European Journal of Innovation in Nonformal Education (EJINE)
Volume 6 | Issue 4 | Apr - 2026 ISSN: 2795-8612

Instructional Competence of Special Education Teachers among Selected Schools: Basis for a Training Plan

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A B S T R A C T

The general objective of this study was to evaluate the instructional competence of special education teachers among selected schools in the locale of the study. By assessing the current state of instructional competence and identifying specific areas for improvement, this study aimed to develop a comprehensive training plan that enhances the skills and effectiveness of special education teachers. The overarching goal was to improve the quality of education for students with special needs, ensuring they receive the support and instruction necessary for their academic and social success. The study employs a descriptive quantitative research design. A total of 80 respondents were included, comprising 16 special education teachers and 64 receiving teachers who were selected using purposive sampling. The primary research instrument used in this study was a survey, which is designed to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions across various domains. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, ranking, and Whitney U test. Results revealed that special education teachers demonstrate strong instructional competence, excelling in classroom management, subject mastery, and flexible teaching strategies, while fostering positive learner relationships. They actively engage in research and community projects. Challenges like heavy workloads, limited funding, and low motivation exist, highlighting the need for targeted training, resources, and institutional support to enhance effectiveness.

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A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:
Received 15 Feb 2026
Received in revised form
15 Mar 2026
Accepted 13 Apr 2026

Keywords: Instructional Competence; Special Education Teachers; Training Plan.

Introduction

Special education teachers play a crucial role in the academic and social development of students with special needs. The instructional competence of these educators is fundamental to the success of special education programs, particularly in ensuring that students receive individualized, effective instruction tailored to their unique learning requirements (Kachak & Blyznyuk, 2023).

Recent trends in special education highlight the increasing emphasis on inclusive education, where students with disabilities are integrated into mainstream classrooms. This shift necessitates that special education teachers are not only proficient in specialized instructional strategies but also capable of collaborating with general education teachers to create inclusive learning environments. According to Aspelin et al. (2021), there has been a growing recognition of the need for ongoing professional development to equip special education teachers with the necessary skills to navigate these inclusive settings effectively. Furthermore, advances in educational technology offer new tools and resources that can support differentiated instruction, making it imperative for special education teachers to be adept at integrating technology into their teaching practices (Fernandez et al., 2021).

According to Allam and Martin (2021), the instructional competence of special education teachers has long been a critical issue in the field of special education. Historically, the focus has been on ensuring that these teachers possess a deep understanding of the content they teach, as well as the pedagogical skills to address the diverse needs of their students. Over the years, numerous studies have highlighted the challenges faced by special education teachers, including inadequate training, lack of resources, and the need for more effective instructional strategies. For instance, a study by Starks and Reich (2023) revealed that many special education teachers feel unprepared to handle the complexities of inclusive classrooms, which can lead to suboptimal educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

Previous research has underscored the importance of targeted professional development for special education teachers. For example, Scott et al. (2022) found that professional development programs focusing on evidence-based instructional strategies significantly improve the teaching efficacy of special education educators. Additionally, studies have shown that ongoing support and training in areas such as technology integration and behavior management are crucial for enhancing instructional competence (Woulfin & Jones, 2021).

Investigating the instructional competence of special education teachers is essential for several reasons. Firstly, the quality of education provided to students with special needs directly impacts their academic and social development. By identifying and addressing gaps in instructional competence, this study aims to enhance the overall educational experience for these students. Secondly, the findings of this research can inform the development of targeted professional development programs, ensuring that special education teachers receive the support they need to excel in their roles. Finally, this study is timely and relevant given the ongoing shift towards inclusive education, which requires special education teachers to adapt to new instructional challenges and opportunities.

The potential benefits of this research are significant. By improving the instructional competence of special education teachers, this study can contribute to better educational outcomes for students with special needs, fostering their academic success and social integration. Furthermore, the proposed training plan can serve as a model for other districts facing similar challenges, promoting a more standardized approach to professional development in special education. The relevance of this study is underscored by the growing recognition of the need for specialized training and support for special education teachers, as highlighted by recent educational policies and research.

The general objective of this study was to evaluate the instructional competence of special education teachers among selected schools in the locale of the study. By assessing the current state of instructional competence and identifying specific areas for improvement, this study aimed to develop a comprehensive training plan that enhances the skills and effectiveness of special education teachers. The overarching goal was to improve the quality of education for students with special needs, ensuring they receive the support and instruction necessary for their academic and social success.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of instructional competence of special education teachers in selected schools in the areas of classroom management; qualifications and experience; mastery of subjects taught; instructional methods and strategies; engagement in research activities, and participation in extension projects?
2. Is there a significant difference in the instructional competence among special education teachers in selected schools?
3. What are the primary challenges faced by special education teachers in delivering effective instruction within the context of special education?
4. Based on the findings, what professional training recommendations can be made to enhance the instructional competence of special education teachers in selected schools?

The theoretical framework of this study provides an essential foundation for understanding the instructional competence of special education teachers among selected schools. This framework draws on three recent and relevant theories that collectively underpin the research: Theory of Differentiated

Instruction, the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, and the Self-Efficacy Theory. These theories offer a comprehensive lens through which to examine the instructional practices, challenges, and competencies of special education teachers, and to inform the development of a targeted training plan.

The Theory of Differentiated Instruction, primarily developed by Carol Ann Tomlinson, is a pedagogical approach that advocates for tailoring teaching methods, resources, and learning activities to address the diverse needs of students. This theory posits that students have varied readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, which necessitate differentiated instructional strategies to optimize their learning experiences. The key concepts of this theory include readiness, interests, and learning profile. Readiness refers to students' current knowledge, understanding, and skill level. Interests pertain to topics or activities that engage students and motivate learning. The learning profile encompasses individual preferences in learning styles, intelligence types, and environmental factors.

In the context of special education, differentiated instruction is particularly pertinent as special education teachers must often adapt their teaching to accommodate a wide range of abilities and needs within their classrooms. This study uses the Theory of Differentiated Instruction to examine how well special education teachers in District I can modify their instructional approaches to meet the unique needs of their students. The theory provides a framework for evaluating the teachers' ability to design and implement lessons that are responsive to individual student differences.

The TPACK framework integrates technology into pedagogical practice by emphasizing the interconnectedness of three primary forms of knowledge: Technological Knowledge (TK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Content Knowledge (CK). The framework underscores the need for teachers to develop a nuanced understanding of how technology can enhance teaching and learning within their specific content areas. The key concepts include Technological Knowledge, which involves understanding and leveraging technological tools and resources; Pedagogical Knowledge, which refers to the mastery of teaching methods and strategies; and Content Knowledge, which entails a deep understanding of the subject matter being taught.

In the context of this study, Self-Efficacy Theory is applied to understand how special education teachers' beliefs in their instructional capabilities influence their teaching practices and professional growth. It examines the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their instructional competence, as well as the impact of professional development on enhancing self-efficacy.

The integration of these three theoretical frameworks provides a comprehensive basis for examining the instructional competence of special education teachers. The Theory of Differentiated Instruction highlights the importance of tailoring teaching methods to meet diverse student needs, while the TPACK framework emphasizes the critical role of technology integration in modern education. Self-Efficacy Theory underscores the importance of teachers' beliefs in their own abilities, which directly influences their teaching practices and professional development needs. Together, these theories offer a multidimensional perspective on instructional competence, addressing the practical, technological, and psychological aspects of teaching in special education. By leveraging these frameworks, the study aims to develop a holistic understanding of the current state of instructional competence among special education teachers among the schools

Methods

The study employs a descriptive quantitative research design, which is appropriate for systematically describing the characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. This design is chosen because it allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data to quantify the instructional competence of special education teachers and identify challenges they face.

A total of 80 respondents were included, comprising 16 special education teachers and 64 receiving teachers who were selected using purposive sampling. The primary research instrument used in this study was a survey, which is designed to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions across various domains. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, ranking, and Whitney U test.

Results

Table 1 – Level of instructional competence of SPECIAL EDUCATION teachers among selected schools

Area of Instructional Competence	Special Education Teachers		Receiving Teachers		Composite Mean	
	Mean	Inter.	Mean	Inter.	Mean	Inter.
Classroom Management	3.475	Agree	3.502	Agree	3.496	Agree
Qualifications and Experience	4.425	Strongly Agree	4.339	Strongly Agree	4.356	Strongly Agree
Mastery of Subjects Taught	3.888	Agree	4.003	Agree	3.980	Agree
Instructional Methods and Strategies	3.519	Agree	3.481	Agree	3.489	Agree
Engagement in Research Activities	3.806	Agree	3.847	Agree	3.839	Agree
Participation in Extension Projects	3.331	Agree	3.466	Agree	3.439	Agree

The overall mean for classroom management was 3.475 for special education teachers and 3.502 for receiving teachers, with a composite mean of 3.496, indicating agreement among both groups. These findings align with the current study, which highlights the need for continuous improvement in classroom management practices to enhance instructional competence.

The overall mean for the instructional competence of special education teachers, considering both special education and receiving teachers' perspectives, is 4.356, falling under the Strongly Agree category. This reflects a generally high level of instructional competence among special education teachers in the selected schools.

The overall mean for the mastery of subjects taught is 3.980, indicating general agreement among both special education and receiving teachers. Results emphasized the importance of subject mastery in enhancing instructional competence and student outcomes.

The overall mean for the instructional methods and strategies used by special education teachers and receiving teachers was 3.519 and 3.481, respectively, with a composite mean of 3.489, indicating general agreement. It underscores the critical role of adaptive instructional methods in enhancing educational outcomes for students with special needs.

The overall mean for the engagement in research activities was 3.806 for special education teachers and 3.847 for receiving teachers, with a composite mean of 3.839, indicating agreement. It emphasized the critical role of research activities in enhancing instructional competence and fostering innovation in educational practices. These findings align with the current study, underscoring the importance of research engagement among special education teachers in improving educational outcomes for children with special needs.

The overall mean for the participation in extension projects was 3.331 for special education teachers and 3.466 for receiving teachers, with a composite mean of 3.439, all interpreted as agree. This indicates a generally positive and proactive involvement of both special education and receiving teachers in extension projects.

Table 2 - Significant difference in the instructional competence among SPECIAL EDUCATION teachers in selected schools

Dimension	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation	Decision
Classroom Management	479.000	615.000	-0.400	0.689	Not Significant	Accept H□
Faculty Qualification and Experience	435.000	2515.000	-0.931	0.352	Not Significant	Accept H□
Mastery of Subject Taught	428.500	564.500	-1.020	0.308	Not Significant	Accept H□
Method and Strategy Used in Teaching	479.000	2559.000	-0.399	0.690	Not Significant	Accept H□
Research	487.500	623.500	-0.297	0.767	Not Significant	Accept H□
Extension Project	429.000	565.000	-1.006	0.315	Not Significant	Accept H□

In classroom management, the Mann-Whitney U value is 479.000, and the Asymp. Sig.(2-tailed) is .689. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in classroom management competence among special education teachers. In faculty qualification and experience, the Mann-Whitney U value is 435.000, and the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) is .352. This suggests that there is no significant difference in faculty qualification and experience. In mastery of subject taught, the Mann-Whitney U value is 428.500, and the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) is .308. This result shows no significant difference in the mastery of the subject taught. In method and strategy used in teaching, the Mann-Whitney U value is 479.000, and the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) is .690. This indicates no significant difference in the instructional methods and strategies used. In research, the Mann-Whitney U value is 487.500, and the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) is .767. This shows no significant difference in research competence. In extension project, the Mann-Whitney U value is 429.000, and the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) is .315. This result indicates no significant difference in participation in extension projects.

Based on the Mann-Whitney U test results, there are no statistically significant differences in the instructional competence among special education teachers among selected schools across the various dimensions assessed. This finding suggests that the instructional competence of special education teachers is relatively consistent, regardless of the specific aspect being measured.

Table 3 - The primary challenges faced by special education teachers in delivering effective instruction within the context of special education among the schools

Indicators	Special Education Teachers		Receiving Teachers		Composite Mean		Rank
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation	
1. Lack of management support and encourage to provide training opportunities for special education teachers.	3.13	Moderately Encountered	3.17	Moderately Encountered	3.16	Moderately Encountered	10
2. No master plan for the training of teachers according to their field of specialization.	3.63	Encountered	3.61	Encountered	3.61	Encountered	4
3. The teachers do not strive to acquire and develop continuously their	3.63	Encountered	3.42	Encountered	3.46	Encountered	8

own knowledge and skills.							
4. Lack of laboratory facilities/equipment, supplies and materials use for instructional purposes.	3.88	Encountered	3.36	Moderately Encountered	3.46	Encountered	7
5. There will be no instructional materials use to support in teaching learning process.	3.19	Moderately Encountered	3.22	Moderately Encountered	3.21	Moderately Encountered	9
6. Overloaded of teacher's assignment	3.94	Encountered	3.94	Encountered	3.94	Encountered	1
7. Children with Special Needs are not diagnosed	3.56	Encountered	3.58	Encountered	3.58	Encountered	6
8. No support from the administration in terms psycho diagnostic evaluation of children	2.94	Moderately Encountered	3.06	Moderately Encountered	3.04	Moderately Encountered	11
9. Lack of funding support for training and development of teachers.	3.50	Encountered	3.72	Encountered	3.68	Encountered	2
10. Lack of opportunity to take graduate studies.	3.63	Encountered	3.59	Encountered	3.60	Encountered	5
11. Lack of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation	3.50	Encountered	3.64	Encountered	3.61	Encountered	3
Overall Mean Challenges Encountered	**3.669**	**Encountered**	**3.683**	**Encountered**	**3.680**	**Encountered**	

Lack of management support and encouragement to provide training opportunities for special education teachers: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.13, while receiving teachers reported a slightly higher mean score of 3.17. Both groups interpreted this challenge as "Moderately Encountered," leading to a composite mean of 3.16. This indicator ranked 10th among all the challenges, suggesting that while it is a concern, it is not the most pressing issue.

No master plan for the training of teachers according to their field of specialization: Both special education and receiving teachers reported mean scores of 3.63 and 3.61, respectively, indicating that this challenge is "Encountered." The composite mean was 3.61, ranking this issue 4th. This highlights the need for a structured training plan to better equip teachers in their specialized fields.

The teachers do not strive to acquire and develop continuously their own knowledge and skills: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.63, while receiving teachers reported a mean score of 3.42. Both groups interpreted this challenge as "Encountered," resulting in a composite mean of 3.46. This indicator ranked 8th, suggesting that while professional development is important, other challenges are more immediate.

Lack of laboratory facilities/equipment, supplies, and materials used for instructional purposes: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.88, indicating a significant challenge, while receiving

teachers reported a mean score of 3.36, interpreting it as "Moderately Encountered." The composite mean was 3.46, ranking this issue 7th. This discrepancy points to the need for better resource allocation.

There will be no instructional materials used to support the teaching-learning process: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.19, and receiving teachers reported a mean score of 3.22, both interpreting this challenge as "Moderately Encountered." The composite mean was 3.21, ranking it 9th. This suggests that while instructional materials are a concern, they are not the most critical issue.

Overloaded teacher's assignments: Both special education and receiving teachers reported identical mean scores of 3.94, interpreting this challenge as "Encountered." The composite mean was also 3.94, making this the highest-ranked issue (1st). This underscores the urgent need to address teacher workload to improve instructional effectiveness.

Children with Special Needs are not diagnosed: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.56, and receiving teachers reported a mean score of 3.58, both interpreting this challenge as "Encountered." The composite mean was 3.58, ranking it 6th. This highlights the importance of timely and accurate diagnosis for effective intervention.

No support from the administration in terms of psycho-diagnostic evaluation of children: special education teachers reported a mean score of 2.94, while receiving teachers reported a mean score of 3.06, both interpreting this challenge as "Moderately Encountered." The composite mean was 3.04, ranking it 11th. This indicates that while administrative support is important, other challenges are more pressing.

Lack of funding support for the training and development of teachers: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.50, and receiving teachers reported a higher mean score of 3.72, both interpreting this challenge as "Encountered." The composite mean was 3.68, ranking it 2nd. This highlights the critical need for financial support in teacher development.

Lack of opportunity to take graduate studies: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.63, and receiving teachers reported a mean score of 3.59, both interpreting this challenge as "Encountered." The composite mean was 3.60, ranking it 5th. This underscores the importance of providing opportunities for advanced education.

Lack of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation: special education teachers reported a mean score of 3.50, and receiving teachers reported a mean score of 3.64, both interpreting this challenge as "Encountered." The composite mean was 3.61, ranking it 3rd. This highlights the need for motivational strategies to enhance teacher performance.

The overall mean for the challenges encountered by special education and receiving teachers was 3.680, indicating that these challenges are generally "Encountered." It has emphasized the importance of addressing these challenges to foster an inclusive and effective educational environment. By focusing on these areas, the schools can make significant strides in improving special education services.

Professional Training Recommendations

The need for specialized training for special education teachers among the schools has been highlighted by recent studies that identify significant gaps in instructional competence. These gaps are attributed to a lack of adequate resources, insufficient training opportunities, and limited administrative support. By addressing these issues through a structured and comprehensive professional development program, we can empower special education teachers to overcome these challenges and improve educational outcomes for their students. This training program is based on both local and international best practices and is tailored to meet the specific needs of special education teachers among the schools.

Area of Concern	Objectives	Strategies/ Activities	Persons Involved	Time Frame	Expected Outcomes
Comprehensive Professional Development Program	Provide ongoing training addressing diverse needs of special	Workshops on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction,	special education teachers, educational experts, trainers	Ongoing, with quarterly workshops	Enhanced instructional strategies and classroom management

	education teachers	classroom management, and behavior intervention			skills
Specialized Training in Assistive Technologies	Enhance proficiency in using assistive technologies	Workshops on assistive devices and software, integrating technology into lesson plans	special education teachers, technology specialists	Bi-annually	Improved use of technology to support student learning
Development of a Master Plan for Teacher Training	Establish structured professional development tailored to needs	Create detailed training curriculum, regular assessment and updates, collaborate with educational experts	special education teachers, curriculum developers, educational experts	Annual review and update	Systematic and updated training programs
Funding Support for Professional Development	Ensure access to financial resources for continuous learning	Budget allocation for conferences, workshops, scholarships for advanced degrees	School administrators, educational authorities	Annual	Increased participation in professional development activities
Enhanced Administrative Support	Provide robust support systems within schools	Establish policies and procedures, regular meetings, encourage teacher collaboration	school administrators, special education teachers	Ongoing, monthly meetings	Improved administrative support and teacher collaboration
Opportunities for Graduate Studies	Promote higher education and specialized training	Partnerships with universities, flexible scheduling, financial aid and scholarships	universities, special education teachers, educational institutions	Annual intake	Increased number of special education teachers with advanced degrees
Motivational Programs for Teachers	Enhance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	Recognition and rewards programs, career advancement opportunities, positive work environment	school administrators, special education teachers	Bi-annually	Increased job satisfaction and teacher motivation

Provision of Adequate Instructional Materials and Resources	Ensure access to necessary teaching tools and materials	Regular supply of updated materials, access to laboratories, evaluation and replenishment of supplies	school administrators, special education teachers, procurement officers	Quarterly	Well-equipped classrooms with adequate instructional materials
Diagnostic and Evaluation Support	Provide comprehensive diagnostic and evaluation services	Training on assessments and referrals, collaboration with specialists, development of IEPs	special education teachers, psychologists, specialists	Ongoing, annual review	Accurate diagnostic information and effective individualized education plans

Discussion

The findings reveal that special education teachers demonstrate a generally strong level of instructional competence across key domains. Both special education and receiving teachers agreed that classroom management practices are effective, particularly in fostering positive social relationships among learners with disabilities, which emerged as the highest-rated indicator. This highlights the importance of socio-emotional support in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, the very high ratings in qualifications and experience indicate that special education teachers possess the necessary skills, collaboration abilities, and communication competencies essential for effective teaching.

In terms of subject mastery and instructional strategies, respondents affirmed that special education teachers integrate relevant, up-to-date content and design flexible teaching approaches that address diverse learner needs. Engagement in research and extension activities further reflects their commitment to professional growth and community involvement. Notably, the absence of significant differences in instructional competence suggests consistency in teaching performance across the group.

However, persistent challenges such as heavy workloads, limited funding for professional development, and low motivation may hinder optimal performance. Addressing these issues through targeted training, adequate resources, and institutional support is essential to sustain and further enhance special education teachers' effectiveness.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study highlights that special education teachers exhibit a strong and consistent level of instructional competence across multiple domains, including classroom management, subject mastery, instructional strategies, and professional engagement. Their ability to foster positive social relationships with learners, maintain up-to-date knowledge, and implement flexible teaching methods underscores their essential role in promoting inclusive education. The findings also reflect their dedication to research and community-oriented activities, demonstrating a commitment to both professional growth and societal contribution.

Despite these strengths, challenges such as heavy workloads, insufficient funding for training, and low motivation pose significant barriers to maximizing their instructional potential. Addressing these issues through comprehensive professional development programs, targeted support in instructional resources, and motivational initiatives is critical. By implementing these strategies, schools and educational institutions can further enhance the competence, confidence, and overall effectiveness of special EDUCATION teachers. Ultimately, supporting these educators not only strengthens their professional practice but also contributes to improved learning outcomes and the holistic development of students with special needs.

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