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective practices. By emphasizing the social and contextual nature of learning, Vygotsky's framework underscores the importance of experiential learning, peer interaction, and continuous guidance in preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education.

Therefore, applying this theory to the study provides a strong foundation for understanding how knowledge, attitudes, and pedagogical practices are developed and how these factors collectively influence the effective implementation of inclusive education in early childhood settings.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

This research encompassed a section on research design, research locale, research respondents, research instrument, and Data gathering procedure.

➤ *Research Design*

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the knowledge, attitude and pedagogies of Early Childhood Education (ECE) pre-service teachers regarding inclusive education at Central Mindanao University. This design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' motivational beliefs, and perceived preparedness for teaching in inclusive classrooms. By focusing on the participants' lived experiences, the study aims to capture their genuine perspectives and provide a clear, detailed description of their readiness to teach in inclusive settings. Recent research supports the use of qualitative descriptive designs in inclusive education contexts, demonstrating that such approaches enable researchers to richly describe teachers' perceptions and collaborative experiences without imposing heavy theoretical interpretation (Hirsh et al., 2025).

This study integrates phenomenological practices to better understand the lived experiences of Early Childhood Education pre-service teachers regarding inclusive education. By focusing on participants' firsthand accounts, reflections, and meanings drawn from their coursework, field experiences, and exposure to inclusive classrooms, the study captures how they personally experience, interpret, and make sense of inclusive education. This phenomenological orientation supports the qualitative descriptive design by grounding the findings in the authentic voices of the participants and allowing deeper insight into their beliefs, attitudes, and challenges in preparing for inclusive teaching.

This design is appropriate for the present study because it seeks to describe and interpret how motivational beliefs shape the preparedness and attitudes of pre-service teachers toward inclusive education. Through this approach, the researchers will be able to present findings that reflect the authentic voices of the participants and align with the practical, descriptive aims of the study.

➤ *Research Setting*

The study was conducted at Central Mindanao University (CMU), located in Musuan, Maramag, Bukidnon. The College of Education, particularly the Program of Early Childhood Education, offers a program that prepares early childhood education pre-service teachers to handle diverse learners through both theoretical coursework and practical field experiences. The university served as an ideal setting for this study because of its commitment to inclusive education, teacher preparation programs, and exposure to learners with diverse needs.

Central Mindanao University has been recognized for promoting inclusive and equitable quality education, consistent with the goals of the Philippine Department of Education and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes inclusive learning environments for all learners (UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, recent studies highlight the importance of higher education institutions in Mindanao in fostering inclusivity and multicultural understanding among pre-service teachers (Alamon, 2024). Hence, Central Mindanao University provides a relevant and rich academic context for exploring the motivational beliefs and preparedness of Early Childhood Education pre-service teachers toward inclusive education.

➤ *Sampling Design*

The study used a purposive sampling technique to select participants who have finished or are currently taking at least one inclusive education-related subject. This method allowed the researchers to deliberately choose participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding inclusive education, ensuring that their experiences and perspectives are meaningful to the study. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to focus on Early Childhood Education pre-service teachers who have the foundational knowledge and exposure necessary to discuss their motivational beliefs, pedagogies, and perceived preparedness for teaching in inclusive classrooms.

By selecting participants based on these criteria, the study ensured that the data collected was both relevant and insightful. This sampling method supported the objectives of the study by providing a purposeful selection of participants who could offer detailed accounts of the challenges and facilitators related to inclusive education. Through this approach, the researchers were able to gather data that reflects authentic experiences and contributes to a deeper understanding of pre-service teachers' readiness to teach in inclusive settings.

➤ *Participants of the Study*

The participants of this study were the Early Childhood Education (ECE) pre-service teachers who are currently enrolled at Central Mindanao University. Participants were those who had completed at least one inclusive education-related course or field experience. These participants were chosen because they are in the process of developing professional competencies that are essential for teaching in inclusive settings. Their experiences and perspectives provided valuable insights into how motivational beliefs influence preparedness for inclusive education.

The inclusion criteria focus on students who can clearly articulate their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions regarding inclusive education. Approximately 10 participants were selected to ensure adequate representation and meaningful data, with five (5) students coming from the second-year level and five (5) from the third-year level. This number was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, allowing the researchers to gather in-depth information while maintaining the quality and manageability of the data collected.

➤ *Research Instrument*

The primary instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the participants' knowledge, and pedagogies of inclusive education, as well as their motivational beliefs and perceived preparedness for teaching in inclusive classrooms. The instrument was validated by experts in education and qualitative research to ensure its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. The researchers also adapted it from the "Survey of Educator Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education" instrument developed by Harkins and Fletcher (2015). These questions allowed participants to share their personal insights and reflections freely, providing rich qualitative data that will contribute to a deeper understanding of their experiences and motivational beliefs related to inclusive education.

➤ *Data Gathering Procedure and Ethical Consideration*

• *Research Protocol*

This study strictly adhered to ethical and institutional protocols to safeguard the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants and to maintain the integrity and credibility of the research process. Prior to the conduct of the study, the researchers coordinated closely with the College of Education and the Program of Early Childhood Education at Central Mindanao University to obtain the necessary approvals and permissions. All research activities complied with the university's ethical standards and guidelines for research involving human participants. The researchers ensured that all procedures were conducted responsibly, respectfully, and professionally throughout the duration of the study. To strengthen the trustworthiness and dependability of the research, the researchers carefully documented all procedures, schedules, and communications related to the study. Proper coordination and adherence to institutional requirements helped ensure that the study was conducted systematically and transparently. Furthermore, the researchers remained objective and avoided personal biases during the implementation of the study to uphold confirmability and maintain the authenticity of the research findings.

• *Informed Consent*

Before the data gathering process began, informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure that participation in the study was fully voluntary and ethically sound. The researchers provided a formal consent form that clearly explained the purpose and objectives of the study, the nature of participation, the expected duration of the interview, and the procedures involved in the research. The consent form also emphasized the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or negative consequences. In addition, the researchers assured the participants that all information gathered would remain confidential and that their identities would be protected through anonymity and the use of pseudonyms or codes. Participants were given adequate time to carefully read, understand, and ask questions regarding the consent form before voluntarily signing it. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, the researchers established rapport and open communication with the participants to encourage honest and authentic responses. The researchers also ensured that participants fully understood their role in the study, which contributed to the reliability and authenticity of the gathered data.

• *Data Gathering Procedure*

Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews guided by a carefully developed interview protocol prepared by the researchers. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed and meaningful responses related to the participants' knowledge, beliefs, pedagogical strategies, and preparation regarding inclusive education in early childhood education. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the collected information. Depending on the participants' availability and preference, interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet and comfortable environment to promote openness and minimize distractions during the conversation. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of the participants' responses. To strengthen the credibility of the study, participants were given the opportunity to review and validate their transcripts through member checking, allowing them to clarify or confirm the accuracy of their statements. The researchers also maintained detailed field notes and organized records throughout the data collection and analysis process to support dependability and confirmability. All collected data were systematically organized, securely stored, and accessed only by the research team for academic and research purposes. Rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences and responses were also presented to enhance the transferability of the findings to similar educational contexts and settings.

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study, focusing on the knowledge, attitudes, pedagogical practices, and challenges of Early Childhood Education pre-service teachers toward inclusive education. It begins with the profile of the participants, followed by the presentation and analysis of data across key variables. A thematic analysis is also included to identify emerging patterns, and the section concludes by highlighting the research gap based on the findings.

➤ *Interpretation and Analysis*

Table 1 Knowledge of Pre-Service Teachers on Inclusive Education

Theme	Code	Segment Statement
Developing Conceptual Understanding of Inclusion	Equal access, diversity, inclusion, curriculum adaptation	Participant 1: "Inclusive education prioritizes creating an education system where all students, regardless of their learning styles, including children with disabilities or special needs, are included and provided with quality education." Participant 3: "Inclusive education talks about having equal access to education regardless of their background... it ensures modifications when it comes to their curriculum to ensure that it aligns to their developmental needs." Participant 9: "I understand that inclusive education means teaching all kinds of learners in one classroom, including those with special needs, different learning styles, and different backgrounds."
Knowledge Level of Understanding the Policies	Policy awareness, limited knowledge, theoretical policies	Participant 1: "With regard to policies, I only have a limited understanding so far since we are just starting... one policy that really stood out to me is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)." Participant 4: "Moderately familiar. We learned more about like the Magna Carta 7277 which is also known as 'Magna Carta for Disabled Person', which guarantees the right of person with disability to education." Participant 6: "At this point, I realize that my knowledge of specific policies is still limited. However, I am aware of the importance of these policies in guiding teachers."
		Participant 1: "With regard to policies, I only have a limited understanding so far since we are just starting... one policy that really stood out to me is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)." Participant 4: "Moderately familiar. We learned more about like the Magna Carta 7277 which is also known as 'Magna Carta for Disabled Person', which guarantees the right of person with disability to education." Participant 6: "At this point, I realize that my knowledge of specific policies is still limited. However, I am aware of the importance of these policies in guiding teachers."

The table presents the conceptual knowledge of pre-service teachers regarding inclusive education, categorized into two sub-themes: developing conceptual understanding, and general knowledge level of understanding policies. The participants generally define inclusive education as a system providing equal access and quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities. However, they describe their current understanding as "basic" and "small," likened to the "tip of the iceberg."

An analysis of the data reveals that while pre-service teachers have a positive conceptual grasp of inclusion, their knowledge is primarily theoretical. They are able to identify the core philosophy, such as the importance of not segregating students, but they struggle with the specifics of legal framework and policy details. This indicates that while the "what" of inclusive education has been introduced, the technical and legal "how" remains at a surface level.

The findings suggest a gap between philosophical awareness and technical proficiency. The pre-service teachers exhibit a high degree of "conceptual readiness" but a low degree of "policy literacy." This interpretation points to a need for more intensive instruction on the legal mandates governing inclusive education to ensure that future teachers are not only willing but also legally and technically informed to advocate for their students.

The foundational knowledge of pre-service teachers is a critical predictor of successful inclusion, yet research consistently shows that this knowledge is often restricted to general concepts rather than specific instructional or legal strategies.

According to Florian (2014), the challenge in teacher education is moving beyond the "knowledge of" inclusion toward "knowing how" to implement it in diverse settings to ensure that the presence of learners with disabilities leads to meaningful participation.

Table 2 Preparedness of Pre-Service Teachers on Inclusive Education

Theme	Code	Statement
Theory-Practice Gap in Inclusive Pedagogy	Academic Foundation, Theory-Practice Gap, Experiential Learning Needs	Participant 1: "As of now, I mainly have theoretical knowledge, but I have not had enough practical experience in handling such situations. I still need to further develop my skills through more practice." Participant 3: "I guess it's different when we are exposed in experiential learning is quite different like lectures alone... it needs to have more exposure to be able to work with the student." Participant 9: "My college program gave me a good foundation and understanding... However, I think it is not enough on its own. I still need more hands-on experience, such as practice teaching."
Self-Efficacy and Professional Readiness	Low Instructional Confidence, Skill Development, Simulation Requirements	Participant 4: "Partially, yes. But now we are learning more on theoretical and we need to learn more on inclusive education matters and experiences matters." Participant 5: "My college program helped me understand the importance of inclusion... However, I think it would be better if there were more activities like simulations, case studies, and actual classroom practice." Participant 7: "Our program helped me understand the concepts and theories. However, I still believe that I need more hands-on experience so I can apply what I've learned more effectively."
Systemic and Structural Barriers to Implementation	Classroom Management Complexity, Resource Scarcity, High Student-to-Teacher Ratios	Participant 2: "Even during our demonstration teaching... I felt overwhelmed. I am not yet fully trained to properly handle and teach children... handling a large classroom is still challenging." Participant 7: "One of the biggest challenges is handling different needs in one classroom, especially if you are the only teacher and you have a large number of students, like around 50." Participant 10: "Some challenges I expect to encounter include lack of experience, difficulty in managing learners with different needs in one classroom, and limited resources or materials."

The research data indicates that while pre-service teachers possess a comprehensive "theoretical foundation" and a "good understanding" of inclusive education, there is a critical deficit in their "hands-on experience" and "actual classroom practice". Participants consistently reported that "lectures alone" are insufficient for developing the skills necessary to manage "learners with different needs" in a real-world setting. Furthermore, they identified significant "implementation barriers," specifically the logistical strain of "handling around 50" students and the scarcity of "limited resources or materials".

This results in a clear "theory-practice gap," where academic proficiency does not translate into instructional confidence. When pre-service teachers describe feeling "overwhelmed" despite their "good foundation," it suggests that the current curriculum prioritizes cognitive acquisition over the development of pedagogical fluency. The anxiety regarding "large classroom" management indicates that the respondents do not just fear a lack of knowledge, but a lack of the "practice teaching" required to habituate inclusive behaviors under systemic pressure.

The findings suggest that pre-service teachers view inclusive education as a high-stakes professional challenge for which they are only "partially" equipped. The perceived "practical deficit" creates a state of professional insecurity where the educator understands the "importance of inclusion" but lacks the procedural "how" to implement it effectively. This implies that without a shift toward "experiential learning" and "simulations," new teachers may remain in a perpetual state of "low confidence" when faced with the complexities of diverse classrooms.

Bridging the gap between theory and practice is essential for the success of inclusive education initiatives. Research indicates that pedagogical knowledge alone does not translate to effective inclusive teaching without sustained clinical exposure. Forlin (2010) argues that teacher education programs must provide more than just content knowledge, they must offer "practicum-based" experiences that allow pre-service teachers to interact with students with disabilities to reduce anxiety and increase self-efficacy.

Table 3 Pedagogical Practices of Pre-Service Teachers on Inclusive Education

Sub Theme	Code	Segment Statement
Adaptive and Learner-Centered Pedagogical Practices	Differentiation, flexibility, UDL, play-based, supportive environment	Participant 1: "Incorporating game-based or play-based approaches in the classroom is very important. Especially nowadays, when many children have shorter attention spans." Participant 3: "I think we should stop the approach about the one size fits all... it's important because you as a teacher must know different strategic approaches... and also the universal design for learning (UDL)." Participant 6: "Differentiated instruction allows me to adjust lessons based on my students' needs. Using various strategies such as visual materials, play-based activities, and collaborative learning."
Professional Development	Training needs, skill development, seminars, workshops	Participant 1: "I think one of the most important types of training that teachers need is in classroom management... teachers really need to be strategic in managing the classroom." Participant 4: "Workshops, where it can help teachers to learn about assistive technology where it would help to support the learners... Also training in implementing individualized education." Participant 10: "Workshops on classroom management, behavior strategies, and the use of appropriate teaching methods and materials can also help teachers become more effective."
Teacher Disposition	Motivation, willingness, positive mindset, self-efficacy	Participant 3: "My motivational beliefs helped me or it fuels me to do more to learn more or to do better... it will fuel you or give fire to learn better." Participant 6: "My motivation comes from a deep passion for teaching... This belief pushes me to become more patient, understanding, and committed to helping every learner succeed." Participant 9: "My confidence is still developing, but my willingness to learn and help students motivates me... having a positive mindset and patience helps me become more ready."

The table presents the pedagogical strategies favored by pre-service teachers, focusing on adaptive practices, teacher disposition, and needs for professional development. Participants identified differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and play-based/Montessori-inspired methods as key strategies. Furthermore, they emphasized that their internal motivation and patience are primary "dispositional strategies" they use to prepare for inclusive settings.

Analysis of the responses suggests that pre-service teachers are adopting a "learner-centered" mindset. They recognize the importance of flexibility and tailoring lessons to individual needs rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach. However, there is a clear reliance on "future-oriented" strategies, things they *plan* to do or *wish* to learn more about (like assistive technology and behavior management) rather than techniques they have already mastered.

The interpretation of these findings is that pre-service teachers possess a high level of "inclusive intentionality." They are psychologically aligned with modern inclusive pedagogies, such as UDL and differentiation. However, their strategy set is currently more aspirational than operational. They recognize what needs to be done to facilitate inclusion, but they view their own lack of technical skills (e.g., using assistive tools) as a primary hurdle on actually executing these strategies.

The use of differentiated instruction and UDL is widely recognized as the gold standard for inclusive classrooms. Tomlinson (2014) emphasizes that differentiation is not just a set of tools, but a way of thinking about teaching and learning that advocates for the teacher to adapt to the student's needs rather than forcing the student to adapt to the curriculum. In early childhood settings, these strategies are particularly effective when blended with play-based learning to foster social-emotional and academic growth.

➤ *Results and Discussion*

The overall results reveal that pre-service teachers possess a strong theoretical understanding of inclusive education, defining it as a system of equal access and support for all learners. However, they describe this knowledge as "basic" and "the tip of the iceberg," noting a significant lack of technical familiarity with specific policies like the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons. This indicates a conceptual readiness that is not yet matched by professional or legal mastery.

The teacher education program is perceived as being heavily weighted toward theoretical foundations rather than practical application. Participants expressed that while they understand the "what" of inclusion, they feel "partially prepared" and "overwhelmed" due to a lack of hands-on experience, simulations, and real-classroom exposure. This "theory-practice gap" results in low confidence regarding classroom management and the actual implementation of inclusive practices.

In terms of pedagogy, pre-service teachers advocate for adaptive, learner-centered strategies such as Differentiated Instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and play-based approaches. They emphasize that personal dispositions, including patience, passion, and a positive mindset, are their primary tools for readiness. Nevertheless, they identified structural barriers such as large class sizes and limited resources as major challenges that require more specialized, workshop-based training to overcome.

The study shows that while future educators are philosophically committed to inclusion, they remain technically under-equipped. Their readiness is driven by a willingness to learn and a desire to support diverse needs rather than existing clinical competence. To ensure effective implementation, the results suggest a need for more practicum-based training that moves beyond the classroom lecture and into real-world teaching scenarios.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter presents a comprehensive synthesis of the findings derived from the study, followed by the conclusions drawn from the analysis and the corresponding recommendations. It integrates the key insights gathered from Early Childhood Education (ECE) pre-service teachers regarding their knowledge, preparedness, pedagogical practices, and challenges in implementing inclusive education.

➤ *Summary*

The study explored the knowledge, preparation, and pedagogical strategies of pre-service Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers regarding inclusive education. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers possess a strong foundational understanding of inclusive education and recognize it as a system that promotes equal access to quality learning for all learners regardless of disability, background, or individual differences. However, their understanding remains largely conceptual, as many participants admitted having limited knowledge of important legal mandates and policies such as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons. The study also identified a significant theory-practice gap within the teacher education program, where participants felt that their preparation focused heavily on theoretical discussions rather than authentic classroom exposure and practical experiences. As a result, many participants expressed feelings of being only partially prepared, particularly in managing classroom behavior, adapting instruction, and responding to diverse learner needs in actual inclusive classroom settings. In terms of pedagogical strategies, pre-service teachers demonstrated familiarity with learner-centered approaches such as Differentiated Instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and play-based learning. Nevertheless, these strategies were not yet fully mastered in practice, as participants still struggled with technical aspects such as utilizing assistive technology and implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Overall, the findings suggest that while pre-service teachers possess positive attitudes, empathy, and willingness toward inclusive education, they still require deeper policy literacy, extensive practical training, and stronger technical competencies to effectively implement inclusive practices in early childhood education classrooms.

➤ *Conclusion*

The study concludes that pre-service ECE teachers are generally motivated, compassionate, and conceptually prepared to support inclusive education; however, their readiness remains incomplete due to gaps in legal knowledge, practical exposure, and technical teaching competencies. Although participants demonstrated positive beliefs and learner-centered perspectives toward inclusion, their preparation was largely grounded in theory rather than authentic classroom practice, resulting in uncertainty and anxiety when faced with real-world inclusive teaching situations. Furthermore, while they showed awareness of inclusive pedagogical approaches such as UDL and differentiated instruction, many lacked the operational skills necessary to confidently implement these strategies in diverse learning environments. The findings emphasize that effective inclusive education requires more than positive attitudes and theoretical understanding; it also demands strong professional preparation, policy awareness, hands-on experiences, mentorship, and specialized instructional skills. Therefore, teacher education programs play a critical role in ensuring that future educators are not only emotionally and morally prepared for inclusion but are also technically, legally, and professionally equipped to meet the complex needs of diverse learners in early childhood education settings.

➤ *Recommendations*

- **Enhance Policy Literacy:** Integrate in-depth discussions and analysis of key laws such as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA 7277) into the curriculum to strengthen pre-service teachers' legal awareness and professional responsibility.
- **Use Case-Based Learning:** Incorporate case studies and problem-solving activities that allow students to apply inclusive education policies in real classroom scenarios, strengthening the link between theory and practice.
- **Increase Field Exposure:** Provide more frequent and sustained classroom immersion, practicum, and internship opportunities throughout the teacher education program to develop real-world teaching competence.
- **Implement Simulation Training:** Use simulation-based activities where pre-service teachers can practice handling diverse learners, classroom management, and instructional adaptation in a safe learning environment.
- **Strengthen School Partnerships:** Establish strong collaborations with inclusive schools to provide meaningful mentorship, observation opportunities, and guided teaching experiences with expert educators.
- **Conduct Skills-Based Workshops:** Offer hands-on training on assistive technologies, differentiated instruction, and the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- **Standardize UDL Integration:** Make Universal Design for Learning (UDL) a core framework in lesson planning to ensure inclusive instructional design across all subjects.
- **Support Teacher Well-Being:** Provide programs that promote stress management, emotional resilience, and mental health support to prepare pre-service teachers for the demands of inclusive education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. PERMISSION LETTER FOR THE DEAN

April 07, 2026

Julie Ann A. Orobia PhD.
College Dean
Central Mindanao University
University Town, Musuan, Dologon, Maramag, Bukidnon

Dear Dr. Orobia,
Greetings of peace!

We, the third-year students of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education program from Central Mindanao University under the College of Education, respectfully request permission to conduct our research study within the College of Education.

Our study is entitled **“Pre-Service Teachers’ Understanding of Inclusive Education in Early Childhood.”** This research is a requirement for our subject ECED 95.2 – Research in Early Childhood 2.

As part of our data gathering procedure, we intend to interview **ten (10) early childhood pre-service teachers**, specifically five (5) second-year students and five (5) third-year students. The purpose of this study is to explore pre-service teachers’ understanding of inclusive education in early childhood and how their lived experiences in teaching young learners with special needs contribute to fostering inclusivity in early childhood classrooms. The data collection for this study will be conducted on **April 13–17, 2026.**

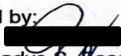
Rest assured that all information gathered will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and will be used strictly for academic purposes only. We will also ensure that the interview schedule will not interfere with the teachers’ duties and responsibilities.

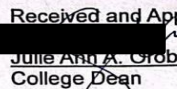
In this regard, we sincerely hope for your approval to conduct the said study in your college.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

ALBEOS, SEBASTIAN JEAN B.
LIBUNAO, JEMARICH H.
MARATAS, MARCEL JINO V.
PERALTA, PRINCES RYAN O.
SIGNE, ANGEL FAITH D.

Noted by: 
Dr. Gladys S. Escarlos
Research Instructor
ECED 95.2 – Research in early Childhood 2

Received and Approved by: 
Julie Ann A. Orobia PhD.
College Dean

Appendix B. PERMISSION LETTER FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

Republic of the Philippines
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Central Mindanao University
University town, Musuan, Bukidnon

Department of Professional Education
Early Childhood Education Program

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

Research Working Title	Pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of Inclusive Education in Early Childhood
Researchers Me	Albeos, Spurcy Jean B. Libunao, Jemiahrich H. Maratas, Marcel Jino V. Peñaflorida, Princes Ryan O. Signe, Angel Faith D.
Adviser	Dr. Gladys S. Escarlos
Contact Information	0935-390-3189, s.penaflorida.princesryan@cmu.edu.ph

Name of the Participant: _____

I have read and understand the nature, purpose and mode of my role in the above-mentioned study of the above-mentioned researchers, as a participant in this study "Pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of Inclusive Education in Early Childhood". That my acquisition, perspective and insight shall be interviewed after my participation.

Furthermore, I agree to the following terms:

- a. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can refuse any time to answer the questions.
- b. I will answer the questions honestly and appropriately.
- c. The researchers will use technological audio record.
- d. All information I provide in the interview will be treated with confidentiality, and privately.
- e. I have the right to ask questions regarding the study.
- f. The signed consent forms the researchers' observation will be retained by the researchers who can access the details.
- g. The transcript information from the researchers' observation will be retained for a month or until the study has been evaluated.
- h. Under freedom of information of legalization, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as secured by the researchers.
- i. The researchers will remove all the traces of my identity in the manuscript and publishable article.

Signature: _____

Appendix C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: Personal Details

Full Name: _____ Year Level: _____
Email Address: _____ School: _____
Phone Number: _____

Section 2: Knowledge of Pre-Service Teachers Toward Inclusive Education

1. What knowledge do you have about inclusive education?
2. How do you describe their understanding of inclusive education?
3. How familiar are you with the policies related to inclusive education?

Section 3: Preparedness of Pre-Service Teachers on Inclusive Education

4. Do you feel adequately trained to work with special needs students?
5. How do your motivational beliefs (such as confidence, self-efficacy, or interest) influence your readiness to teach inclusively?
6. Do you think that your college level educational program prepared you to implement inclusion in the general education classroom?
7. What specific kinds of training do you think might be helpful to teachers and paraprofessionals to better prepare them to implement inclusion in the general education classroom?

Section 4: Pedagogical Practices of Pre-Service Teachers Toward Inclusive Education

8. What would you consider some pedagogical practices that would promote inclusive practices in your school?

Appendix D. DOCUMENTATION



