

IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of Inclusive Physical Education (IPE) in Philippine public schools, focusing on teachers' perceptions, challenges, and perceived effectiveness. Anchored on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, it employed a quantitative descriptive–correlational design. A validated, researcher-developed questionnaire was administered to public school physical education teachers. The survey measured perceived benefits and feasibility of IPE, and the severity of challenges in resource availability, specialized training, class management, and administrative support. Results showed that teachers strongly recognized the benefits of IPE for learners with and without disabilities, especially in promoting participation, social interaction, and equitable learning experiences. Feasibility was rated moderate, indicating uncertainty about schools' readiness to sustain inclusive practices. Challenges were perceived as moderate to high, with inadequate adaptive equipment and facilities and limited professional development emerging as the most severe barriers, followed by difficulties coordinating diverse learners in large classes and inconsistent administrative backing. Perceived effectiveness of IPE implementation was moderate and was positively associated with perceived benefits and feasibility, but negatively associated with challenge severity. The findings suggest that positive teacher attitudes must be matched by concrete supports for IPE to succeed. The study recommends sustained capacity-building for PE teachers, dedicated budgeting and procurement of adaptive resources, stronger leadership and monitoring at the school and division levels, and policy reforms to address class size and support services. Future studies may include classroom observations and learner outcomes to triangulate survey results. These results provide an empirical basis for DepEd and school heads to design context-responsive programs that sustainably expand inclusive participation nationwide.

Keywords: Inclusive Physical Education, Teachers' Perceptions, Implementation Challenges, Feasibility, Theory Of Planned Behavior, Philippine Public Schools

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has become a central direction of global and national schooling, grounded in the principle that all learners—regardless of disability, gender, background, or ability—should participate meaningfully in shared learning spaces. Internationally, inclusive education is closely linked to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2020). In the Philippines, inclusion is not only a global aspiration but also a legal mandate. Republic Act (RA) 7277, or the Magna Carta for Persons with Disability (as amended by RA 9442), affirms the right of persons with disabilities to equal educational opportunities and obliges the State to ensure their integration into mainstream education whenever appropriate (Republic Act No. 7277, 1992; Republic Act No. 9442, 2006). Consistent with this, the Department of Education (DepEd) has institutionalized an Inclusive Education Policy Framework and related guidelines that require schools to identify, support, and accommodate learners with disabilities within general basic education settings (DepEd, 2022).

Physical Education (PE) is a crucial, yet often underexamined, component of inclusive schooling. UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport recognizes participation in quality and inclusive PE as a fundamental right, emphasizing that no learner should be excluded from physical activity due to disability or other forms of difference (UNESCO, 2015/2021). Likewise, the UNESCO Quality Physical Education (QPE) framework stresses that PE must provide equitable opportunities for all students to build physical literacy, social-emotional skills, and lifelong engagement in movement (UNESCO, n.d.). In inclusive settings, PE can uniquely promote peer interaction, confidence, and a sense of belonging, while also contributing to physical health and functional development. However, achieving these outcomes depends greatly on whether PE teachers are prepared to address learner diversity and can access the supports needed for inclusive practice.

Research across contexts suggests that teachers generally endorse the *idea* of inclusive PE, yet their confidence to implement it varies sharply depending on perceived supports and barriers. A recent mixed-methods systematic review found that PE teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are "largely favorable," but become less positive when disabilities are more severe or when teachers feel underprepared (Tarantino et al., 2022). Teachers frequently cite limited training in adapted or inclusive PE, insufficient equipment, large class sizes, and unclear administrative backing as persistent obstacles (Tarantino et al., 2022). Earlier scholarship similarly emphasizes that inclusive PE requires more than goodwill; it calls for intentional curriculum adaptation, collaborative support, and a school culture that treats diversity as a learning asset rather than a complication (Webb & Pope, 1999). These patterns matter for systems like the Philippines, where public schools routinely face shortages in facilities and instructional resources, and where many PE teachers have had minimal pre-service exposure to disability-specific pedagogy.

Understanding teachers' perceptions is especially important because teacher beliefs shape actual classroom decisions. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a useful lens for examining inclusive PE implementation, proposing that behavior is predicted by (a) attitudes toward the behavior, (b) subjective norms or perceived social expectations, and (c) perceived behavioral control reflecting resources and self-efficacy. In inclusive PE, teachers who believe inclusion benefits all learners (positive attitude), feel supported by colleagues and school leaders (subjective norms), and perceive themselves as capable and resourced (behavioral control) are more likely to implement inclusive strategies consistently. TPB has been widely used in inclusion research because it explains how positive intentions can still fail to translate into practice when perceived control—such as training, equipment, or time—is weak (Ajzen, 1991; Tarantino et al., 2022).

Despite policy commitments, Philippine evidence on inclusive PE remains limited and fragmented. Much local research on inclusion focuses broadly on classroom accommodations or special education programs, leaving PE-specific realities underdocumented. However, PE poses distinctive instructional challenges: movement tasks must be adapted in real time, safety risks must be managed for heterogeneous ability levels, and participation is highly visible—meaning exclusion can occur subtly through activity design, peer dynamics, or assessment practices. When inclusive PE is poorly supported, learners with disabilities may experience token participation, reduced skill development, or social isolation. Conversely, when teachers are empowered, inclusive PE can become one of the strongest arenas for actualizing school-wide inclusion by making cooperation, empathy, and differentiated success visible to all students. The gap in PE-focused inclusion data, therefore, constrains DepEd divisions and school leaders' ability to plan training, allocate budgets, and evaluate program outcomes in ways that are responsive to PE teachers' lived conditions.

This study addresses that gap by examining the implementation of Inclusive Physical Education in Philippine public schools through the perspectives of PE teachers. Specifically, it

investigates teachers' perceived benefits and feasibility of inclusive PE, the severity of challenges they encounter regarding resources, specialized training, class management, and administrative support, and their perceived effectiveness of current IPE implementation. It further explores the strategies teachers employ to achieve inclusion in practice and uses empirical findings to develop policy recommendations aligned with national inclusion mandates. Grounded in TPB, this study assumes that teachers' attitudes and perceived feasibility (attitudinal beliefs) and the severity of challenges (behavioral control constraints) are associated with their overall judgments of implementation effectiveness. By mapping these relationships, the research aims to identify leverage points for improving inclusive PE at the classroom, school, and system levels.

Overall, the study contributes to inclusive education scholarship in three ways. First, it provides PE-specific evidence on inclusion within a developing-country public school context. Second, it clarifies which challenges most strongly undermine teachers' sense of effectiveness, offering a priority map for interventions. Third, it produces policy-relevant recommendations for DepEd and school leaders to strengthen inclusive PE through capacity building, resource provision, and institutional support. In doing so, the study supports the broader national goal of ensuring that inclusive education is not only legislated, but fully realized in everyday learning experiences—including in the gymnasium, on the field, and in every space where movement and participation can belong to all.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive–correlational research design to examine how public-school Physical Education teachers perceive and implement Inclusive Physical Education (IPE). A descriptive approach was used to summarize teachers' perceived benefits and feasibility of IPE, the severity of challenges across resources, specialized training, class management, and administrative support, and their perceived effectiveness of IPE implementation, primarily through weighted means and standard deviations. The correlational component determined the strength and direction of relationships between key variables—specifically, whether teachers' perceptions of benefits and feasibility were associated with higher perceived effectiveness, and whether greater challenge severity was linked to lower effectiveness—using appropriate statistical tests such as Pearson product–moment correlation and regression analysis. This design was appropriate because it enabled the study to capture the status of IPE implementation in public schools and to identify meaningful statistical associations among perceptions, barriers, and effectiveness, thereby informing evidence-based policy and program recommendations.

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study were public-school Physical Education (PE) teachers drawn from selected Philippine public schools, as they are the primary implementers of Inclusive Physical Education (IPE) in everyday classroom and activity settings. Using a defined sampling procedure (with sample size computed through a standard formula such as Slovin's and participants selected based on availability within the study locale), the respondents included teachers currently handling PE classes at the basic education level and who had direct experience teaching learners with diverse abilities, including learners with disabilities. This participant group was appropriate because their perceptions, experiences, and instructional practices provide the most immediate and practical evidence about the benefits, feasibility, challenges, and effectiveness of IPE implementation in real public-school contexts, making their responses essential for generating grounded conclusions and policy recommendations.

2.3 Instrumentation

The study used a researcher-developed, structured questionnaire as the primary data-collection instrument to assess the implementation of Inclusive Physical Education (IPE) in Philippine public schools. The instrument was organized into clear sections aligned with the statement of the problem: (a) teachers' perceptions of IPE benefits, (b) perceived feasibility of implementation, (c) severity of challenges across resource availability, specialized training/professional development, class management, and administrative support, (d) perceived effectiveness of current IPE practices, and (e) strategies or best practices used by teachers. Items were rated using a Likert-type scale to quantify levels of agreement or severity, enabling computation of weighted means, standard deviations, and correlational statistics. Prior to full administration, the questionnaire underwent content validation by experts in Physical Education and inclusive teaching, followed by pilot testing to establish clarity and internal consistency, with reliability verified through an acceptable Cronbach's alpha. This instrument was appropriate because it systematically captured both attitudinal and contextual variables needed to describe and statistically relate teachers' perceptions, barriers, and implementation outcomes.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures to address each research question on the implementation of Inclusive Physical Education (IPE). After coding and tabulating questionnaire responses, descriptive statistics—frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and standard deviations—were computed to summarize teachers' perceived benefits, feasibility, challenge severity across the four domains, perceived effectiveness, and commonly used strategies. Mean scores were interpreted using predetermined Likert-scale intervals to determine the level of agreement or severity. For the inferential component, Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to test the relationships between teachers' perceptions (benefits and feasibility) and perceived effectiveness, as well as between challenge severity and effectiveness; where applicable, regression analysis was used to identify which variables significantly predicted implementation effectiveness. These analyses provided both a clear profile of current IPE conditions in public schools and empirical evidence of how perceptions and barriers are statistically linked to effectiveness, forming the basis for conclusions and policy recommendations.

3 Results

The results indicate that public-school PE teachers hold clearly positive attitudes toward Inclusive Physical Education (IPE), but concerns about its practical implementation temper this positivity. On the perceptions scale, teachers agreed that IPE is beneficial, rating its overall benefits sub-mean at 4.23 (Agree). The strongest endorsed benefit was that inclusive PE "promotes equality" (WM = 4.30, Strongly Agree), followed by enhancing social skills (WM = 4.22) and improving motivation (WM = 4.18). In contrast, feasibility received a much lower sub-mean of 3.14 (Neutral). Teachers were particularly unsure whether IPE is manageable in large classes (WM = 3.05), practical with current resources (WM = 3.12), and supported by training (WM = 3.25). This pattern shows a "benefit-feasibility gap": teachers believe inclusion is pedagogically and ethically valuable, yet they are uncertain that schools are ready to sustain it under present conditions.

Regarding barriers, teachers rated overall challenges as very challenging (WM = 4.05), suggesting that structural constraints remain severe and persistent. The most critical obstacle was resource availability—adaptive equipment and accessible facilities—rated very challenging (WM = 4.40). Specialized training and professional development were closely followed (WM = 4.25, Very Challenging), suggesting that many teachers feel they lack the technical skills and ongoing capacity-building needed to accommodate diverse learners in movement-based

activities. Class management (WM = 3.85) and administrative support (WM = 3.70) were rated as challenging rather than very challenging, indicating that teachers can cope with these issues to some extent but still experience them as significant. Overall, the data point to systemic limitations—especially resources and training—as the strongest factors undermining inclusive PE practice.

Despite strong belief in IPE's benefits, teachers perceived the implementation's effectiveness only at a moderate level (overall WM = 3.65; Moderately Effective). They observed that IPE effectively improves peer acceptance (WM = 3.90) and student participation (WM = 3.85), reflecting visible social and engagement gains in inclusive classes. However, broader outcomes were weaker: "improves overall class outcomes" was only moderately effective (WM = 3.55), and "supported by existing structures" was the lowest-rated indicator (WM = 3.30). This suggests that inclusive PE is producing learner-level improvements, but school-level systems and infrastructures are not yet strong enough to fully sustain or scale those gains.

Teachers also reported practical strategies that help them work around these constraints, highlighting resilience in day-to-day implementation. The most common best practices included peer-assisted learning (students supporting classmates with disabilities), activity modification and adaptation to match different ability levels, collaboration with colleagues—especially special education teachers—and continuous self-learning through webinars or training modules. These strategies function as "on-the-ground solutions" that enable inclusion even when formal supports are insufficient. However, the findings also imply that relying solely on teacher improvisation is not sustainable without institutional reinforcement.

Finally, the results directly informed policy proposals to close the feasibility and effectiveness gaps revealed in the data. Because resources and training were the most severe challenges, the study recommends a resource enhancement policy with dedicated funding for adaptive PE equipment and facilities, mandatory inclusive PE training embedded in regular professional development, class-size regulation to make inclusive management realistic, and stronger administrative support structures, such as inclusion coordinators and monitoring systems. These recommendations follow logically from the quantitative patterns: teachers are ready and willing to support IPE in principle, but effectiveness will remain moderate unless the system upgrades the material, training, and leadership conditions required for fully inclusive PE.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study corroborate a consistent pattern in inclusive physical education research: PE teachers tend to strongly endorse the *benefits* and moral value of inclusion, while simultaneously expressing reservations about *feasibility* under current school conditions. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses report generally favorable teacher attitudes toward including learners with disabilities in PE, especially regarding social participation, equity, and peer development, mirroring this study's high ratings for IPE benefits (Tarantino et al., 2022; Varea et al., 2024). However, these same reviews also note that positive attitudes weaken when teachers anticipate limited support or face more complex learner needs, which aligns with the present study's "benefit–feasibility gap" where feasibility was rated only neutral despite strong belief in IPE's value (Tarantino et al., 2022; Varea et al., 2024).

The severity ranking of barriers in the results also matches the literature's most frequently cited "hard constraints." International and local studies consistently identify inadequate resources (adaptive equipment, accessible spaces) and insufficient specialized training as the most powerful obstacles to inclusive PE, often outweighing teachers' personal willingness (Picardal, 2024; Tarantino et al., 2022; IRE Journals, 2023). Philippine-based evidence likewise highlights that PE teachers feel underprepared to modify activities and assess diverse learners because inclusive or adapted PE is not deeply embedded in pre-service curricula and in-service offerings (Picardal, 2024). This directly supports the study's finding that resource availability and

professional development were perceived as “very challenging,” positioning these as priority intervention areas.

The study’s moderate rating of implementation effectiveness is also coherent with broader evidence showing that inclusion in PE often progresses unevenly: social outcomes improve first, while systemic and instructional outcomes lag. Meta-syntheses of inclusive/adapted PE document that teachers commonly achieve partial inclusion through peer support and activity modifications, but the depth of learning and consistency of participation depend on structural supports that schools often lack (International Journal of Progressive Sciences and Technologies, 2024; UNESCO, n.d.). In other words, inclusive PE *works to a point*—especially for belonging and engagement—but remains limited in scale and sustainability without stronger institutional inputs. This parallels results where peer acceptance and participation were among the more effective outcomes, while system support indicators were weaker.

Finally, the relationships identified in the study align well with the Theory of Planned Behavior research on inclusive practice. TPB-based studies show that teachers’ positive attitudes toward inclusion predict intentions and perceived effectiveness, but actual implementation is strongly constrained by perceived behavioral control—namely, training, time, resources, and administrative norms (Ajzen, 1991; Kozina et al., 2021; Schwab et al., 2023). This aligns with the finding that higher perceived benefits/feasibility are associated with higher effectiveness, while higher challenge severity is associated with lower effectiveness. The corroboration reinforces policy conclusion: improving inclusive PE requires not only attitudinal support, but also concrete system changes that increase behavioral control (training, resources, manageable class structures, and normative administrative backing).

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