Journal of Elementary and Secondary School (JESS), Vol. 3 No. 2 (2025) https://doi.org/10.31098/jess.v3i2.3290

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Research Paper

Describing The Inclusivity of Elementary School Buildings for Pupils with Disabilities

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Received : April 23, 2025	Revised : May 11, 2025	Accepted : May 19, 2025	Online : September 30, 2025

Abstract

This research examines the inclusivity and accessibility of the Columban Elementary School and College Department building in Pagadian City, with a focus on key features such as parking areas, entrances, doors, corridors, toilets, and stairways. A survey, adapted from the Batas Pambansa Bilang 344 compliance checklist, was administered to 42 Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) students and 53 Grade 6 pupils. Quantitative data analysis was employed to interpret the responses. The results indicate that both Grade 6 pupils and BEED students generally perceive the school buildings as accessible, with Grade 6 pupils rating accessibility features slightly higher. A statistical test revealed a significant difference between the perceptions of Grade 6 pupils and BEED students, suggesting that younger students may have a more favorable view of the school's accessibility. These findings highlight the need for ongoing assessment of school infrastructure to ensure it meets the needs of all students, especially those with disabilities. The study proposes an action plan to improve accessibility, including feedback mechanisms, staff training on inclusive practices, collaboration with accessibility experts, and regular audits. By emphasizing the importance of an inclusive school environment, this research aims to contribute to the development of educational settings that support all learners, including those with disabilities.

Keywords: *Accessibility, Inclusivity, Disability, Buildings, Bp 344, Students, Pupils*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusivity of elementary school buildings for pupils with disabilities is central to the topic, epitomized by Republic Act No. 11650, also referred to as the Inclusive Education Act of 2021, which "aims to promote all schools and learning centers into becoming inclusive schools and inclusive learning and resource centers (ILRC)" In this dynamic and unequal environment of accommodation and safety, understanding the intricate relationships between inclusive buildings and pupils with disabilities has become imperative. The designs of these schools had to consider differences between pupils, their needs, and varying abilities. The development of school building architecture was considered insufficient without considering the possibility of education for people with disabilities (Korotkova et al., 2020). New approaches to adapting the environment for children required the mandatory inclusion of those with disabilities. However, the aspects of the buildings that were built were not accessible to children with SEND (Gyimah, 2021).

The study showed that injuries such as bruises, cuts, and abrasions were common among the children. This indicates that it is crucial to address safety concerns in inclusive schools to support the self-esteem of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Education is a fundamental pillar of society; however, children with impairments often have limited opportunities to participate in school activities. The design of school spaces and outdoor play areas for children with impairments lacks functionality, arguably due to insufficient performance guidelines that target the body condition of children with impairments (McIntosh et al., 2019). Architectural

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barriers that hinder a child's participation in school can negatively impact their quality of life and may lead to further deterioration of their health. Children, including those with disabilities, are considered an essential part of society, and advocating for their rights is deemed necessary (Abdou, 2020). It is important to establish a comfortable environment that caters to the needs of children with disabilities, facilitating their swift integration into society. Both indoor and outdoor areas should be designed to help these children learn and have fun while fostering their independence and enabling them to move through the spaces safely and easily. Each characteristic of children with special needs has different requirements for facilities and infrastructure (Azzahra et al., 2022), and several infrastructure facilities can be designated for various types of children with special needs, including appropriate rooms, equipment, media, and learning resources.

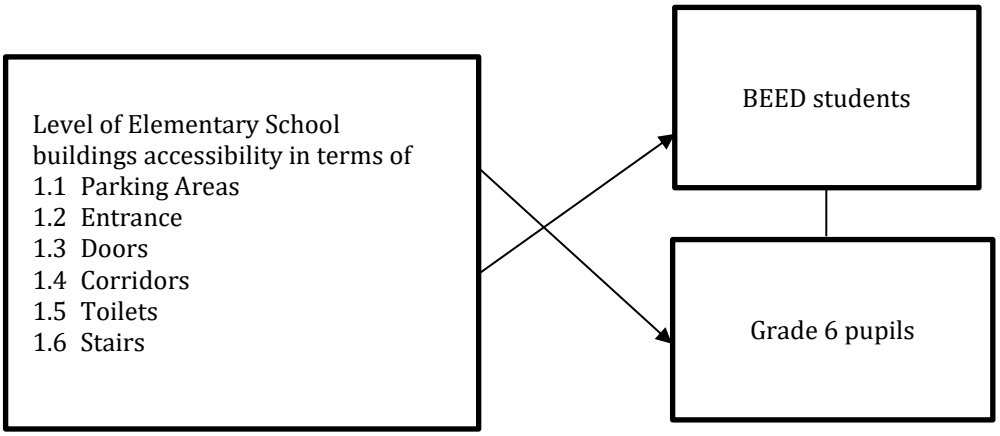

Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

Figure 1 shows the study's conceptual framework, which consists of two variables: the level of Elementary Building Accessibility as an Independent Variable and BEED and Grade 6 as a Dependent Variable.

The first frame provided the study's Level of Elementary Buildings Accessibility (Independent Variables). The construction of inclusive buildings in elementary schools is crucial as it ensures that all students can participate in school without discrimination based on physical or mental disabilities. In these inclusive environments, students with special needs can fully engage in activities and lessons alongside their peers, fostering unity, understanding, and respect among children. Moreover, inclusive buildings provide more significant opportunities for training and learning in a dynamic environment, promoting the overall development of every student.

The second frame presented the Grade 6 and BEED students (Dependent Variable), significantly impacting the school's inclusivity. However, this variable is only possible with the independent variables that provide pupils with disabilities access to inclusive school buildings, which are essential for promoting equality and equitable educational opportunities. Inclusive school buildings are purposefully designed to accommodate the diverse needs of all students, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities. This study is grounded in the principles of the social model theory of disability; the model says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Barriers can be physical, such as buildings not having accessible toilets. Alternatively, they can be caused by people's attitudes towards difference, such as assuming disabled people cannot do certain things. The social model helps us recognize barriers that make life more complicated for disabled people. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice, and control.

This study described the Inclusivity of Elementary School Buildings for Pupils with Disabilities in the Saint Columban College Elementary School Department. The study is conducted during the school year 2023-2024. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following queries:

1. What is the level of accessibility of elementary school buildings as perceived by Grade 6 pupils in terms of:
    a) Parking areas
    b) Entrance
    c) Doors
    d) Corridors
    e) Toilets
    f) Stairs
2. What is the level of accessibility of elementary school buildings as perceived by BEED students in terms of:
    a) Parking areas
    b) Entrance
    c) Doors
    d) Corridors
    e) Toilets
    f) Stairs
3. Is there a significant difference between perceptions of BEED students and Grade 6 pupils regarding the inclusivity of elementary school buildings for pupils with disabilities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Findings suggested that understanding inclusive school design could inform changes in architectural practice to create a conducive school environment for the meaningful participation and social interaction of children with physical disabilities (Aldersey et al., 2023). While this finding is crucial, the literature lacks a discussion on the practical application of inclusive school designs in various settings, especially within local contexts like Pagadian City. A more thorough exploration of how such designs have been implemented or adapted in real-world schools would offer deeper insights into the barriers and successes of integrating these practices into existing educational infrastructures.

The impact of abnormal health status on students in special needs classrooms is considered to encourage them to have everyday personal lives and integrate them into the primary school community (Jebril, 2020). However, this research does not offer a comprehensive examination of how the integration of students with varying health statuses is achieved in different school settings. Exploring the resources, strategies, and challenges faced by schools in Pagadian City, in particular, would enhance the relevance of this study to local educational challenges.

Facilitating the meeting of the needs of disabled and functionally diverse students is essential to increase their accessibility and e-inclusion capabilities in educational settings (Tlili et al., 2020). While the need for e-inclusion is highlighted, there is insufficient discussion on how technology is integrated into local educational frameworks, especially in the Philippines. Investigating the availability of such resources and the extent to which they support inclusive education in local schools could provide valuable context for the study.

Inclusive education is understood as the right of all children to access, present, participate in, and successfully attend their local regular school, which shifts the focus from labels, diagnoses, and deficits of some students to quality education for all children (Kielblock et al., 2023) While inclusive education is framed as a right, the implementation of inclusive practices in different

regions, including Pagadian City, is not adequately examined. The challenges faced by local school authorities, educators, and students need to be explored to identify what gaps exist between the theory of inclusive education and its practice on the ground.

Inclusive education means adjusting the learning environment and teaching methods to enhance the academic success of all students, regardless of their race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, culture, learning styles, or language (Research Journal in Advanced Social Sciences, 2020) However, this approach does not fully address the unique challenges schools face when it comes to students with disabilities, particularly in terms of physical infrastructure. Understanding the specific challenges that arise in the context of Pagadian City, where resources may be more limited, would contribute significantly to this discourse.

In inclusive schools, various elements such as movement, space, color, lighting, shape, patterns, and wayfinding are carefully examined in accordance with building codes and regulations. The importance of nature concerning the well-being and psychology of children is also considered, as well as providing safety for children in any environment (Ibrahimi, 2021). While this is an important aspect of school design, the implementation of such considerations within local schools remains unexplored in the literature. Local authorities in Pagadian City should be involved in assessing the challenges and progress made in implementing such designs in their school buildings.

Inclusive design is a relatively new architectural concept. It provides a means to ensure access and equal participation in the built environment, offering the opportunity to improve and design new equivalent solutions in architecture while simultaneously paving the way for a broad clarification of equality (Alhusban et al., 2023) Despite the potential of inclusive design, there is little exploration of how these new architectural practices are being applied locally, especially in areas with less infrastructure investment. A deeper analysis of how inclusive design is integrated into educational institutions within Pagadian City would offer essential insights.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2021) reports that twenty million children in Nigeria lack access to basic education, partly due to inadequate support for children with unique educational needs and impairments in primary school buildings (Ahmed et al., 2024) Although the statistics reflect global trends, there is a gap in the literature regarding similar issues in the Philippines, particularly in Pagadian City. Studies that explore the local challenges of accommodating children with unique educational needs in the region could highlight specific barriers that need to be addressed.

In this context, private schools in the country accommodate many children but are often unaware of inclusive policies, making it essential to explore the existing situation. The study aimed to find out the attitude of primary school authorities toward the inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream of the system (Islam et al., 2021). While private schools' attitudes toward inclusion are discussed, the local context of Pagadian City is not fully explored. The perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and students in this specific area should be analyzed to provide a clearer picture of the real-world dynamics of inclusive education.

To build a more inclusive and accessible city for all through the UN-HABITAT New Urban Agenda, a participatory design process with multiple stakeholders, teachers, local government, and, most importantly, students, plays a vital role in ensuring inclusive planning in cities (Manuturi et al., 2022) The study of participatory design processes is important, but how these processes are applied in local schools in Pagadian City has not been sufficiently addressed. Exploring the level of participation from local stakeholders would provide a richer understanding of how inclusivity is actively promoted within these communities.

Designing buildings in educational institutions where all children, with or without disabilities, can receive education together is essential (Aktas et al., 2023). While the importance of

inclusive school design is emphasized, the implementation of such designs in local schools needs further examination. Investigating the extent to which local authorities have integrated universal design principles into school construction in Pagadian City would help clarify the challenges and opportunities within the local context.

DepEd (2021) aimed to create a more inclusive environment for all learners, fostering collaboration regardless of individual challenges or differences. The order sought to make schools inclusive by ensuring that students with disabilities are included in mainstream or general education classes. However, the review does not assess how this order has been practically implemented in specific areas like Pagadian City. Investigating the policy's impact and the barriers to its full implementation would provide valuable insights for the study.

BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 344 (1983), also known as the "Accessibility Law," is legislation enacted to enhance the mobility and accessibility of disabled persons in the Philippines. It requires that specific buildings, institutions, establishments, and public utilities install necessary facilities and devices that facilitate easy access for individuals with disabilities, including ramps, handrails, elevators, accessible restrooms, and designated parking spaces. While the law is mentioned, the review does not explore its practical application, compliance, and the impact it has had on local schools, particularly in Pagadian City. A deeper exploration of the barriers to compliance and the steps taken to ensure access to education for all students in the local context would be critical for this study.

Addressing the obstacles faced by students with disabilities in school buildings is essential for promoting true inclusivity. Overcoming architectural barriers, incorporating universally accessible designs, and ensuring that infrastructure aligns with the diverse needs of students are pivotal steps. A more nuanced examination of these barriers in Pagadian City, considering local infrastructural and financial constraints, is necessary. By critically engaging with the local challenges, this review can offer concrete suggestions for creating inclusive environments that accommodate the diverse needs of all students.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-quantitative method as the researchers aimed to identify the level of accessibility in elementary school buildings. A descriptive-quantitative method is utilized, a data-driven approach that objectively describes and quantifies the variables of interest in the study. A survey questionnaire was used to assess the accessibility of elementary school buildings and identify areas for improvement to ensure inclusivity for all students. The survey questionnaire allowed the researchers to obtain the data and the study results. A quantitative method was employed to assess the inclusivity of elementary school buildings for pupils with disabilities by conducting a facility audit. This involved measuring physical accessibility features such as ramps and wide doorways. The survey questionnaire enabled the researchers to gather data and derive insights from the study results.

Statistical Treatment

The study employed inferential statistics, specifically conducting a t-test to compare the mean scores of BEED students and Grade 6 pupils on questionnaire responses regarding the inclusivity of school buildings for pupils with disabilities. A significance level (alpha) of 0.05 was set to determine the significance of the findings. Data processing was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to ensure accuracy and proper analysis of the collected data. The statistical analysis results are presented in subsequent chapters for

interpretation and discussion.

Research Environment

This study was conducted in one of the private Elementary Schools in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur. The elementary school campus has two buildings. The first building has three floors. The first-floor houses classrooms, the school clinic, and the principal's office. On the second floor, there are classrooms and a Genyo Lab. The third floor also features classrooms and a chapel, each with its own comfort room.

The second building has two floors. The first floor is dedicated to the cafeteria, where students can enjoy their meals. On the second floor, the library offers a quiet and conducive environment for reading and studying.

Table 1. The Research Participants

Group	N
Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) students	42
Grade 6 pupils	53
Total	95

The participants of this study are 42 Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) students and 53 Grade 6 pupils. They participated in a survey questionnaire to assess or evaluate how accessible the buildings are in elementary schools. Automatic inclusion is implemented in this study, whereby second- to fourth-year BEED (Bachelor of Elementary Education) students who have attended significant classes in elementary school and all grade 6 pupils are automatically included. This approach ensures that relevant groups, such as education students with classroom experience and current elementary pupils, are represented without random selection.

Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire for assessing the accessibility of elementary school buildings was adapted from BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 344 (1983) compliance checklist, an act that enhances the mobility of disabled persons by requiring certain buildings, institutions, establishments, and public utilities to install facilities and other devices. The researchers modified and validated this questionnaire with input from professionals. The scores in the survey questionnaire served as the data subject for analysis and interpretation. The instrument focused on identifying the level of accessibility of elementary buildings, which guided the researchers in developing an action plan.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection for this study included several steps. Researchers provided a letter to the Dean of the CTEAS and Elementary School Departments, and the assigned instructor facilitated the survey. One researcher explained the importance of participation and urged students to carefully read the questionnaire. Others distributed consent forms and questionnaires individually. The responses gathered were then used to streamline the data collection process. 6 This study was conducted at a private elementary school in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur. The school campus consists of two buildings. The first building has three floors. The first floor contains classrooms, the school clinic, and the principal's office. The second floor features additional classrooms and a Genyo Lab. The third floor also has classrooms and a chapel, each equipped with its own comfort room.

The second building has two floors: the first floor features a cafeteria for students, while the second floor contains a quiet library for reading and studying. This study includes 42 Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) students and 53 Grade 6 pupils who participated in a survey on building accessibility in elementary schools. The study uses automatic inclusion, incorporating second to fourth-year BEED students with relevant classroom experience and all Grade 6 pupils, ensuring representation without random selection.

The survey questionnaire for assessing the accessibility of elementary school buildings was adapted from BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 344 (1983) compliance checklist, an act that enhances the mobility of disabled persons by requiring certain buildings, institutions, establishments, and public utilities to install facilities and other devices. The researchers modified and validated this questionnaire with input from professionals. The scores in the survey questionnaire served as the data subject for analysis and interpretation. The instrument focused on identifying the level of accessibility of elementary buildings, which guided the researchers in developing an action plan. The following actions comprised the data collection method for this study. The researchers prepared and handed a letter to the Dean of the CTEAS Department and the Elementary School Department, and the assigned instructor, who conducted the survey questionnaire test together. One of the researchers explained to the students the importance of participating in the study and reminded them to read and understand the survey questionnaire carefully. The other researchers distributed the consent forms, as well as the questionnaire, individually. Afterward, the survey questionnaire was used to simplify the data gathered. The study employed inferential statistics, specifically conducting a t-test to compare the mean scores of BEED students and Grade 6 pupils on questionnaire responses regarding the inclusivity of school buildings for pupils with disabilities. A significance level (alpha) of 0.05 was determined to evaluate the significance of the results. For precise data analysis, we utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software during the data processing phase. The findings from the statistical analysis will be detailed in the subsequent chapters for interpretation and discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A comprehensive analysis of a survey assessing the accessibility of school buildings for students with impairments. The survey included 31 grade 6 students from Saint Columban Elementary School and 42 BEED students from Saint Columban College, achieving a 100% response rate from the 73 participants. The survey aimed to establish a friendly environment for students with special needs by evaluating accessibility features such as parking lots, entrances, doors, corridors, restrooms, and stairs. The data, analyzed using SPSS version 20.0, highlighted the perspectives of grade 6 and BEED students. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to compare the accessibility experiences between these two groups. Table 2 presents the level of accessibility of elementary school buildings as evaluated by Grade 6 pupils. Using a hypothetical mean range scale, the pupils' responses are categorized into four levels: Strongly Agree (3.26 – 4.00), Agree (2.51 – 3.25), Disagree (1.76 – 2.50), and Strongly Disagree (1.00 – 1.75). This scale provides a clear framework for understanding pupils' perceptions of accessibility within their school environments.

Grade 6 Pupils

Table 2. *Level of accessibility of elementary school buildings as perceived by Grade 6 pupils*

Variables	Grade 6 Pupils		
	Mean	**SD**	**Interpretation**
Stairs	3.30	0.80	SA
Corridors	3.25	0.81	A
Parking Space	3.19	0.76	A
Doors	3.19	0.77	A
Entrance	3.17	0.76	A
Toilet	3.12	0.87	A
Total	3.19	0.80	A

Hypothetical mean range: 3.26 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.51 – 3.25 – Agree; 1.76 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.0 – 1.75 – Strongly Disagree.

The survey findings reveal that sixth-grade students have a positive perception of their school environment. The stairs received the highest rating, scoring a mean of 3.30 with a standard deviation of 0.80, indicating a high level of satisfaction. Corridors, parking areas, doors, and entrances garnered mean ratings around 3.19, with standard deviations between 0.76 and 0.81, suggesting a consensus among the students. The toilets had a slightly lower mean score of 3.12 but still remained in the acceptable range. In general, sixth-grade students find the school environment favorable, achieving an overall average score of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.80. Children, including those with disabilities, play a crucial role in society, and it is important to advocate for their rights (Abdou, 2020). Creating an inclusive environment that addresses the needs of children with disabilities is essential for promoting their involvement in society. Spaces, both indoors and outdoors, should be designed to support their learning and enjoyment, enabling them to be independent and navigate these areas safely.

Bachelor of Elementary Education Students

Table 2. Level of accessibility of elementary school buildings as perceived by BEED students

Variables	**Mean**	**SD**	**Interpretation**
Doors	3.15	0.74	A
Corridors	3.07	0.75	A
Stairs	2.98	0.94	A
Toilet	2.92	0.81	A
Parking Space	2.91	0.89	A

Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Entrance	2.90	0.86	A
Total	3.00	0.82	A

Hypothetical mean range: 3.26 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.51 – 3.25 – Agree; 1.76 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.0 – 1.75 – Strongly Disagree.

The survey results indicate that Bachelor of Elementary Education - BEED students generally perceive the facilities of their institution favorably, with mean scores ranging from 2.90 to 3.15 out of 4 across various categories - Parking Space, Entrance, Doors, Corridors, Toilet, and Stairs. These scores suggest a high level of satisfaction - an "A" grade interpretation - regarding the mentioned aspects of the campus environment. The overall mean score of 3.00 with a standard deviation of 0.82 further supports this positive perception, reflecting a consistent and generally positive assessment of the facilities among BEED students. Findings suggested that understanding inclusive school design could inform changes in architectural practice to create a conducive school environment for the meaningful participation and social interaction of children with physical disabilities (Aldersey et al., 2023). Facilitating the meeting of the needs of disabled and functionally diverse students was essential to increase their accessibility and e-inclusion capabilities in educational settings (Tlili et al., 2020)

Grade 6 Pupils and Bachelor of Elementary Education Students

Table 3. Testing the difference between the perceptions of BEED students and Grade 6 pupils regarding the inclusivity of elementary school buildings for pupils with disabilities using an independent t-test

Variables	N	Mean	SD	p-value	remarks
Grade 6 pupils	31	3.1932	0.7957	0.053	No Significant Difference
BEED students	42	3.0021	0.8206		

*Significant at 0.05 level

Hypothetical mean range: 3.26 – 4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.51 – 3.25 – Agree; 1.76 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.0 – 1.75 – Strongly Disagree

The table showed that Grade 6 pupils had a mean perception score of 3.1932 and a standard deviation of 0.7957, while BEED students had a mean perception score of 3.0021 with a standard deviation of 0.8206. Utilizing an independent t-test, the obtained p-value was 0.053, indicating no significant difference between the two groups' perceptions at the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, based on the findings, it can be inferred that both Grade 6 pupils and BEED students share similar perceptions regarding the inclusivity of elementary school buildings for pupils with disabilities. However, the p-value approached the significance level, suggesting a potential trend worth further investigation with larger sample sizes to ascertain more conclusive results.

The study concluded that the elementary school buildings are accessible to pupils with disabilities. DepEd (2021) aimed to create a more inclusive environment for all learners, fostering collaboration regardless of individual challenges or differences. The order sought to make schools

inclusive by ensuring that students with disabilities are included in mainstream or general education classes.

Facilitating the meeting of the needs of disabled and functionally diverse students was essential to increasing their accessibility and e-inclusion capabilities in educational settings (Tlili et al., 2020)

Discussion

The analysis of the accessibility of elementary school buildings, based on mean scores provided by Grade 6 pupils and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) students, offers a comprehensive view of how these two groups perceive access to essential facilities within the school environment. Both groups generally agree that the buildings are accessible. However, a consistent trend shows that Grade 6 pupils express higher satisfaction levels than BEED students. This finding provides insights into how younger students, who are current users of the facilities, and older students, who are future educators, evaluate the same environment from different perspectives.

A significant difference in perceptions is evident in how Grade 6 pupils and BEED students evaluate stair accessibility. Grade 6 pupils expressed a high level of satisfaction with an average rating of 3.30, while BEED students gave a more moderate score of 2.98, indicating their agreement but with reservations. This contrast may arise from BEED students, as future educators, taking a more critical stance on infrastructure, particularly regarding accessibility challenges for students with mobility issues.

The relatively high scores from both groups demonstrate that the elementary school has made efforts to ensure that its infrastructure is accessible, particularly from the viewpoint of its current users, the Grade 6 pupils. However, the slightly lower scores from BEED students could suggest that aspects of the school's accessibility may not fully meet the expectations of future educators, who might be more aware of the importance of catering to diverse student needs, including those with disabilities.

The results of this study have significant implications for architectural design in schools, especially regarding accessibility. Policymakers and school administrators can use these findings to enhance the inclusivity of school facilities. For example, specific features such as parking spaces, entrances, and toilets may need to be further improved to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those with physical disabilities. As future educators, BEED students could play an important role in advocating for and implementing these improvements in future school designs.

Furthermore, these findings strengthen the connection with the social model of disability. The social model emphasizes that disability is not solely a medical condition but a result of societal barriers that hinder participation in everyday activities. By improving accessibility, schools can play a key role in reducing these barriers, offering greater independence and opportunities for students with disabilities. This research highlights that societal efforts, such as the creation of inclusive school environments, are crucial in breaking down these barriers and enabling all students, regardless of their abilities, to thrive.

This study underscores the importance of designing accessible school environments that support the learning and participation of all students, including those with disabilities. While the overall perception of accessibility in Saint Columban Elementary School is positive, further efforts can be made to address areas where perceptions differ, particularly concerning stair accessibility. By incorporating the perspectives of students and future educators, schools can create more inclusive environments that cater to the needs of diverse learners, aligning with both the principles of accessibility legislation and the social model of disability.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the overall consensus among the respondents highlighted that school environments were largely inclusive for students with disabilities. This reflects the effort made by schools to ensure that buildings and facilities are carefully designed to meet a wide range of student needs, both in terms of physical accessibility and instructional accommodations. Such efforts aim to bridge the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to participate in school life, whether academic or extracurricular. These findings are particularly significant as they emphasize the importance of inclusive school designs in facilitating full participation for students with disabilities.

The study also explored the concept of self-efficacy in teacher education, examining how field-based placements and course designs influenced inclusive practices. The findings indicate that both strategies significantly increase self-efficacy among educators in the context of inclusive education. However, the results revealed no significant differences between the two approaches, suggesting that professional development in inclusive education does not require a specific path to be effective. This insight is essential for teacher preparation programs as it demonstrates that a variety of pedagogical strategies can successfully enhance educators' confidence in implementing inclusive practices. The alignment between the study's findings on school accessibility and the development of teacher self-efficacy is crucial: well-designed school environments contribute to the confidence of educators by providing them with the resources and infrastructure needed to confidently include all students, regardless of their abilities.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of not only meeting the physical needs of students but also addressing their emotional and psychological well-being. An inclusive school environment should foster a sense of belonging, where students feel safe, valued, and loved. This includes providing both physical accessibility and a supportive, positive atmosphere where students can be themselves without fear of exclusion or bullying. Based on the survey results, it became clear that the accessible features of the school environment positively impacted students' emotional comfort and sense of belonging. The physical accessibility features contributed to students' feeling welcomed and accepted, which, in turn, supported their academic and social engagement. This underscores the need for schools to continue prioritizing the emotional and psychological aspects of inclusivity, alongside physical adaptations.

To further enhance inclusivity, the study suggests several concrete recommendations. First, schools should ensure continuous feedback through regular surveys and focus groups with students, teachers, and staff to gather insights on accessibility and inclusivity. This ongoing dialogue will help schools address emerging issues and stay responsive to the needs of the entire school community. Additionally, staff training on accessibility and inclusive practices should be a routine part of professional development, helping educators develop the skills and mindset needed to create inclusive classrooms. Appointing accessibility champions among staff can also help maintain focus on inclusivity by ensuring continuous monitoring and advocacy for necessary improvements.

Furthermore, schools should collaborate with accessibility experts to regularly assess and propose improvements to school infrastructure, ensuring that universal design principles are implemented in all renovations and new constructions. This expert input can guide schools in making meaningful changes that improve physical access for all students. Regular accessibility audits should also be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of existing features and to identify areas in need of enhancement. These audits, along with transparent reporting and tracking systems, will help maintain accountability and ensure that progress continues to be made.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reinforce the importance of creating inclusive school environments, not just in terms of physical accessibility but also in fostering emotional well-

being and a sense of belonging. The alignment between the positive perceptions of Grade 6 pupils and BEED students suggests that the efforts made by schools are effective in promoting inclusivity. However, continued efforts are necessary to ensure that inclusivity becomes an integral part of the educational experience for all students. As schools evolve, they must continue to focus on providing equal opportunities for every student, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their abilities, are given the support they need to succeed.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

To create an inclusive environment, we propose regular feedback through surveys and focus groups, continuous staff training on accessibility, collaboration with experts for inclusive design, and frequent accessibility audits. This approach ensures ongoing dialogue, improved awareness, expert-guided improvements, and systematic progress monitoring.

1. Implement Continuous Feedback: Regularly distribute surveys and install feedback boxes to gather student, teacher, and staff insights. Conduct focus groups to discuss specific needs and gather suggestions.
2. Staff Training and Awareness: Organize regular training sessions on accessibility and inclusive practices. Appoint staff as accessibility champions to monitor and advocate for improvements.
3. Engage Experts for Inclusive Design: Work with accessibility specialists to review and propose upgrades, incorporating universal design principles in all new construction and renovations.
4. Monitor and Evaluate Progress: Conduct regular accessibility audits to ensure compliance, identify improvement areas, and establish a transparent process for reporting issues and tracking progress.

To create a truly inclusive environment in schools, a comprehensive approach is essential, one that combines continuous feedback, staff training, expert collaboration, and regular assessments to ensure sustained improvement. First and foremost, it is critical to establish a continuous feedback loop through surveys, focus groups, and feedback boxes. By regularly distributing surveys to students, teachers, and staff, schools can gather a wide range of insights and suggestions regarding the current accessibility features. Focus groups can then be conducted to dive deeper into specific needs and to create a space for open discussion. This ongoing engagement with the school community ensures that their voices are heard and that any evolving needs are addressed promptly.

However, this study's sample size and scope, which only included one school, limit the generalizability of its findings. Future research could broaden its scope to include multiple schools across different regions and demographic settings to gain a more representative picture of accessibility and inclusivity in school environments. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which could introduce biases in the responses, as participants may be inclined to provide socially desirable answers or align their responses with the perceived goals of the school. To mitigate this, future studies could incorporate objective data collection methods, such as observations of the school environment or expert evaluations, alongside surveys to triangulate the findings and provide a more comprehensive assessment of the school's inclusivity.

In terms of staff training, schools must organize ongoing, regular sessions on accessibility and inclusive practices. These training programs should be designed to equip staff with the necessary skills to create inclusive classrooms and environments. The training could also include practical strategies for identifying and addressing accessibility barriers and promoting an inclusive mindset among staff members. To further reinforce the importance of accessibility, schools should

consider appointing accessibility champions who can monitor progress, advocate for changes, and lead efforts to improve inclusivity on an ongoing basis. These champions could serve as a critical resource for staff and students alike, ensuring that the school remains proactive in fostering an inclusive environment.

Collaboration with experts in inclusive design is another crucial aspect of creating an accessible school environment. Schools should work closely with accessibility specialists to regularly review and suggest improvements for the physical infrastructure. These experts can guide the incorporation of universal design principles, ensuring that the school's infrastructure not only complies with legal requirements but is genuinely inclusive for students with various needs. In particular, experts should be consulted when planning new construction or renovations to ensure that accessibility features are integrated seamlessly into the design.

Finally, to ensure that the improvements are not just one-time fixes, regular accessibility audits must be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of current practices and identify areas that need further attention. These audits should be a recurring process, enabling the school to track progress over time, assess the impact of implemented changes, and make necessary adjustments. Establishing a transparent system for reporting issues and tracking progress will help create an accountable environment where improvements are continually made. These audits should be linked to the feedback gathered from surveys and focus groups, ensuring that the accessibility improvements directly reflect the concerns and needs of the school community.

By addressing these aspects comprehensively and continuously, schools can build an environment that fosters inclusivity, where all students, regardless of their abilities, feel welcomed, valued, and empowered to succeed.

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