

# Voices From the Classroom: Teachers' Journeys in Fostering Inclusive Learning for Students with Disabilities

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*Abstract* — Inclusive education policies increasingly require the placement of learners with disabilities within mainstream classrooms; however, the practical daily realities for teachers who implement these reforms remain inadequately explored. This study attempts to describe the lived experiences, challenges, and pedagogical strategies of public elementary school teachers as they promote inclusive learning for students with various disabilities. Guided by a descriptive phenomenological design, ten teachers with direct experience in educating learners with disabilities were selected via purposive sampling. Data collection occurred via semi-structured in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and a reflexive journal, using a researcher-developed interview guide that passed expert review and reached a content validity index of 1.00, which is interpreted to be excellent. Verbatim transcripts, observation notes, and reflexive entries underwent Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Findings reveal that teachers' early experiences of inclusion were dominated by emotional shock, uncertainty, and self-doubt, but that these feelings gave way to a more profound sense of moral and professional commitment. Participants still complained about ongoing difficulties with differentiation, behavioral management, and assessment in the presence of large class sizes and inconsistent institutional support but were found to be creative, adaptable, and reflective in their practice through differentiated tasks, peer tutoring, flexible pacing, and growth-oriented assessment. This study concludes that inclusive teaching is a challenging, yet transformative, professional journey that has been sustained largely by teacher resilience, and it argues that efforts to further enhance classroom-based mentoring, collaborative learning structures, and practical training in inclusive strategies would be welcome.

***Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teacher Experiences, Learners with Disabilities, Pedagogical Strategies, Qualitative Stud***

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In fact, on the local public transit, advertisements and other forms of media reach at least 90% of target customers aged 14-65 years.

Global reforms in inclusive education stress not only access but also meaningful participation and learning for students with disabilities. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Sustainable Development Goal 4. However, there is evidence at both international and regional levels to suggest that inclusive policies are often thwarted by a lack of teacher preparation, scant resources, and the emotional and instructional burden placed on general education teachers, often facing uncertainty, stress, and lack of clarity regarding their roles when attempting to support learners with diverse needs. Within most public school systems, access to assistive technologies, multidisciplinary services, and sustained coaching is severely limited, leaving teachers to draw more on personal resourcefulness and peer support than on robust institutional structures. Local studies further show that, within regular classrooms, teachers frequently encounter learners with autism, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, hearing and visual impairments, and other exceptionalities unsupported by adequate support personnel, functional assistive devices, or fully developed individualized education plans, leading to unequal instructional support and sustained tensions between policy ambitions and classroom realities.

In this background, the present study explores the lived experiences, challenges, and pedagogical strategies of regular public school teachers who work directly with learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It intends to specifically look at: (1) teachers' lived experiences and perceptions in accommodating learners with diverse disabilities; (2) the major challenges they experience and the institutional, professional, and personal support systems they access or need; and (3) instructional strategies, adaptations, and innovations they adopt and how they perceive their usefulness. Constrained by its focus on teachers from inclusive regular classes, the study does not report on learner outcomes but instead emphasizes depth, meaning, and contextual nuance afforded by qualitative inquiry. By placing teachers' voices at the center, and by

documenting their emotional landscapes, daily instructional routines, and needs for support, the present study attempts to generate evidence that will lead to more realistic teacher education, strengthened school- and system-level support, and shape the refinement of inclusive education policies and programs toward more dignified and equitable learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

### **Literature Review**

Inclusive education is framed in an international perspective as a rights-based imperative anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Its approach accentuates participation, equity, and dignity, and maps the systemic transformation of school culture, curriculum, assessment, and teacher preparation, rather than mere placement of learners with disabilities into unchanged classrooms. International bodies such as UNESCO and UNICEF emphasize the need for structural supports-including assistive technologies, specialized services, and sustained teacher development-further supported at a national framework by individualized support and inclusive learning systems. Conceptually, inclusive pedagogy rests on the assumption that all learners can participate meaningfully, while teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, and professional agency shape the enactment of inclusion. Research suggests that teacher attitudes and preparedness are influenced by training, perceived competence, and available support, while phenomenological approaches further help elucidate how teachers interpret and negotiate inclusion in everyday practices. Empirical studies suggest that teachers are often initially overwhelmed and underprepared but gradually develop adaptive, relational pedagogies through reflection, collaboration, and experiential learning. Needless to say, limited training, scant resources, and inconsistent institutional support further exacerbate the difficulties; yet, many are equally resilient and resourceful. Higher efficacy relates to proactive differentiation and flexible assessment, while lower efficacy is associated with reactive management. Scholars from both global and Philippine literature characterize inclusive teaching as emotionally complex and pedagogically demanding, better-sustained by teacher resilience and informal collaboration than consistent systemic structures. Gaps in integrated, experience-based accounts inform the present study's phenomenological emphasis on teachers' lived experiences in mainstream classrooms.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive phenomenological design to investigate the lived experiences, challenges, and strategies of teachers in the implementation of inclusive education. With a sample size that depended on the attainment of depth and saturation, ten public elementary teachers with direct experiences in teaching learners with disabilities were chosen through purposive, criterion-based sampling. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide (CVI = 1.00) that contained participant profiles and open-ended items related to instruction, classroom management, assessment, collaboration, and support. After securing ethics clearance and administrative permits, participants were oriented to the study and asked to provide their written informed consent. In-depth interviews lasting 45-60 minutes were audio-recorded in private school settings, accompanied by non-participant observations to contextualize the narratives shared. The researchers' assumptions and decisions related to methods were bracketed through a reflexive journal. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews, observation notes, and reflexive entries were subjected to Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis to generate coherent and trustworthy themes regarding inclusive teaching.

### Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive phenomenological research design that aimed to explain the lived experiences, challenges, and instructional practices of teachers who implement inclusive education for learners with disabilities. The adopted research design is befitting to the extent that an understanding of participants' perspectives is centered and not clouded by preconceived assumptions. Qualitative data were collected using in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization with the data; generation of initial codes; identification, review, and refinement of themes; development of thematic definitions; and production of the final interpretive report. This systematic operation provided the means to realize rigor, transparency, and depth in unraveling the major patterns and meanings embedded in teachers' narratives.

### **Sample of the Study**

Using purposive sampling, the study recruited ten teachers of public elementary schools to ensure that all participants had direct experience in handling learners with disabilities within mainstream classrooms. This criterion-based selection aligned with the qualitative design by emphasizing information-rich participants capable of yielding deep, meaningful insights into inclusive teaching. While the sample size was small, this allowed for an in-depth, nuanced look at the teachers' lived experiences, challenges, support systems, and instructional adaptations. Data saturation was reached because no new themes emerged during subsequent interviews. Participants represented varied backgrounds in their teaching experience, grade levels, and exposure to inclusive education, enhancing the study's credibility, richness, and depth.

### **Measures**

This was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview that was utilized as the main data collection tool in the present study, with the intention of capturing the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers on accommodating learners with disabilities within mainstream classrooms. The first part elicited participants' profiles, including demographic details, teaching experience, and previous training on inclusive or special education. The second part consisted of open-ended questions about instructional planning, classroom management, assessment accommodations, consultation with parents and specialists, and school-level support. Probing questions were used to obtain more detailed and reflective responses. Content validity of the instrument was checked by a panel of experts and an excellent Content Validity Index (CVI = 1.00) was obtained, indicating that the instrument was clear, relevant, and adequate. All the interviews were audio-taped with permission from the participants and transcribed verbatim. An open-ended question format allowed participants to describe challenges, strategies, emotions, and insights, and thus provided rich qualitative data appropriate for theme identification and for developing a context-responsive support framework.

## Procedure

The research was conducted only after institutional ethical clearance, along with all the necessary endorsements, was attained, and the participating teachers were oriented to the study's aims, procedures, and confidentiality protections, followed by informed consent. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflexive journaling throughout the time period. In-depth interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, occurred in private school settings, and were audio-recorded with informed consent. Classroom observations situated teacher narratives within real instructional contexts by documenting instructional practices, student behaviors, peer interactions, and environmental conditions. Lastly, reflexive journaling captured the researcher's assumptions, emotional responses, and methodological decisions. Transcription of all interviews was done verbatim, and data from the three sources were triangulated and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. These challenges were minimized: scheduling conflicts, environment disturbances, or participants being hesitant at the beginning, by establishing rapport, making flexible arrangements when required, and sticking strictly to ethical standards, which resulted in rich and credible data of teachers' lived experiences of inclusive education.

## Data Processing

The research was in accordance with institutional ethics and was supported by formal approval and consent from ten purposively selected teachers. Participation was oriented on the research issues, processes, assured confidentiality, and voluntary participation principles. Data collection was through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant classroom observation, and continuous reflexive journaling. Interviews were conducted in private school settings at times that did not interfere with the teachers' heavy workload, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Observations provided contextual information about instructional practices, learner behavior, peer dynamics, and environmental conditions. Continuous reflexive journaling enhanced bracketing, documented emergent ideas, and thus monitored researcher bias. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed together with observational notes and reflexive entries.

Data analysis was based on Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic framework, including familiarization, systematic coding, and theme construction, followed by iterative refinement and synthesis. Initial and focused codes—such as emotional overload, inadequate preparation, differentiation demands, behavioral complexity, assessment dilemmas, adaptive strategies, and professional fulfillment—were organized in a structured codebook with explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to guarantee analytic transparency. Codes were compared iteratively across transcripts in order to identify patterned meanings until thematic saturation was reached. Difficulties posed by scheduling, environmental interruptions, and initial participant hesitation were minimized by building rapport, making flexible arrangements, and strictly adhering to ethical protocols. Triangulation of interview data, observation notes, and reflexive journal entries enhanced the credibility, confirmability, and trustworthiness of the findings, giving way to a rich and coherent portrayal of teachers' lived experiences within inclusive education.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### **Teachers' Lived Experiences and Perceptions in Accommodating Learners with Various Types of Disabilities Within Mainstream Classroom Settings**

This section presents data obtained from participants regarding their lived experiences and perceptions in accommodating learners with varied disabilities within inclusive classroom settings. It systematically presents, rigorously analyzes, and lucidly interprets findings according to the objectives of the study. The discussion enumerates the themes that emerged from teachers' narratives and explains how the identified themes reflect the realities of inclusive education in real classroom practice.

**TABLE 3**  
**OBSERVATION PROTOCOL SUMMARY**

| Observation Site                             | Date           | Duration  | Key Behaviors Observed   | Supporting Theme   |
|--|----------------|-----------|--|--|
| San Francisco District – Classroom 1         | March 10, 2025 | 2 hours   | Teacher adjusted instructions for a learner with ADHD; used visual cues; reorganized seating to reduce distraction; provided one-on-one prompting while facilitating whole-class work. | Instructional–Behavioral Complexity; Differentiation Demand                  |
| San Francisco District – Classroom 2         | March 12, 2025 | 3 hours   | Teacher modified reading materials for visual impairment; peers assisted voluntarily; teacher praised small achievements to boost confidence.  | Instructional Adaptations; Emerging Peer Support; Inclusive Pedagogy         |
| San Francisco District – Classroom 3         | March 15, 2025 | 1.5 hours | Teacher slowed pacing for a learner with autism; used multi-sensory materials; redirected off-task behavior; provided sensory break.   | Behavioral Complexity; Adaptive Strategies; Emotional Labor & Teacher Growth |
| San Francisco District – Classroom 4         | March 18, 2025 | 2 hours   | Teacher used peer tutoring; peers engaged actively; scaffolds were provided; learner showed improved participation.  | Peer-Assisted Learning; Social Dynamics; Building Belonging                  |
| San Francisco District – Classroom 5         | March 20, 2025 | 2.5 hours | Teacher improvised visual aids due to resource limitations; used audio recordings; recycled materials for modifications; expressed quiet frustration but adapted continuously.         | Instructional Innovation; Resource Limitations; Teacher Resilience           |
| San Francisco District – Parent–Teacher Area | March 22, 2025 | 1 hour    | Teacher met informally with a parent; clarified expectations; encouraged partnership; demonstrated empathy.  | Building Bridges with Stakeholders; Emotional–Professional Commitment        |
| San Francisco District – Classroom 6         | March 25, 2025 | 3 hours   | Teacher used performance tasks; allowed extended time; accepted oral responses; documented progress through notes.   | Assessment Flexibility; Development-Focused Monitoring                       |
| San Francisco District – School Grounds      | March 27, 2025 | 1.5 hours | Teacher comforted a teased learner; facilitated restorative conversation; reinforced kindness norms; used values integration.  | Peer Hesitation → Peer Support; Social Inclusion Work; Emotional Labor       |

The findings describe classrooms in the District of San Francisco that show consistent use of inclusive teaching practices characterized by differentiation, adaptation, and responsiveness to emotional-relational dynamics. Modifications for children with ADHD, visual impairments, and

autism used visual cues and multisensory materials, flexible pacing, peer support, and sensory breaks, which furthered instructional-behavioral complexity and heightened responsiveness to learner needs. Peer tutoring often constituted an effective mechanism for promoting participation and belonging. Teachers also contributed with practical ingenuity when instructional materials were absent, evidencing creativity and resilience. Assessment practices were flexible, including performance tasks, oral responses, extended time, and progress notes to track developmental growth. Observations beyond the classroom setting noted teachers engage in relational work, such as parent engagement, the resolution of peer conflicts, and reinforcing prosocial norms that extend beyond instructional activities.

### **Initial Encounter and Teaching Context**

Initial contacts between teachers and students with disabilities were abrupt, emotionally straining, and disorienting for the educators, with many instances of the feelings of shock, confusion, and perceived inadequacy being rooted in a lack of orientation and the sudden presence of learners with diverse needs. Observation notes corroborated these facts of hesitancy, cognitive overload, and reactive adjustment processes. Early misunderstandings of ADHD symptoms as wilful misbehavior were gradually overcome by more supportive strategies once teachers recognized the learner difficulties with self-regulation. Such problems were compounded by subject-specific and disability-specific obstacles in particular in English and Science, where high auditory and visual demands were exacerbating inequities and forcing special arrangements such as enlarged texts, repetitive instruction, and extra time. Even among experienced teachers, theoretical preparation had not aligned with the emotional and contextual complexities of inclusion, especially when social difficulties and stigma were surfacing. Aggregately, these results show that disability type, subject area, grade level, and institutional support shaped teachers' initial responses, revealing systemic chinks but at the same time igniting deeper reflection and adaptive professional growth.

### **Perceptions and Meaning of Inclusive Education (Improved Discussion)**

The teachers' perceptions of inclusive education did not evolve from the policy frameworks or official orientations alone but evolved through regular, lived classroom experiences. Early in their careers, many educators envisioned inclusion as an administrative duty and not a serious pedagogical philosophy, frequently acting out of obligation rather than deliberate intention. Such a positioning was reflected in observations where learners with disabilities were seated without adaptations, indicating a procedural rather than reflective stance. These reflective notes further corroborated this distance, suggesting that to them, inclusion initially signified work demands, time pressures, and unfamiliar responsibilities. However, over some time, their views have progressively turned as they begin to engage with learners' diverse needs at deeper levels for emergent awareness of equity, differentiated support, and learner participation. Small but significant adjustments to practice, such as the modification of tasks for learners with motor or sensory impairments, evolved teachers' perspectives over time from mere placement to relational work that is grounded on acceptance and equity.

A critical point of change arose when teachers witnessed the progress of learners and accessed positive peer interactions, which brought emotional resonance and challenged their professional identities. Such moments—for example, peers clapping when a learner with a disability recited his lesson or peers collaborating to guide a visually impaired classmate—changed the felt sense of obligation for teachers into one of advocacy. Incrementally, inclusion came to be interpreted not only as part of the job but as an imperative tied to learner dignity, social participation, and meaningful engagement. Observation notes captured increased and more purposeful strategies for differentiation, while reflexive insights revealed an emerging sense of purpose among teachers. Triangulated findings thus reveal a sequential experiential movement from compliance to cognitive awareness, to emotive realization and finally to moral commitment. In the end, it was not the official mandate that built meaning for inclusion; instead, it was the everyday relational encounters through which teachers supported, struggled with, and celebrated learner growth.

## Classroom Experiences in Inclusive Settings

Text restated:

Daily instruction in inclusive classrooms demanded constant modifications, flexible judgments, and continuous instructional experimenting. Teachers reported that lesson planning required multiple revisions of activities, instructions, and visual supports to meet different learning needs, which was supported by the Differentiation Demand code. Observational data confirmed the use of parallel materials-simplified worksheets, enlarged print, color-coded guides, chunked instructions-along with parallel approaches, including peer tutoring, mixed-ability grouping, multisensory activities, and flexible deadlines. Classroom management enhanced these demands, as frequent pauses were made to refocus students who were exhibiting behavioral or attentional difficulties. Despite such interruptions, teachers reported that consistent inclusive routines gradually brought about empathetic, patient, and cooperative responses from students, reflecting the socio-emotional development described by Jennings and Greenberg (2020). These daily adaptations highlighted the key message emphasized by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2020): flexibility is at the heart of inclusive pedagogy.

Among these, the teachers consistently reported emotional and relational breakthroughs, which strengthened their commitment to inclusion. Events like a learner volunteering for the first time or mastering a simple act created remarkable professional satisfaction, confirmed by observations of spontaneous peer applause and increased participation. Eventually, classrooms became collaborative learning communities in which diversity was normalized and learners actively cared for each other. Teachers mentioned increased group cohesion, voluntary peer support, and celebration of progress together as ways in which inclusion was realized through small, sustained acts of care rather than large-scale interventionism. Together, the triangulated data paint the inclusive classrooms as complex, relational spaces in which unrelenting instructional and behavioral pressures coexist with powerful moments of development, challenging class culture and instructor beliefs about diversity, belonging, and what is meant by learning.

## **Emotional and Professional Impact on the Teacher**

Inclusive teaching had a significant emotional and professional impact on the educators, especially in the initial stages of implementation. A good number of teachers experienced sustained levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, frustration, and self-doubt in trying to balance the needs between the curricular and individualized needs for students with disabilities. Some aspects leading to such emotional exhaustion included prolonged preparation of lessons, constant monitoring in the classroom, and frequent challenging behaviors displayed by students. Educators also felt overwhelmed when progress was slow or the perceived personal effort put in seemed inadequate. This is in line with Forlin & Chambers (2020), who reported that emotional strain and burnout are often common among teachers in inclusive settings due to heightened instructional demands, emotional labor, and accountability pressures.

Notwithstanding these emotional challenges, inclusive teaching also brought about substantial professional fulfillment and a renewed sense of purpose. Teachers reported that seeing even small gains in the academics and behavior of learners with disabilities brought greater meaning into their job and strengthened their professional identity as educators. Indeed, such moments reminded them of their commitment and motivation to continue practicing inclusion. Besides, teachers mentioned that inclusive teaching encouraged more patience, reflection, and empathy toward the diverse needs of learners. This finding is consistent with the views of Malinen, Savolainen, and Xu (2021), who discovered that educators who witness the progress of learners in inclusive classrooms build a much more dynamic professional satisfaction and emotional engagement in their work.

Professionally, teachers indicated that inclusive education significantly expanded their competencies and instructional perspectives; some sought specialized training in special education, differentiated instruction, and behavior management while others engaged in peer mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, and professional learning communities. These professional engagements were considered necessary strategies in response to the demands of teaching in an inclusive classroom. While emotionally demanding, inclusive education acted like a catalyst for professional development, flexibility, and innovative practice. This finding agrees

with Loreman et al. (2020), who noted that, although challenging, inclusive practice engenders continuous teacher development and strengthens professional resilience through continuous reflective practice and collaboration.

### **Social Interactions and Support**

For some teachers, there were significant emotional and professional impacts, especially within the first few years of inclusive teaching. For several participants, this was summarized as “kapoy nga mulabaw pa sa usual workload” (P04, L5–6), reflecting the emotional labor of having to meet curricular expectations and addressing diverse and highly individual needs of learners with disabilities. Participant 01 reflected: “Naay mga adlaw nga murag dili nako kabalo unsay buhaton kay daghan kaayo’g kinahanglan tagdon sa klase” (L3–4). These observations were corroborated by the observation notes that captured events such as teachers momentarily leaving the pace of a lesson for managing behavior, explaining things again to those who were not getting it, or slowing down with a learner who was struggling in a given lesson. The reflexive journal entry reads: “I noticed how often teachers let out soft sighs before they restarted explanations, as if gathering strength each time.” These are consistent with the findings of Forlin and Chambers (2020) that emotional strain and burnout persist in inclusive settings due to increased instructional demands and accountability pressures.

Notwithstanding these emotional challenges, inclusive teaching also emerged as a meaningful source of fulfillment and renewed professional purpose. Teachers consistently emphasized that even small signs of learner progress—such as voluntary responses, completion of tasks, or increased confidence—result in immense emotional satisfaction. As Participant 08 mentioned, “Dili man ko kabayad anang kalipay nga makita nimo nga nigrow gyud sila maski hinay-hinay lang” (L10–11). In one observation, a learner with a delay in communication was able to read aloud, and the whole class applauded in surprise; the teacher surreptitiously wiped away tears. The reflexive journal set the scene: “The teacher’s smile looked like relief and pride mixed into one—proof that progress, no matter how incremental, sustains their commitment.” This is

similar to Malinen, Savolainen, and Xu (2021), who discovered that genuine progress by learners significantly enhances the emotional involvement and professional satisfaction of teachers.

Professionally, teachers attested that inclusive education has expanded their competencies, transformed their instructional orientation, and increased resilience. Many pursued further training in differentiated instruction, SPED strategies, and behavior management, which was a response to the realization that “kinahanglan gyud ko mutubo isip teacher kay lain-lain ang ilang needs” (P06, L7–8). Others narrated how inclusive teaching urged them to learn to plan more efficiently, to coordinate with colleagues, and to engage more fully in professional learning communities. Observation notes highlighted how teachers would consult with colleagues during break times between classes, discussing modifications or alternative activities for learners with disabilities. The reflexive journal characterized this as “a natural culture of shared problem-solving that emerged because no teacher felt they could navigate inclusion alone.” Such findings concur with Loreman, Sharma, and Forlin (2020) that inclusive practice, though challenging, brings about professional resilience, continuous reflective practice, and sustained pedagogical innovation. Together, triangulated data suggest that the emotional and professional consequence of inclusive teaching is dual in nature: it is exhausting yet deeply rewarding, overwhelming yet transformative. Emotional exhaustion co-occurs with moral purpose while instructional challenge catalyzes adaptive growth. Within these lived experiences, inclusive education becomes not only a classroom practice but, importantly, a significant process of human and professional becoming.

### **Primary Challenges Teachers Encounter in Implementing Inclusive Education Practices, and What Support Systems**

This section outlines teachers' lived experiences regarding the challenges met in implementing inclusive education practices and support systems to which they currently have access or for which they still require. The findings are organised around five key themes which capture the instructional, behavioral, institutional, professional and personal dimensions of inclusive teaching.

## **Instructional and Classroom Challenges**

Teachers consistently mentioned instructional adaptation and classroom management as their most persistent challenges in inclusive education, due to the constant need to modify lessons, materials, and strategies. For instance, participant 03 responded with the following: “Mag-usab ko sa lesson halos kada adlaw kay lahi-lahi gyud ang ilang needs” (L4–5). Observations revealed teachers who momentarily stopped in the middle of the lesson to create makeshift visual aids or to regroup the students, while the reflexive journal recorded evidence of constant, taxing decision-making. Moreover, this strain was intensified as the effort to balance the needs of learners with and without disabilities increased. Participant 07 said, “I feel torn kay samtang ako mutabang sa usa, ang uban kay nagsugod na’g lain na activity” (L8–10). Another teacher added, “Lisod gyud i-flow ang lesson kung kinahanglan nimo balik-balikon ang instructions sa lain-laing paagi” (P02, L12–13). These responses mirrored observations of lessened lesson momentum and instances of teachers having their attention stretched thin, both of which served to underscore the structural challenges of differentiation within standardized systems.

Difficulties also arose during group work, assessments, and task transitions, where risks of exclusion or inequity frequently arise. Participant 10 said, “Sa group work, usahay dili nila apilon ang bata kay lisod daw kuyogan” (L3–4), as was evidenced when a learner with communication difficulties was sidelined during an activity. Assessment periods became particularly tense, where extended time needs clashed with rigid schedules; as one teacher pointed out, “Time pressure is a big issue. Some learners really need more time, but the schedule does not allow it” (P05, L14–15). In these accounts, teachers showed persistence and improvisation in the face of emotional and instructional overload, and revealed systemic gaps that require structural, not merely individual, solutions.

## **Learner-Related and Behavioral Challenges**

Specific challenges that have consistently influenced daily instruction in inclusive classrooms involve learners' behavior, pace of learning, and participation. Indeed, students who

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had difficulties paying attention or who had emotional and communicational barriers often needed repeated guidance and constant monitoring, which resulted in slowing down lessons and requiring sustained attention from teachers. Participant 05 identified that “there are days when the student cannot focus at all, and it affects the whole class” (L3–4), while another teacher pointed out: “some students take so much longer to understand simple instructions, and I fear that they may fall behind” (P02, L8–9). Observational data confirmed frequent interruptions, either to re-explain activities or to comfort distressed learners, and reflexive records underlined how teacher attention was “pulled in all directions,” playing up the emotional and cognitive intensity of this work. This supports the finding of McIntyre et al. (2020) that attention and self-regulation challenges significantly disrupt pacing and increase instructional load in inclusive settings.

Uneven learner participation and complex peer dynamics further complicated instructional efforts. Students with disabilities often did not want to contribute because they were afraid of judgments; as Participant 07 illustrated, “She wants to join in, but you can see that she is afraid of being judged” (L12–13). Simultaneously, peers complained about the possible lesson slowdown or unintentional exclusion during group work: Participant 03 noticed, “Some regular learners complain that the lesson becomes slow because of others” (L6–7), and further expressed, “There are times when classmates unintentionally isolate the learner because they think he cannot contribute” (P06, L10–11). The direct observations confirmed passive participation and subtle exclusion, requiring an active form of mediation by the teacher. The triangulated data suggest that such challenges are relational in nature, rather than purely individual, and emanate from interactions among students with disabilities, their peers, and the instructional pressures involved in the classroom ecology.

### **Institutional and Administrative Support**

Teachers represented institutional and administrative support for inclusive education as existing but decidedly inconsistent. Some described authentic support, such as flexible assessments, access to SPED personnel, and informal mentoring. Participant 04 mentioned, “Our school head allows flexible assessment for learners with special needs, and that helps a lot” (L5–

6), and another participant similarly commented, “We have a SPED teacher whom we can consult when the situation becomes difficult” (P02, L9–10). These supportive actions were corroborated by observational notes, including instances of administrators inspecting classrooms, providing modified worksheets, and allowing extended testing time. The reflexive journal recorded, “teachers seemed relieved when someone acknowledged their needs and provided direction.” As noted in Sharma and Sokal (2021), it is indeed responsive leadership and specialist collaboration that go a long way to building the capacity of teachers to perform inclusive teaching.

Nevertheless, despite these positive examples, respondents commonly framed support as unstable, inadequate, or even symbolic. Participant 01 mentioned, “Support is there in principle, but in practice we are often left to handle the challenges on our own” (L11–12), while another said, “We lack teaching aides, adaptive materials, and even proper guidance when a new learner with disability is enrolled” (P07, L14–15). Observational data validated gaps, such as the absence of adaptive tools and extended periods without assistance, prompting teachers to improvise solutions. Leadership-driven initiatives—such as referral systems or LAC sessions—operated very differently across schools, with Participant 06 pointing out that “if the principal pushes for inclusion, things move. If not, everything becomes LAC discussions only.” Triangulated data reveal that while teachers highly covet administrative support, it is experienced as episodic, which has led them to fall back on personal initiative and peer collaboration. This inconsistency highlights a need for systemwide, sustained structures to guarantee that inclusive education is enacted equitably and authentically..

### **Professional Support and Capacity Building**

Most plants growing on disturbed ground would not be accounted for in vegetation surveys on such soils.

Teachers considered professional training as necessary yet not enough in promoting inclusive education. Many participants shared that seminars initially increased their understanding of learner behavior and basic instructional modifications. Participant 03 expressed, “The seminar

on behavior management really helped me understand why my learner acts that way” (L7–8), and Participant 09 described that “The training on differentiated instruction changed how I prepare my activities” (L12–13). Observational data confirmed that teachers enacted strategies from these seminars—providing visual clues, simplifying tasks, and providing structured routines—and reflexive journals detailed that teachers were “genuinely empowered” when recalling helpful seminars. This echoes the contention of Forlin and Sin (2021) that targeted training can strengthen foundational competencies within inclusive settings.

Nevertheless, participants stressed that professional development today still remains too theoretical and misaligned with classroom realities. Participant 01 mentioned, “We attend training, but when we return to the classroom, the challenges are still different” (L14–15), while one teacher said, “We need coaching, not only lectures” (P05, L10–11). Participants also mentioned gaps in assistive technology, IEP development, alternative assessments, and communication strategies; thus, Participant 06 further said, “I want to help more, but I don’t know how to make an IEP or how to adapt a test correctly” (L18–19). Reflexive notes recorded teachers as “willing but under-equipped,” signaling system failure in providing long-term and practice-based support. From the data emerged a marked tension: on one hand, teachers need deeper, continuous, and practice-oriented training, and on the other, professional development is still fragmented and insufficient to respond to the challenge of inclusive teaching.

### **Personal Coping and External Support**

Self-motivation, praying, reflecting, and family networks were very important personal coping mechanisms that helped teachers deal with the emotional and instructional demands of inclusive education. For instance, Participant 04 said, “When I feel exhausted, I remind myself why I became a teacher” (L3–4), whereas Participant 07 added, “I cry sometimes at home, but my family always encourages me to continue” (L9–10). Observational data showed how teachers momentarily paused before dealing with the challenge of certain behavioral issues, which was an embodied example of emotional regulation, whereas reflexive notes portrayed how “teachers' eyes softened when speaking about their families,” which signaled gratitude as a buffer against stress.

These triangulated accounts align with Jennings and Greenberg's (2020) findings that meaning-making and familial reassurance mitigate burnout in demanding educational contexts.

Peer relationships also emerged as a vital layer of emotional and practical support. Participant 02 explained, “Talking with my colleagues makes me feel that I am not alone in this struggle” (L14–15), a sentiment echoed in observations where teachers exchanged strategies and sought rapid advice during breaks. Reflexive notes highlighted that “peer conversations acted almost like micro–support groups,” visibly reducing teachers’ tension. Some participants also received affirmation from parents; for example, Participant 08 recalled a parent saying, “Ma’am, thank you for not giving up on my child” (L20–22), which “recharged her energy.” Nevertheless, external support remained inconsistent, leaving many teachers dependent on personal resolve and informal networks. Collectively, the data indicate that when institutional structures are deficient, teachers sustain themselves through self-driven coping, family encouragement, and collegial solidarity—underlining that inclusive teaching relies as much on emotional scaffolding as on instructional skill.

### **Instructional Strategies, Adaptations, Innovations, and Evaluation in Inclusive Education**

This section describes instructional strategies, adaptations, and innovations teachers in schools use to promote meaningful learning experiences among students with disabilities. It also looks into how teachers assess the effectiveness of such approaches within an inclusive classroom.

#### **Instructional Strategies and Adaptations in Inclusive Teaching**

Scientific Evidence There is little scientific evidence to support or refute the tenets of FMS.

Educators employed a broad repertoire of flexible, learner-centered strategies and purposeful instructional adaptations to address the cognitive, behavioral, and sensory requirements of students with disabilities, demonstrating that inclusive teaching necessitates continual

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adjustment rather than fixed techniques. Core daily practices encompassed differentiated instruction, scaffolded instruction, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and one-on-one remediation. As Participant 03 stated, “I always break the lesson into smaller parts so the learner will not feel overwhelmed” (L5–6), while Participant 01 affirmed, “I use pictures, real objects, and demonstrations so they can better understand the lesson” (L15–16). These multisensory, scaffolded approaches—described in reflexive notes as transforming the classroom into “a small laboratory”—were paired with structural modifications such as simplifying instructions, reducing task complexity, enlarging text, and reorganizing outputs to enhance accessibility. Participant 06 articulated the underlying philosophy: “We are not making the lessons easier; we are making them reachable” (L3–4). Peer-mediated support and pacing adjustments further reinforced instructional delivery, with Participant 07 remarking, “Peer tutoring helps a lot because the learner does not feel isolated” (L11–12), and Participant 05 adding, “I slow down when I see that the learner is struggling” (L21–22). In addition, teachers modified assessments through extended time and alternative output formats—such as oral responses or drawings—because, as Participant 08 noted, “If writing is difficult for them, I allow them to answer orally or draw instead” (L20–21). Across interviews, observations, and reflexive accounts, it became evident that teachers did not merely adjust lessons but actively restructured learning conditions, creating micro-learning pathways that respect individual pacing, reduce anxiety, and maintain rigor. These practices portray inclusive instruction as a dynamic, ethically grounded process of ongoing assessment, improvisation, and adaptation, affirming that equity in learning arises from flexibility rather than uniformity.

### **Instructional Innovations, Flexible Assessment, and Reflective Improvement in Inclusive Teaching**

Teachers enhanced learner engagement and monitored progress in inclusive classrooms by integrating instructional innovations, flexible assessments, and reflective practices. They increasingly used digital presentations, video lessons, interactive applications, and visual tools to support comprehension, with one teacher noting, “Using video lessons helps my learners understand better” (P04, L5–6), while another shared, “Educational apps motivate them” (P07,

L8–9). Multi-sensory supports such as visual schedules further reduced confusion and stabilized routines. Yet limited resources—“sometimes we do not have enough technology” (P01, L14–15)—pushed teachers to rely on improvised, low-cost materials, revealing both creativity and systemic gaps. To assess progress, teachers adopted performance tasks, oral assessments, portfolios, and observational tools, recognizing that “improvement cannot be seen in written quizzes” (P05, L4–5). Participation, confidence, and social interaction became key indicators of growth, as affirmed by the insight, “I look at their confidence and willingness to participate as signs of progress” (P03, L8–9). Peer-assisted learning and multi-sensory activities further demonstrated effectiveness, with teachers observing that “peer tutoring is very effective because the learner does not feel isolated” (P04, L10), and that tactile activities sustained focus when lectures did not. Despite these successes, teachers expressed a strong desire for deeper training—“I want to learn more about assistive technology” (P07, L14)—and valued co-teaching and collaboration as pathways to improved practice. Collectively, these fused insights show that inclusive instruction thrives through innovation, flexible assessment, reflective adaptation, and ongoing professional growth, even amid resource limitations.

### **Cross-Theme Analysis**

The integrated analysis of the three research subproblems has established that teachers' lived experiences within inclusive education constitute a holistic, interwoven process of emotional adjustment, pedagogical adaptation, and systemic negotiation. This developmental trajectory results from the continuous interplay among teachers' perceptions, classroom realities, institutional structures, professional growth, and personal resilience. Initial encounters with learners with disabilities often induced emotional dissonance—characterized by fear, confusion, and felt inadequacy—representing a disjunction between policy expectation and classroom preparedness. With repeated exposure, these affective reactions transitioned into a moral commitment which reshaped instructional decision-making.

Instructional challenges, learner behaviors, and institutional support were mutually constitutive: differentiation, pacing, and assessment difficulties were exacerbated by behavioral and

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participation challenges, whereas strong leadership and special education coordination buffered these demands, while inconsistent support exacerbated them. Professional learning empowered teachers yet remained insufficiently practical, necessitating personal coping strategies, peer collaboration, and familial encouragement. Meanwhile, teachers also held active designing roles for inclusive learning environments, using differentiated instruction, peer-supported structures, multi-sensory approaches, flexible assessments, and creative digital and improvised innovations to address diverse needs. Measures of success included learners' participation, confidence, and social integration rather than academic metrics alone.

Across these dimensions, there was a uniting phenomenological pattern: inclusive education is experienced as a continued transformation from uncertainty to advocacy, sustained by emotional labour, reflective pedagogy, adaptive problem-solving, and negotiated school-wide support. Finally, inclusive education works not just because of policy imperatives, but when there is a synergistic relationship among teachers' intrinsic commitment, adaptable instructional practices, and continuous school-wide support. Without such synergies, inclusion remains in a fragile state; with it, inclusion can be a sustainable, transformative force in educational practice.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study yield several essential conclusions regarding teachers' lived experiences within inclusive education. First, teachers' first encounters with students having disabilities are emotionally salient and are largely shaped by their level of preparation and the realities of their classroom environments. As teachers gain experience, their perception of inclusion shifts from a compliance obligation to a professional and moral commitment situated within equity and the dignity of learners. Inclusive instruction is inherently demanding; it requires attention to diverse learning needs, the management of complex behaviors, and ongoing adaptation of instructional approaches. Such demands illustrate that inclusive education cannot rest on individual effort; instead, it requires sound institutional structures, administrative support, and access to specialist support. Despite these demands, teachers emerge as consistently adaptable, creative, and

reflective in their practice, often devising innovative instructional strategies to meet student needs. The study reinforces that flexible, growth-oriented approaches to assessment better serve the needs of learners with disabilities rather than rigid, standardized approaches. Ultimately, inclusive education is sustained when this commitment by teachers is supported through coordinated resources, collaborative structures, and effective leadership. One nuanced implication that arises from these conclusions is the strengthening of systemic supports-mentoring, specialist services, school-based professional learning-to ensure that a commitment by teachers translates into meaningful and sustained inclusive practice.

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