

Voices From the Field: Lived Experiences of School Heads and Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Education

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Abstract — This qualitative study explored the lived experiences, challenges, and perceptions of school heads and teachers regarding the implementation of inclusive education in public schools within Talisay Cluster 1 and 2, Schools Division of Talisay City, Cebu, during the School Year 2024–2025. Using a phenomenological approach, the research captured rich, narrative accounts from educators directly involved in inclusive practices. Findings revealed that while teachers and school leaders express a deep commitment to inclusive education, they face significant obstacles, including lack of resources, inadequate training, logistical constraints, and attitudinal resistance. These challenges often lead to inconsistent application of inclusive strategies, despite educators' personal dedication and willingness to innovate. The study further revealed the importance of systemic support, such as sustained professional development, administrative backing, peer collaboration, and school-wide cultural alignment, to ensure the sustainability of inclusive education. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping inclusive environments by promoting shared ownership and embedding inclusion into school values and policies. Additionally, the findings underscore the need for coordinated policy actions, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and increased investment in infrastructure and human resources. Implications of the study emphasize that inclusive education cannot rely solely on individual passion it must be supported by a robust, multi-level system that aligns policy, practice, and community engagement. The results inform educators, administrators, and policymakers about the concrete steps needed to move from fragmented efforts to a cohesive, inclusive education framework that ensures equity and quality for all learners, especially those with diverse learning needs.

Keywords — *Inclusive Education, Teacher Experiences, Educational Challenges, School Leadership, Systemic Support*

I. Introduction

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 prioritizes inclusive education to ensure equal learning opportunities for all, especially individuals with disabilities. Countries like Finland and Canada have made significant progress by investing in teacher training and accessible infrastructure. In the Philippines, inclusive education is backed by laws such as Republic Act No. 11650 (2022) and DepEd Order No. 21 (2019), providing support through systems like the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and Special Education (SPED). However, challenges remain due to limited resources, untrained staff, and inadequate learning materials.

In Talisay City, only a small portion of public schools (35%) have disability-friendly facilities, and just 28% of teachers have received formal SPED training. Overcrowded classrooms,

limited diagnostic tools, and weak structural and organizational support hinder the implementation of inclusive education. A study by Cebu Normal University (2023) and data from the Talisay City Division Office confirm these issues, especially in Clusters 1 and 2.

Nationally and globally, studies often rely on quantitative data rather than the lived experiences of school leaders and teachers. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring how educators in Talisay understand and apply inclusive practices, the obstacles they encounter, and how they address them. The study aims to provide practical insights to improve local education policies and address real-world challenges in inclusive education.

Statement of the Problem

This study explores the lived experiences, challenges, and perceptions of school heads and teachers regarding the implementation of inclusive education in public schools within Talisay Cluster 1 and 2, Schools Division of Talisay City, Cebu during the School Year 2024-2025 with the end view of proposing an action plan.

Specifically, it seeks answer to the following questions:

1. How do school heads and teachers describe their lived experiences in implementing inclusive education in public schools?
2. What are the perceived challenges faced by school heads and teachers in implementing inclusive education?
3. What insights do school heads and teachers offer regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive education strategies?
4. Based on the findings of the study, what framework can be proposed?

II. Methodology

The study adopted Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach, using Giorgi's (2009) methodology to explore how school heads and teachers in Talisay Clusters 1 and 2 perceive and implement inclusive education (IE). Bracketing is used to reduce researcher bias, ensuring participants' experiences are authentically represented. Data is collected through interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed using Giorgi's four-step method: reviewing data, identifying key themes, translating them into disciplinary terms, and synthesizing core ideas. The goal is to capture teachers' perspectives on IE implementation to inform educational policy improvements.

Data Processing

The study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Colaizzi's seven-step method to deeply examine educators' experiences with inclusive education in Talisay District.

Analysis began with repeated transcript reviews until data saturation, while a reflective journal documented researcher biases. Significant statements from participants were used to develop meanings and emergent themes through reflective discussions. A double hermeneutic approach allowed for interpreting both participant perspectives and researcher insights. Validation involved member checking and peer debriefing to ensure accuracy and consistency. The result was a comprehensive account of shared experiences in implementing inclusive education.

III. Results and Discussion

Research Question #1: How do school heads and teachers describe their lived experiences in implementing inclusive education in public schools?

Theme 1: Perceptions and Understanding of Inclusive Education

Teachers and school heads in the study demonstrated a transformative view of inclusive education, expanding it beyond support for students with disabilities to a broader commitment to respecting all learners' individual differences. Inclusion is now seen as a mindset centered on equity—meeting each student's unique needs—rather than uniform equality. This shift has led to more thoughtful planning, adaptable teaching methods, and a stronger focus on student well-being.

Educators stressed that inclusion should be a shared, school-wide philosophy rooted in moral and professional responsibility. Despite initial doubts, especially in under-resourced settings, even small, sustained efforts were found to improve student engagement and classroom relationships. Teachers noted that inclusive practices benefit all students, encouraging empathy, cooperation, and positive behavior.

The understanding of inclusion also aligns with Gender and Development (GAD) principles and the Department of Education's Child Protection Policy. Teachers saw inclusive education as essential for protecting students from marginalization and harm, emphasizing its role in promoting dignity, safety, and resilience. Overall, inclusive education is viewed not just as an educational strategy, but as a legal and ethical obligation to ensure equity, protection, and holistic development for every child.

Significant Response 1:

The respondent emphasized that inclusive education is more than integrating students with disabilities—it's about fostering an environment where all learners, regardless of their differences, can succeed together. Initially perceived as relevant only to students with special needs, the respondent's understanding evolved to see inclusion as a respect for each learner's uniqueness. This shift redefined inclusive education as a standard practice, not a special provision. It led to changes in lesson planning, student engagement, and teaching mindset, highlighting the need for flexibility, creativity, and continuous learning.

Significant Response 2:

The respondent defined inclusive education as fairness—meeting each student's unique needs—rather than treating all students the same. Their understanding evolved through experience, especially when supporting a student with a hearing impairment, where simple adjustments made a meaningful impact. This reinforced that inclusion doesn't require major changes, but rather consistent, thoughtful actions. The experience also fostered greater empathy and a commitment to creating a safe, respectful classroom environment. For the respondent, inclusive education is an ongoing journey that significantly enhances student well-being and learning.

Significant Response 3:

The school head viewed inclusive education as a whole-school commitment led by strong, values-driven leadership. It involves setting the tone, allocating resources, and supporting teachers to foster a culture that embraces diversity. While initial resistance from staff was common, ongoing dialogue, training, and modeling inclusive values helped shift mindsets. Inclusive education is now seen not as a separate initiative, but as a foundational approach to teaching and leadership. The respondent emphasizes that inclusion is a moral duty that benefits all students by creating more compassionate, adaptable, and collaborative school communities.

Theme 2: Strategies and Adaptations in Classroom Practice

Teachers and school leaders implemented a range of inclusive strategies, notably differentiated instruction, flexible assessments, visual aids, peer mentoring, and assistive technologies. These approaches, though often designed for students with additional needs, were found to benefit all learners. Educators emphasized that inclusion requires not just instructional changes but a shift in mindset—promoting co-teaching, sensory-friendly spaces, collaborative planning, and student voice. Despite structural challenges, teacher-led innovations in the Philippines highlight how creativity, collaboration, and strong leadership can foster meaningful inclusion aligned with global goals like the UNCRPD.

Significant Response 1:

The respondent highlights differentiated instruction as a key inclusive strategy, using varied formats like visual aids and hands-on tasks to meet diverse learning needs. Though it requires more planning, it leads to greater student engagement and fewer behavioral issues. They emphasize that inclusion doesn't require a complete curriculum overhaul—small, flexible adjustments can make a significant difference.

Significant Response 2:

The respondent, a school head, implemented co-teaching as a key inclusive strategy—pairing general and special education teachers to support diverse learners and encourage professional collaboration. While initially met with resistance, co-teaching led to better classroom

management, student participation, and teacher confidence. Institutionalizing it as part of school culture transformed inclusion from an added task into a shared responsibility, reducing burnout and improving outcomes.

Significant Response 3:

The respondent used visual schedules and cues to support students with autism and attention challenges, which also improved organization and independence for all students. This experience highlighted the universal benefits of inclusive strategies, reinforcing the importance of planning for diversity from the outset.

Theme 3: Support Systems and Collaborative Practices:

Inclusive education thrives when strong support systems and collaborative practices are in place. Teachers emphasized the importance of peer support, teamwork, and shared responsibility. School leaders fostered inclusive cultures through mentorship, regular check-ins, and structures like Inclusion Support Committees. Partnerships with parents, communities, and specialists further reinforced inclusive practices. Emotional and administrative support for educators—through collaboration, leadership, and flexibility—was also key to sustaining inclusion and protecting vulnerable learners.

Significant Response 1:

The teacher emphasized that peer collaboration has been key to successful inclusive education. Regular team meetings and open communication among colleagues have reduced feelings of isolation and built a strong support network. This culture of shared responsibility has fostered a more effective and meaningful approach to inclusion.

Significant Response 2:

The school head highlights the importance of strong support systems, including ongoing professional development and teacher mentoring, to sustain inclusive education. Pairing new teachers with experienced mentors provides practical guidance and reduces stress. Emotional support is also prioritized, with leadership playing an active role in fostering a culture of care, open communication, and shared responsibility.

Significant Response 3:

The teacher emphasized the transformative impact of collaborating with parents in inclusive education. By establishing regular communication through diaries, messaging apps, and home visits, teachers gain valuable insights and build trust. This partnership empowers parents to actively participate in their child's learning, creating a stronger, more cohesive support system across home and school—an essential component of sustainable inclusion.

Theme 4: Emotional and Professional Impact

This theme reveals that the journey of inclusive education is both **emotionally intense and professionally transformative** for educators. While teachers and leaders find deep fulfillment in student growth and connection, they also face **emotional strain, burnout, and self-doubt**, especially when resources are limited. These dual experiences underscore the need to **prioritize teacher well-being** as part of child protection and inclusive education policies.

Professionally, inclusive practices have reshaped educators' definitions of success—shifting from standardized outcomes to **personalized progress**—and fostered growth in skills like **flexibility, collaboration, and empathy**. Many describe this period as the most **transformative** in their careers, marked by both **professional growth and personal awakening**.

Critically, inclusion has prompted teachers to **confront biases, expand emotional literacy,**

Significant Response 1:

The teacher finds inclusive education both rewarding and emotionally taxing. While witnessing student growth brings deep fulfillment, the demands of meeting diverse needs often lead to feelings of inadequacy. Despite the challenges, the experience has fostered professional growth, transforming the teacher's perspective on students, learning, and their role as an educator.

Significant Response 2:

The school head described the emotional weight of leading inclusive education, feeling immense responsibility amid limited resources. Despite the stress, witnessing student progress and teacher growth brings deep fulfillment. The experience has shaped them into a more empathetic and supportive leader, redefining inclusive leadership as creating space for others to thrive.

Significant Response 3:

The teacher shared that inclusive education is emotionally challenging, with moments of defeat and heartbreak, especially when student needs go unmet. However, small victories bring deep fulfillment. Professionally, the experience has redefined their understanding of success and made them a more reflective and compassionate educator.

Research Question #2: What are the perceived challenges faced by school heads and teachers in implementing inclusive education?

Theme 1: Attitude

Attitudes toward inclusive education are crucial to its success. Resistance often comes from beliefs that students with disabilities should be separated and fears that inclusion lowers standards or disrupts classrooms. Policies alone aren't enough; a deeper shift in values is needed to truly

embrace every learner's worth. Importantly, attitudes can change through reflection, support, and firsthand experience, with school leaders playing a key role in modeling inclusive values. Beyond teachers, parents, students, and administrators also shape the school climate, making ongoing communication and empathy-building essential. Ultimately, inclusion thrives when it's seen as a shared moral commitment rather than just a policy requirement.

Significant Response 1:

A key barrier to inclusive education is the persistent belief among some teachers that students with disabilities belong in separate schools. This attitude leads to resistance and superficial implementation of strategies. The respondent emphasizes that lasting change requires addressing underlying beliefs through empathy, as true inclusion begins when teachers genuinely value every child's right to belong in mainstream classrooms.

Significant Response 2:

The school head observed that resistance to inclusion often takes the form of passive non-compliance, driven by fear and misunderstanding. This subtle resistance can influence school culture negatively if unaddressed. The leader emphasizes the importance of modeling inclusive values and celebrating small successes to gradually shift attitudes and build a more supportive, inclusive environment.

Significant Response 3:

The teacher initially resisted inclusive education, feeling overwhelmed by its demands. However, through personal experience and reflection, their mindset gradually shifted as they witnessed its positive impact on students. Now an advocate, they use their journey to support colleagues in developing a more positive, purposeful attitude toward inclusion.

Theme 2: Training

Training for inclusive education is often inadequate, overly theoretical, and poorly aligned with real classroom needs. Many teachers lack SPED certification and feel unprepared, relying on trial-and-error. Effective training should be sustained, practical, context-specific, and include mentorship and leadership development. Current programs often ignore local realities, making them frustrating and ineffective. Without culturally relevant and embedded support, inclusive education risks being aspirational rather than actionable.

Significant Response 1:

The teacher highlights a major gap in formal training for inclusive education, relying mostly on trial-and-error. This lack of preparation causes anxiety and uncertainty in adapting lessons for students with disabilities. The teacher emphasizes the need for comprehensive, practical training programs that build confidence and improve outcomes.

Significant Response 2:

The school head points out that current professional development for inclusive education is often superficial and disconnected from classroom realities. Without follow-up or practical support, teachers struggle to implement what they learn. The response emphasizes the need for sustained context-based training with mentorship to make inclusion truly effective.

Significant Response 3:

The respondent described feeling unprepared and overwhelmed when teaching a student with autism due to a lack of structured training. They had to rely on self-directed learning, which was confusing and isolating. The response highlights the urgent need for systematic, school-based training to support effective inclusive practices.

Theme 3: Workload

Inclusive education significantly increases teachers' workloads, adding both physical and emotional demands without corresponding support or adjustments. Teachers often work beyond hours to modify lessons, manage behaviors, and coordinate with families and specialists, leading to burnout. The lack of co-teachers, teaching assistants, and planning time exacerbates this strain. Bureaucratic tasks, such as managing IEPs, further blur roles and stretch capacity. These burdens limit opportunities for professional growth and risk undermining the sustainability of inclusive education. Structural reforms and equitable support systems are essential to make inclusion feasible and effective.

Significant Response 1:

The teacher described the heavy demands of inclusive education, highlighting how lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and assessment modification extend work hours significantly. These efforts require constant creativity and individualized attention, yet they go unrecognized in formal workload expectations. Despite being passionate about inclusion, the teacher finds the workload unsustainable without structural support.

Significant Responses 2

School heads and teachers alike emphasized that inclusive education adds significant, uncompensated workload. Teachers face large classes, administrative tasks, and the added complexity of inclusion without additional time or staffing. Documentation duties—like IEPs and behavior reports—are especially burdensome, often detracting from instruction and planning. Both responses call for systemic changes, including better tools and shared responsibilities, to prevent burnout and sustain inclusion effectively.

Significant Response 3:

The teacher emphasized that documentation tasks—such as IEPs, behavior reports, and parent communications—consume a significant amount of time, making them feel like they are juggling multiple roles. This administrative burden often detracts from lesson planning and direct student support. They suggest that better digital tools or shared responsibilities could alleviate the pressure, as the current system places too much on individual teachers.

Theme 4: Attitude

Negative or indifferent attitudes among educators emerged as a major barrier to inclusive education. Despite supportive policies, many teachers remain skeptical, fearing academic compromise or lacking confidence in their abilities. These mindsets, often shaped by fear and misunderstanding, influence not only classroom practices but also the broader school culture. Leadership plays a key role in shifting attitudes through modeling, mentoring, and promoting inclusive values. Ultimately, attitude change is a personal, experience-driven process—rooted in empathy, relationships, and belief in students’ potential—without which inclusion cannot succeed, regardless of available resources or training.

Significant Response 1:

The respondent highlights that negative teacher attitudes remain a major barrier to inclusion, with some educators believing students with special needs belong in separate settings. Such mindsets foster resistance and low expectations, limiting the impact of training. The respondent stresses that lasting change requires a shift in beliefs—not just policies or professional development.

Significant Response 2:

The school leader observes that shifting teacher attitudes is more challenging than implementing strategies. Negative mindsets, if unchecked, quietly influence school culture and harm student support. To counter this, the school promotes positive role models, peer mentoring, and success stories, recognizing that attitudes—positive or negative—are contagious and deeply impactful.

Significant Response 3:

The teacher reflects on their initial skepticism toward inclusion, driven by fear and self-doubt. This mindset led to resistance until a workshop experience demonstrated that the real barrier was their attitude, not the students. Since then, they’ve embraced inclusion, acknowledging that personal attitude change was the essential first step toward meaningful progress.

Research Question #3: What insights do school heads and teachers offer regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive education strategies?

Theme 1: Implementation

The implementation of inclusive education is often inconsistent due to inadequate preparation, lack of follow-through, and top-down approaches that overlook classroom realities. Sustainability improves when practices are gradually integrated, tailored to school contexts, and supported by collaborative planning among educators and administrators. Strong leadership and systemic coordination enhance consistency, while fragmented efforts lead to confusion and inequity. Teachers emphasized the need for adaptability, reflective practice, and student input. Inclusion is most effective when viewed not as a fixed program, but as a continuous, context-sensitive journey shaped by committed, flexible educators.

Significant Response 1

The respondent emphasized that inclusive strategies are only effective when consistently reinforced, not introduced as fleeting initiatives. Sustainable implementation requires gradual integration, allowing teachers time to experiment and reflect. Practical pacing—not rushed mandates—is key to building confidence and long-term success in inclusive education.

Significant Response 2

The respondent highlights that collaboration is essential for effective inclusive education. Regular coordination among teachers, aides, and administrators—such as through weekly team meetings—ensures consistency and shared problem-solving. Inclusive strategies become more impactful and sustainable when implemented through collective, school-wide efforts rather than isolated actions.

Significant Response 3

The respondent emphasizes that inclusive strategies must be flexible and individualized, as no single approach works for every student—even with similar needs. Effective implementation requires preparation and a willingness to continuously adapt. Sustainability in inclusive education stems from an ongoing mindset of responsiveness and refinement, not one-time solutions.

Theme 2: Impact

Inclusive education positively influences students' academic, social, and emotional development. When teaching strategies align with individual needs, students—especially those with disabilities—become more confident, engaged, and successful. These benefits extend to all learners through more dynamic, inclusive instruction.

Socially, inclusion fosters empathy, peer support, and a respectful school culture. These changes improve classroom climate and build a stronger, more collaborative community. Professionally, teachers gain resilience and job satisfaction, while schools attract families and build trust. Overall, inclusive education enhances learning outcomes, strengthens communities, and promotes lifelong values of equity and collaboration.

Significant Response 1:

This response highlights the transformative impact of inclusive strategies on student confidence and participation. When support is tailored to individual needs, students—especially those previously marginalized—become more engaged and self-assured. The teacher shares a compelling example of a student with a mild intellectual disability who shifted from withdrawal to active involvement after receiving appropriate modifications and peer support. This visible progress underscores that inclusive practices foster not only academic growth but also meaningful emotional and social development.

Significant Response 2:

This response emphasizes the broad, school-wide benefits of inclusive strategies. The teacher notes that methods like differentiated instruction not only support students with special needs but also enhance learning for all students by presenting content in varied and engaging ways. This universal impact improves lesson effectiveness and classroom dynamics. The respondent argues that when every student benefits, inclusive practices become more justifiable and sustainable, as the motivation to maintain them extends beyond targeted support to encompass the whole learning community.

Significant Response 3:

This response highlights the cultural and social benefits of inclusive education. The teacher observes that inclusive environments foster empathy and cooperation among students, leading to spontaneous acts of peer support. These behavioral shifts, while sometimes subtle, reflect deeper values of respect and solidarity. The respondent emphasizes that this positive cultural transformation extends beyond individual classrooms, contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable school-wide community over time.

Theme 3: Support

The sustainability of inclusive education hinges on robust support systems at multiple levels. School leadership plays a vital role by advocating for inclusion and providing resources, time, and training. Equally important is peer collaboration—through co-planning, mentoring, and shared problem-solving—that fosters a collective approach and boosts teacher morale. Access to special education professionals further enhances classroom confidence and practice. External supports, including parental involvement, resource availability, and mental health provisions,

round out this framework. Together, these layers of support form the backbone of successful, enduring inclusive education.

Significant Response 1:

This response emphasized the critical role of school leadership in sustaining inclusive education. The teacher highlights that when principals actively promote and invest in inclusive practices, it boosts staff morale and legitimizes the added effort teachers make. Effective support includes not just encouragement but also practical resources like planning time, specialist access, and targeted training. The respondent underscores that inclusion requires ongoing administrative commitment and adaptability—not just a one-time initiative—to remain effective and sustainable.

Significant Response 2:

This response highlights the vital role of **peer collaboration** in sustaining inclusive education. The teacher explains that regular support from colleagues—through informal groups and co-planning—helps alleviate the isolation often felt in inclusive teaching. These collaborative spaces foster practical problem-solving, skill-building, and emotional encouragement. The teacher stresses that such peer networks are crucial not only for refining strategies but also for maintaining morale and motivation, showing that **emotional support is just as essential as pedagogical guidance** in inclusive practice.

Significant Response 3:

This response emphasizes the **critical role of special education professionals**—such as SPED coordinators and therapists—in supporting inclusive education. Their expertise and hands-on collaboration, including co-teaching and modeling lessons, help bridge gaps in general educators' knowledge and build real-time confidence. The teacher notes that students benefit when staff coordination is visible and cohesive. However, the sustainability of this support is threatened when SPED personnel are overextended or spread across multiple schools. The response underscores that **consistent, dedicated special education support is key to maintaining quality and continuity in inclusive practices**.

Theme 4: Commitment

Commitment to inclusive education starts with dedicated teachers who believe in its importance and invest extra time and creativity to make it work. However, **personal passion alone isn't enough**—lasting success requires **institutional backing** and a school culture that treats inclusion as a central mission. Strong leadership reinforces this by integrating inclusion into hiring, training, budgeting, and everyday practices. Schools that persist through challenges and celebrate progress foster **resilience and long-term change**.

Commitment also extends beyond teachers and leaders to **families, communities, and policymakers**, whose support and involvement reinforce inclusive efforts. Teachers' **willingness**

to reflect, learn, and grow further deepens their impact. Ultimately, inclusive education thrives when it is **collectively owned** and embedded in the school's identity—not reliant on a few passionate individuals but supported by a whole system that believes in its value.

Significant Response 1:

This response highlights that **individual teacher commitment is essential** for inclusive education, particularly in how it shapes classroom practices and inspires peers. Teachers often go beyond their formal duties—designing custom materials or seeking out professional development—because they believe in the value of inclusion. However, the respondent emphasizes that **personal dedication is not enough**. For inclusion to be sustainable, it must be **reinforced by supportive school leadership and culture**. Institutional backing is necessary to maintain momentum and transform individual effort into lasting, system-wide change.

Significant Response 2:

This response emphasized that **school leadership is critical** in establishing and sustaining a culture of commitment to inclusive education. When administrators consistently advocate for inclusion—through **budgeting, hiring, and professional development**—they communicate that it is a core institutional value. The respondent notes that this **consistency from leadership**, even in challenging times, fosters a culture of **accountability and shared purpose**. Strong leadership creates the conditions where inclusive practices are not optional but expected, ultimately reinforcing long-term, school-wide commitment.

Significant Response 3:

This response highlights that **true commitment to inclusive education is reflected in how schools respond to challenges**. Rather than retreating when faced with behavioral issues, limited resources, or staff resistance, committed school communities **reflect, adapt, and persist**. The respondent underscores that sustainable inclusion doesn't rely on perfection but on **resilience and a collective belief that inclusion is non-negotiable**. This shared mindset fuels continuous improvement and long-term success, reinforcing that inclusive education is a **core value**, not a temporary initiative.

Discussion

Research Question #1: How do school heads and teachers describe their lived experiences in implementing inclusive education in public schools?

School heads and teachers described their lived experiences with implementing inclusive education as **both rewarding and challenging**. Their deep commitment and sense of purpose drive them to support diverse learners, often in the face of **limited training, resources, and personnel**. While personal dedication is a powerful force, these educators emphasize that **systemic support is essential** for sustaining inclusive practices.

Key enablers include **ongoing professional development, practical classroom strategies, and leadership that actively advocates for inclusion.** Equally important is the presence of **collaborative peer environments**, where teachers can share experiences and develop solutions together, reducing isolation and enhancing morale.

Their narratives stress that inclusive education is a **dynamic, evolving process**—not a static goal. Effective implementation requires **adaptive leadership, collective responsibility, and aligned policy support.** Addressing these systemic gaps can turn the current challenges into a **replicable model for equitable and inclusive schooling** in Talisay and similar contexts.

Research Question #2: What are the perceived challenges faced by school heads and teachers in implementing inclusive education?

The experiences of school heads and teachers in implementing inclusive education paint a vivid picture of both dedication and struggle. A common thread in their reflections is the persistent lack of resources—whether it be assistive technology, adapted learning materials, or access to specialized staff such as therapists and SPED coordinators. Teachers often describe the need to improvise or create materials on their own, sometimes investing personal time and money just to ensure that students with diverse learning needs can participate meaningfully. This resource gap not only creates inequities for learners but also contributes to teacher fatigue and emotional strain, especially in under-resourced public-school settings.

Professional development—or the lack of it—is another challenge that emerges strongly. Many teachers admit they entered the profession without sufficient training in inclusive education. While they express willingness to learn, they often feel unprepared and overwhelmed when faced with students who have a wide range of disabilities and learning differences. Traditional workshops and lectures are seen as inadequate, as they don't always translate into usable strategies in real classrooms. Teachers emphasize the need for ongoing, hands-on training that is tailored to real-life scenarios and adaptable to their specific teaching contexts.

In addition to these structural and professional barriers, attitudinal challenges also complicate the implementation process. Some educators report encountering resistance from colleagues who either do not see inclusion as their responsibility or view it as an extra burden. This resistance can lead to feelings of isolation among those who are deeply committed to inclusive practices. Without a shared sense of ownership across the school community, inclusive education efforts can become fragmented and unsustainable. Teachers highlight the importance of fostering a positive school culture where inclusion is embraced by all and supported at every level.

Logistical constraints further add to the complexity. Teachers frequently point to large class sizes, rigid schedules, and a lack of time for collaboration or co-planning as major obstacles. These conditions make it difficult to implement differentiated instruction or provide individualized support. Even when teachers are committed, they often lack the time and structural flexibility to adjust lessons, consult with peers, or prepare appropriate accommodations.

Together, these challenges suggest that implementing inclusive education requires more than good intentions. It calls for a coordinated and comprehensive approach—one that addresses not just the material and training needs of educators, but also the culture, leadership, and policies that shape everyday school life. Teachers and school heads alike stress that with stronger institutional support, sustained professional learning, and a collaborative spirit, inclusive education can move from being an ideal to a practical, equitable reality.

IV. Conclusion

The findings highlighted that while school heads and teachers in Talisay Clusters 1 and 2 are committed to inclusive education, they face significant systemic challenges. Key issues include a lack of resources—such as adaptive tools, learning materials, and trained staff—and insufficient, practical training tailored to real classroom contexts. These limitations force educators to compensate with personal effort, leading to strain and inconsistent application of inclusive practices.

Additionally, attitudinal barriers like staff resistance and unclear responsibility undermine cohesive implementation. A shift in school culture, driven by strong leadership, is needed to make inclusion a shared priority.

To advance inclusive education, the study emphasizes the need for better resource allocation, ongoing professional development, cultural alignment within schools, and supportive administrative structures. Only through coordinated, strategic efforts can inclusive education be effectively sustained and scaled.

V. Recommendations

The recommendations aimed to address the challenges faced by school heads and teachers in implementing inclusive education in Talisay Clusters 1 and 2. Key proposals include:

- **Resource Provision:** The Department of Education, local government, and stakeholders should ensure consistent access to adaptive materials, assistive technology, and inclusive infrastructure. Hiring more SPED professionals is essential to support both students and general education teachers.
- **Sustained Professional Development:** Training should be continuous and practical, focusing on real classroom needs like differentiated instruction and behavior management. Peer mentoring and professional learning communities can offer ongoing support and collaboration.

- **Inclusive School Leadership:** Leaders should promote inclusion as a shared, school-wide responsibility. Inclusive goals should be integrated into school plans, staff evaluations, and recognition programs, while celebrating successful inclusive practices to boost engagement.
- **Policy Reforms:** The Schools Division of Talisay City should revise policies to reduce systemic barriers—improving teacher-student ratios, allowing time for co-teaching, and simplifying administrative tasks to prioritize instruction.
- **Community Engagement:** Strong partnerships with parents, community leaders, and advocacy groups are vital. Regular communication and inclusion-focused initiatives can foster greater community support and help address resource gaps.

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