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TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: BASIS FOR AN ENHANCED SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education rests on the belief that every learner deserves meaningful participation, equitable learning opportunities, and a sense of belonging in the classroom. Yet making inclusion work in everyday practice is complex and demanding for teachers who must respond to diverse learner needs while meeting the demands of the whole class. This study explored the experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms in Samal District, Schools Division of Bataan, during School Year 2025–2026: how teachers navigate the realities of inclusion, the challenges they encounter, the strategies they use, and the support they need to sustain inclusive practice. A qualitative grounded theory design was employed. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten purposively selected teachers and analyzed through systematic coding (open, axial, and selective), constant comparison, categorization, memo writing, and theoretical saturation. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Florian and Black-Hawkins' Inclusive Pedagogy provided complementary lenses for interpreting the classroom, interpersonal, and institutional dimensions of teachers' experiences. Teachers actively strive to make inclusion meaningful through differentiated instruction, learner participation, peer support, individualized monitoring, and flexible classroom practices. However, large classes, limited time and resources, inadequate training, insufficient specialist support, workload, and emotional demands make inclusion difficult to sustain. Teachers respond through continuous adaptation, reflection, and collaboration, and they identified needs for practical professional development, specialist assistance, stakeholder communication, accessible materials, dedicated spaces, funding, and protected preparation time. The experiences generated the Adaptive Collaborative Support Theory of Inclusive Education, which holds that sustainable inclusion requires not only committed teachers but also collaborative and responsive school systems. The findings provided the basis for the proposed INCLUDE-SAMAL Enhanced School Support Program.

Keywords: *inclusive education, teachers' experiences, grounded theory, adaptive collaborative support, school support program*

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Inclusive education means ensuring that all students, regardless of their differences, can learn together in regular classrooms. Doing this well requires flexible teaching methods and strong school support (Yap, 2026). Many general education teachers nevertheless continue to encounter systemic barriers, such as insufficient resources and a lack of specialized training, which limit their ability to address the complexity of diverse learning needs (Oliveros et al., 2025). The continuing challenges teachers face, from inadequate pedagogical preparation to the lack of assistive technology, often result in higher stress levels and suboptimal classroom outcomes (Buenaobra & Belena, 2025). This gap between inclusive mandates and classroom realities calls for a close examination of the specific professional and structural challenges educators face (Wang, 2026).

Jabeen et al. (2025) describe inclusive education as a major change in global policy that places diversity at the center of the agenda in order to provide equitable learning opportunities for all individuals, irrespective of ability or socio-economic background. The paradigm has received considerable international attention and is a vital mechanism for dismantling the systemic barriers that have traditionally marginalized learners in public school systems (Aisha et al., 2025). Kaji and Dutta (2026) likewise confirm that teachers "consistently struggle with inadequate training, limited knowledge of diverse learning needs, insufficient resources, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of support from multidisciplinary teams." This mirrors a Philippine study at General Santos City SPED Integrated School, which identified teacher training as a primary challenge in implementing inclusive education (Esto & Baynosa, 2025).

Inclusive education has become a major strand of present educational reform, focusing on the right of all learners to access quality education regardless of ability, background, or circumstance. It rests on equity and social justice and aims to remove the barriers that prevent learners with diverse needs from participating fully in the learning process. International frameworks that emphasize inclusive approaches in building societies that embrace diversity and human rights include the Salamanca Statement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, SDG 4 on Quality Education, Target 4.5, calls for the elimination of disparities in education and equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. This target directly supports the principles of inclusive education by promoting equitable learning opportunities and addressing barriers that limit the participation of learners with diverse needs (Urata et al., 2023).

Despite this global shift, the practical application of inclusive policies often falters at the classroom level, where educators navigate significant systemic barriers and resource limitations (Paredes et al., 2025). Understanding these first-hand implementation hurdles is essential because the sustainability of inclusive practices relies heavily on providing educators with targeted resources, training, and systemic backing (Oliveros et al., 2025). By investigating teachers' lived experiences, this research aims to identify the specific professional development needs and material gaps that impede equitable instruction (Buenaobra & Belena, 2025). Teachers are the frontline implementers of inclusive practices, and their lived experiences provide invaluable insight into the realities of classroom integration (Donath et al., 2025). Such an inquiry also recognizes both the successes and the struggles teachers encounter, including limited resources, insufficient training, and the complexity of balancing varied learning requirements (Kaji & Dutta, 2026).

Findings from this inquiry can serve as a foundation for an enhanced school support program designed to alleviate these systemic constraints and strengthen teacher efficacy (Yap, 2026). Such an intervention seeks to bridge the gap between policy mandates and operational classroom realities, addressing issues such as the absence of specialized curriculum frameworks and insufficient pedagogical resources (Barba & Baguio, 2025), and fostering an environment in which teachers can use pedagogical strategies such as differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning. The study also stresses the need for collaborative networks between educators and support services to counter systemic resistance and reduce professional isolation (Bacolor, 2024). The aspiration is to move from reactive support models toward proactive systems that address challenges such as classroom overcrowding and behavioral management (Dela

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Cruz, 2026). Sustainable inclusion requires a shift from individual effort to robust, school-wide systemic support (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2018). Inclusive education also promotes shared responsibility and participatory strategies for tackling educational inequalities within the community, supporting wider initiatives to guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education and enhance lifelong learning opportunities for all learners (Mancas & Braguta, 2025).

Evidence-based intervention models that integrate sustained professional development with robust collaborative support systems can equip teachers to navigate the complexities of diverse classrooms. By translating abstract policy mandates into actionable, school-level practices, such models address the persistent implementation gap that compromises educational equity for learners with diverse needs (Wang, 2026). The present study, *Teachers' Experiences in Implementing Inclusive Education: Basis for an Enhanced School Support Program*, therefore examines how public elementary school teachers experience inclusion, the challenges they face, the strategies they use, and the support they require. These experiences inform the identification of patterns and the development of a substantive theory explaining how teachers negotiate and sustain inclusive education in mainstream classrooms, and they provide the basis for an improved school support program that increases teacher capacity and promotes inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all learners.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, and Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) Inclusive Pedagogy.

Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory explains that an individual's development and experiences are influenced by the environments and relationships surrounding them. It proposes five interconnected systems: the *microsystem* (immediate relationships and environments such as family, teachers, classmates, and school); the *mesosystem* (interactions among these immediate environments, such as parent–teacher collaboration); the *exosystem* (external factors that indirectly affect the individual, such as school policies, administrative decisions, and community resources); the *macrosystem* (broader cultural, social, economic, and political beliefs and policies); and the *chronosystem* (changes and significant events over time). Because these systems influence one another, an individual's experiences cannot be understood by looking at the person alone. In inclusive education, the theory suggests that teachers' experiences are shaped not only by their interactions with learners but also by relationships with parents and colleagues, school leadership and policies, available resources, community support, and broader educational policies and societal attitudes. Successful implementation therefore requires coordinated support across the systems surrounding teachers and learners, and the theory offers a framework for determining teachers' needs and designing a support program that accounts for the many factors affecting implementation.

Sociocultural Theory. Vygotsky's theory holds that learning and development are strongly influenced by social interaction, culture, and the tools people use within their environment. Individuals do not learn in isolation; learning occurs through interaction with teachers, peers, family, and other community members, and language, communication, collaboration, and guidance serve as forms of mediation. A key concept is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the difference between what a learner can accomplish with appropriate assistance and what they can do independently. Applied to this study, the theory shows that inclusive education depends greatly on collaboration, interaction, and support. Teachers learn and improve their inclusive practices through experiences with learners, fellow teachers, school heads, parents, and other stakeholders, and guidance, professional development, mentoring, collaboration, and shared resources can help them address diverse learner needs. Teachers' experiences are thus shaped by their social and professional environment, and understanding them can help identify the support needed.

Inclusive Pedagogy. Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) approach explores how teachers can respond to learner diversity within ordinary classroom practices. Inclusion should not focus on identifying differences as a reason to separate learners; teachers should instead develop approaches that provide meaningful learning opportunities for everyone while recognizing that learners have different needs, abilities, and ways of participating. Inclusive pedagogy involves extending what is normally available to all learners rather than creating separate or additional approaches

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only for particular learners. Teachers make thoughtful adjustments to their teaching, classroom activities, and support strategies so that all learners can participate, which requires the knowledge, flexibility, and professional judgment to respond to differences while maintaining high expectations for every learner. Examining teachers' experiences can therefore reveal the challenges they face in adapting instruction, addressing diverse needs, and ensuring participation for all, and can inform a program that provides appropriate training, resources, collaboration, and administrative support.

Taken together, the three perspectives are complementary. Bronfenbrenner's theory explains how teachers' experiences are influenced by the systems around them, including learners, families, colleagues, school leadership, policies, resources, and the wider community. Vygotsky's theory highlights the importance of social interaction, collaboration, guidance, and professional support in developing teachers' knowledge and practices. Florian and Black-Hawkins' approach emphasizes teachers' role in providing meaningful learning opportunities for all learners within ordinary classroom practice. Collectively, they provide a comprehensive lens for examining implementation practices, challenges, strategies, and support needs, and guide the interpretation of teachers' experiences and the development of a substantive theory and an enhanced school support program for Samal District.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Implementation of inclusive education: concepts, policy, and the implementation gap

Rogahang et al. (2024) define the implementation of inclusive education as the practices and processes teachers and schools undertake to ensure that learners with varying abilities and special educational needs are included, supported, and active participants in mainstream classroom learning. It entails tailoring instruction, learning materials, assessment methods, classroom management, and learning activities to individual needs, and providing equitable opportunities for participation and achievement. Inclusive education rests on the principle that all learners should have an equal opportunity to participate, learn, and succeed regardless of ability, background, or circumstance (OECD, 2023; Regmi, 2017). This extends to acknowledging diversity of culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, and learning styles in addition to disability (OECD, 2023; UNICEF, 2017), and it aims to break down barriers to participation. Dignath et al. (2022) view inclusive education as a fundamental human right and note a move away from medical labels toward a bio-psychosocial model that considers individual needs and environmental barriers. It is built on the Social Model of Disability, which sees barriers in education as shortcomings of the system rather than of individuals (Bibiana et al., 2020), and is complemented by social constructivism and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as pedagogical bases for equitable environments that embrace neurodiversity (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). These frameworks enable a move toward transformative inclusion, in which pedagogy, assessment, and school cultures are deliberately restructured to create a sense of belonging for all learners (Ramya, 2020).

Although SDG 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education, its achievement remains uneven. In a study of teacher trainees and teacher educators in Ghana, Nketsia et al. (2020) observed that teacher preparation was aligned to the medical model of special educational needs, limiting the development of inclusive knowledge, values, and pedagogical practices. Ahmed et al. (2025) found that teacher preparation programs in Pakistan were inadequate for addressing learner diversity and disability, especially in translating differentiated instruction into inclusive practice. These studies point to shortcomings in teacher preparation but offer little insight into how practicing teachers confront these challenges in the mainstream classroom. In the Philippines, a major barrier is the shortage of qualified Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers, which limits schools' capacity to provide instructional support and individualized interventions (Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department [CPBRD], 2023). Effective implementation requires systemic reform and specialized teacher preparation to address the relationship between inclusive policy and classroom reality (Dignath et al., 2022); the barriers are interrelated, and institutional constraints and pedagogical rigidity frequently undermine equitable participation (Chaudhary, 2026). The literature also points to an implementation gap in translating inclusive theory into practice, with inadequate training and inflexible resource constraints as common obstacles to differentiated instruction (Gaewen, 2025), a lack of solid evidence-based guidance

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for mitigating the long-term effects of social bias and institutional deficits (Kumar, 2025), and a lack of longitudinal research on the socio-emotional outcomes of students with special educational needs (Wang, 2026).

Empirical studies show that systemic and organizational barriers impede implementation. Siriban (2025), in a descriptive-correlational study of 114 primary teachers from 20 elementary schools, identified the absence of teaching materials, high student–teacher ratios, and insufficient parental cooperation as the primary barriers; a teacher's capacity to provide differentiated, responsive instruction is shaped by personal competencies and by the resources and support available in school and home. Javier (2023) found that teachers and administrators perceived implementation challenges as high, especially regarding teacher training, specialized facilities, and budget allocation, indicating the need for institutional investment. Sijuola and Davidova (2022) reported that inadequate physical infrastructure, such as inaccessible facilities and limited adaptive technology, was associated with reduced academic engagement among learners with disabilities. Workload and organizational structure also matter: Schmidt and Venet (2022) found that many general education teachers lacked opportunities to collaborate with special education personnel and identified lack of time as a major operational barrier, while the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2024) indicated that the separate organizational structures of general and special education may impede the sharing of resources, expertise, and support. Teacher beliefs matter as well; implicit biases and low expectations toward learners with intellectual disabilities can create subtle barriers to participation (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2023), so successful inclusion depends on professional reflection as well as resources. Policy mandates falter when not backed by sufficient funding and support at the school level (Buli-Holmberg et al., 2023), leaving schools expected to practice inclusion without the resources, personnel, time, and organizational mechanisms to do so. Taken together, these barriers (material resources, class size, workload, infrastructure, funding, collaboration, organizational structures, preparation, and beliefs) interact and compound one another.

Successful implementation depends on collaboration among teachers, school leaders, families, and communities (UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2021), and inclusive systems should provide coordinated and sustainable support that enables schools to respond to learner diversity (Nolan et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2020). Curriculum adaptation is one area where policy must be translated into practice. An inclusive curriculum should offer flexible teaching, assessment, and learning opportunities while maintaining meaningful educational goals, with equity, diversity, individualized support, and UDL as key components (Kunwar & Adhikari, 2023). Yet teachers often struggle to adapt learning objectives, strategies, and assessment without compromising academic standards, and to translate inclusive expectations into classroom practice (Lindner & Schwab, 2025; Werner et al., 2025). Inclusive school culture, defined as a collective commitment of teachers, school leaders, learners, and families to embrace diversity, promote participation, and value individual differences (Artiles et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2020), can enhance teachers' capacity by promoting collaboration, collective responsibility, and mutual support; learners who experience belonging are more likely to engage, develop confidence, and achieve positive academic and social outcomes (Artiles et al., 2020; Pijl et al., 2021). Systemic deficiencies, including a lack of specialized materials and limited professional development, constrain teachers' ability to operationalize inclusive pedagogy (Belarda & Belena, 2025), and force educators to manage difficult behaviors and parental resistance without adequate administrative support, lowering their self-efficacy for high-quality differentiation (Wang, 2026). This gap between policy ideals and day-to-day instruction highlights the need to revisit existing school-based support systems (Yap, 2026).

In the Philippine context, Obcial et al. (2025) reported the absence of formal training and sufficient preparation among many teachers. Yet little attention has been paid to teachers' adaptation, improvisation, informal learning, and sustained professional agency under such constraints; previous research has tended to treat inadequate preparation as a deficit requiring more training rather than exploring lived experiences, coping methods, and sources of support. A significant gap therefore remains in knowledge of how public elementary school teachers experience and negotiate the implementation of inclusive education, the strategies they develop, and the forms of school support they consider necessary (Duncan et al., 2021).

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Teachers' experiences and preparedness

Steen and Wilson (2020) describe teachers as the critical frontline of inclusive education, whose experiences reveal a complex landscape of challenges, resilience, and professional growth. Although teachers often express positive attitudes toward inclusion, implementation reveals significant gaps between policy intentions and practice. A phenomenological study of Philippine elementary teachers found that participants experienced "equity amidst inclusivity" while confronting "challenged but competent teachers" who worked to enhance learners' social skills despite mainstreaming barriers (Bacus, 2024). Teachers in Nepal reported low self-awareness regarding the education of students with disabilities and immature perceptions of inclusion, alongside a desire for more administrative support and professional development (Shrestha et al., 2023). Singaporean teachers had generally positive attitudes toward inclusion, but their practical experiences were more negative than positive, most notably the stress resulting from difficult behaviors and the instructional challenge of meeting diverse needs (Yeo et al., 2014). Philippine teachers reported meaningful professional development and movement toward learner-centered approaches but stressed the need for stronger institutional support, resources, training, and recognition (Galutera, 2025).

Teacher preparation, knowledge, and ongoing professional support are key to successful implementation. Chigwenembe (2026) reported that inadequate pre-service training and limited professional development may leave teachers unprepared to adapt instruction, implement UDL, and develop meaningful Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Crispel and Kasperski (2021) found that ongoing professional development increases teachers' confidence and capability to cater to diversity, particularly through differentiated instruction; without it, teachers experiment with methods and accommodations and remain unsure whether they are doing the right thing. Professional development should therefore be an ongoing process rather than a one-off requirement. In their systematic review, Cabello et al. (2025) observed that Philippine teachers hold positive dispositions toward inclusion but that these are insufficient without clear policy directions, continuous professional development, adequate resources, and stakeholder collaboration; persistent challenges included poor teaching and learning materials, overburdened teachers, late identification of students with special needs, and a lack of consensus on the concept of inclusive education. Rubillar (2025) found that general education teachers face environmental barriers, both external and internal, implying challenges at the classroom level (instruction, resources), the school level (structures), and the institutional level (support). At the classroom level, Salguet (2025) studied nine MAPEH teachers in Bagabag National High School, Nueva Vizcaya, and found that choosing appropriate strategies and reinforcements, identifying customized educational needs, and accommodating learners with disabilities was a rewarding experience, yet teachers felt unprepared owing to a lack of formal training, limited materials, inadequate facilities, and insufficient stakeholder support. Collectively, these studies show that teacher disposition toward inclusion is promoted or impeded by professional preparation, resources, institutional support, and stakeholder collaboration, and that inclusion is a shared responsibility across teacher, school, and system levels.

Readiness is a recurring theme. Manguilimotan et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of preparedness, UNESCO (2009) stressed inclusive curricula, effective teaching strategies, professional development, and sufficient resources, and Gheyssens et al. (2022) emphasized that training, support services, and institutional mechanisms are essential in translating policy into classroom practice. Moon (2023) reported that teachers were somewhat ready in classroom instruction, curriculum implementation, assessment, and learner monitoring, with readiness associated with participation in training and seminars. DepEd highlighted the growing diversity of learners and the need to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to address it (DepEd, 2018, as cited in Dioso et al., 2022). Evangelico (2025) found that teachers in Catholic schools had high knowledge and readiness but reported high levels of challenge related to limited resources, training, and support, and that elementary teachers may need more support given younger learners' developmental needs. Gonzaga et al. (2024) found that general education teachers felt ready yet encountered challenges: gaps in specialized training, limited resources, poor infrastructure, and insufficient institutional support. Zegeye (2022) found that Ethiopian primary teachers did not feel adequately prepared because pre-service preparation did not sufficiently develop inclusive competencies; teaching experience contributed to confidence, but continuous professional development was still needed. Dayso et al. (2025) similarly reported that lack of training and inequalities

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in policy execution remain major issues, so success depends not only on placing learners in regular classes but on teachers' ability to respond to their needs.

Knowledge does not automatically translate into confident practice. Malaysian mainstream teachers understood inclusive policies for learning disabilities, but many were hesitant to welcome diverse classrooms (Seman et al., 2021). Zrig (2025) found that teachers gradually develop strategies for mixed-ability classes through experience, yet adapting instruction remains challenging and requires ongoing support. White and Fletcher (2026) identified personal teaching approaches, school limitations, school culture, and professional experience as interacting factors, and Isyatirradhiyah et al. (2025) recognized the importance of ongoing professional development, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive, innovative strategies. Atanasova and Papen (2026) found that UK university teachers valued student diversity and developed inclusive approaches but encountered institutional challenges. Materechera (2020) found that South African teachers supported inclusion but faced limited time, large classes, and inadequate training, so commitment must be supported by resources, working conditions, and institutional support. Nīmante and Kokare (2022), studying 1,590 Latvian teachers, found that teachers perceived themselves as competent yet had difficulty with curriculum differentiation and early identification of needs. In a review of 36 studies, Lindner et al. (2023) found neutral or mixed attitudes among primary teachers, varying by type of disability. Griful-Freixenet et al. (2021) pointed to school support, resources, clear policies, and continuous development as requirements for success; Gheyssens et al. (2022) to differentiated instruction and institutional support; and Demchenko et al. (2021) to preparedness and competence. Francia and Siy (2024) showed that inclusion depends on the cumulative effect of teacher readiness, collaborative support, resources, and favorable school conditions, while Webster (2022) argued that placement alone does not ensure equitable participation and that structural barriers can lead to separation and marginalization.

Self-efficacy and emotional well-being are closely tied to readiness. A large meta-analysis found that teacher self-efficacy was associated with willingness to include learners with special educational needs and with reduced anxiety (Yada et al., 2022); strong pre-service training can protect against burnout in under-resourced schools (Werner & Shulman, 2023). Practical, hands-on preparation builds confidence better than theory alone (Specht & Metsala, 2023); initial teacher education should offer practical competencies in behavior management and lesson adaptation (Mintz et al., 2022); and teachers with higher self-efficacy adapt their methods to specific learners rather than using whole-class approaches (Savolainen et al., 2022). Practical experience, mentorship, and interpersonal support contribute to self-efficacy (Fairbrother et al., 2025), and teacher education should integrate theory and practice, UDL, mentorship, and ongoing development (Kimhi & Bar Nir, 2025). Professional development must go beyond one-off workshops: peer observation, mentoring, and collaborative reflection lead to more sustainable change (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2025); Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) allow general and special education teachers to reflect and plan together (Sharma & Nuttall, 2022); hands-on training is valuable for complex behaviors (King & Dockrell, 2022); professional development should consider the intersection of disability with other aspects of diversity (Waitoller & Super, 2023); and effective development is sustained, tied to teachers' responsibilities, and connected to classroom realities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). Emotional factors also matter: effective teacher emotional regulation was associated with better teacher–student interaction, classroom climate, and participation of learners with autism (Hernández González et al., 2024), so support should address emotional and interpersonal demands as well as instructional competence.

Philippine studies describe teachers' experiences in similar terms. Beltran et al. (2025) characterize teachers' experiences as the lived professional experiences of planning, delivering, adapting, and assessing instruction, collaborating with parents and other personnel, and promoting equitable participation. Macabenta et al. (2023) found that teachers engaged in professional development, enacted inclusive policies, and used pedagogical innovations, but reported a lack of special education training, limited resources, and insufficient support services. Mabeza and Villacruz (2025) stressed that teachers must continually adapt methods, resources, classroom control, and evaluation to learner differences. Lanorio and Albino (2026) found that teachers succeeded through differentiated instruction, engagement strategies, and supportive practices but were limited by training, large classes, resources, lack of SPED personnel, and unclear policies; Omoso and Villarente (2024) found that teachers practiced inclusion despite limited training and

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institutional support, often creating their own strategies. Navarro (2022) noted that many public schools lack classroom facilities, ICT access, and other supports, so inclusion cannot be sustained by teachers' efforts alone. The Department of Education (2023) pointed to teacher aides, early assessment tools, manageable class sizes, and localized learning materials as important supports for public elementary schools, and Chow et al. (2023) to appropriate materials, access to specialists, classroom aides, and sufficient time.

Strategies for inclusive teaching and whole-school support

Effective inclusion requires teachers to depart from a one-size-fits-all approach and offer flexible opportunities that respond to differences in readiness, interests, and needs. Novak (2022) highlighted UDL as an approach that embeds multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression in regular lesson planning rather than treating accommodations as additional interventions, and Tomlinson (2023) stressed assessing readiness through informal classroom checks and adjusting content, activities, and tasks. Structured peer tutoring produced substantial improvements in task completion and social interaction among learners of different ability levels (Bond & Castagnera, 2022); modified rubrics and formative visual assessment increased participation of learners with special needs (Maher et al., 2023); multisensory strategies improved reading comprehension among students with attention problems (Garcia & Lim, 2023); and step-by-step cognitive strategies with clear visual aids can build focus and confidence (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2023). Wang (2026) reported positive results from structured scaffolding, assistive technology, and flexible grouping, including improved academic performance and self-esteem. Inclusive instruction is thus enhanced by differentiated instruction, scaffolding, assistive technology, flexible grouping, peer support, and accessible assessment.

Classroom practice cannot be sustained by individual effort alone. Sustainable inclusion involves school leaders creating a collaborative culture and sharing leadership (Fullan & Quinn, 2023), and leaders play a role in fostering equity and providing resources and professional support (Leithwood & Sun, 2022). Treating parents of learners with special needs as real educational partners can enhance learner involvement and well-being (Epstein et al., 2024); partnerships with community organizations, health providers, nonprofits, and therapists expand support (Gross et al., 2023); and an inclusive school climate depends on open communication, trust, and shared responsibility among leaders, teachers, parents, and support personnel (Haines et al., 2022). At the classroom level, teachers need practical strategies such as UDL, differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, flexible assessment, multisensory instruction, scaffolding, visual supports, and assistive technology; at the school level, these must be supported by good leadership, professional collaboration, family involvement, community partnerships, adequate resources, and a culture of trust.

Related studies on outcomes, policy, and teacher efficacy

Inclusion benefits the whole school community. Sumner et al. (2020) note that inclusive settings allow learners with special needs to develop relationships with peers while other learners develop understanding, empathy, and respect for differences, helping to reduce stereotypes and increase acceptance and belonging, in line with SDG 4 (Urata et al., 2023). Inclusive classrooms do not necessarily harm academic achievement and may support engagement, participation, and cognitive development (Delogu et al., 2023), and inclusive practices support social skills and acceptance (Brady et al., 2024). Achieving these outcomes takes more than placing diverse learners in one room: a long-term professional development program for school teams in Estonia identified leadership, collaboration, stakeholder commitment, sufficient resources, a whole-school approach, and external expert support as conditions for success (Kivirand et al., 2022).

Policy implementation matters. Inconsistent and poorly implemented policies create significant barriers to inclusion (Brady et al., 2024), and the lack of defined strategies to address discrimination and support students facing academic challenges can impede inclusive goals (Trent et al., 2021). SH and Supriyono (2024) identified teacher training, policy implementation, resource availability, and socioeconomic conditions as influences on effectiveness: well-prepared teachers, supportive policies, and inclusive curricula are linked to good learner outcomes, while resource gaps, limited preparation, and inconsistent implementation remain obstacles. Subarna et al. (2022) reported that personalized

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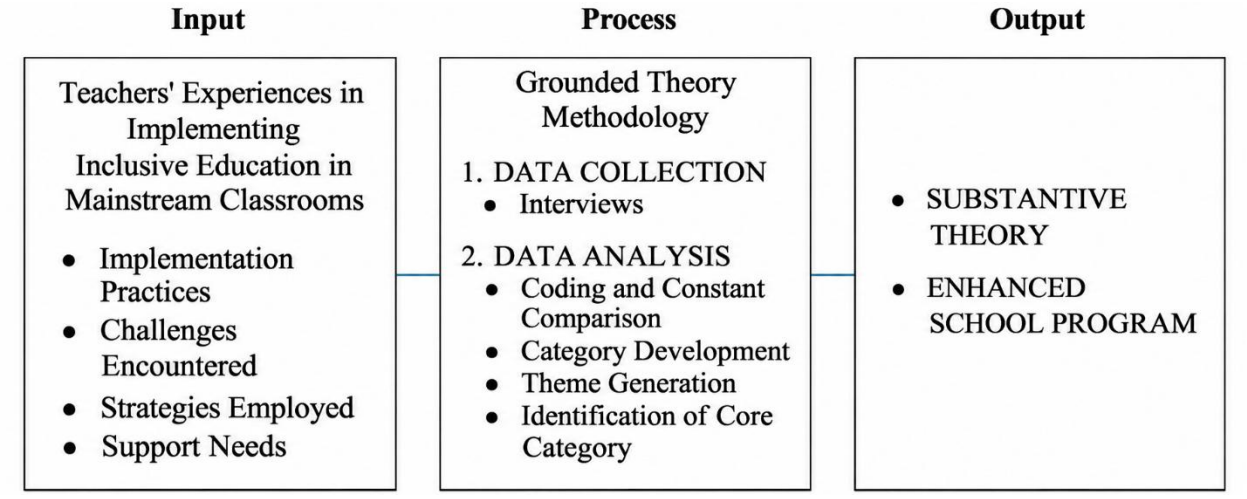
planning, collaborative support, and differentiated teaching enable learners with disabilities to succeed in regular classrooms. Pechous (2026) showed that inclusion is more successful with co-teaching, targeted professional development, and UDL; learners with disabilities made greater reading gains in classrooms led by teachers trained in inclusive practices, and teachers gained confidence and commitment through collaborative, ongoing development. Baş (2022) reported that teachers' confidence is significantly affected by student-related factors (notably parental involvement) and school-related factors (notably class size). Woolfson (2025) emphasized a coherent framework, effective resource sharing, and teacher-centered practices, and argued that inclusion should be evaluated through learners' overall well-being and psychological development as well as academic and social outcomes.

Finally, the literature indicates that placing learners with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms does not by itself constitute meaningful inclusion. Inclusive education requires an interconnected approach comprising inclusive policies and systems, flexible curriculum and instruction, teacher capacity, and a supportive school culture. Policies set expectations, but teachers translate them into practice and may need explicit guidance, practical approaches, collaboration, and organizational support (Lindner & Schwab, 2025; Werner et al., 2025). Understanding teachers' real experiences, challenges, and strategies is therefore important for identifying the support they need, and such insights can be used to strengthen school support systems and to design interventions that are more feasible, responsive, and sustainable.

Conceptual Framework

The paradigm of the study (Figure 1) follows the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model and is anchored on the grounded theory approach, which aims to develop a substantive theory from the experiences of public elementary school teachers implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.

Figure 1. Paradigm of the study



The **Input** is teachers' experiences in implementing inclusive education, explored through four dimensions: implementation practices (how teachers carry out inclusive education in regular classrooms), challenges encountered (the difficulties and barriers teachers face in accommodating learners with special needs), strategies employed (the pedagogical and behavioral approaches used to address challenges and support inclusive learning), and support needs (the administrative, material, professional, and other assistance teachers require). The **Process** applies grounded theory methodology: data are gathered through interviews and systematically analyzed through coding and constant comparison, category development, and theme generation, allowing significant concepts and patterns to emerge; through continuous analysis and refinement, a core category is identified that integrates the major findings. The **Output** is a substantive theory and an Enhanced School Support Program for Inclusive Education in Samal District, informed by the theory and findings and designed to address teachers' needs by strengthening administrative support,

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expanding professional development, improving access to instructional materials and resources, and promoting stakeholder collaboration.

Research Problem and Questions

Despite growing evidence on inclusive education, little is known about how public elementary school teachers in the study context experience and negotiate its implementation. The general problem was: *How do public elementary school teachers describe their experiences in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms in Samal District during School Year 2025–2026?* Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- RQ1. How do public elementary school teachers implement inclusive education for learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms?
- RQ2. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing inclusive education?
- RQ3. What strategies do teachers employ to address these challenges?
- RQ4. What support do teachers need to implement inclusive education more effectively?
- RQ5. What substantive theory can be generated from teachers' experiences implementing inclusive education?
- RQ6. Based on the substantive theory and the findings, what enhanced school support program may be proposed for inclusive education in Samal District?

Significance of the Study

The findings are significant to the following groups. **Learners** with special and diverse educational needs may benefit because a school support program grounded in teachers' experiences can lead to more responsive instruction, better accommodations, and a stronger sense of belonging; by understanding how teachers navigate barriers and apply inclusive strategies, schools may create environments where all learners, particularly those at risk of exclusion, experience improved academic progress, social participation, and emotional well-being. **Teachers** gain a voice for their actual experiences in public schools in the Schools Division of Bataan, and the documentation of challenges and effective practices may guide targeted professional development, coaching, and peer-support mechanisms that respond to real training needs, workload concerns, and classroom management issues. **School heads, district supervisors, and division officials** obtain evidence on how inclusive education policies and programs are translated into practice, which may strengthen school support programs, particularly Learning Action Cells (LAC) and In-Service Training (INSET), and promote more consistent practices across schools. **Parents** may be encouraged toward stronger home–school collaboration, guided parent engagement, and advocacy for appropriate services and resources. **Communities** may better understand their role in supporting inclusion beyond the school walls; by highlighting community attitudes, resource mobilization, and partnerships, the study could guide efforts to reduce stigma, promote acceptance, and foster an inclusive culture, contributing to wider goals for equitable and inclusive education through collaboration among schools, families, and community stakeholders. **Future researchers** gain an addition to local literature on teachers' experiences in inclusive education and a conceptual and empirical basis for developing or refining school-based support models that can be replicated or adapted in divisions with similar contexts.

Definition of Terms

- **Teachers' experiences** refer to the personal and professional experiences, observations, perceptions, and reflections of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in their regular classrooms, including how they work with diverse learners, modify instruction, meet challenges, collaborate with others, and respond to the needs of learners with special educational needs.

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- **Implementing inclusive education** refers to what teachers and schools do to ensure that learners with special educational needs have real opportunities to participate, learn, and interact in mainstream classrooms, including changes to teaching delivery, learning materials, class management, assessment, and other aspects of pedagogy.
- **Inclusive education** is an approach that promotes the participation and learning of all learners, regardless of ability, disability, background, or individual differences, in a supportive and responsive environment. This study focuses on the inclusion of learners with special educational needs in regular public elementary classrooms.
- **Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs)** are learners who need additional, modified, or specialized educational support due to disabilities, developmental differences, learning difficulties, or other conditions that may affect participation and learning in the regular classroom.
- **School support program** is a systematic package of interventions, resources, services, and support mechanisms provided by the school to enable teachers to meet learners' requirements and implement inclusive education effectively, which may include professional development, instructional resources, technical assistance, collaboration, mentoring, and administrative support.
- **Enhanced school support program** refers to the proposed school-based support mechanisms resulting from the study, intended to respond directly to the experiences, challenges, strategies, and support needs expressed by teachers.

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METHODS

Research Design

The study used a qualitative grounded theory design, with semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the primary data-gathering technique. Interviews gave teachers the opportunity to describe openly their experiences, challenges, strategies, and support needs in implementing inclusive education. Grounded theory was chosen because it can generate an in-depth understanding of teachers' actual experiences and a strong empirical basis for developing an Enhanced School Support Program responsive to identified needs, challenges, and practices (Ayaya & Makoelle, 2020). Data were analyzed through constant comparative analysis, systematic coding, categorization, memo writing, and theoretical saturation to identify recurring patterns and relationships among teachers' experiences. Focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis were considered as supplementary sources when appropriate, to support triangulation; the findings reported in this paper are drawn from the interview data (see Figure 1).

Participants and Sampling

Participants were public elementary school teachers of Samal District, Schools Division of Bataan, who had personally experienced implementing inclusive education in regular or mainstream classrooms. They were selected purposively using three inclusion criteria: (1) currently teaching in a public elementary school in the district; (2) experienced in teaching learners with special or diverse educational needs in an inclusive classroom; and (3) having adequate experience to provide meaningful information on the challenges, strategies, and support received in implementing inclusive education. Ten teachers (P1–P10) participated. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent, confidentiality, and other ethical requirements were observed throughout. The participants were the primary data sources for understanding teachers' experiences and formulating the Enhanced School Support Program.

Research Instrument

The main instrument was a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide, developed from the research questions and the literature on inclusive education and organized by the study's objectives (Appendix A). It consisted of open-ended questions on teachers' experiences in managing learners with different educational needs, challenges encountered, strategies and practices used, support received from school administrators and colleagues, resource and professional development needs, and recommendations for strengthening school support. Each research question (RQ1–RQ4) was addressed by four questions, presented in English with Filipino translations. During the interviews, follow-up and probing questions elicited elaboration of important experiences and emerging ideas. Interviews, which were expected to last approximately 30 to 60 minutes, were audio-recorded with informed consent and supplemented with field notes.

Instrument Construction and Validation

To establish content validity, the initial interview guide was submitted to experts in qualitative research, inclusive education, and educational management: Dr. Ronaldo A. Punla (qualitative research), Godlyn Pearl A. Matacot (Special Education Teacher I), and Dr. Noah V. De Lara (head teacher and leader in educational management). The experts assessed the questions for relevance, clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives, and their comments and recommendations were incorporated. The guide was also piloted with teachers who had characteristics similar to the intended participants but were not included in the final study, to determine clarity, appropriateness, and reliability, and the questions were refined accordingly.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering began after approvals and permissions were obtained from the Samal District Office and the concerned school heads. Qualified participants were identified through purposive sampling and gave informed consent. Data

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were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews using the validated guide; interviews were recorded with permission and supplemented with field notes, then transcribed, coded, and analyzed using constant comparative analysis. Further interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved. All data were treated as confidential and used for study purposes only.

Data Analysis

With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and checked against the recordings for accuracy. Transcripts were organized, coded, and analyzed to identify significant statements, recurring ideas, and patterns related to teachers' experiences. Because the study aimed to generate a substantive theory, grounded theory coding procedures were applied: *open coding* to identify meaningful concepts in participants' statements; *axial coding* to examine relationships among concepts and group related codes into categories; and *selective coding* to integrate the major categories around a central phenomenon. Constant comparison was used throughout (data with data, codes with codes, categories with categories), and memo writing documented analytic insights and decisions. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively until sufficient conceptual depth was reached and no substantially new categories or relationships emerged. The resulting themes and substantive theory were supported by participants' statements and served as the basis for the proposed program. The coding matrices are summarized in the results tables.

Trustworthiness

Rigor was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Adler, 2022; Guha et al., 2021). *Credibility* was ensured through in-depth interviews, probing questions, and member checking, in which participants reviewed their transcripts and emerging interpretations to verify that their experiences were accurately represented. *Transferability* was addressed by describing the context, participants, and findings in sufficient detail for readers to judge applicability to similar settings. *Dependability* was established through an audit trail documenting data collection, transcription, coding, analysis, and the development of themes and theory, with detailed documentation of procedures, decisions, and data management. *Confirmability* was strengthened through reflexive journaling, documentation of analytic decisions, and the use of participants' statements to support findings (Adler, 2022; Ahmed, 2024).

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical principles to safeguard participants' rights, privacy, and welfare. Informed consent was obtained before participation, after participants were given a clear description of the purpose, procedures, and possible consequences of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality was ensured through pseudonyms and secure data storage; data were reported so that no individual teacher or school could be identified. Institutional research protocols were followed, and the necessary approvals and permissions were obtained from the concerned authorities.

Scope and Delimitation

The study focused on public elementary school teachers in Samal District, Schools Division of Bataan, who handled learners with special needs in regular or mainstream classrooms during School Year 2025–2026. It examined how teachers implement inclusive education, the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the support they perceive as necessary (professional development, instructional resources, classroom management, collaboration, administrative assistance, and access to specialized services). Other districts of the division were not included, which provides a focused, context-specific understanding of conditions, practices, and support structures in the district. The resulting theory and proposed program apply primarily to contexts with similar conditions and may not be directly generalizable to all public elementary schools or other districts.

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RESULTS

The findings are organized by research question (RQ1–RQ4), followed by the substantive theory (RQ5) and the proposed school support program (RQ6). Verbatim statements are attributed to participants (P1–P10); statements originally in Filipino are retained with English translations in brackets. The summary matrices (Tables 1–4) capture the dual experience of fulfillment and burden inherent in inclusive teaching.

Implementation of Inclusive Education (RQ1)

Teachers implemented inclusive education through active learner participation, differentiated instruction, peer support, and individualized monitoring. Their narratives show that inclusion involves more than placing learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms; it requires adjusting lessons, activities, instructions, assessments, and classroom interactions, and helping learners feel accepted, respected, and involved in the regular life of the class. Although implementation was challenging, teachers found meaning and fulfillment when learners made progress, participated, and gradually developed confidence and independence. Five themes emerged (Table 1).

Theme 1: Inclusive education as challenging but meaningful

Participants described teaching learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms as challenging, demanding, and emotionally exhausting, citing classroom behavior, communication barriers, differences in learning pace, limited attention, and the need to support these learners while teaching the rest of the class.

"My overall experience… is difficult and challenging. It involves lots of patience, strategies, and appealing activities." (P3)

"Nakakapagod siya, challenging, nakaka-stress pero fulfilling [It is tiring, challenging, stressful, but fulfilling]." (P6)

"At first, medyo challenging [a bit challenging] because I have to understand the learner's condition, behavior, learning needs, and limitations." (P5)

These accounts show that inclusion requires teachers to perform multiple roles at once: instructor, behavior facilitator, emotional supporter, and classroom manager. Yet teachers also described the work as rewarding. P2 felt "happy and fulfilled" when learners improved and participated, and P5 expressed satisfaction when learners gradually followed lessons.

"As I see them improve and participate in a class, I feel happy and fulfilled as a teacher." (P2)

"Kapag nakikita kong may progress sila… it is already very rewarding for me as a teacher [When I see that they are making progress… it is already very rewarding for me as a teacher]." (P5)

P5 emphasized that inclusion is not simply placing a learner with special needs in a regular classroom but helping the learner participate and feel that they belong. The theme thus reflects a dual experience of burden and fulfillment: small improvements in participation, confidence, and learning provide emotional rewards that reinforce commitment to inclusive practice.

Theme 2: Participation in regular classroom activities

Teachers implemented inclusion by involving learners with special needs in the ordinary life of the classroom, including group activities, games, pair work, classroom responsibilities, recitation, and regular lessons. P5 stated that learners were not immediately isolated or separated, and P9 explained that the learner was included in all regular activities and seated where he could see and hear the teacher clearly. Inclusion was thus understood as active participation rather than mere physical placement.

"I let them join group activities, classroom games, and other learning tasks." (P2)

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"I give them opportunities to work with their classmates through pair work, group activities, games, and classroom responsibilities." (P5)

"I include my learner in all regular activities." (P9)

Teachers also deliberately protected learners from embarrassment, exclusion, and negative treatment. P4 stated that the learner should not be embarrassed in front of classmates, and P7 stressed, "Hindi mo siya pwedeng ii-etsapuwera" [You cannot exclude or brush them aside]. Teachers were sensitive not only to academic access but also to social belonging and dignity, viewing the classroom as a community in which learners with special needs should be accepted and given meaningful roles.

Theme 3: Differentiated and flexible instruction

Differentiated instruction emerged as a central response to learner diversity. Teachers reported simplifying instructions, repeating explanations, modifying materials, adjusting activities, providing additional time, and assigning tasks according to individual abilities. P4 noted that some learners needed simpler instructions, repetition, or more time; P6 explained that teachers provided easier activities more closely matched to learner needs; and P5 described giving a different but related task when the regular activity was too difficult.

"Others need simpler instructions, repetition, or more time to finish the activity." (P4)

"Nagbibigay kami ng activities na kung saan mas madadalian sila at mas tugma doon sa needs nila [We provide activities through which they will find it easier and that are more aligned with their needs]." (P6)

"If the regular task is too difficult, I simplify the instructions or give them a different but related task." (P5)

"Dapat gumawa ka ng ibang paraan o ibang activity na makukuha mo attention nila [You should find another way or create a different activity that will catch their attention]." (P8)

"We need to adjust the way we teach depending on the needs and abilities of the child." (P4)

Modified activities allowed learners to participate in the same lesson at an appropriate level of difficulty. Differentiation also involved flexibility in pacing and teacher attention: teachers did not limit progress to correct answers or grade performance but adjusted support according to the learner's response.

Theme 4: Peer-supported participation and acceptance

Peer support helped learners with special needs participate. Teachers paired learners with classmates, assigned buddy helpers, included them in group work, and encouraged other pupils to assist respectfully. P6 explained that support should not come only from the teacher; P9 used buddy helpers; and P5 assigned peer buddies when appropriate. These practices reduced the teacher's sole responsibility for assistance and created opportunities for social interaction and cooperation.

"I also encourage their classmates to help and work with them." (P2)

"Hindi lang ako yung nakakatulong sa kanila pati yung classmate nila [I am not the only one helping them; their classmates help too]." (P6)

"I pair him with their classmates as buddy helpers." (P9)

"I assign peer buddies whenever appropriate." (P5)

Peer support also contributed to confidence and acceptance. P4 encouraged classmates to be supportive and respectful, and P7 oriented the class about the learner's situation using appropriate and respectful language.

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"I also encourage their classmates to be supportive and respectful." (P4)

"Kailangan ma-encourage sila, para ma-ano yung self confidence nila [They need to be encouraged so that their self-confidence can be built up]." (P7)

Peer involvement served both instructional and social purposes: classmates helped learners complete tasks and helped them feel accepted. For peer support to remain effective, however, it should be guided by the teacher and implemented in ways that avoid labeling, dependency, or embarrassment.

Theme 5: Individualized assessment and progress monitoring

Teachers monitored progress through worksheets, written work, performance tasks, examinations, recitation, observation, anecdotal records, and individual conversations. P3 kept records of worksheets, performance tasks, written works, and examinations; P6 used daily observation and anecdotal records; and P10 assessed the learner individually and allowed ample time to complete the assessment. Teachers thus used both formal and informal information to understand learner development.

"I have the record for worksheets, performance tasks, written works and examinations." (P3)

"Na-observe ko sila daily… nagagawa ako ng anecdotal record [I observe them daily… I make anecdotal records]." (P6)

"I assess them individually… and give them ample time to complete the assessment." (P10)

A significant finding was the emphasis on individual progress rather than comparison with classmates. P4 considered it better to compare a learner's current performance with previous performance, and P5 considered increased participation a significant improvement even if the learner still performed below classmates. Teachers also monitored behavioral, social, and emotional development; P9 recorded academic milestones and social-emotional progress.

"It is better to compare their current performance to their previous performance." (P4)

"Kung dati ay ayaw niyang sumali sa activity pero ngayon nakikilahok na, that is already a significant improvement [If before they did not want to join activities but now they participate, that is already a significant improvement]." (P5)

"I note both their academic milestones and their social-emotional progress." (P9)

This multidimensional approach recognizes that progress may appear as increased participation, reduced assistance, improved interaction, or greater independence, not only in academic scores. Overall, the matrix for RQ1 shows five interconnected practices: creating a meaningful and accepting classroom environment, involving learners in regular activities, adapting instruction, using peer support, and monitoring individual progress. Teachers also evaluated progress through parent communication and viewed participation, improvement, and belonging as sources of professional fulfillment.

Table 1. Summary matrix for RQ1: Implementation of inclusive education

Major themes	Codes	Supporting statements	Interpretation
1. Inclusive education as challenging but meaningful	Challenging teaching experience; patience; flexibility; emotional fulfillment; recognition of learner	P2: "As I see them improve and participate in a class, I feel happy and fulfilled as a teacher." P5: "Inclusive education is not simply placing a learner with special needs inside a regular classroom."	Inclusive education is demanding because teachers must address diverse academic, behavioral, and emotional needs; learner participation and progress make the

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	progress; learner belonging	P6: "Nakakapagod siya, challenging, nakaka-stress pero fulfilling." P9: "Inclusion is about making small and meaningful changes so every child feels welcome and understood."	work meaningful and professionally rewarding.
2. Participation in regular classroom activities	Group activities; classroom games; pair work; classroom responsibilities; participation in regular lessons; non-isolation; protection from embarrassment	P2: "I let them join group activities, classroom games, and other learning tasks." P5: "I give them opportunities to work with their classmates through pair work, group activities, games, and classroom responsibilities." P7: "Kung ano ginagawa namin, sinasama ko siya." P9: "I include my learner in all regular activities."	Inclusion is implemented by letting learners with special needs share the same classroom experiences as peers. Teachers avoid isolating or embarrassing them and provide meaningful roles.
3. Differentiated and flexible instruction	Simplified instructions; repetition; modified activities; adjusted materials; extra time; individualized guidance; activities matched to ability	P4: "Others need simpler instructions, repetition, or more time to finish the activity." P5: "If the regular task is too difficult, I simplify the instructions or give them a different but related task." P6: "Nagbibigay kami ng activities na kung saan mas madadalian sila at mas tugma doon sa needs nila." P10: "Adapting materials, and giving focused attention."	Teachers adjust content, process, materials, pacing, and level of assistance to make instruction accessible to learners with different needs.
4. Peer-supported participation and acceptance	Peer buddies; classmate assistance; respectful classmates; group participation; shared responsibility; confidence-building	P2: "I also encourage their classmates to help and work with them." P5: "I assign peer buddies whenever appropriate." P6: "Hindi lang ako yung nakakatulong sa kanila pati yung classmate nila." P4: "I also encourage their classmates to be supportive and respectful."	Classmates serve as sources of assistance, encouragement, and social acceptance. Peer support strengthens participation and helps create a classroom culture of cooperation and respect.
5. Individualized assessment and	Classroom-based assessment; observation; anecdotal records;	P3: "I have the record for worksheets, performance tasks, written works and examinations."	Teachers monitor academic, behavioral, social, and emotional growth using formal and

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Volume 1 Issue 4 Pages 2359-2411
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progress monitoring	individual progress; small gains; one-on-one assessment; parent communication	P6: "Na-observe ko sila daily… nagagawa ako ng anecdotal record." P4: "It is better to compare their current performance to their previous performance." P10: "I assess them individually… and give them ample time to complete the assessment."	informal evidence. Progress is judged primarily through individual development rather than comparison with classmates.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education (RQ2)

Teachers encountered interconnected instructional, behavioral, structural, and emotional challenges. The most prominent were managing diverse learning needs, handling challenging behavior, teaching large classes, providing individualized attention, and completing lessons within limited time. Teachers also reported insufficient specialized training, inadequate instructional materials, limited funding, lack of professional services, heavy paperwork, and insufficient parental or specialist support. These systemic challenges affected not only classroom implementation but also teachers' well-being, resulting in stress, fatigue, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy (Table 2).

Theme 1: Managing diverse learning and behavioral needs

Teachers had substantial difficulty managing learners with different abilities, learning speeds, attention spans, communication patterns, and behavioral needs. P2 explained that learners had different levels of ability and needs, while P5 described difficulties with expression, following instructions, and emotional control.

"Learners have different levels of ability and different needs." (P2)

"Some learners with special needs may have difficulty expressing themselves, following instructions, or controlling their emotions." (P5)

Participants reported tantrums, shouting, crying, lack of focus, and behavior that interrupted classroom activities, requiring individualized responses while instruction for the whole class continued. P7 explained that disruptive behavior could be imitated by younger classmates, compounding management issues, and P9 reported difficulty managing tantrums while addressing pacing because the learner completed tests more slowly than peers.

"Nagkakaroon ng… kaguluhan [There is… disorder]." (P7)

"I also struggle with the tantrums while managing pacing." (P9)

The challenges of inclusion are therefore not limited to curriculum adaptation; they also involve emotional regulation, safety, peer behavior, classroom routines, and the capacity to respond to individual needs without neglecting the rest of the class.

Theme 2: Large class size and limited time

Large class size was among the most consistently identified challenges. Participants explained that many learners made it difficult to provide individual attention, monitor progress, give one-on-one assistance, and complete individualized activities. P6 said that with many learners the teacher cannot adequately focus on one child, and P9 reported difficulty providing the appropriate individual attention in a class of 29 pupils. These accounts reveal a structural conflict between mainstream instruction and the individualized support learners with special needs require.

"The number of learners in the classroom can also make it difficult to provide individual assistance." (P2)

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"Kapag marami sila sa isang klase, hindi mo talaga matutukan yung isang bata [When there are many of them in a class, you really cannot focus on one child]." (P6)

"With a full class of 29 pupils, giving this learner the right amount of individual attention is very difficult." (P9)

Limited time intensified the effect of class size. Teachers had to complete lessons, attend to other learners, manage behavior, prepare materials, and complete administrative responsibilities. P4 explained that teachers must support an individual learner while ensuring that the whole class continues learning, and P7 added that disruptions sometimes prevented the lesson from being completed.

"Mahirap magbigay ng individualized attention sa bawat learner [It is hard to give individualized attention to every learner]." (P4)

"Sa halip matapos niyo yung lesson, hindi mo talaga matatapos [Instead of finishing the lesson, you really cannot finish it]." (P7)

Theme 3: Insufficient training and professional preparedness

Participants reported insufficient specialized training in inclusive education. They were uncertain how to handle specific disabilities, respond to meltdowns, select appropriate activities, design interventions, and determine suitable assessment procedures. P8 stated that teachers had some assessment-related exposure but lacked training on handling learners with special needs, and P7 explained that teachers did not know where to begin when preparing an intervention or determining the level of assessment.

"Wala kaming training… kung how to handle the LSEN, wala kami ngayon… minsan talaga dumarating sa point na hindi mo alam kung paano mo sila i-handle [We have no training… on how to handle LSEN, we have none now… sometimes you reach a point where you do not know how to handle them]." (P8)

"Hindi mo alam kung saan ka ba magsisimula [You do not know where to start]." (P7)

This lack of preparedness affected confidence and decision-making. P3 described feeling unable to provide the best support during a prolonged meltdown because the teacher did not know what to do, and P9 explained that being new to inclusive education and lacking proper training made mainstream teaching very challenging.

"I am also new with the concept of inclusive education and don’t have proper training." (P9)

General teaching experience alone did not appear to equip teachers to respond to diverse disabilities; teachers need sustained, practical, case-based professional development rather than occasional orientation sessions.

Theme 4: Limited resources, funding, and support services

Teachers described a lack of instructional materials, insufficient budget, limited assessment, lack of therapy, inadequate specialist support, and weak parental support (Table 2). P6 cited the lack of materials and the absence of a budget allocated for such learners; P7 said that teachers lacked appropriate tools and that learners needed professional advice and check-ups. The absence of materials, funding, professional services, and specialist support limits teachers’ capacity to provide comprehensive, individualized assistance.

Theme 5: Teacher stress and competing responsibilities

Inclusive education increased teachers’ workload and emotional demands. Participants cited heavy paperwork, emotional exhaustion, frustration, feelings of inadequacy, and competing classroom demands. P6 said there is a great deal of paperwork in schools today; P4 described the work as sometimes tiring and overwhelming; P5 said the challenges can be physically and emotionally tiring; and P6 expressed, "Nakaka-stress… parang feeling ko wala akong worth na teacher [It is stressful… it feels like I have no worth as a teacher]." When teachers cannot provide adequate

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support, they may experience frustration, stress, and reduced professional self-confidence. Overall, the challenges are both instructional and systemic.

Table 2. Summary matrix for RQ2: Challenges in implementing inclusive education

Major themes	Codes	Supporting statements	Interpretation
1. Managing diverse learning and behavioral needs	Different ability levels; varied learning pace; short attention span; communication difficulties; tantrums; emotional regulation; classroom disruption	P1: "Hirap talaga silang makasunod… hindi sila nakafocus." P2: "Learners have different levels of ability and different needs." P5: "Some learners with special needs may have difficulty expressing themselves, following instructions, or controlling their emotions." P9: "I also struggle with the tantrums while managing pacing."	Teachers find it difficult to manage diverse academic, behavioral, emotional, and communication needs within one classroom; these differences may interrupt instruction and affect the learning environment.
2. Large class size and limited time	Large learner-teacher ratio; limited one-on-one support; competing learner needs; reduced monitoring; unfinished lessons; limited instructional attention	P4: "Mahirap magbigay ng individualized attention sa bawat learner." P6: "Kapag marami sila sa isang klase, hindi mo talaga matututukan yung isang bata." P7: "Sa halip matapos niyo yung lesson, hindi mo talaga matatapos." P9: "With a full class of 29 pupils, giving this learner the right amount of individual attention is very difficult."	Large classes make individualized instruction difficult while maintaining whole-class teaching; limited time reduces opportunities for monitoring, intervention, and learner assistance.
3. Insufficient training and professional preparedness	Lack of specialized training; uncertainty about strategies; difficulty handling meltdowns; limited disability-specific knowledge; trial-and-error practice	P3: "The challenges… [include] the proper strategies, techniques on how to handle them." P6: "Kulang na kulang din sa mga trainings." P8: "Wala kaming training… kung how to handle the LSEN, wala kami ngayon." P7: "Hindi mo alam kung saan ka ba magsisimula."	Teachers feel inadequately prepared to handle different disabilities, manage challenging behavior, modify instruction, and design appropriate interventions.
4. Limited resources,	Lack of instructional materials; insufficient budget; limited assessment; lack of	P6: "Kakulangan natin sa mga materials."	The absence of materials, funding, professional services, and specialist support limits teachers'

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funding, and support services	therapy; inadequate specialist support; weak parental support	P6: "Wala tayong budget na nakalaan para sa mga ganung learners." P7: "Wala naman kasi tayong talagang gamit na pwede." P7: "Kailangan yung professional advice, kailangan nila ng check-up."	capacity to provide comprehensive, individualized assistance.
5. Teacher stress and competing responsibilities	Heavy workload; paperwork; emotional exhaustion; frustration; feelings of inadequacy; competing classroom demands	P6: "Tapos yung paperworks. Ang daming paperworks kasi ngayon sa school." P4: "Personally, sometimes nakakapagod siya at overwhelming." P5: "These challenges can sometimes be physically and emotionally tiring." P6: "Nakaka-stress… parang feeling ko wala akong worth na teacher."	Inclusive education increases workload and emotional demands. When teachers cannot provide adequate support, they may experience frustration, stress, and reduced professional self-confidence.

Strategies Used by Teachers (RQ3)

Teachers responded to the challenges with flexible, reflective, learner-centered strategies. They first observed the learner and identified the possible cause of a difficulty before modifying their response; used simplified instructions, task chunking, additional time, visual aids, demonstrations, games, movement, hands-on activities, positive reinforcement, clear routines, and emotional-regulation strategies; and consulted colleagues, parents, school heads, and SNED teachers when challenges exceeded individual capacity (Table 3).

Theme 1: Needs-based and reflective response

Participants commonly observed and analyzed the learner's situation before responding. Rather than interpreting noncompliance as laziness or inability, teachers tried to identify whether the difficulty resulted from unclear instructions, task complexity, lack of concentration, emotional distress, or interaction with classmates. P4 determined first where the learner was experiencing difficulty, and P10 evaluated whether the task was too difficult or the instructions unclear.

"I don't immediately think that the learner is not listening or not capable." (P4)

"I evaluate whether the task I assigned is too difficult or unclear." (P10)

This is reflective, needs-based teaching: teachers observe responses, identify what may be causing the difficulty, implement an adjustment, and evaluate whether it works. P2 changed strategies based on the learner's response, and P5 reflected on what could be done differently after a challenging situation.

"I first try to understand the learner's needs and identify the possible cause of the difficulty… I also observe what strategies work best and make changes based on the learner's response." (P2)

"I first try to understand the situation and identify what may have caused the behavior." (P5)

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Teachers thus engaged in informal action research within the classroom. The process remained largely individual and experience-based, however, which underscores the importance of structured coaching and professional learning communities.

Theme 2: Differentiated instruction and individualized scaffolding

Differentiated instruction was the most prominent strategy. Teachers simplified directions, divided tasks into smaller steps, gave additional time and extra explanation, and adjusted activities by ability. P4 used one-step-at-a-time instructions; P5 combined step-by-step guidance with visual cues and demonstrations; and P9 prepared three levels of assessment for advanced, average, and support-needing learners.

"I simplify the instructions. I break the task into smaller steps." (P4)

"I break the activity into smaller and more manageable steps." (P5)

"I prepare three levels of assessments for my class." (P9)

These practices function as scaffolding because they reduce task complexity while maintaining access to the learning objective. Teachers did not necessarily remove learners from the classroom; they modified how learners accessed and demonstrated learning, reflecting a shift from uniform instruction toward flexible, equitable participation. By retaining all learners in the shared classroom while adapting instructional entry points, they operationalized inclusive pedagogy rather than lowering expectations or resorting to pull-out remediation.

Theme 3: Multimodal, play-based, and experiential learning

Teachers shifted intentionally from teacher-centered instruction toward interactive, multisensory strategies, using visual aids, demonstrations, songs, movement, role-play, games, videos, and hands-on activities. P3 moved from writing exercises to play-based exercises and used body movement to develop writing skills; P6 explained that games and hands-on activities produced greater participation than lecture, writing, or copying from the board; and P8 used videos and movement.

"I use differentiated activities, visual materials, demonstrations, group activities, and individual assistance." (P2)

"I let them sing, dance, role play… from a simple writing exercises to play based exercises." (P3)

"More on games na tsaka hands-on activities… learning by doing." (P6)

"Gumamit ka ng visual… videos din gagayahin nila… Dapat happy-happy… masaya sila, dapat makukuha attention nila [Use visuals… they will imitate videos too… It should be happy… they are happy, you should get their attention]." (P8)

Teachers recognized the limits of relying solely on verbal explanation, written tasks, or board work. Multimodal teaching allowed engagement through visual, physical, auditory, and experiential channels, which was particularly useful for learners with short attention spans, communication barriers, or difficulty with written tasks, and it benefited the whole class by making lessons more active. Inclusive strategies were thus viewed not only as accommodations for one learner but as practices that could improve participation for everyone.

Theme 4: Positive behavior support and emotional regulation

Teachers used proactive classroom management: praise, small rewards, encouragement, clear expectations, structured routines, calm communication, and planned breaks. Specific practices included immediate praise and rewards (P1), "catching them doing the right thing immediately" (P10), and acknowledging incremental improvement (P4), which boosted learners' willingness to participate when they felt valued. These strategies reflect a strengths-based approach.

"Kapag very good siya, may reward siya sa akin [When he is very good, he gets a reward from me]." (P1)

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"I focus on encouraging positive behavior by catching them doing the right thing immediately." (P10)

"I also recognize their small improvements." (P4)

Teachers also regulated their own responses and allowed learners time to calm down. P6 described remaining calm; P9 paused, observed, and approached the learner once the tantrum had subsided; and P1 did not force the learner to work when not in the mood, providing individual work later when the learner was ready.

"Hangga't maaari… kalma lang, kalma [As much as possible… just calm, calm]." (P6)

"Once they are calm, that is my time to slowly approach them." (P9)

"Kapag wala siya sa mood, di ko na siya pinipilit… Kapag nasa mood na siya… doon ko naman mag-sosolo time para magawa niya yung mga na-miss niya [When he is not in the mood, I no longer force him… When he is in the mood… that is when I have solo time with him so he can do what he missed]." (P1)

Educators viewed emotional readiness as a prerequisite for academic engagement. Although mild punitive measures occasionally appeared, the dominant narrative favored positive reinforcement, relational patience, constructive redirection, and psychological support over punitive consequences.

Theme 5: Collaboration and adaptive problem-solving

Teachers responded to challenges by consulting colleagues, parents, school heads, and SNED teachers. P2 asked colleagues for suggestions, and P3 and P6 consulted SNED teachers and co-teachers. P4 and P5 emphasized that inclusive education should not be the responsibility of the classroom teacher alone. Parents were consulted because they could provide information about routines, interests, triggers, and strategies that worked at home.

"I communicate with my colleagues and ask for suggestions." (P2)

"I usually ask guidance… to our SNED teacher." (P3)

"Lalapit ako sa mga co-teachers [I will approach my co-teachers]." (P6)

"I also coordinate with people who can provide support." (P4)

"We share experiences and strategies that worked for us." (P5)

Collaboration helped teachers make decisions and adapt their responses, and it reduced the isolation of classroom teachers who lacked specialized training. P4 considered collaboration more effective, and P9 maintained open communication with parents and colleagues.

"It is more effective when there is collaboration." (P4)

"I keep an open, friendly line of communication with the parents and with colleagues." (P9)

Table 3. Summary matrix for RQ3: Strategies used by teachers

Major themes	Codes	Supporting statements	Interpretation
1. Needs-based and reflective response	Observation before intervention; identifying causes; assessing readiness; evaluating task difficulty; reflecting on strategies;	P2: "I first try to understand the learner's needs and identify the possible cause of the difficulty." P4: "I don't immediately think that the learner is not listening or not capable."	Teachers first observe the learner and identify the cause of the difficulty; interventions are based on learner needs rather than

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	modifying teacher response	P9: "I pause, take a deep breath, and observe first." P10: "I evaluate whether the task I assigned is too difficult or unclear."	immediate assumptions or negative judgments.
2. Differentiated instruction and individualized scaffolding	Simplified instructions; task chunking; additional time; extra guidance; individualized activities; tiered assessments	P3: "I give extra time, attention, careful instruction and long patience." P4: "I break the task into smaller steps." P6: "Ibe-break mo siya into small steps." P9: "I prepare three levels of assessments for my class."	Teachers make learning tasks more manageable by adjusting instructions, activity levels, pacing, assistance, and assessment conditions.
3. Multimodal, play-based, and experiential learning	Visual aids; demonstrations; games; movement; songs; dance; role-play; hands-on activities; video resources	P3: "I let them sing, dance, role play." P3: "From a simple writing exercises to play based exercises." P6: "More on games na tsaka hands-on activities." P8: "Gumamit ka ng visual… videos din gagayahin nila."	Varied sensory and experiential approaches sustain attention, improve comprehension, and encourage participation among learners with different preferences and abilities.
4. Positive behavior support and emotional regulation	Praise; rewards; recognition of effort; clear routines; calm communication; breaks; patience; emotional self-regulation	P1: "Kapag very good siya, may reward siya sa akin." P4: "I also recognize their small improvements." P6: "Hangga't maaari… kalma lang, kalma." P9: "Once they are calm, that is my time to slowly approach them." P10: "I focus on encouraging positive behavior by catching them doing the right thing immediately."	Teachers promote appropriate behavior through encouragement, praise, rewards, routines, calm responses, and opportunities for learners to regulate their emotions.
5. Collaboration and adaptive problem-solving	Peer consultation; parent communication; SNED coordination; school-head support; strategy sharing; continuous adjustment	P2: "I communicate with my colleagues and ask for suggestions." P3: "I usually ask guidance… to our SNED teacher." P5: "We share experiences and strategies that worked for us."	Teachers seek assistance from others and continuously revise strategies; collaboration helps them manage situations that exceed individual knowledge or experience.

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		P9: "I keep an open, friendly line of communication with the parents and with colleagues."	

Support Needed for Effective Inclusive Education (RQ4)

Participants understood the importance of inclusive education but accepted that successful implementation requires appropriate knowledge, resources, collaboration, and institutional support. Their experiences indicate that teachers cannot meet diverse learner needs by themselves; continuous, coordinated support from the school, specialists, parents, and other stakeholders is needed (Table 4).

Theme 1: Continuous practical training and professional development

Participants consistently requested more training on different disabilities, classroom and behavior management, differentiated instruction, assessment, and instructional-material development. P2 identified the need for training on types of special needs and appropriate assessment; P5 emphasized that training should not be purely theoretical but include actual classroom strategies; and P4 valued demonstrations because teachers can see how inclusive practices work in real situations.

"I would benefit from more training on different types of special needs, classroom management, differentiated instruction, and appropriate assessment strategies." (P2)

"It would be helpful if the training includes actual classroom strategies, behavior management, differentiated instruction, assessment, and creating appropriate learning materials." (P5)

"I still need more training about different types of special needs… the hands-on training or actual demonstration will be a big help." (P4)

Teachers preferred sustained, practical, case-based professional development addressing actual classroom situations such as tantrums, communication difficulties, attention problems, and varying academic abilities, including modeling, demonstrations, guided practice, coaching, case discussions, and follow-up support.

Theme 2: Specialist assistance and additional classroom personnel

Teachers expressed a strong need for SNED teachers, specialists, therapists, shadow teachers, and additional classroom personnel. P9 highlighted the importance of a shadow teacher for learners with higher needs; P5 and P9 emphasized additional personnel because one teacher can hardly provide individualized attention to learners with diverse needs; and P6 mentioned the need for pre-assessment and accessible therapy services.

"They also need the shadow teacher… additional manpower to handle the number of pupils with diverse personalities and attitudes." (P9)

"If specialists are available, their guidance… would also be very helpful." (P5)

"Sana magkaroon ng… pre-assessment tsaka free therapy sessions [I hope there will be… pre-assessment and free therapy sessions]." (P6)

This theme reflects the limits of expecting one mainstream teacher to handle all academic, behavioral, communication, and developmental needs. Specialist support can help teachers interpret learner profiles, design interventions, manage behavior, and monitor progress, and additional personnel could reduce disruption and allow more learners to receive focused assistance. Teachers need support from SNED teachers, learning support aides, shadow teachers, therapists, psychologists, and other specialists.

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Theme 3: Collaborative communication and stakeholder partnership

Communication was one of the most important forms of support. Participants stressed regular consultation and open communication among teachers, school heads, specialists, and parents, and the sharing of information about behavior, progress, strengths, routines, and specific needs. P1 identified communication as the main support needed, and P2 and P7 highlighted regular consultation and sharing of ideas and knowledge. P4 explained that when parents and teachers use consistent approaches at home and school, teachers can better respond to a learner's needs; P5 and P10 highlighted continued collaboration, openness, and parent involvement.

"Number one, yung communication [Number one, the communication]." (P1)

"The most helpful support would be regular consultation and guidance." (P2)

"Palitan ng idea, palitan ng mga kaalaman [Exchange ideas, exchange knowledge]." (P7)

"It's easier for us to help the learner if the teachers and parents have the same direction." (P4)

"Continuous collaboration and open communication would be very helpful." (P5)

"Parents can support us by communicating their child's specific needs." (P10)

Parent partnership was especially valuable when families accepted the learner's condition and communicated openly. Effective inclusion involves continuous, two-way, purposeful communication among teachers, school heads, specialists, and parents, with regular consultation, feedback, and coordinated home–school strategies.

Theme 4: Accessible instructional materials and technology

Teachers requested visual aids, picture cards, simplified worksheets, reading materials, manipulatives, activity kits, letter boards, educational videos, interactive resources, and differentiated activity sheets. Materials need to be adaptable to learners' abilities, communication needs, attention span, sensory needs, reading level, and pace. P4 also acknowledged the benefits of technology in providing educational videos and interactive activities.

"Appropriate and accessible instructional materials, visual aids, learning modules, and other resources." (P2)

"Visual aids, picture cards, manipulatives, simplified reading materials, and differentiated activity sheets." (P5)

"Visual aids, reading materials, mga activity kits." (P6)

"Mga instructional materials, yung mga letter boards [Instructional materials, the letter boards]." (P8)

"Visual aids, simplified worksheets, and activities that can be adjusted." (P4)

Ready-to-use materials would also reduce the preparation burden of adapting every activity independently. Materials should be accessible, flexible, and developmentally appropriate, and should support participation in the regular lesson rather than make the learner feel separated from classmates.

Theme 5: Dedicated facilities, funding, and protected preparation time

Teachers identified quiet spaces, learner corners, resource rooms, sensory areas, adequate funding, and preparation time as necessary. P6 requested a quiet space for extra help; P10 envisioned a resource room equipped with instructional materials, playpens, and manipulatives; and P7 suggested a learner corner where children could calm down and use appropriate materials without disrupting the class. P2 emphasized sufficient time to prepare individualized activities, and P3 requested funds for producing instructional materials.

"Quiet space para sa extra help [A quiet space for extra help]." (P6)

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"A dedicated facility or resource room specifically designed to accommodate learners with special needs." (P10)

"Kahit man lang at least meron silang corner [At the very least, let them have a corner]." (P7)

"Additional facilities and spaces for intervention would also be helpful." (P2)

"Fund for the instructional materials to produce." (P3)

Such facilities would serve individualized instruction, emotional regulation, sensory breaks, focused assessment, and temporary intervention, but facilities alone would not suffice without funding and time. Because inclusion requires teachers to adapt materials, activities, assessments, and strategies for individual learners, protected planning time is essential; without it, teachers struggle to sustain individualized interventions alongside regular teaching. The findings point to institutional investment and a comprehensive support system rather than the assumption that teachers should individually accommodate classrooms and materials. Overall, effective inclusion needs continuing support at the professional, human, material, and institutional levels.

Table 4. Summary matrix for RQ4: Support needed for effective inclusive education

Major themes	Codes	Supporting statements	Interpretation
1. Continuous practical training and professional development	Disability-specific training; behavior management; differentiated instruction; assessment adaptation; hands-on training; learning-material development	P2: "I would benefit from more training on different types of special needs, classroom management, differentiated instruction, and appropriate assessment strategies." P4: "The hands-on training or actual demonstration will be a big help." P5: "Hindi lang sana theoretical." P10: "I need training on how to properly handle behavioral issues and manage tantrums."	Teachers need sustained, practical professional development directly applicable to classroom situations involving diverse learning and behavioral needs.
2. Specialist assistance and additional classroom personnel	SNED teacher support; specialist consultation; shadow teachers; therapists; additional manpower; case-specific technical guidance	P4: "Regular consultation and guidance from specialists are big." P5: "If specialists are available, their guidance… would also be very helpful." P6: "Sana magkaroon ng… pre-assessment tsaka free therapy sessions." P9: "They also need the shadow teacher."	One teacher cannot provide all the individualized academic, behavioral, developmental, and therapeutic support some learners need; professional, classroom-based assistance is required.
3. Collaborative communication and stakeholder partnership	Regular consultation; peer sharing; parent cooperation; school-head support; home-	P1: "Number one, yung communication."	Inclusive education requires coordinated action among teachers, parents, school heads, classmates, specialists, and other

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	school consistency; shared responsibility	P4: "It's easier for us to help the learner if the teachers and parents have the same direction." P5: "Continuous collaboration and open communication would be very helpful." P6: "Teamwork ng parents, ng teacher, ng classmate."	stakeholders; consistent communication connects support across home and school.
4. Accessible instructional materials and technology	Visual aids; picture cards; simplified worksheets; manipulatives; activity kits; technology; ready-to-use resources; differentiated materials	P2: "Appropriate and accessible instructional materials, visual aids, learning modules, and other resources." P4: "Visual aids, simplified worksheets, and activities that can be adjusted." P5: "Visual aids, picture cards, manipulatives, simplified reading materials, and differentiated activity sheets." P6: "Visual aids, reading materials, mga activity kits."	Teachers need accessible, adaptable materials that support different academic, sensory, communication, and behavioral needs while letting learners remain involved in regular classroom activities.
5. Dedicated facilities, funding, and protected preparation time	Quiet spaces; learner corners; resource rooms; sensory areas; intervention spaces; budget; preparation time	P2: "Additional facilities and spaces for intervention would also be helpful." P5: "A dedicated space where learners who need a quieter environment can receive additional support." P6: "Quiet space para sa extra help." P7: "Kahit man lang at least meron silang corner." P10: "A dedicated facility or resource room specifically designed to accommodate learners with special needs."	Teachers need physical spaces and institutional resources for individualized instruction, emotional regulation, focused intervention, and learner rest; adequate funding and preparation time make these supports functional.

Substantive Theory: The Adaptive Collaborative Support Theory of Inclusive Education (RQ5)

The Adaptive Collaborative Support Theory of Inclusive Education (ACSI Theory) proposes that inclusive education becomes more sustainable and meaningful when teachers continuously adapt their instructional practices to learners' diverse needs while receiving collaborative, professional, and institutional support. The theory emerged from the interconnected experiences of teachers: differentiated instruction, learner participation, peer support, individualized

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monitoring, reflective problem-solving, collaboration, and the need for continuous school support. Teachers described inclusion not as placing learners with special educational needs in regular classrooms but as actively adjusting instruction, activities, materials, pacing, assessment, and classroom interaction to enable meaningful participation. The theory comprises four interrelated processes.

- **Needs-based observation and reflection.** Teachers observe learners' behavior, participation, responses, and difficulties before deciding how to respond, and adjust instruction, activities, and interventions accordingly. They do not apply one fixed strategy to all learners but continually assess classroom situations and adapt; observation and reflection are the starting point of adaptive inclusive teaching.
- **Adaptive teaching and individualized support.** Teachers simplified instructions, divided tasks into smaller steps, used visual materials and demonstrations, provided additional time, modified activities, and adjusted assessment, maintaining the learning goal while modifying the pathway through which learners access and demonstrate learning.
- **Collaborative support.** Teachers sought assistance from colleagues, school heads, parents, SNED teachers, and other professionals. Collaboration helped address classroom challenges and reduced the feeling that inclusion is the sole responsibility of the individual classroom teacher.
- **Institutional support and continuous professional development.** Teachers identified practical training, specialist assistance, instructional materials, technology, facilities, funding, preparation time, and sustained communication as important supports, indicating that individual commitment and creativity are necessary but insufficient for sustained inclusion.

The central proposition of the ACSI Theory is that effective inclusive education develops through a continuous cycle of noticing learner needs, adapting teaching and support, collaborating with significant stakeholders, accessing institutional resources, monitoring learner progress, and reflecting on practice. The process is not linear, because teachers return continually to observation and reflection as learners' needs and classroom conditions change. Inclusive education is thus a dynamic, adaptive, and collaborative process rather than a one-time classroom intervention. The proposition is grounded in the findings: teachers described five interconnected inclusive practices (accepting classrooms, participation in regular activities, adapted instruction, peer support, and individual progress monitoring); their instructional and behavioral challenges were intensified by large classes, limited time, insufficient training, inadequate resources, limited professional services, and competing responsibilities; their responses included observation, differentiation, multimodal teaching, positive behavior support, and collaboration; and they identified continuous professional development, specialist assistance, stakeholder collaboration, accessible materials, facilities, funding, and protected preparation time as essential institutional support.

Proposed Enhanced School Support Program (RQ6)

Drawing on the theory and findings, the **INCLUDE-SAMAL** program (*Inclusive and Collaborative Learner Development and Enhanced School Support Program for Samal District*) is proposed. Its general objective is to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education in Samal District by providing teachers with continuous professional development, collaborative support, accessible instructional resources, individualized learner monitoring, and appropriate school-based support systems. The program has ten key result areas (KRAs) (Table 5). Indicative budgets are summarized in Table 6 and total ₱105,000.

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Table 5. The INCLUDE-SAMAL enhanced school support program

Key result area	Objective	Activities	Persons involved	Time frame	Budget	Source of funds	Success indicators
KRA 1: Teacher Capacity and Professional Development	Strengthen teachers' knowledge and skills in responding to diverse learner needs.	Conduct practical training on inclusive education, differentiated instruction, classroom and behavior management, individualized assessment, and strategies for learners with special educational needs; include demonstrations, case discussions, peer sharing, and guided practice.	PSDS, school heads, district inclusive education coordinator, SNED/SPED teachers, master teachers, resource persons	Quarterly	₱15,000	MOOE, INSET funds, SEF from LSB, possible partner support	At least 90% of participating teachers demonstrate increased knowledge and confidence in inclusive teaching strategies; teachers develop sample differentiated activities/materials.
KRA 2: Collaborative Teacher Support	Establish a regular mechanism for teachers to discuss learner needs, challenges, interventions, and progress.	Establish an Inclusive Education Support Team (IEST); conduct case conferences, peer consultation, Learning Action Cell sessions, and collaborative planning; share effective classroom strategies and intervention practices.	School heads, teachers, master teachers, SNED/SPED teachers, inclusive education coordinator, guidance personnel	Monthly/Quarterly	₱8,000	MOOE, LAC funds, SEF from LSB and PSB	Regular IEST meetings conducted; teachers document consultations and agreed interventions; teachers report increased access to professional support.
KRA 3: Adaptive and Differentiated Instruction	Enable teachers to adapt instruction according to learners'	Develop and implement differentiated lesson activities; simplify/chunk instructions; provide	Classroom teachers, master teachers, SNED/SPED teachers	Whole school year	₱12,000	MOOE, Learning Resources funds, SEF from LSB and PSB	Teachers implement differentiated activities in regular classes; learners demonstrate increased participation

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	abilities, needs, pace, and participation.	visual aids, demonstrations, manipulatives, additional time, flexible activities, and varied assessment methods; conduct peer observation and feedback.					and completion of appropriate learning tasks.
KRA 4: Accessible Learning Materials and Technology	Provide teachers with accessible and adaptable instructional resources for learners with diverse needs.	Develop a District/School Inclusive Learning Resource Bank containing picture cards, simplified worksheets, visual schedules, reading materials, manipulatives, activity sheets, differentiated assessments, videos, and other adaptable resources.	Teachers, master teachers, school heads, LR coordinator, ICT coordinator, SNED/SPED teachers	Quarterly development; whole-school-year use	₱20,000	MOOE, SEF from LSB and PSB, donations/partnerships	Each participating school develops or acquires an accessible resource collection; teachers regularly use adapted materials; learners have increased access to classroom activities.
KRA 5: Positive Behavior and Learner Participation	Promote learner participation, belonging, positive behavior, and emotional regulation in regular classrooms.	Establish classroom routines; use positive reinforcement; provide appropriate breaks and quiet time; implement peer buddy/group support; use games, movement, hands-on activities, and other multimodal strategies; recognize learner progress.	Classroom teachers, learners, parents, school head, guidance personnel, SNED/SPED teachers	Whole school year	₱8,000	MOOE, SEF from LSB and PSB	Reduced classroom participation barriers; increased learner participation in group and regular activities; teachers document positive behavioral and social progress.

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KRA 6: Individualized Learner Monitoring and Assessment	Strengthen systematic monitoring of learners' academic, behavioral, social, and participation progress.	Develop learner profiles; establish individual progress-monitoring records; use observation, anecdotal records, performance tasks, written outputs, recitation, and individualized assessment; conduct periodic learner progress reviews.	Classroom teachers, master teachers, SNED/SPED teachers, school head, parents	Baseline; monthly monitoring; quarterly review	₱5,000	MOOE, SEF from LSB and PSB	Individual learner records are maintained and updated; progress is compared with the learner's previous performance; intervention adjustments are documented.
KRA 7: Family and Stakeholder Collaboration	Strengthen communication and coordinated support between school, parents, and other stakeholders.	Conduct regular parent consultations; establish home–school communication; gather information about learner routines, interests, strengths, and triggers; develop consistent home–school strategies; conduct stakeholder meetings when needed.	Teachers, parents/guardians, school heads, SNED/SPED teachers, guidance personnel	Quarterly and as needed	₱5,000	MOOE, SEF from LSB and PSB	Regular parent consultations documented; parents participate in learner support planning; home–school strategies are coordinated.
KRA 8: Specialist and Additional Support Services	Improve access to professional assistance for learners requiring specialized support.	Establish referral and consultation mechanisms with SNED/SPED teachers, guidance personnel, health professionals, therapists, and other available specialists; conduct case discussions	School heads, teachers, SNED/SPED teachers, guidance personnel, district office, parents, available specialists	Whole school year	₱10,000	MOOE, Division funds, LGU/SEF, partnerships	Referral and consultation system established; teachers receive appropriate professional guidance; learners needing specialized support are referred through proper channels.

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		and referrals when necessary.					
KRA 9: Inclusive Learning Environment and Support Spaces	Provide safe and appropriate spaces that support learner regulation, participation, and individualized intervention.	Establish a Learner Support Corner/Quiet Space or small resource area using available school space; provide basic visual supports, manipulatives, reading materials, and calming/regulation resources.	School head, teachers, PTA, school DRRM/property coordinator, learners	1st–2nd quarter; maintenance throughout the year	₱15,000	MOOE, PTA, SEF, donations/partnerships	Each participating school establishes an appropriate support area based on available space; learners can access the space when appropriate and under teacher supervision.
KRA 10: Program Monitoring and Continuous Improvement	Ensure the support program remains responsive to teachers' and learners' needs.	Conduct baseline and end-of-year assessment; review teacher feedback, learner progress records, intervention results, and implementation issues; conduct quarterly program review; revise strategies based on findings.	District inclusive education coordinator, school heads, teachers, IEST	Quarterly and year-end	₱7,000	MOOE, District/Division funds	Quarterly monitoring reports completed; implementation gaps identified and addressed; program recommendations documented for the succeeding school year.

General objective: To strengthen the implementation of inclusive education in Samal District by providing teachers with continuous professional development, collaborative support, accessible instructional resources, individualized learner monitoring, and appropriate school-based support systems. MOOE = Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses; SEF = Special Education Fund; LSB/PSB = Local/Provincial School Board; PSDS = Public Schools District Supervisor; IEST = Inclusive Education Support Team.

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Table 6. Proposed budget summary of the INCLUDE-SAMAL program

Program component	Indicative budget
Teacher Capacity and Professional Development	₱15,000
Collaborative Teacher Support	₱8,000
Adaptive and Differentiated Instruction	₱12,000
Accessible Learning Materials and Technology	₱20,000
Positive Behavior and Learner Participation	₱8,000
Individualized Learner Monitoring and Assessment	₱5,000
Family and Stakeholder Collaboration	₱5,000
Specialist and Additional Support Services	₱10,000
Inclusive Learning Environment and Support Spaces	₱15,000
Program Monitoring and Continuous Improvement	₱7,000
TOTAL	**₱105,000**

Note. The financial requirements are indicative planning estimates, not fixed prescribed amounts. Actual expenses should be adjusted to the approved Annual Implementation Plan, available MOOE/SEF or other allowable funding sources, procurement rules, and actual school needs.

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DISCUSSION

This study explored how public elementary school teachers in Samal District experience the implementation of inclusive education. The findings reveal a significant tension at the heart of inclusion: teachers face substantial systemic challenges while simultaneously adapting their roles, practices, and strategies to meet diverse learner needs. This section interprets the results against the literature and the study's theoretical lenses.

Implementation: inclusion as participation, belonging, and professional fulfillment

The results reflect an emerging international consensus that inclusion requires not only placing students in general settings but also ensuring their active involvement and sense of belonging (Nilholm, 2021; Schwab & Alnahdi, 2020). The dual experience of burden and fulfillment (Theme 1) aligns with Theme 3 (Impactful and Fulfilling Experiences) of Galgao et al. (2025), in which transformative teaching moments restore an educator's sense of professional identity, and with Paseka and Schwab's (2023) conceptualization of inclusive teaching as a dual psychological dynamic balancing emotional burden with intrinsic reward. While adapting instruction and accommodating diverse needs impose considerable demands, the operational sacrifices noted by Galgao et al. (2025) are offset when student progress translates daily instructional challenges into professional satisfaction. The twofold nature of the experience also supports Alamo and Llorent (2024), who posited that inclusive teaching deepens empathy, patience, and commitment. Consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, teachers grew personally and professionally through constant interaction with diverse learners, and the effort of building an environment in which students truly belong (P5) became the enabler of that growth.

Teachers' emphasis on participation in regular classroom activities reflects Liu et al. (2021), who found active classroom participation key to making inclusion work, and Putra (2023), who observed that meaningful engagement makes students feel valued and accepted. Their adjustments to content, process, materials, pacing, and assistance correspond to the differentiation strategies identified by Gheyssens et al. (2023) and to Pinaranda and Sario (2024), who highlighted that flexible grouping, tiered activities, and multimodal teaching enhance academic performance and participation. Peer assistance corresponds to the literature on peer-assisted learning (Carter & Biggs, 2021) and to Galgao et al. (2025), whose participants emphasized that collaborative learning fosters peer support, inclusion, and mutual respect, strengthening participation, confidence, and empathy among learners, while teamwork among teachers promotes shared responsibility. The emphasis on self-referenced progress echoes Bourke and Mentis (2023), who advocate measuring progress against a learner's own previous performance, and Lani and Santos (2024), who highlight how observation and portfolio records capture meaningful gains that standardized tests miss. Documentation and anecdotal records align with recommendations for multidimensional assessment (Desormeaux & Mitchell, 2022), and the focus on academic, behavioral, social, and emotional growth is consistent with Villarente and Moral (2026) on teachers' professional competence in responsive instruction. Inclusion practitioners often report increased job satisfaction because of greater opportunities for student engagement.

Challenges: structural conditions beyond individual teacher effort

The challenges teachers reported align with recent literature. Javier (2023) found that educators face significant hurdles due to heavy workloads and insufficient instructional and financial support during program implementation, and Hadiana et al. (2024) observed that balancing diverse student needs alongside inadequate training escalates teacher stress and burnout and hinders sustainable practice. The demands of managing behavioral needs reflect findings that maintaining psychological safety, predictable routines, and complex peer dynamics places heavy demands on teachers' social-emotional competence and instructional balance (Tampubolon et al., 2024). Large classes are consistent with Bacus (2024), who found that high student-to-teacher ratios constrain individualized attention and accommodations; with Vakili et al. (2024), who noted that managing disruptive behavior in overcrowded classrooms

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imposes heavy workloads and severe time constraints; and with Likuru and Mwila (2022), who showed that overcrowding and insufficient planning time make differentiated instruction and individualized support difficult to sustain. Differentiated instruction requires educators to evaluate learning profiles, readiness, and specific needs and then adapt content, process, and products; when class density is high, teachers must devote much of their active time to behavioral control, basic group management, and broad content delivery, which limits one-on-one interaction, flexible small-group arrangements, and ongoing formative feedback.

The absence of targeted, practical staff development remains one of the primary obstacles to quality inclusive instruction worldwide (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024). Quiaot and Suplaag (2026) found a positive relationship between teacher readiness and self-efficacy, so teachers lacking formal preparation have reduced confidence in inclusive classrooms, and Hakel and Magin (2024) found that prior experience does not predict readiness or long-term implementation; ongoing professional learning, rather than years on the job, drives inclusive practice. This supports the present finding that general teaching experience alone does not equip teachers to respond to diverse disabilities. Taken together, resource limits, workload, and emotional strain show that the challenges of inclusion are instructional and systemic, consistent with the ecological view that teachers' experiences are shaped by exosystem and macrosystem conditions such as policy, funding, and resources.

Strategies: reflective, adaptive, and collaborative practice

Teachers' practice of identifying the cause of a difficulty before responding aligns with frameworks emphasizing reflective practice as a means of addressing individual needs and underlying distress rather than enforcing compliance. Cole et al. (2022) show that reflection helps educators move beyond reflexive disciplinary measures and adjust instruction based on deeper learner needs, and Machost and Stains (2023) note that reflective inquiry allows teachers to reframe noncompliance as a signal for pedagogical adjustment, fostering more supportive teacher–student relationships. The cycle of observation, adjustment, and evaluation matches Mintjes et al. (2024), who describe how systematic action research uses classroom observation and feedback loops to refine strategies. Because the process remained largely individual, structured coaching and PLCs are warranted; Liu (2022) shows that embedding reflective practice in PLCs significantly enhances teachers' creative self-efficacy and pedagogical innovation compared with isolated practice.

Differentiation and scaffolding are supported by Ferrer and Naanep (2025), who found that tiered assignments, adjusted task complexity, and structured steps enhance engagement and growth across capability levels, and by Pozas et al. (2021), who show that differentiated scaffolding (tiered difficulty, flexible grouping, varied presentation) enhances engagement and academic self-concept without isolating learners. Multimodal and play-based teaching is consistent with Li et al. (2023), whose work on playful learning shows that hands-on, sensory-rich experiences boost engagement and motivation, and with UDL frameworks that treat learner variability as predictable rather than exceptional (Almeqdad et al., 2023); proactively designing lessons with kinesthetic, auditory, and visual elements removes barriers before frustration occurs (Trifonova, 2025). Multimodality therefore acts as a universal tool, providing accessibility scaffolds for learners with specialized needs while enhancing interest, retention, and peer collaboration across the class.

Positive behavior support is validated by evidence that behavior-specific praise delivered immediately after desired actions improves engagement and on-task focus and reduces disruptions compared with punitive discipline (Frontiers in Education, 2025), and that proactive routines, clear expectations, and strengths-affirming feedback cultivate a low-anxiety environment that builds self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (European Journal of Education Studies, 2025). Teachers' emphasis on emotional readiness is consistent with Guo et al. (2025), who linked teacher emotional support to engagement through academic self-efficacy and resilience, and Bhatt et al. (2025), whose systematic review found that positive reinforcement boosts emotional and cognitive engagement and reduces off-task behavior more effectively

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than punitive discipline. Cultivating emotional readiness is therefore a key mechanism for a psychologically safe classroom climate. The finding that teachers regulate their own responses also resonates with Hernández González et al. (2024) on teacher emotional regulation and learner participation. Teachers' consultation with parents is supported by Ebron (2026), who showed that sharing home routines, behavioral insights, and child preferences is critical to the design and execution of IEPs and that consulting parents as equal partners yields greater consistency, better behavior management, and improved outcomes. Overall, the multi-pronged approach reflects evidence that successful inclusion combines diagnostic instruction with collaborative ecosystems: identifying barriers before intervention and scaffolding tasks multimodally lowers cognitive load while preserving rigor (Korpershoek et al., 2025), and shifting from isolated teaching to networks of parents, administrators, and special educators makes inclusion a system-wide commitment (MDPI Education Sciences, 2024), applying adaptations and behavioral interventions consistently across home and school.

Support needs: toward coordinated, multi-level institutional support

The call for practical training is supported by Woulfin and Jones (2021), who found limited opportunities for ongoing, collaborative professional development even among special education teachers, and by Ahmed et al. (2021), who identified professional development as a key area for disability-inclusive education in low- and middle-income Asia-Pacific countries. Kumekpata et al. (2024) stressed continuous, practical, hands-on programs that help teachers identify special educational needs, empower teachers, and collaborate with stakeholders, which closely reflects P4's request for real demonstrations. Philippine studies provide contextual support: Honteveros et al. (2025) linked training, institutional support, and readiness in Cebu City, and Alojado (2024) reported that differentiated learning and personalized assessment practices call for ongoing professional development. Professional development should therefore be ongoing, practical, contextualized, and classroom-focused, covering behavior management, communication and attention problems, differences in academic ability, assessment adaptations, and material development.

The request for specialists and additional personnel aligns with Chow et al. (2023), who point to the value of teaching assistants, resources, collaboration, and institutional support; Ufermann et al. (2025), who noted that support staff need clear roles, communication, trust, and collaboration with teachers; Buenrostro-Jocson (2023), who found that Philippine shadow teachers provide individualized support, help manage behavior, and collaborate with teachers and parents; and Jeremy et al. (2024), whose scoping review highlighted teacher–therapist collaboration in inclusive primary schools. Philippine policy supports this: Republic Act No. 11650 (the Inclusive Education Act) provides for para-teachers, multidisciplinary teams, and specialized support for learners with disabilities, and its implementing rules recognize special needs teachers, psychologists, therapists, and learning support aides in assessing learners, developing IEPs, and monitoring progress. A multidisciplinary approach can enhance teachers' capacity and offer learners more tailored support.

The priority given to communication is supported by Çelik and Tomris (2024), who found that home–school collaboration is a dynamic, sustained process that contributes to children's learning and development; Suwarni et al. (2024), who found that communication, mutual understanding, and active participation between teachers and parents create a supportive environment and may improve academic and social development; and Abueva and Gallardo (2024), whose study of public elementary teachers in Davao City identified positive parent–teacher communication as an important aspect of inclusion, with regular communication and ongoing professional development as ways of addressing collaboration challenges. The request for accessible materials is consistent with UDL and with Bray et al. (2024), who showed that digital technologies provide flexible, accessible learning, and Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022), who pointed to the advantages of assistive technologies. In the Philippines, Mesias (2026) found unequal access to adaptive materials and assistive technologies, and Alojado (2024) emphasized differentiated instruction,

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personalized assessment, and instructional technology; RA 11650's implementing rules encourage accessible formats such as Braille, large print, electronic, and multimedia resources. The requests for resource rooms and spaces are reinforced by the 2024 implementing rules, which provide for Inclusive Learning Resource Centers (ILRCs) and accessible facilities, including satellite ILRCs in schools with operation and maintenance included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP), and the requests for funding are supported by the Program Support Budget under RA 11650 for specialists, related services, assistive devices, equipment, and learning materials, with continuing implementation funded through annual appropriations. The need for protected preparation time underscores that inclusion increases planning responsibilities, and without time and organizational support, teachers struggle to sustain individualized interventions alongside regular teaching.

The ACSI Theory in relation to the literature

The ACSI Theory is consistent with recent research. Gheyssens et al. (2021) found that teachers' ability to notice and reason about inclusive teaching was associated with greater use of differentiated instruction, supporting the first process (needs-based observation and reflection). Gibbs and McKay (2021), in a systematic review of differentiated teaching, found that differentiation provides better opportunities to learn while stressing the importance of professional learning, mentoring, coaching, and school leadership, supporting the second and fourth processes. Sannen et al. (2021) found that teachers in more connected collaborative networks were more positive toward inclusion and reported greater use of differentiated instruction, and Pozas and Letzel-Alt (2023) found that more intensive collaboration, particularly synchronization and co-construction, was significantly associated with differentiated practice, strengthening the collaborative component. Recent work on inclusive pedagogy likewise emphasizes flexibility, professional development, and collaboration among teachers and professionals as conditions for responding to diverse needs. The theory also integrates the study's three lenses: ecological (support spans the systems around teachers), sociocultural (adaptive practice develops through guidance and collaboration), and inclusive pedagogy (adaptation extends what is available to all learners).

Synthesis

In addressing RQ1, teachers demonstrate that genuine inclusion transcends physical co-presence; it is an active, dignifying, socio-emotional endeavor operationalized through intentional differentiation (Pinaranda & Sario, 2024), structured peer-assisted learning (Carter & Biggs, 2021; Galgao et al., 2025), and self-referenced, multidimensional progress monitoring (Bourke & Mentis, 2023; Lani & Santos, 2024). Although modifying lessons and safeguarding dignity impose immense daily demands, witnessing incremental milestones generates an intrinsic reward that restores educators' professional identity (Galgao et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2021; Putra, 2023; Villarente & Moral, 2026). The evidence for RQ2, however, shows this human agency being pushed to its threshold by structural bottlenecks: managing acute behavioral dysregulation (Tampubolon et al., 2024), class density and high student-to-teacher ratios that shatter instructional pacing (Bacus, 2024; Likuru & Mwila, 2022; Vakili et al., 2024), and a systemic deficit in disability-specific training that diminishes self-efficacy and fuels burnout (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024; Hadiana et al., 2024; Hakel & Magin, 2024; Javier, 2023; Quiaot & Suplaag, 2026). While teachers show remarkable resilience in turning daily stress into learner growth, relying on individual sacrifice is inherently unsustainable. Inclusion cannot survive on empathy alone; it demands systemic reform, manageable class sizes, and targeted, sustained professional development to turn sacrificial commitment into an empowered, equitable, and lasting reality.

Implications

For practice, the findings suggest that school and district support should be organized around the adaptive cycle described by the ACSI Theory: protected time and structures (LAC sessions, an Inclusive Education Support Team, case conferences) for reflection and collaboration; practical, demonstration-based training tied to actual classroom

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cases; a shared bank of accessible materials; referral pathways to specialists; and learner-support spaces. For policy, the findings show where mandated provisions such as RA 11650 (ILRCs, para-teachers, multidisciplinary teams, program support budgets) need to reach the classroom level in a district like Samal. For theory, the study extends accounts of teacher deficit by foregrounding teachers' adaptation, improvisation, and informal learning, which the literature has tended to overlook.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study involved ten teachers from one district during one school year, and the theory and program are applicable primarily to contexts with similar conditions rather than generalizable to all public elementary schools. The findings rest on teacher self-report, and the proposed program has not yet been implemented or evaluated; its budget figures are indicative planning estimates. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparable studies in other educational settings, to include learners, parents, school heads, and specialists as participants, and to assess the efficacy and sustainability of inclusive education initiatives and of the INCLUDE-SAMAL program itself.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

- **Implementation.** Teachers implement inclusive education through active participation, differentiated instruction, peer support, and individualized monitoring, understanding inclusion as participation and belonging rather than placement. They involve learners in group activities, games, pair work, responsibilities, and recitation; simplify instructions, repeat explanations, modify activities, allow additional time, and match tasks to ability; use peer buddies to build acceptance; and track progress through worksheets, performance tasks, observation, anecdotal records, and individual assessment, valuing small gains in participation, interaction, confidence, and independence.
- **Challenges.** The most prominent challenges were diverse learning and behavioral needs, large classes, limited time, insufficient specialized training, inadequate resources and support services, and competing responsibilities, which led to tiredness, stress, frustration, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of inadequacy. They are connected to school-level and system-level conditions.
- **Strategies.** Teachers observed learners before deciding on an intervention; used differentiated instruction and scaffolding; applied multimodal, play-based, and experiential approaches; practiced positive behavior support and self-regulation; and collaborated with colleagues, parents, school heads, and SNED teachers, increasingly viewing inclusion as a shared responsibility.
- **Support needs.** Teachers need continuous, practical professional development; specialist assistance and additional personnel; stronger communication and stakeholder collaboration with home–school consistency; accessible and adaptable materials and technology; and dedicated spaces, funding, and protected preparation time.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is characterized by meaningful learner participation, differentiated instruction, and continuous effort to meet the diverse requirements of learners with special educational needs. Teachers show commitment, creativity, and flexibility but face large classes, limited time, insufficient training, inadequate resources, and competing responsibilities. Teamwork among teachers, school heads, parents, SNED teachers, and other professionals is essential for learner support, and progress should be assessed holistically, considering participation, social interaction, confidence, behavior, and independence in addition to academic achievement. Inclusive education is both

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a classroom practice and an institutional responsibility requiring continuous professional development, accessible resources, specialist help, and effective collaboration. This process is explained by the Adaptive Collaborative Support Theory of Inclusive Education, which involves continuous identification of learner needs, instructional adaptation, collaboration, utilization of resources, progress monitoring, and reflection. Successful inclusion is a collective responsibility and an ongoing institutional commitment to ensure that all learners are valued, included, and given meaningful opportunities to learn, participate, and develop to their full potential.

Recommendations

- Enhance inclusive education through ongoing professional development, efficient school-based support systems, sufficient resources, cooperative partnerships, and adaptable teaching methods.
- The Schools Division Office, school administrators, teachers, parents, and the larger school community are urged to collaborate to meet the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs.
- Consider and, where feasible, implement the INCLUDE-SAMAL program to strengthen inclusive practice and address the issues identified, and assess its efficacy and sustainability regularly.
- Future researchers are encouraged to carry out comparable studies in different educational settings and assess the efficacy of inclusive education initiatives and support systems, to help create more adaptable, lasting, and inclusive learning environments where each student is respected, encouraged, and given equal chances to learn and achieve.

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