

Inclusive strategies and challenges in teaching MAPEH to learners with Special Educational needs

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Abstract: Inclusive education is an approach aimed at ensuring that all students have equal opportunities and access to high-quality education. This study utilized the basic qualitative research design as it described the inclusive strategies, challenges and coping mechanisms used by the teachers in teaching MAPEH to learners with special educational needs. The researcher used an in-depth interview to gather the data needed. This study explored how 15 MAPEH teachers under the umbrella of Schools Division of Roxas City, utilize inclusive strategies inside the classroom, the challenges they have experienced and the coping mechanisms they used to address those challenges. The researcher found that teachers in the Roxas City Division actively employed inclusive strategies like differentiated instruction, individualized teaching plans, active engagement through collaborative learning, and multisensory experiences. They also modified physical education activities for diverse abilities and integrate practical, real-world learning. However, these teachers faced significant challenges, including a lack of specialized equipment and accessible facilities, inadequate funding for professional development, and difficulties in engaging and motivating students with diverse needs. Despite these hurdles, teachers demonstrated resourcefulness, implement differentiated instruction strategically, and foster support networks to creatively address diverse student needs and promote inclusive education. By understanding these factors, the researcher aimed to improve MAPEH education by the proposed seminar-workshop, focusing on inclusive teaching strategies.

Keywords: Inclusive Strategies, Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Learners with Special Educational Needs, MAPEH Teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an educational strategy that attempts to provide equal opportunity and access to excellent education for all students, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, as well as students from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The purpose of inclusive education is to provide a welcoming and encouraging learning atmosphere in which every student feels valued, respected, and included. Inclusive education ensures all students, regardless of their abilities, have the opportunity to learn alongside their peers in general education classrooms. This approach requires educators to adapt their instruction and create supportive learning environments to meet the diverse needs of their students (Walker, 2020).

Over the past three decades, inclusive education has become a significant focus within global educational discussions and reform initiatives (Forlin, 2016). Establishing inclusive schools plays a vital role in ensuring that young individuals with disabilities are able to engage with, contribute to, and benefit from their communities, ultimately supporting them in leading meaningful lives (Hehir et al., 2016). Schools are also essential environments for fostering

inclusive communities that benefit all members of society. However, as highlighted by the ongoing Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and echoed in South Australian findings (Walker, 2017), many students with disabilities—and their families—continue to encounter adverse educational experiences. Despite notable advancements, existing educational systems and practices frequently contradict inclusive ideals (Slee, 2014), and a gap often persists between inclusive education theories and their real-world application in schools (Spandagou, 2014). Moreover, both new and experienced teachers regularly report lacking adequate preparation to effectively support students with disabilities and additional learning needs (Jarvis, 2019).

In order to implement inclusive education, educators, administrators, lawmakers, and the entire school community must commit and collaborate. It entails providing instructors with adequate training and resources, modifying teaching procedures and materials to accommodate a variety of needs, and developing inclusive policies and practices at the school and system levels (Abawi, 2018).

Over the past three decades, inclusive education has been a central theme in international discussions and educational reform efforts (Berlach & Chambers, 2016). Creating inclusive school environments is essential for enabling young individuals with disabilities to engage in, contribute to, and benefit from their communities, ultimately supporting them in leading meaningful and fulfilling lives (Hehir et al., 2016). Furthermore, schools play a foundational role in building inclusive societies that support the wellbeing of all citizens. In light of this, the present study aims to explore teachers' understanding of and preparedness for implementing inclusive education.

Creating a genuinely inclusive culture within schools is essential for achieving lasting and effective inclusion (McMaster, 2014). A school's culture is shaped by the collective beliefs, values, and attitudes shared among its community members (Booth, 2016). Shifting toward authentic inclusivity involves a deliberate focus on fostering positive attitudes and ensuring broad support for inclusive principles—not only among staff but also among students and the wider school community (Forlin & Chambers, 2014).

This study was geared towards determining the inclusive strategies of the teachers, the challenges they have experienced and the coping mechanisms they adapt to address these challenges. MAPEH subjects offer unique opportunities for engagement and can be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities. However, adapting these subjects for inclusive classrooms may present specific challenges for teachers. By examining these aspects, the study will provide valuable insights into the needs and experiences of teachers in the context of inclusive education. The findings can inform the development of targeted professional development programs to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively include all students in their classes.

The researcher, as an educator, firmly advocates for an inclusive and holistic education to all the learners. She also believed that every child is unique and all learners should be treated equally and with utmost care. Thus, this research study was conceptualized.

This research is significant because it contributes to a growing body of knowledge on teacher inclusive strategies. Understanding the specific needs of MAPEH teachers will allow for targeted support and ultimately lead to more inclusive learning experiences for all students.

Problem statement

This study sought to investigate the implementation of inclusive education in MAPEH classrooms by addressing the following research questions:

1. What inclusive teaching strategies are employed by MAPEH teachers to cater the diverse learning needs of students with special needs?
2. What challenges do MAPEH teachers experience in implementing inclusive education?
3. What coping mechanisms do MAPEH teachers utilize to overcome the challenges they encounter in implementing inclusive education?

Theoretical framework

The inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools is increasingly promoted worldwide in the last few decades. An important philosophy behind inclusive education is that the chances for an optimal social participation should be maximized in a regular-education setting (see article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability, United Nations, 2006). Social participation is an important condition for students' development, because students develop social skills and gather knowledge while interacting with peers (Pepler and Bierman, 2018).

In the context of inclusive education, social participation can be seen as an umbrella term including four themes: the acceptance of students with disabilities by their classmates (e.g., social preference, or rejection), the presence of positive social contact/interaction between students with disabilities and their classmates (e.g., by playing together), social relationships/friendships between students with and without disabilities, and the students' perception they are accepted by their classmates (e.g., social self-perception) (Koster et al., 2009). This operationalization shows that social participation is mainly about actual, overt behavior, in this case, of peers ensuring participation of the student with disabilities. Without the facilitation of typically developing peers, students with disabilities are unable to participate. Evidently, students with disabilities should also seize opportunities to participate.

Even though the enrolment of students with disabilities in regular classrooms increases the opportunities for contact with typically developing peers, social participation does not always occur spontaneously for students with disabilities (Guralnick et al., 2007; Pijl et al., 2008). Hence, this study will seek to determine the level of knowledge and readiness of teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education in the Schools Division of Roxas City.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study aimed to identify the inclusive strategies employed by the MAPEH teachers in teaching learners with special educational needs including the challenges they have experienced as well as their coping mechanisms to address such challenges. The study was conducted in the Schools Division of Roxas City for School Year 2024 – 2025.

Fifteen (15) MAPEH Teachers in the Schools Division of Roxas City were the respondents of this study who were chosen through purposive sampling.

This study employed the basic qualitative study of research. A researcher-made interview guide was prepared, validated by experts and used during the conduct of the interview among participants to gather data for this study. The data obtained from the interview was transcribed and processed through inductive coding and Braun & Clarke thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Inclusive strategies employed by the MAPEH teachers

The inclusive strategies employed by the MAPEH teachers are the following: the use of differentiated instructions, developing personalized educational plans, promoting active engagement and interaction, prioritizing collaborative learning opportunities, and modifying activities and equipment.

In the Department of Education (DepED), Roxas City Division, teachers specializing in Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH) are implementing inclusive teaching strategies that cater to the diverse and varied needs of their students. Recognizing that each learner has unique strengths, challenges, and interests, these educators are committed to creating an environment that promotes equitable access to learning opportunities for all.

A significant component of their instructional approach is the incorporation of advanced technology. This includes utilizing video platforms that allow students to both create and share their work, offering them a medium for self-expression and creativity. Editing tools enable students to refine their projects, enhancing their skills in critical thinking and problem-solving while also providing them with the tools to produce high-quality work.

This technological integration not only fosters inclusivity but also motivates students by making learning more interactive and relevant. It encourages collaboration among peers, as students can share their insights and experiences through digital platforms. Overall, the emphasis on innovative teaching practices and the thoughtful use of technology in MAPEH subject represents a significant step toward creating an inclusive educational landscape that celebrates diversity and empowers all learners to excel.

The educational approach utilized by the MAPEH teachers in contemporary classrooms reflects a deep understanding of the diverse learning needs of students. To effectively accommodate various learning styles and promote holistic development, teachers employ a variety of teaching methods, such as hands-on activities, student-centered practices, and collaborative projects. These strategies are designed to engage all students actively and cater to the unique strengths and challenges they may face.

Research underscores the importance of these differentiated teaching strategies. For instance, Tomlinson (2015) highlights that differentiated instruction not only addresses diverse learning preferences but also fosters a more inclusive classroom environment. By incorporating a mix of instructional techniques, teachers are better positioned to reach students across the spectrum of abilities and interests.

A significant component of this pedagogical framework includes performance-based tasks, such as children's theatre and other artistic presentations. These activities not only promote creativity but also encourage students to express their thoughts and emotions in a supportive setting. According to a study by Eisner (2015), arts education plays a crucial role in enhancing students' social skills and emotional intelligence. Engaging in theatre and performance arts enables students to build confidence, collaborate effectively with peers, and develop essential communication skills.

The necessity of adapting curricula and instructional strategies to support students with disabilities and those with special interests is paramount. Research by Florian and Linklater (2015) demonstrates that inclusive education practices lead to better outcomes for all students, not just those with additional needs. By modifying the curriculum and fostering a learning environment that supports active participation, educators can create valuable opportunities for

self-expression and personal growth. This approach not only empowers students with disabilities but also enriches the classroom dynamic, as diverse perspectives and abilities contribute to a more vibrant learning community.

Overall, the integration of varied teaching methodologies, including collaborative and performance-based activities, is essential in creating an adaptive and inclusive learning environment. By drawing on research and best practices, educators can ensure that all students, regardless of their individual challenges or strengths, have the opportunity to thrive and develop their unique talents.

Challenges experienced by the MAPEH teachers in implementing inclusive education

The challenges experienced by the MAPEH teachers in implementing inclusive education are the following: insufficient specialized equipment, absence of accessible facilities, insufficient teacher training, rigid curriculum, and difficulties in engaging and motivating students with learners with special educational needs.

Implementing inclusive education produced significant challenges for MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) teachers in the Roxas City Division of the Department of Education, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in teaching a diverse student population. Specifically, the multifaceted nature of MAPEH encapsulates various disciplines, each with its own set of skills, knowledge bases, and pedagogical approaches. This diversity makes it imperative for educators to adapt their teaching strategies to cater to students with diverse abilities and needs.

One of the primary challenges is the lack of specialized training for teachers. According to Cummings and Timmons (2015), many educators are not adequately prepared to modify activities or assessments to accommodate students with disabilities, which can include wide-ranging conditions such as physical challenges, sensory processing disorders, and cognitive differences. This gap in professional development restricts the ability of MAPEH teachers to implement inclusive practices effectively. Furthermore, a study by Lupart and Webber (2015) reinforces this notion, highlighting that insufficient training leads to a reliance on traditional teaching methods, which often exclude students with diverse needs.

In addition to the training deficit, the availability of resources plays a vital role in fostering an inclusive environment. MAPEH educators often face challenges in accessing adapted equipment and materials necessary for inclusive participation. According to a survey conducted by Noyes et al. (2016), many teachers lack the tools necessary to modify lessons effectively, which can limit the engagement of students with disabilities in MAPEH activities. Moreover, the performance-driven nature of many MAPEH activities complicates the assessment of students with disabilities. Educators often struggle to create fair evaluation methods that reflect the unique progress and achievements of these students, as pointed out by O'Brien and Synott (2018).

Time constraints and large class sizes can further hinder the ability of MAPEH teachers to provide personalized attention to students. Research by Blatchford et al. (2016) suggests that high student-to-teacher ratios limit the opportunities for teachers to identify and respond to individual student needs, particularly in physically active or expressive subjects like MAPEH, where personal guidance is crucial. As a result, many students may not receive the support they require to thrive in these subjects.

Additionally, biases and misconceptions regarding the capabilities of students with disabilities can impact the inclusivity of MAPEH practices. Educators may unconsciously lower

their expectations or may be hesitant to fully engage these students, inadvertently creating boundaries to their participation. According to the work of Salend (2016), educators must be aware of their attitudes and assumptions about disability and how these can influence their teaching practices and classroom dynamics.

Collaboration with other professionals also introduces a layer of complexity to inclusive education in MAPEH. Effective inclusion often requires teamwork between MAPEH teachers, special education educators, and related therapists. A study by Roberts et al. (2017) emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration for developing individualized education plans and instructional strategies that meet the needs of students with disabilities. However, time constraints and differing educational priorities can create barriers to this necessary collaboration.

Coping strategies employed by the MAPEH teachers in addressing the challenges in implementing inclusive education

The coping strategies employed by the MAPEH teachers in addressing the challenges in implementing inclusive education are the following: resourcefulness, implementing differentiated instructions strategically, and foster support networks.

The coping strategies employed by MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) teachers are not only diverse but crucial for effectively navigating the challenges of inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning experiences for all students, accommodating those with varying needs and abilities. However, this approach can introduce unique obstacles for educators, particularly in subjects like MAPEH, which emphasize hands-on learning and performance-based assessments.

In recent years, various studies have explored effective coping strategies for teachers in inclusive settings. For instance, a study by DelliCarpini (2015) highlights the importance of differentiated instruction for meeting the diverse needs of students. This involves adapting curriculum content, pedagogical techniques, and assessment methods to cater to different learning styles and capabilities. MAPEH teachers, in particular, can implement differentiated activities that allow students to engage at their own levels, whether through modified physical activities in PE, varied artistic projects in Arts, or different approaches to musical performance.

Collaboration is another significant strategy that MAPEH educators utilize. According to a study by Friend and Cook (2017), collaboration among teachers, special education professionals, and parents is essential for creating a supportive educational environment. This collaborative model fosters a shared resource network where MAPEH teachers can exchange ideas and solutions, ultimately enhancing the learning experience for students with diverse needs.

Ongoing professional development is also a critical coping mechanism. Research by Garriott et al. (2017) underscores the necessity for teachers to continually engage in workshops and training focused on inclusive teaching strategies. Such professional development equips MAPEH instructors with the skills to understand special needs and effectively integrate assistive technologies into their lesson plans. For instance, using adaptive equipment in physical education or incorporating technology in music education can significantly enhance accessibility and engagement.

Resourcefulness and creativity are vital attributes for MAPEH teachers, especially when resources are limited. In a study by Horne and Timmons (2016), it was noted that teachers often need to adapt existing materials or create new, imaginative activities to suit their students' needs. MAPEH educators, faced with the challenge of limited funding or resources, are known for their

ability to invent engaging activities that foster learning and creativity, enriching the educational experience for all students.

Additionally, maintaining a positive mindset and resilience is crucial for managing the emotional stresses of inclusive teaching. A study by Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2015) indicates that teacher well-being is significantly impacted by their emotional health, which in turn influences student outcomes. MAPEH teachers benefit from self-care practices and stress management techniques, which help them navigate the emotional demands of teaching in inclusive environments. Techniques such as mindfulness and peer support groups can contribute to maintaining their mental health.

Effective classroom management is indispensable for creating a safe and conducive learning atmosphere. According to Duran and Harker (2018), establishing clear expectations and employing proactive behavior management strategies help in maintaining discipline and inclusivity within the classroom. MAPEH instructors need to implement structured routines and guidelines that support all students, including those with behavioral challenges.

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) also play a key role in the instructional strategies of MAPEH teachers. Research by Mastropieri and Scruggs (2017) emphasizes that understanding and implementing IEPs allows educators to tailor their teaching effectively to meet individual student needs, fostering an environment where every student can thrive. MAPEH teachers can create specific activity modifications based on IEP goals, leading to better engagement and achievement among students with diverse abilities.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn based on the summary of findings of the results in the study:

Successful inclusive education involves implementing a variety of strategies to cater to the diverse needs of all students. Individualized instruction encourages engagement with the curriculum, while promoting active participation creates a vibrant learning environment. By addressing different senses and learning styles, teachers can enhance understanding and retention. Involving all students in physical education fosters enjoyment and skill development, regardless of ability.

To effectively address the challenges of limited resources and student engagement, it's crucial to provide MAPEH teachers with adequate resources, specialized training, and ongoing support. Creating inclusive MAPEH classrooms benefits all students, enhances their learning experience, and fosters a better understanding of individual differences, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive society.

MAPEH teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience as they tackle the challenges of inclusive education by implementing several key coping strategies. Their ingenuity and ability to think on their feet enable them to address the diverse needs of their students, even in situations with limited resources, resulting in creative classroom solutions. By employing differentiated instruction and targeted strategies, they can deliver personalized and effective lessons that accommodate the various learning styles and abilities of each student. Furthermore, emphasizing the importance of creating support networks and practical strategies highlights the need for collaboration and realistic approaches in effectively including students with differing needs.

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