



BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS HANDLING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the barriers to inclusive education through the experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in inclusive education settings. It examined their lived experiences, coping mechanisms in addressing inclusive classroom challenges, and proposed inclusive education programs based on the findings of the study. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to capture the realities of teachers as they managed diverse learner needs, adjusted classroom instruction, supported learner participation, and responded to behavioral, communication, and instructional challenges. The participants were teachers from Sto. Tomas West District, Division of Davao del Norte, who had at least three years of experience in teaching or handling inclusive classrooms. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with four teachers and a focus group discussion with five teachers. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and emerging themes from the participants' narratives. Findings revealed that teachers' lived experiences were shaped by the development of empathy and professional fulfillment, strengthened inclusive classroom practices, instructional challenges due to limited training and resources, increased workload and classroom management difficulties, and difficulty in communication and learner participation. Teachers reported challenges such as lack of training, insufficient learning materials, large class sizes, behavioral concerns, difficulty providing one-on-one guidance, and learners' limited ability to express their needs. To cope, they practiced differentiated instruction, simplified instructions and learning tasks, used visual and concrete learning materials, provided peer support, collaborated with teachers, parents, and school heads, and relied on patience, commitment, and willingness to learn. The study further emphasized the need for capacity-building programs, inclusive learning materials, specialist guidance and technical assistance, school-based coaching and monitoring, parent and community partnerships, and inclusive awareness and orientation programs. It is recommended that schools and education authorities strengthen teacher training, provide appropriate instructional resources, improve support systems, promote stakeholder collaboration, and establish sustainable inclusive education programs for learners with special needs.

KEYWORDS: *Inclusive Education, Students With Special Needs, Teacher Experiences, Differentiated Instruction, Classroom Support, Inclusive Learning Materials, Sto. Tomas West District.*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is designed to provide all learners, including those with special educational needs, fair access to learning within regular classroom environments. It supports diversity, promotes acceptance, and ensures equal educational opportunities. However, its effective implementation continues to present difficulties for many educators. Teachers often encounter challenges such as inadequate training, limited access to suitable teaching resources, insufficient classroom assistance, and lack of collaboration with specialists. These obstacles hinder the academic progress of learners with special needs and place additional strain on teachers striving to meet diverse educational demands.

Globally, research on inclusive education has emphasized instructional strategies and policy frameworks, yet there remains a gap in examining the emotional and psychological toll on teachers. In Vietnam, studies highlight limited focus on teachers' emotional well-being, with stress and burnout affecting retention and effectiveness (Sharma & Loreman, 2020). In Cambodia, most research originates from high-income countries, leaving inadequate exploration of inclusive practices in low-resource settings where schools often lack facilities and trained personnel (Singal, 2019). In

Malaysia, there is a shortage of longitudinal studies assessing the sustained impact of inclusion training on classroom practices (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

In the Philippines, while support for inclusive education is growing, localized and culturally relevant training programs remain limited. Professional development often fails to account for diverse linguistic, socio-cultural, and geographic contexts, leaving teachers unprepared to address the unique needs of learners with disabilities (Abao, 2021). In Quezon City, empirical studies rarely document teachers' day-to-day classroom practices (Gines, 2016). In CALABARZON, despite DepEd policies promoting inclusion, research evaluating support systems such as specialists, teaching assistants, and learning materials remains insufficient (Lazaro & Sibug, 2020).

In Davao del Norte, there is a significant gap in localized research on teacher preparedness for inclusive education. National policies such as DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 provide frameworks, but their translation into effective classroom practices at the provincial level is unclear. Teachers in rural and geographically isolated schools often struggle with adapting strategies, assessing diverse learners, and accessing resources due to the absence of localized data. Furthermore, there is limited documentation of the firsthand experiences of public



school teachers in the province, despite unique challenges related to infrastructure, specialist availability, and resource access. Addressing this gap through qualitative research can empower educators and inform responsive programs tailored to the local context.

Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that every student deserves access to quality education regardless of ability or learning differences. By implementing inclusive practices, schools foster diversity, encourage acceptance, and provide fair opportunities for participation. In recent years, DepEd reports (2022–2025) indicate a steady rise in learners under Special Needs Education (SNED) integrated into mainstream classrooms. This trend requires regular teachers to accommodate diverse learning needs alongside existing responsibilities, underscoring the urgent need for effective support systems, training, and instructional resources.

Despite these efforts, teachers continue to face considerable challenges in inclusive classrooms. With five years of experience as a receiving teacher for students with disabilities, I have personally witnessed the realities of managing learners with varying abilities, behavioral needs, and academic levels. Teachers must continuously adjust instructional strategies, modify activities, and provide individualized support while meeting curriculum expectations. These experiences shaped my understanding of the complexities of inclusive education and strengthened my interest in conducting this study.

This research therefore focuses on examining the lived experiences of educators working in inclusive classrooms, particularly those teaching SNED learners in mainstream settings. It aims to identify the difficulties they face, the strategies they employ, and the support systems needed to enhance inclusive teaching practices. By documenting these experiences, the study seeks to contribute to improving the implementation of inclusive education, especially in addressing the practical needs of teachers in Davao del Norte.

Objectives of the Study

The study explored the experiences of teachers in handling students with special needs in inclusive education settings. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Describe the experiences of teachers in handling students with special needs in inclusive education settings.
2. Identify the coping mechanisms employed by teachers in addressing the challenges they encounter in implementing inclusive education; and
3. Propose inclusive education programs based on the findings of the study.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it sheds light on the real-world experiences and challenges faced by teachers in handling students with special needs in inclusive education settings. By examining their experiences, this research aims to uncover not only the barriers they encounter but also the strategies they use to support learners with diverse needs. The insights generated may serve as a valuable reference for school administrators, teachers, education officials, parents, stakeholders, and future researchers in strengthening inclusive education practices and support systems.

Students. The study may contribute to better learning experiences for students with special needs by promoting classroom practices that support participation, confidence, belongingness, and meaningful learning. It may also help ensure that learners receive appropriate support, learning materials, and inclusive activities suited to their abilities and needs.

Teachers. This study can assist teachers in developing a better understanding of the typical difficulties encountered in inclusive education, as well as the strategies used to manage them. The results may help educators enhance their teaching approaches, improve classroom management, apply differentiated instruction more effectively, and provide better emotional support to learners with special needs.

School Administrators. This research offers school administrators a better understanding of the needs of both teachers and students in inclusive classroom settings. The results can assist them in developing effective school-based support programs, providing necessary instructional resources, enhancing supervision and coaching practices, and fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Division and Regional Education Officials. The results of this study may assist division and regional education leaders in creating targeted training initiatives, offering technical support, strengthening policy frameworks, and developing intervention programs that effectively address the needs of teachers working with learners with special needs in inclusive education environments.

Stakeholders. Parents, community members, barangay officials, and partner organizations can also gain from this study by developing a clearer awareness of the shared role they play in supporting inclusive education. The findings may promote stronger cooperation, increased support at home, active community involvement, and greater participation in programs aimed at improving the well-being of learners with special needs.

Future Researchers. Future researchers may benefit from this study as it contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education, teacher experiences, classroom support, and barriers encountered in handling students with special needs. The study may also serve as a basis for further research on inclusive education practices in other schools, districts, or divisions.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research concentrated on exploring the experiences of teachers in managing learners with special needs within inclusive classroom environments. It explored how teachers managed learners with diverse needs, adjusted classroom instruction, supported learner participation, and responded to challenges related to behavior, communication, classroom management, limited resources, and lack of training. The study also investigated the coping mechanisms employed by teachers in implementing inclusive education, including differentiated instruction, simplification of learning tasks, use of visual and concrete materials, peer support, collaboration with parents and school heads, and the development of patience, commitment, and willingness to learn. Furthermore, the study examined the



inclusive education programs that can be developed or recommended based on the results of the study.

The research was carried out with selected teachers from the Sto. Tomas West District in the Division of Davao del Norte. Participants included both male and female educators who have experience teaching students with special needs within inclusive classroom settings. A qualitative research approach was employed, using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather rich and detailed information about their lived experiences, the challenges they face, the coping strategies they utilize, and their suggested programs for enhancing inclusive education practices. The study primarily highlighted teachers' personal accounts as they described their day-to-day realities in managing inclusive classes and supporting learners with special needs. However, the scope of the study was limited to a specific location and a selected group of teacher-participants within Sto. Tomas West District. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to teachers in other districts, divisions, regions, or educational contexts. The data relied largely on participants' self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by their personal perspectives, recollections, emotions, and interpretations of classroom situations. Additionally, the research mainly considered teachers' viewpoints and did not extensively include insights from students with special needs, parents, school administrators, specialists, guidance counselors, or other stakeholders who also play an important role in inclusive education.

Moreover, the study did not involve formal assessments of learners with special needs, evaluations of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), classroom observations, or technical reviews of school-based inclusive education programs. Instead, it focused on understanding teachers' lived experiences, coping strategies, and suggested improvements based on their narratives. Factors such as time constraints, participant availability, and school accessibility may have also limited the extent of data collection. Despite these limitations, the research offers meaningful insights into how teachers support students with special needs, manage challenges in inclusive education, and identify programs that could enhance teacher readiness, student engagement, parental involvement, institutional support, and inclusive classroom practices.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The review of related literature situates this study within the broader discourse on inclusive education. It identifies gaps, emphasizes key findings, and strengthens the theoretical framework (Creswell, 2023). The focus is on inclusive education's impact on student achievement, administrative efficiency, and the challenges and strategies in its implementation.

Lived Experiences of Teachers in Inclusive Education.

Teachers are central to inclusive classrooms, adapting strategies and materials to meet diverse needs. However, insufficient training, limited resources, and increased workload often hinder effective practice. Research underscores that teachers' lived experiences reveal both challenges and coping strategies in inclusive education.

Globally, inclusion is recognized as essential for democracy and equity. UNESCO and the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasize equitable quality education for all learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN). OECD highlights teacher education as critical in bridging inclusive ideals with classroom realities. Theoretical perspectives such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) stress the importance of relatedness, belonging, and motivation in fostering inclusion.

Learners with Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms.

Teachers' attitudes toward diversity strongly influence inclusion. Effective educators value diversity, employ learner-centered approaches, and integrate emotional and social dimensions of learning. Inclusive practices are shaped by teachers' efforts to build supportive environments, promote belonging, and support achievement. Collaboration among educators and commitment to equity remain essential.

Studies across countries show that while teachers generally support inclusion, differences in training and experience affect perceptions and practices. This highlights the need for consistent preparation across educational levels.

Coping with Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education.

Teachers face barriers such as lack of training, insufficient materials, large class sizes, and minimal specialist support. Coping strategies include peer collaboration, differentiated instruction, and strong communication with parents. Research emphasizes that inclusive education requires restructuring curricula, reallocating resources, and fostering equality of opportunity.

Empirical studies (e.g., Graham, 2020; Florian & Beaton, 2020; Rose & Howley, 2020; Dapudong, 2021) reveal that teachers support inclusion but express concerns about practical implementation. Effective inclusive teaching involves adapting lessons, modifying environments, using digital tools, and encouraging peer collaboration. Strong partnerships with families are also essential.

Improving the Implementation of Inclusive Education.

Findings highlight the need for continuous professional development, adequate resources, and collaborative school environments. Schuelka et al. (2020) note that inadequate pre-service preparation contributes to teachers feeling ill-equipped. Ahmed & Sharma (2019) emphasize that low self-efficacy leads to resistance in adopting inclusive strategies. Cultural beliefs and stigmatization of disabilities also pose challenges (Eke, 2022).

Support professionals such as therapists and psychologists are critical, yet often unavailable. The absence of assistive technologies and accessible infrastructure further hinders inclusion (Dapudong, 2021). Overcrowded classrooms exacerbate difficulties in differentiated instruction (O'Connor et al., 2019). Teacher burnout is another concern (Alnahdi, 2020).

Parental and community involvement remains inconsistent, limiting supportive environments (Ainscow, 2021). Weak policy implementation and insufficient funding also restrict inclusive practices (Sithole & Tanyanyiwa, 2021). Overall,



stronger administrative support and monitoring are needed to ensure effective practice.

Related Studies. Empirical studies confirm that inclusive education is both meaningful and challenging. Teachers must respond to diverse needs, manage behavior, and promote participation. Graham (2020) emphasized meaningful participation beyond placement, while Florian & Beaton (2020) stressed inclusive pedagogy. Rose & Howley (2020) and Dapudong (2021) identified barriers such as limited training and resources.

Studies also highlight teacher resilience and well-being (Collie, 2021; Gu & Day, 2020), showing that inclusive contexts foster empathy and professional growth. Coping strategies include differentiated instruction (Strogilos et al., 2023; Tomlinson & Moon, 2020), use of visual materials (Mitchell, 2020; Asian Development Bank, 2022), and collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2020; Vangrieken et al., 2020; Epstein, 2020).

Improving implementation requires teacher training, leadership support, and parent involvement. Forlin & Chambers (2021) and Sharma & Sokal (2020) highlight teacher efficacy, while Leithwood et al. (2020) and UNESCO (2024) emphasize leadership. Family engagement also strengthens outcomes (Garbacz et al., 2020; Epstein, 2020).

Theoretical Lens

This study is further anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Theory, both of which provide meaningful perspectives in understanding inclusive education. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains that learners develop behaviors, attitudes, and skills through observation and interaction. In inclusive classrooms, teacher modeling and peer support become critical in fostering acceptance and reducing barriers. The way teachers demonstrate inclusive practices influences not only students with special needs but also their peers, shaping classroom culture and promoting empathy.

Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Theory emphasizes that teaching should be adapted according to learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This principle is highly relevant to inclusive education, as students with special needs often require varied strategies, flexible assessments, and individualized support. The theory helps explain the difficulties teachers encounter when managing diverse learner needs within one classroom, particularly when resources and training are limited. It also underscores that barriers to inclusion often arise when teachers lack the time, materials, or professional preparation to differentiate instruction effectively.

Together, these theoretical lenses highlight that inclusive education is shaped by social interactions, classroom practices, and the teacher's capacity to adapt instruction. They reinforce the idea that successful inclusion depends on both the attitudes and actions of teachers and the availability of supportive systems that enable them to respond to learner diversity.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methods used in the study, emphasizing how data-based management practices affect student performance and administrative effectiveness in

schools within the Sto. Tomas West District, Division of Davao del Norte. It describes the research design, procedures for gathering data, and the methods applied for analysis to ensure a thorough and dependable investigation.

A qualitative approach was utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of school leaders and teachers in applying data-driven strategies. This method provides meaningful insights into their views and actual practices. Through the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study seeks to identify key factors that influence the use of data-informed practices in education and enhance understanding of their implementation within the selected district.

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of teachers and school administrators in carrying out inclusive education practices in Sto. Tomas West District in the Davao del Norte Division. A phenomenological approach was considered appropriate for this study as it focused on understanding how individuals perceived and made sense of their experiences within a specific educational context (Creswell, 2019). In this research, the investigators aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of educators' perceptions and experiences in teaching students with special needs, as well as how they manage the challenges present in inclusive classroom environments.

The choice of a phenomenological design aligned closely with constructivist perspectives (Piaget, 1972), which emphasized the importance of individuals' subjective experiences in shaping their actions and decisions. Inclusive education practices required teachers and school leaders to adapt instructional and management strategies based on real classroom experiences. In this context, phenomenology allowed an in-depth exploration of how teachers and school heads experienced inclusive education implementation and how these experiences influenced their instructional practices, leadership support, and classroom management approaches.

The participants were teachers and school heads from Sto. Tomas West District in the Davao del Norte Division. They had at least three years of experience in teaching or school administration, ensuring that they possessed sufficient exposure to inclusive education practices and the challenges associated with implementing such strategies in schools. A minimum of three years of experience was considered essential as it ensured that participants had developed practical knowledge and familiarity with managing inclusive classrooms and supporting learners with special needs.

Data were collected through qualitative methods, specifically five (5) in-depth interviews (IDI) and four (4) focus group discussions (FGD) to ensure a comprehensive and rich understanding of the participants' lived experiences. The in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face to promote an open, natural, and confidential exchange of ideas, allowing participants to freely express their personal experiences in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. Each interview was semi-structured and utilized open-ended questions to encourage deep reflection on their experiences in handling



students with special needs and managing inclusive classrooms.

In addition, four focus group discussions were conducted to capture collective perspectives, shared practices, and common challenges encountered by teachers in implementing inclusive education. The FGDs provided opportunities for participants to interact, validate shared experiences, and build on one another's insights, thereby enriching the data. A clear and structured interview protocol was followed for both the IDIs and FGDs to ensure consistency, credibility, and reliability in data collection. The interview and discussion guides were developed based on the research objectives and theoretical framework, focusing on participants' experiences in implementing inclusive education, challenges encountered, coping strategies adopted, and available support mechanisms within their school environments.

Sources of Data

The research participants consisted of nine (9) teachers from the District of Sto. Tomas West in Davao del Norte. These participants were engaged through two qualitative data collection methods: five (5) teachers participated in In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), while four (4) teachers took part in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The use of both individual interviews and group discussions enabled the study to gather comprehensive insights into the implementation and practices of inclusive education. The IDIs provided detailed, personal accounts of teachers' lived experiences in handling students with special needs, while the FGD allowed participants to collectively share perspectives, validate common experiences, and discuss shared challenges and practices in managing inclusive classrooms.

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. This method underwent validation from expert, selected because it allowed the researcher to deliberately choose participants who possessed relevant experience and expertise in inclusive education practices (Creswell, 2019). Since the study focused on educators with at least three years of experience in handling inclusive classrooms, purposive sampling ensured that participants had sufficient background knowledge and firsthand experience to provide meaningful and in-depth contributions to the study.

To maintain anonymity and protect the identities of participants throughout the research process, a coding system was utilized. Teachers who participated in the In-Depth Interviews were assigned codes ranging from IDI-T1 to IDI-T5, while those involved in the Focus Group Discussion were assigned codes FGD-T1 to FGD-T4. These codes were consistently used during transcription, data analysis, and reporting to prevent any direct link between participants' identities and their responses. The implementation of this coding system adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring confidentiality while enabling accurate and systematic analysis of the collected data.

Research Participants

The participants of the study were composed of ten teachers from Sto. Tomas West District in Davao del Norte. They were involved in in-depth interviews (IDIs), which allowed the

researchers to collect detailed and personal insights regarding their experiences and practices in implementing inclusive education, particularly in teaching learners with special needs.

A purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability method frequently applied in qualitative studies, was used to select the participants. This approach enabled the researchers to deliberately choose individuals who could provide rich and relevant information based on their knowledge and experience in inclusive education (Creswell, 2019). Since the research focused on educators with at least three years of experience in inclusive classrooms, this method ensured that those selected had sufficient expertise to contribute valuable perspectives to the study.

To protect the identity of the participants and maintain confidentiality, a coding system was implemented. Each participant in the in-depth interviews was assigned a code ranging from IDI-FT1 to IDI-FT10. These codes were consistently used throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure anonymity and prevent any direct association between participants and their responses. This practice adhered to ethical research standards while also supporting accurate data handling and interpretation.

Sampling Data

A purposive sampling method was applied in choosing the participants for this study. This approach was suitable because the research specifically required individuals who have firsthand experience in teaching students with special needs within inclusive classroom environments. Participants were selected based on set qualifications to ensure they could contribute relevant and meaningful insights regarding their experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and perspectives on inclusive education.

The selection criteria include the following: participants must be public school teachers, currently teaching in an inclusive setting, have experience working with learners who have special needs, possess a minimum of three years of teaching experience, and demonstrate willingness to participate in the study. These requirements ensured that the selected individuals had adequate experience, knowledge, and direct involvement in handling inclusive classrooms and supporting learners with special needs.

Research Instrument

Qualitative analysis was utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of the study in terms of credibility, transferability, and dependability. The experiences of the participants were recorded through audio during a semi-structured focus group discussion. Each participant was invited to take part in a group interview session, which lasted approximately three hours.

Interview Guide. The researcher developed five open-ended questions for the semi-structured interviews to collect detailed responses and additional information that would support and validate the study's findings. These questions were carefully formulated to align with the research objectives and guide the direction of the inquiry.



Data Gathering

Prior to gathering data, the researcher obtained initial approval from the Dean of Rizal Memorial College to carry out the study. Following this, a request for authorization was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent of Davao del Norte. The formal request included essential documents such as the research manuscript, interview guide, and the criteria for participant selection.

After securing the required permissions, the researcher coordinated with school heads and selected teacher-participants from Sto. Tomas West District. The objectives, procedures, and relevance of the study were clearly explained, particularly its focus on teachers' experiences in educating learners with special needs within inclusive settings. Participants were provided with informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the research, their responsibilities, their right to withdraw at any point, and the assurance of confidentiality.

Data collection involved both in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. The participants were teachers from Sto. Tomas West District in the Division of Davao del Norte. Four teachers took part in the individual interviews, while six joined the focus group session. These methods enabled the researcher to gather rich data on participants' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and suggested support programs related to inclusive education.

A validated semi-structured interview guide was used to maintain consistency while allowing flexibility to explore emerging ideas. The individual interviews provided detailed personal narratives, while the focus group discussion encouraged the sharing of collective experiences, diverse viewpoints, and common insights about inclusive practices.

Once consent was obtained, interview schedules were arranged at times and locations convenient for the participants. With their permission, all discussions were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation. Field notes were also taken to supplement and enrich the recorded data.

To maintain anonymity, a coding system was assigned to each participant. Those in the in-depth interviews were labeled IDI-FT1 to IDI-FT4, while participants in the focus group discussion were identified as FGD-FT1 to FGD-FT6. This system ensured confidentiality and facilitated organized data analysis.

After completing the data collection, all recordings were transcribed word-for-word. Responses expressed in local languages were translated into English while preserving their intended meaning. The finalized transcripts were then prepared for coding and thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas, key statements, and emerging themes related to inclusive education.

Data Analysis

The data were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes derived from the participants' responses. This process involved carefully examining the transcripts from in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions to identify recurring ideas and insights. Following Braun and Clarke's framework, I engaged deeply with the data, coded meaningful segments, and grouped them into potential themes that reflected the challenges, coping

strategies, and insights related to inclusive education practices in handling students with special needs. The themes were carefully reviewed and refined to ensure they clearly reflected the participants' experiences and were consistent with the goals of the study.

Clear definitions and labels were assigned to each theme, providing a coherent structure for interpretation. The findings were presented as a narrative, incorporating direct quotations to maintain authenticity and depth. This rigorous analytical approach ensured that the study's results were credible, relevant, and reflective of the participants lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to strict ethical standards to protect the rights, safety, and well-being of the teacher-participants involved in the study. Key ethical principles observed throughout the process included respect for social values, obtaining informed consent, safeguarding participant welfare, ensuring privacy and confidentiality, evaluating potential risks and benefits, promoting fairness, maintaining transparency, declaring any conflicts of interest, ensuring researcher competence, providing appropriate research facilities, and encouraging community involvement. These principles guided every stage of the study, from its initial planning up to the dissemination of results.

Social Value. The researcher acknowledged the importance of this study in addressing the real challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education for learners with special needs. By focusing on their lived experiences, the research aimed to generate practical insights that could support policy development, enhance teaching practices, and strengthen support systems for educators. The outcomes of the study were intended to be beneficial not only to teachers but also to students, school leaders, and policymakers who are committed to advancing inclusive education. This reflects the ethical objective of producing research that contributes meaningful value to society.

Informed Consent. Informed consent was obtained from all teacher-participants after providing a clear explanation of the study's purpose, methodology, possible risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participants received an information sheet and consent form to ensure they made a well-informed decision about joining the study. Respect for autonomy and transparency were central to this process, fostering a trusting and voluntary research environment.

Privacy and Confidentiality. Protecting participant identity and data was a top priority. Responses were anonymized through the use of codes or pseudonyms, and all data were stored securely. Only the researcher had access to identifiable information, which was destroyed after the study concluded. Aggregated data were used in reporting to ensure that no individual could be identified. These practices ensured the confidentiality of the teacher-respondents and fostered honest and open sharing of experiences.

Vulnerability of Research Participants. This study acknowledged that teachers working with students with special



needs might experience professional and emotional pressures, making them a vulnerable group in educational research. To protect their well-being, the study emphasized voluntary participation, ensured psychological safety during interviews, and avoided any form of coercion or undue influence. Participants were reassured that their responses would have no impact on their professional status or evaluation.

Risks, Benefits, and Safety. The study posed minimal risk to participants, with the only possible concern being emotional unease when discussing their experiences and difficulties in inclusive teaching. On the other hand, the research offered valuable benefits, including a deeper understanding of the challenges in implementing inclusive education and the types of support teachers require. The results may contribute to the improvement of professional development initiatives and the formulation of stronger institutional policies that promote inclusive practices. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher ensured that participants' well-being and comfort were given utmost importance.

Justice and Transparency. Justice was promoted by ensuring fair and equitable selection of participants. Teachers from various schools, grade levels, and backgrounds within the district were included to ensure diverse perspectives were represented. No group was unfairly excluded or overburdened. The study results were shared with participating schools and stakeholders to ensure mutual benefit and equitable access to the knowledge generated. Transparency was maintained by openly communicating the research objectives, data collection process, and use of findings. Participants were clearly informed about how their contributions would support the overall objectives of the research, and they were encouraged to raise questions at any stage of the process. Those who expressed interest were also provided with a summary of the findings, helping to build transparency, trust, and accountability throughout the study.

Researcher Qualifications. As the researcher, I brought relevant academic preparation and professional experience in educational research, particularly in inclusive education and qualitative methods. I committed to upholding ethical standards and methodological rigor throughout the study. My qualifications enabled me to conduct interviews with sensitivity and analyze data responsibly, ensuring both ethical and scholarly integrity.

Facilities and Resources. Interviews were conducted in private, safe, and comfortable spaces where participants felt secure to share their experiences freely. Appropriate tools such as audio recorders and consent forms were prepared. All collected information was securely stored in password-protected digital files, ensuring both data integrity and the comfort of the participants.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings based on teacher-participants' accounts, organized by research questions. Themes highlight challenges, coping strategies, and proposed programs for inclusive education. Narratives are included selectively to illustrate key points.

1. Lived Experiences of Teachers

Theme 1: Development of Teacher Empathy and Professional Fulfillment. Teachers reported that handling learners with special needs transformed their teaching practice. They developed patience, compassion, and emotional sensitivity, finding fulfillment even in small learner improvements. One participant shared, *"I have become more patient in guiding learners with special needs"* (P-IDI-3). These experiences helped teachers become more reflective in their practice and more committed to providing supportive classroom environments. This finding is consistent with Ahmmed and Sharma (2019), who emphasized that inclusive education fosters empathy and professional growth among teachers.

Theme 2: Strengthened Inclusive Classroom Practices. Teachers became more learner-centered, modifying activities to allow participation and providing multiple ways for learners to respond. A participant explained, *"Our activities became more inclusive because we gave learners different ways to respond"* (P-FGD-4). This shows that inclusive education encouraged creativity and flexibility in instructional practices. Learners with special needs were given opportunities to participate meaningfully, highlighting the importance of differentiated and learner-centered teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Theme 3: Instructional Challenges Due to Limited Training and Resources. Despite their willingness, teachers struggled with limited training and inadequate materials. One participant admitted, *"One of our challenges is the lack of training on how to handle learners with special needs"* (P-FGD-2). These constraints made inclusive teaching more difficult, forcing teachers to rely on instinct and personal experience. The lack of institutional support underscores the need for stronger training programs and provision of appropriate instructional resources.

Theme 4: Increased Workload and Classroom Management Difficulties. Inclusive education added to teachers' workload, especially in large classes where one-on-one guidance was difficult. A participant noted, *"It is difficult to manage the class when there are many learners and one child needs special attention"* (P-FGD-1). Behavioral concerns further complicated classroom routines. These findings highlight the importance of classroom assistance and smaller class sizes to support effective inclusion.

Theme 5: Difficulty in Communication and Learner Participation. Teachers encountered communication barriers, as some learners struggled to express needs and feelings. One participant shared, *"Sometimes I struggle to communicate with the learner when he or she cannot clearly express feelings or needs"* (P-IDI-4). Teachers learned to observe behavior more closely and provide alternative ways for learners to participate. This emphasizes that inclusive education requires patience, sensitivity, and strategies beyond verbal instruction.

2. Coping Mechanisms of Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Education

The second research problem examined the coping mechanisms teachers employed in inclusive classrooms. These mechanisms reveal how educators managed challenges through instructional flexibility, simplified tasks, visual supports, peer assistance,



collaboration, and personal commitment. Six major themes emerged from the analysis.

Use of Differentiated Instruction. Teachers modified tasks according to learners' abilities, ensuring participation despite diverse needs. One participant explained, *"We adjust the activity to the learner's level so he or she can still participate"* (P-FGD-1). This practice reflects the principle that inclusive education requires flexible pathways, consistent with Strogilos et al. (2023) and UNESCO (2020), who emphasize that differentiated instruction reduces barriers and promotes belonging.

Simplification of Instructions and Learning Tasks. Teachers simplified directions and broke tasks into manageable steps, often using routines to lessen confusion. A participant shared, *"I simplify the instructions so the learner can understand the task more easily"* (P-IDI-1). This approach helped learners follow classroom activities more successfully and supported behavior management, aligning with UNESCO's (2020) call to adapt classroom practices to learner needs.

Use of Visual and Concrete Learning Materials. Pictures, flashcards, and concrete examples were used to make lessons more accessible. One teacher noted, *"I use pictures and flashcards so the learner can better visualize the lesson"* (P-IDI-2). These materials supported comprehension, especially for learners struggling with verbal instruction, echoing the Asian Development Bank (2022) which highlights the importance of adapted teaching resources in inclusive education.

Peer Support and Classroom Assistance. Teachers assigned peer buddies to assist learners, fostering inclusion and cooperation. A participant explained, *"I assign the learner a peer buddy so he or she has a classmate who can help"* (P-IDI-4). Peer support reduced isolation and promoted empathy among classmates, reinforcing UNESCO's (2020) principle that inclusion involves participation and shared responsibility.

Collaboration with Teachers, Parents, and School Heads. Collaboration emerged as a vital coping mechanism, with teachers seeking support from colleagues, parents, and administrators. One participant emphasized, *"Collaboration with fellow teachers helps us find solutions"* (P-FGD-1). This distributed responsibility strengthened inclusive practices, consistent with DepEd (2021) and Mugisha & Sseguya (2023), who highlight the role of leadership and technical assistance in sustaining inclusion.

Patience, Commitment, and Willingness to Learn. Teachers relied on perseverance and continuous learning to sustain inclusive practices. One participant reflected, *"My own patience and willingness to learn help me face the challenges"* (P-IDI-4). This emotional resilience allowed teachers to remain responsive despite difficulties, supporting UNESCO's (2024) emphasis on professional learning and adjustment as key to effective inclusion.

3. Proposed Inclusive Education Programs

The third research problem focused on the programs that may be proposed to strengthen inclusive education based on teachers' experiences. The findings revealed six major

initiatives: capacity-building, provision of inclusive learning materials, specialist guidance, school-based coaching, parent and community partnership, and inclusive awareness and orientation. These programs highlight that effective inclusion requires not only instructional strategies but also systemic support and shared responsibility.

Capacity-Building Program for Inclusive Education.

Teachers emphasized the need for continuous training that is practical, hands-on, and classroom-based. One participant explained, *"We need training on how to handle different types of special needs"* (P-IDI-1). This reflects the importance of equipping teachers with knowledge and behavior management strategies, consistent with UNESCO (2020) and DepEd (2021), which stress professional development as key to reducing barriers.

Development and Provision of Inclusive Learning Materials.

Participants highlighted the importance of appropriate, ready-made instructional materials that are visual, concrete, and suited to learners' abilities. A teacher shared, *"It would be a big help if there were learning materials suited to the learner's needs"* (P-IDI-2). This aligns with the Asian Development Bank (2022), which emphasizes adapted resources to support diverse learners.

Specialist Guidance and Technical Assistance Program

Teachers expressed the need for guidance from specialists and support personnel to help them apply appropriate strategies. One participant noted, *"We need guidance from specialists so our teaching will be more appropriate"* (P-IDI-3). This finding is consistent with UNESCO (2024), which underscores the importance of coordinated support and technical assistance in inclusive education.

School-Based Coaching and Monitoring Program.

Regular monitoring and coaching from school leaders were identified as essential. A participant explained, *"Regular monitoring and coaching from school leaders are needed"* (P-FGD-5). This continuous guidance helps teachers refine classroom practices, echoing UNESCO's (2024) emphasis on leadership in building inclusive schools.

Parent and Community Partnership Program.

Teachers stressed that inclusive education becomes stronger when schools, parents, and communities work together. One participant shared, *"The school and parents need to work together in monitoring the learner's progress"* (P-IDI-1). This cooperation ensures that learning continues at home and that community groups provide resources, consistent with UNESCO (2020).

Inclusive Awareness and Orientation Program.

Participants emphasized the need for regular orientation for parents and community members to reduce misunderstanding and strengthen cooperation. A teacher explained, *"Regular orientation for parents and the community can help deepen their understanding of inclusive education"* (P-FGD-5). This reflects UNESCO's (2020) view that inclusion requires awareness, acceptance, and open communication among stakeholders.

Overall, the proposed programs demonstrate that inclusive education cannot be sustained by teachers alone. It requires



continuous training, appropriate resources, technical assistance, school leadership, parent involvement, and community cooperation. These initiatives affirm that effective inclusion depends on both instructional support and shared leadership, ensuring that learners with special needs are understood, supported, and given meaningful opportunities to succeed.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings of the study, along with the implications drawn from the results and the recommendations formulated based on the analysis of challenges in inclusive education and the experiences of teachers working with learners with special needs. It highlights how teachers experienced inclusive education in relation to empathy development, classroom adjustments, limited training and resources, increased workload, classroom management difficulties, and learner communication challenges. The chapter also discusses the implications for educational management in strengthening teacher training, inclusive classroom practices, stakeholder collaboration, provision of learning materials, and school-based support systems. Finally, it provides recommendations to improve inclusive education implementation, teacher preparedness, parent and community involvement, and support programs for learners with special needs.

Summary of Findings

This research examined the experiences of teachers working with learners who have special needs in inclusive education settings, along with the strategies they use to manage the difficulties they face and the possible programs that can be developed from the study's results. The findings were based on the participants shared accounts and were organized according to the study's three main research questions. The results indicated that inclusive education goes beyond teaching duties, as it involves emotional, professional, and collaborative responsibilities that demand patience, adaptability, empathy, creativity, and ongoing support. The data highlighted three key areas: teachers lived experiences, their coping strategies, and suggested programs to improve inclusive education.

1. The study found that the lived experiences of teachers in handling students with special needs in inclusive education settings are characterized by the development of teacher empathy and professional fulfillment, strengthened inclusive classroom practices, instructional challenges due to limited training and resources, increased workload and classroom management difficulties, and difficulty in communication and learner participation. Teachers experienced the need to become more patient, understanding, and emotionally sensitive in responding to learners with special needs. They also adjusted classroom activities, lesson plans, and ways of learner participation. However, they encountered difficulties due to limited training, lack of appropriate learning materials, large class sizes, one-on-one guidance demands, behavioral concerns, and communication barriers. Despite these challenges, teachers became more reflective, flexible, and committed in creating inclusive classroom environments.

2. The study revealed that teachers cope with the challenges of inclusive education through the use of differentiated instruction, simplification of instructions and learning tasks,

use of visual and concrete learning materials, peer support and classroom assistance, collaboration with teachers, parents, and school heads, and patience, commitment, and willingness to learn. Teachers modified activities according to learners' abilities, gave simple and clear instructions, used pictures, flashcards, and concrete examples, assigned peer buddies, and sought help from co-teachers, parents, and school leaders. These coping mechanisms showed that teachers relied not only on teaching strategies but also on collaboration, creativity, patience, and emotional resilience in supporting learners with special needs.

3. The study further found that the proposed inclusive education programs should focus on a capacity-building program for inclusive education, development and provision of inclusive learning materials, specialist guidance and technical assistance program, school-based coaching and monitoring program, parent and community partnership program, and inclusive awareness and orientation program. The participants emphasized the need for regular and practical training on special needs, behavior management, and inclusive teaching strategies. They also highlighted the importance of ready-made instructional materials, support from specialists, regular coaching from school leaders, stronger parent and community involvement, and orientation activities to deepen understanding of inclusive education. These proposed programs respond to the actual needs of teachers and aim to strengthen inclusive education implementation in schools.

Implications

This research offers valuable insights for teachers, school administrators, parents, education leaders, and policymakers in improving inclusive education for learners with special needs. The findings highlight that inclusion goes beyond placing these learners in mainstream classrooms; it also involves ensuring active participation, providing appropriate support, preparing teachers effectively, and fostering a nurturing and supportive school environment.

1. The findings imply that teachers need stronger professional preparation and continuing support in handling learners with special needs. Since teachers face diverse learner needs, communication difficulties, behavioral concerns, and classroom management challenges, they must be equipped with inclusive teaching strategies, behavior management skills, and differentiated instruction practices. This implies that teacher training should be practical, hands-on, and based on real classroom situations.

2. The challenges related to limited learning materials imply the need for schools and education offices to provide appropriate instructional resources for inclusive classrooms. Teachers need visual, concrete, and differentiated materials that match the abilities and needs of learners with special needs. This suggests that inclusive education implementation requires not only teacher effort but also adequate materials, tools, and learning supports that make lessons more accessible.

3. The findings imply that inclusive classroom practices must be strengthened through flexible and learner-centered instruction. Since learners with special needs may require different ways of responding, participating, and completing tasks, teachers need to design activities that allow all learners to participate meaningfully. This means that lesson planning,



assessment, and classroom routines should be adjusted based on learner needs and abilities.

4. The coping mechanisms of teachers imply the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility in inclusive education. Teachers cope better when they receive support from co-teachers, parents, school heads, and classmates of learners with special needs. This indicates that inclusive education should not be carried by the classroom teacher alone. A strong support system involving the school, home, and community is necessary to sustain learner progress and teacher confidence.

5. The proposed inclusive education programs imply that school-based support systems are essential for effective implementation. Teachers need regular coaching, monitoring, specialist guidance, and technical assistance to improve their practices. This implies that school leaders should provide continuous guidance and create a supportive environment where teachers can ask for help, receive feedback, and improve their inclusive teaching practices.

6. The findings also imply that awareness and orientation are necessary to build a more accepting and inclusive school culture. Since some parents, community members, and learners may not fully understand why students with special needs require different forms of support, regular orientation can reduce misunderstanding and promote acceptance. This suggests that inclusive education must be supported not only inside the classroom but also by the whole school community.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and their corresponding implications, the following recommendations are suggested to enhance the implementation of inclusive education for learners with special needs.

Teachers are encouraged to continue using differentiated instruction in handling learners with special needs. They may adjust activities, lesson delivery, outputs, and assessments based on the ability and learning needs of each child. This can help ensure that learners with special needs are given meaningful opportunities to participate in classroom learning.

Schools should provide regular capacity-building programs for teachers on inclusive education. Training should focus on different types of special needs, behavior management, differentiated instruction, classroom-based interventions, and practical strategies that teachers can immediately apply in their classrooms.

School heads and education offices should support the development and provision of inclusive learning materials. These may include visual aids, flashcards, concrete materials, adapted worksheets, and ready-made instructional materials suited to the needs and abilities of learners with special needs.

Schools should establish specialist guidance and technical assistance mechanisms. Teachers may be provided with access to special education teachers, guidance personnel, health professionals, or other specialists who can help them identify appropriate strategies and interventions for learners with special needs.

School leaders should strengthen school-based coaching and monitoring for inclusive education. Regular classroom

observation, mentoring, feedback sessions, and follow-up support may help teachers improve their inclusive classroom practices and address challenges more effectively.

Teachers are encouraged to use peer support strategies such as assigning peer buddies. This can help learners with special needs participate in classroom activities while also promoting empathy, cooperation, and acceptance among classmates.

Parents should be actively involved in monitoring and supporting the progress of learners with special needs. Schools may conduct regular parent conferences, home-school monitoring, and communication activities to ensure that learning support continues at home.

Schools should strengthen partnerships with the community, barangay, local government units, and other stakeholders. These partnerships may help provide additional learning materials, support services, and resources needed for inclusive education programs.

Schools should conduct regular inclusive education orientation and awareness activities for parents, learners, teachers, and community members. These activities can help reduce misunderstandings, promote acceptance, and build a more supportive school culture for learners with special needs.

Further research is recommended to explore inclusive education practices in other school contexts. Future studies may focus on the experiences of teachers in remote schools, large schools, small schools, or schools with limited resources. Comparative studies may also be conducted to examine how inclusive education implementation varies across grade levels, districts, or divisions.

Overall, the study's results highlight that inclusive education involves not only instructional duties but also a shared leadership role. Teachers need to demonstrate patience, adaptability, empathy, teamwork, and a strong focus on meeting the needs of learners with special needs. Strengthening teacher training, instructional materials, school-based support, parent involvement, community partnership, and awareness programs can help ensure that inclusive education becomes more meaningful, responsive, and supportive for all learners.

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