



Navigating Inclusion: Teachers Lived Experiences in Handling Learners with Special Needs in Mainstream Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to illuminate the realities of inclusive education through the perspectives of Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers. It seeks to deepen understanding of how teachers manage learners with diverse needs, navigate challenges, implement strategies, and access institutional support within mainstream classrooms. Using a qualitative phenomenological design guided by Moustakas' approach, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected elementary and secondary teachers from District 1-D under the Schools Division of Sagay City. Participants shared rich, first-person narratives reflecting their experiences, approaches, and perceptions of support systems. Analysis revealed four major themes. Teaching at the Edge of Adaptation underscores teachers' continual adjustments of instruction through differentiation, experiential learning, and reflective practice, reinforced by empathy and emotional competence. Teacher Burden and Workload highlight the additional time, effort, and emotional demands placed on educators, alongside the pressing need for specialized skills and stronger institutional support. Collaborative Resilience in Inclusive Education emphasizes the role of collaboration among teachers, parents, and stakeholders, as well as professional empowerment and adaptive problem-solving in sustaining inclusive practices. Finally, Teacher and Learner Resilience capture the development of coping mechanisms, emotional strength, and ongoing professional growth that enable both educators and learners to flourish. Despite limitations related to self-reporting and potential biases, the study offers critical insights into the complex and dynamic nature of inclusive education. It underscores the centrality of teacher adaptability as the foundation of inclusive pedagogy, positioning inclusive teaching as a continuously evolving process shaped by reflection, professional development, and systemic support. It identifies structural barriers, such as resource limitations, rigid curricula, and policy gaps that hinder inclusive practices, advocating for flexible structures, holistic assessment, and collaborative frameworks to promote engagement, and learner success. The findings provide practical guidance for inclusive education policies, professional development programs, and classroom practices to ensure holistic growth for learners.

Keywords: inclusive education, learners with special needs, lived experiences

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a central pillar of contemporary educational reform, emphasizing every learner's right to access quality and equitable learning opportunities regardless of ability or disability, including those with special needs, to participate meaningfully in mainstream classrooms. Inclusion is grounded in both international and national mandates. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2020) highlighted the right of every child to inclusive education without discrimination. In Philippine Education, it is explicitly supported by the Republic Act 10533, known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, mandating inclusivity of learners with disabilities in the regular learning system, Republic Act No 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, 1992), promoting the rights and privileges of persons with disabilities, including access to education. Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 32, s 2017, providing guidelines on the implementation of inclusive education, emphasizing the need for adapting teaching strategies, curricula, and learning environments to cater to learners with diverse abilities.

Despite this legal framework, implementing inclusive education effectively in mainstream classroom remains a significant challenge. As frontliners in implementing inclusive education, teachers face challenges in managing learners with diverse disabilities. These difficulties stem from limited training, insufficient resources, and wide range of learning needs within a single classroom setting. Previous studies highlight the benefits of inclusive education, however, there remains a notable gap in understanding teachers lived experiences their perceptions, coping mechanisms, struggles, and strategies in actual classroom settings. This gap highlights the importance of exploring educators' personal and professional narratives, as these insights are crucial in informing policies, teachers training programs, and classroom interventions designed to improve the inclusion of learners with special needs.

Every program encounters challenges during its implementation phase. In this research, teachers handling learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms faced multifaceted challenges that hinder the effective delivery of learning, such as instructional, emotional, and systemic in nature. One of the most noticeable difficulties is the lack of training in inclusive pedagogy, which limits teachers' ability to design differentiated instruction and adapt lessons to address diverse learning needs. Many teachers rely on traditional teaching approaches due to insufficient preparation, resulting in minimal accommodation for learners with disabilities. Overcrowded classrooms are also one of the major challenges that restrict teachers' capability to provide individualized teaching-learning instruction. Teaching in a large and diverse group of learners often leads to difficulties in controlling classroom situations, behavior management, and monitoring learners' progress. The physical setup and class size hinder effective inclusion practices. Sepadi (2025). Limited institutional support, including a lack of teaching assistants, specialists, and learning resources, significantly affects teachers' capacity to implement inclusive learning. With fewer support systems, teachers experience increased workload and stress. Cantos & Soriano (2025). Teachers also face emotional and psychological challenges that include frustration, burnout, and feelings of inadequacy. While some express a strong commitment to inclusion. They often feel unprepared and unsupported in practice. This creates a gap between their positive attitudes toward inclusion and their actual classroom implementation. Generally, policy–practice gaps continue as a critical issue. Although inclusive education policies have been widely established, teachers struggle to transform these frameworks into effective classroom strategies due to insufficient training, unclear guidelines, and limited collaboration with stakeholders. Caballero, et al (2024).

Classroom management practices serve as the foundation of an inclusive learning environment, while teaching strategies act as the methodology through which inclusion is meaningfully practiced. They are intertwined, for one cannot function effectively without the other. Inclusive classrooms should establish structured, predictable, and supportive learning environments through classroom management. It includes consistent routines, setting clear rules, and positive behavioral expectations. Such structures reduce disruptions, improve time management, and foster learners' responsibility and cooperation. In inclusive settings, this structure is most critical because learners with special needs often require stability and clarity to feel safe and engaged. Garrote, et al (2020).

The Schools Division office is implementing inclusivity in its 87 regular schools, navigating the intersection of policy and practice while examining how teachers experience and manage the complexities of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Generally, this study aimed to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the realities of inclusive education, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement, ultimately guiding more effective educational strategies that ensure the holistic development of all learners.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions.



1. What are the lived experiences of Special Needs Education Teachers in managing learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms?
2. What are the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing inclusive practices?
3. What are the strategies employed by Special Needs Education Teachers in addressing the diverse needs of learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms?"
4. What are the support systems available to teachers in promoting inclusive education?
5. What insights and recommendations for enhancing Inclusive practices in mainstream classrooms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching at the Edge of Adaptation

Teaching at the edge of adaptation is not merely about alternating lesson plans, it is about existing in a constant state of responsiveness. In inclusive classrooms, teachers usually encounter learners whose emotional, behavioral, physical and cognitive needs may differ significantly from the “typical” learner profile. This multiplicity pushes teachers beyond routine instruction into a space where flexibility becomes the core of pedagogy. Teaching in this aspect is no longer static nor standardized. Teaching becomes more fluid, meaning the teacher shifts the teaching strategies in real time, often throughout the lesson itself, based on learners’ responses. It is relational, the accomplishments of the school learning setup depend heavily on understanding each learner’s exceptional context, strengths, and challenges.

Teaching at the edge of adaptation, is vital to understanding of teachers lived experiences in inclusion education. It helps connect gaps between theoretical framework of inclusion and the practical realities faced by teachers. Teachers are not just teaching competencies through utilizing best strategies but also constructing approaches that enable the learners to transport text into real-life activities, often without sufficient institutional support. The ongoing adaptation is necessitating to examine teachers’ experiences, as it exposes both the challenges and the implicit knowledge developed through practice. Tomlinson & Moon (2021).

To better provide inclusive learning teacher adapt instructional delivery flexibility, this is one of the concern inclusive in the implementation of edge adaptation. According to Parsons, Hutchison & Collins. (2022). Flexibility is imperative in adaptive teaching. It empowers teachers to respond in real time to diverse learners’ needs. Through adjustment of lessons, selection of appropriate learning materials, and strategies even mid-lesson educators can make learning accessible, engaging, and more relevant for all learners. In mainstream classrooms, this diminishes stress and frustration for teachers, as rigid plans often fail to meet varied learners’ abilities and learning styles. Simply, to address diverse learners’ needs and make learning meaningful, teachers should understand every learner’s learning capacity and style.

According to Noddings, N. (2021). Relational pedagogy underscore that effective inclusive teaching thrives on deep understanding of each learners’ unique context, strengths, and challenges. Learning becomes a trust-based process, collaborative, shaped by empathy and awareness of lived experiences. Teachers nurture adaptability, emotional resilience, and reflective practice, using strategies such as differentiated instruction, task segmentation, visual scaffolds, and personalized support. This methodology recognizes and value individual learner needs while enhancing confidence and competence through hands-on experience, not solely formal training.

While SNED teachers trained in inclusive education theories, real classroom situations become challenges that theory alone cannot address. This creates a gap between ideal frameworks and practical realities, requiring teachers to improvise and innovate. Pantić & Florian (2021). The tension between theory and practice deeply shapes teachers’ experiences, in or outside the classroom setup with learners with special learning needs. Despite teachers receiving training in inclusive education, real classrooms demand swift adaptation to diverse behaviors, abilities, and learning resource constraints. Teachers address this gap by improving strategies, balancing empathy with structure, and constantly reflecting.

Teacher Burden and Workload in Managing SNED Learners in Mainstream Classroom

Teaching learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms draws a multidimensional challenge that goes beyond standard instructional responsibilities. Teachers are concerned not only with focused on academic demands of learning delivery but also the emotional, behavioral, and individualized support needs of learners with disabilities or learning difficulties. The lived experiences of teachers in classrooms provide critical insights into how these challenges manifest in practice. Sepadi, M. (2025).



Teachers understand the actual implementation of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms, generally support inclusion conceptually, only they struggle to apply effectively due to overcrowded classrooms, rigid curricula, and lack of training.

One main problem that SNED teachers face is the increase in instructional time required to accommodate SNED learners. Reinforced this by noting that instructional time can be reduced or disrupted by conflicts among learners, which adds to the daily workload and planning challenges Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin (2021), Katz, & Sokal (2020).

Loreman Tim (2021), Linda Darling-Hammond et al. (2020). Teachers willingly support the inclusive education despite the challenges encountered. They are still willing to deliver learning in a mainstream classroom; to effectively deliver learning to a diverse learner, teachers need support, either improving their skills in teaching or professional development. Support in teaching may come in any form, but it reflects accomplishments to the learners, teachers and the school. Performance can be achieved when there is support in all aspects of teaching-learning process, support can motivate learners and professionals, and yield meaningful and relevant performance Mel Ainscow et al. (2020)

Lagestad et al. (2023) experienced mainstream teachers described inclusion as emotionally and professionally demanding due to amplified responsibility for diverse learners. Teachers reported that managing learners with special needs involves unceasing adaptation of instruction, behavioral monitoring, and emotional support, intensifying daily workload. The absence of sufficient support further compounds stress, forcing teachers to balance competing classroom demands. These lived experiences highlight how inclusion, while beneficial, places significant burden, often leading to fatigue, reduced instructional efficiency, and concerns about meeting all learners' needs effectively. Mabanag et al. (2024).

Liwes et al. (2026). The lived experiences of non-special education teachers in mainstream classrooms handling learners with special needs. Teachers highlighted increased workload due to extreme management of diverse cognitive and behavioral needs of SNED learners, lack of training, and insufficient learning resources. These encounters reveal emotional strain and instructional burden, necessitating teachers to identify coping mechanisms such as adaptive strategies and collaboration. The gathered information from teachers emphasize that the workload strengthens when inclusive practices are implemented without adequate institutional support systems. Added by Caballero et al. (2024, emphasizes that inclusion processes in mainstream classrooms show that teachers experience enriched instructional demands when integrating learners with special needs. Teachers increasingly modify lessons, manage learning needs of diverse learners, and balance classroom activity participation, contributing to workload stress. Teachers lived realities of juggling inclusive practices while upholding overall class progress, underscoring the complexity and burden of inclusive education in practice. Phasha et al. (2024). When inclusive education in mainstream classrooms is being implemented by the teacher, it emphasizes challenges like overcrowding, limited resources, and insufficient training. Teachers emphasize difficulty differentiating instruction, leading to increased workload and stress. These lived experiences revealed that managing SNED learners requires additional planning and adaptation, which burdens teachers already handling large classes. The findings underscore those systemic limitations significantly contribute to teacher workload in inclusive settings. Mergia et al. (2025).

Support Systems and Professional Empowerment

In inclusive education, support systems and professional empowerment are foundational factors that enable teachers to effectively provide solution the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms. These theories are deeply interconnected, as the presence of strong institutional and social support improves teachers' competence, capability, confidence, and resilience in implementing inclusive practices. Support Systems in Inclusive Education is a multi-layered linkage of assistance afforded to teachers that includes administrative backing, collaboration with colleagues, access to specialists, parental involvement, and availability of instructional learning resources. The system suggestively influences teachers' ability to differentiate instruction, scaffold learning, and provide socio-emotional support to learners with SEN. It highlights that teachers who are supported through collaborative and pedagogical frameworks are more capable of fostering inclusive, engaging, and responsive classroom environments (Woodcock & Wolfson (2019).

Teachers' professional development, equip teachers with the knowledge and skills, autonomy, and confidence necessary to implement inclusive education effectively. It includes continuous professional development, reflective practice, and opportunities for collaboration and decision-making. Teachers that are professionally developed demonstrate: Strong self-efficacy and positive attitudes toward inclusion, competence in differentiated instruction and adaptive strategies, ability to build inclusive classroom climates that promote belonging, and engagement in lifelong learning and professional growth, making teaching and learning more meaningful to SNED learners, their needs are speculatively addressed. Wang, (2026).

Professional development and support systems are mutually intertwining to reinforce each other. Adequate support structures provide the conditions necessary for development, while developed teachers are better able to maximize available support and contribute to a culture of inclusion. Support that teachers needed to be an effective implementer of inclusive education: Administrative support and professional development opportunities enhance teacher competence and confidence, collaborative



environments encourage knowledge-sharing and reflective practices to resources and specialists enable effective instructional adaptation Ozodova (2025), Sepadi (2025)

Navigating Inclusion, teachers lived experiences are supported by the availability, quality, and consistency of support systems, as well as their level of professional empowerment. Their ability to manage learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms depends not only on personal commitment but also on institutional structures that sustain inclusive practices.

The structured daily routine of teachers provides clear expectations that are essential, vital for managing inclusive classroom learning effectively. Evertson and Weinstein (2021) underscores that foreseeable classroom structures help lessen anxiety and improve behavioral outcomes among learners of diverse needs. This supports the teachers' developed clear rules, consistent routines and step-by-step instructions. When learners understand expectations, they are most likely motivated to stay focused and participate actively in all classroom activity, specifically those learners with attention or cognitive difficulties. Teacher 2 expresses the ideas on this, "Maintaining positive and inclusive classroom involves... collaboratively created rules and using consistent, proactive and positive reinforcement. If they know the routine, they do it positively without my words." "Supporting learners... involve establishing consistent, predictable schedules.

The use of differentiated and flexible learning instruction is crucial in addressing diverse learning needs in inclusive classrooms. According to Tomlinson (2022), adapting teaching methodology based on learners' interests, readiness and learning profiles improves engagement and academic success. This brings in with teachers' practices of moderating instruction, providing breaks, and experimenting with techniques to find effective approaches in the delivery of learning.

Teacher and Learner Resilience in Mainstream Classrooms

Teacher and learner resilience in mainstream classrooms presents the capacity of teachers and learners to adapt positively when facing social, academic, and emotional encounters. Resilient teachers engage adaptive coping approaches, being committed, and foster adaptive classroom environments that buffer stress and promote professional effectiveness, able to sustain quality instruction despite daily pressures. In inclusive setups where diverse needs are present, resilience supports adaptive teaching and differentiated learning, developing a culture of persistence and mutual support. Building resilience involves socio emotional resources, supportive relationships, and flexible practices that benefit both teacher well-being and learner outcomes Beltman, Mansfield, & Price (2024).

Mzizi (2023) explored resilience among mainstream teachers supporting learners with autism spectrum disorder. Highlighted how teachers draw on personal traits (patience, dedication, self-care) and social ecological relationships to sustain their resilience. Illustrate lived experiences of classroom challenges, showing resilience is not only an individual trait but also deeply embedded in relationships and contextual support systems that enable teachers to persist in inclusive mainstream settings. Teachers express their internal resilience. Salvo Garrido et al. (2025). Underscore the teacher's resilience predicts self-efficacy and adaptive teaching practices in elementary classrooms. Teachers showed resilient are more effective in instructional methodology and learners' engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on the methods used for data collection. Specifically, it covers the research design, study participants, sampling procedure, study location, research instrument along with its validity and reliability, data gathering process, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative-phenomenological approach for its research. In phenomenology, concepts are not preconceived, and the framework guiding the researchers in data analysis is flexible (Creswell, 2007; cited in Diaz, 2016; cited in Villamor, A., unpublished, 2020).

Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that focuses on the shared experiences of a specific group. The primary goal of this approach is to provide a detailed description of a particular phenomenon. This study aims to gain in-depth insights into the lived experiences of teachers working with learners with special needs and difficulties in mainstream classrooms. It will explore how learning is facilitated for these learners and identify the strategies and support they require to make their education enjoyable and meaningful.

Locale of the Study



This study took place at the Schools Division Office of Sagay City. Specifically, this was conducted in the seven schools under District 1-D, namely, Molocaboc Integrated School, Molo II Elementary School, Matabas Elementary School, Vito Elementary School, Tuong Elementary School, Ellia T. Canoy Esperancilla Elementary School, and Vito National High School. One respondent per school is chosen purposively.

All schools in the division are inclusively integrating learners with special needs into the mainstream classroom. Teachers responsible for these learners receive pedagogical training to effectively address curriculum delivery and ensure mastery. To create a sufficient pool of participants, all identified SNEd teachers were considered potential candidates and were invited to take part in this study. Each participant personally received a formal letter signed by the Schools Division Superintendent and their principal. Further clarifying that SNEd learners of the District 1-D are mostly from Key Stage 1, and those who are in Key Stage 3 are transfers from the other school.

Sampling Technique and Procedure

This study utilized purposive sampling in identifying participants. This non-random technique focuses on individuals who have experience teaching learners with Special Educational Needs and can articulate their experiences regarding this phenomenon. Teachers who have been trained and actively apply their training in managing SNEd classes can provide valuable insights worthy of scholarly investigation. The data collected from this research offers significant information that could benefit other educators working with learners who have special needs. The researcher worked with a small population for data gathering, as the study specifically examines the phenomenon of learning delivery to SNEd learners. Furthermore, the study will utilize specific criteria for participant selection. The following criteria were used to determine eligibility:

Participants must be permanent teachers, assigned as SNEd teachers for at least three years, attended training on pedagogical skills for handling SNEd learners and have a genuine passion for teaching SNEd learners.

Research Instrument

Since this research has a phenomenological focus, the data and information were collected through open-ended questions in face-to-face interviews. To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of SNEd teachers regarding the navigation of inclusion for SNEd learners in mainstream classrooms, the researcher has developed a semi-structured in-depth interview guide. This guide consists of four phases of questions: 1. The lived experiences of Special Needs Education teachers in managing learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms. 2. The challenges encountered by teachers in implementing inclusive practices. 3. The strategies employed by SNEd teachers to address the diverse needs of learners with special needs. 4. The support systems and resources available to teachers for promoting inclusive education. As the researcher asked the main questions, for better data gathering, the researcher provided follow-up questions, not solely rely on the prepared questions to gather in-depth information. Interviews are particularly effective for obtaining insights into participants' opinions, beliefs, and feelings. This method allows individuals to derive meaning from their own understanding and experiences of the phenomenon being studied. Interviews provide large volumes of detailed data and insights from the perspective of SNEd teachers. This approach also facilitates immediate follow-up and clarification of the participants' responses (Ariston, 2016). As cited by Villamor (2020), open-ended questions enable participants to share their experiences without being constrained by the researcher's previous findings. These questions allow participants to form their opinions based on their own understanding and lived experiences.

During the interview process, the use of a semi-structured interview guide permits the researcher to make inferences based on how participants respond. Open-ended questions are designed to elicit important information that supports the study's claims and enhances understanding (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Walker, 2014).

Validity of the Questionnaire

To ensure that the interview questions accurately measured the intended constructs, a content validity assessment was conducted using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR). This method evaluates the extent to which each item in the instrument is considered essential by a panel of experts. In this study, nine experts with relevant experience in the field were invited to review the instrument. Each expert independently assessed the 26 interview questions and indicated whether each item was essential, useful but not essential, or not necessary. The CVR for each item was calculated using Lawshe's formula, which accounts for



the number of experts rating an item as essential relative to the total number of validators. For a panel of nine experts, the minimum critical CVR value required for an item to be considered valid is 0.78 (Lawshe, 1975).

The results of the content validity assessment indicated that all 26 items met or exceeded the critical CVR value of 0.78, demonstrating that each question was deemed essential by the expert panel. Additionally, the Average Content Validity Ratio (A-CVR) was computed to be 0.932, reflecting a high degree of overall agreement among the validators regarding the relevance and adequacy of the instrument. These findings provide strong evidence that the interview questions are representative of the construction intended to be measured and capable of eliciting meaningful responses from participants. By establishing the content validity of each item and the instrument, the study confirms that the interview guide is a valid tool for data collection, ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

To ensure the reliability of the interview questions, an inter-rater reliability (IRR) test was conducted using a systematic coding procedure. Predetermined themes were derived from the research questions and the interview guide, representing the key constructs the instrument aimed to measure. Each written response, transcribed from the audio-recorded interview, was carefully reviewed by the coders. For each theme, the coders indicated its presence or absence by checking the corresponding Yes or No column in the coding sheet. Evaluators were also allowed to provide brief comments to explain their decisions, although this was optional. This approach ensured that coding was both consistent and reflective of the participants' actual responses.

Prior to coding, the coders were oriented to the instructions provided in the IRR tool to ensure a consistent understanding of the procedure and the definitions of each theme. The IRR coding was carried out by two independent coders, which is appropriate for assessing agreement using Cohen's Kappa. Once the coding was completed, Cohen's Kappa was intended to quantify the level of agreement between the coders. This statistic accounts for the possibility of agreement occurring by chance and provides a standardized measure of inter-rater reliability.

The interpretation of Kappa values followed the widely accepted guidelines of Landis and Koch (1977), where values between 0.61 and 0.80 indicate substantial agreement and values between 0.81 and 1.00 indicate almost perfect agreement. In this study, a Kappa value of 0.61 or higher was considered evidence that the instrument is reliable. Values below this threshold would suggest the need to refine the coding procedure, the definitions of the themes, or the interview questions themselves.

In the pilot test, all 26 questions were rated by both coders, and for every question, the predefined themes were marked as present by both raters. As a result, Cohen's Kappa could not be computed because the ratings showed no variability; mathematically, the statistic is undefined when all values are identical. However, this uniformity indicates perfect agreement between the coders. Therefore, the IRR test demonstrated that the instrument was highly reliable, as the coders consistently identified the presence of themes across all questions.

Through this process, the study ensured that the coding of themes in the interview responses was consistent, systematic, and reproducible. The inter-rater reliability test provided confidence that the instrument accurately captured the intended constructs, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the data and the overall quality of the research findings.

Data Gathering Procedure

This qualitative research study utilized a diverse collection of empirical materials, including case studies, personal experiences, introspective accounts, life stories, interviews, observations, historical documentation, and other relevant materials. These resources were aimed at describing both routine and problematic moments in an individual's life (Muhammad Bashr, 2008, cited by Ariston, 2016).

The interviews were conducted in a respectful, empathetic, and non-judgmental approach to gain trust and openness. Participants were encouraged to freely share their experiences, while the researcher actively listened and used probing questions to deepen the discussion. The conversational flow allowed participants to reveal and elaborate on their perspectives, resulting in rich, nuanced data. Generally, the interviews were productive and yielded detailed and rich insights into the phenomenon, with participants expressing comfort and willingness to share their stories.



Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit rich, first-person accounts of participants' lived experiences of teachers in handling learners with special needs in the mainstream classroom. Participants were purposively selected based on their experience with the phenomenon under investigation. An interview guide with open-ended questions was utilized to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for probing and follow-up questions. The interview was conducted in a comfortable, participant-centered setting, either face-to-face, or lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. With informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and data completeness.

After completion of the interview, the researcher transcribed verbatim shortly after each session to preserve the authenticity of participants' narratives. Non-verbal cues like pauses, laughter, and emotional expressions were noted as well, which are relevant to capture the depth and tone of responses. Transcriptions were reviewed and studied multiple times alongside the audio recordings to confirm fidelity and to correct any discrepancies.

The study utilizes a methodological coding process grounded in phenomenological analysis. Initially, transcripts were read repetitively to gain a holistic understanding of the raw data. Significant information was then identified and extracted, focusing on aspects directly related to the lived experience of the phenomenon. These statements were grouped into meaning units, which were subsequently coded and clustered into emerging themes. Through iterative analysis, themes were refined and organized into overarching categories that represent the essence of the participants' experiences. Bracketing (*epoché*) was practiced throughout the process to minimize researcher bias and ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the data.

The data collection procedure was ensured by adhering to the four key standards: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of data, the researcher follows these steps: Conduct in-depth interviews: This involves collecting data through face-to-face interviews that utilize open-ended questions and comments from individuals who have experience in the development of self-learning modules (Creswell, 2007). During the one-on-one interviews, participants will be asked questions related to "Navigating Inclusion: Teachers' Lived Experiences in Handling Learners with Special Needs in Mainstream Classrooms," using a guided questionnaire.

Thematic Insights. Themes represent significant units of detailed descriptions of experiences, incorporating verbatim examples and models (Ariston, 2016). The next step in the research process is imaginative variation, which involves changing the frames of reference and perspectives, as well as considering polarities and reversals. At this stage, intuition is rooted in imagination rather than empirical evidence. Through imaginative variation, researchers can develop a structural theme (Moustakas, 1994, as cited by Ariston, 2016). The validation of these themes occurs when the researcher meets with the participants to present the findings. This allows an examination of whether the researcher successfully captured the essence and meaning of the participants' experiences, as reflected in the interview transcripts (Maranon, 2011).

Reflective Insights. The researcher begins by identifying essential statements that describe the phenomenon experienced by individuals, focusing on those with common meanings and underlying essences. This process involves "horizontalization" of the data, as well as textual and structural analysis (Ariston, 2016). Each statement is considered equally important, and the researcher aims to create a list of distinct, non-repetitive statements. Additionally, this approach highlights "significant statements," sentences, or quotes that enhance the understanding of how participants experience the phenomenon.

Eidetic Insights. This is the stage where the researcher had arrived and peaked at the core of truth, at this stage, the researcher synthesized and integrated the insight contained in the transformed horizon, into a consistent description which provided a synthesis of the meaning and essence of the experience.

Ethical Considerations

1. **Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and individuals have the free choice to join or decline. There is no coercion to participate.

2. **Informed Consent:** All identified research participants will be informed about the study, its procedures, and any associated risks before giving their consent.



3. Risk of Harm: Participants will not be placed in situations that could cause them risk or harm.

4. Confidentiality: Participants are assured that all information collected will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone not directly involved in the study.

5. Anonymity: It is essential that participants' identities remain anonymous throughout the study. To ensure this, all materials containing identifiable information will be destroyed after the research is completed, to protect the privacy of the participants. Additionally, no identifying materials will be included in the appendices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Developed Codes

First, Resilience in Inclusive setting, Collaborative Resilience in Inclusive education, Resilience and adaptation, and differentiated instruction: The emerging theme: Teaching at the Edge of Adaptation, Subthemes: Adaptive and Differentiated Instruction

The second codes, Challenges affecting teacher performance, Assessment and lesson adaptation, Handling behavioral challenges. These codes formulate the Emerging Theme: Teacher Burden and Workload in Managing SNED Learners in Mainstream Classroom. Subthemes: Increase time and effort in instruction

The 3rd group of codes. Collaboration and support system that includes administrative support, collaborate with others Continues support and resources support. This highlights the importance of collaborative networks, administrative backing, and resource availability to aid teaching and inclusion. The developed emerging theme: Collaborative Resilience in Inclusive Education, Subtheme: Support Systems and Professional Empowerment.

Lastly, Classroom management, Exposure with learners with special needs, and Lesson Modification formulated and emerging theme: Teacher and Learner Resilience in Mainstream Classrooms. Subtheme Adaptive Coping and Emotional Resilience in Inclusive Classrooms.

Theme # 1 Teaching at the Edge of Adaptation

For teachers 3, and 6, highlighted adaptability, experiential learning, emotional resilience, empathy, and reflective practice—all themes repeatedly mentioned. They frequently differentiated instruction, visual aids, breaking tasks into smaller steps, and individualized support, which matches the focus on valuing individual learner needs and inclusive teaching practices in the statement. Added, competence and confidence grow through experience, not just training. Inclusive teaching is dynamic, requiring ongoing adjustments. Patience, individualized support, and positive reinforcement are essential. Teacher 7 emphasized adapting instructions and strategies based on SNED learners' abilities. The statement implies continuous adjustment and growing confidence with experience, which resonates with Teacher 6's reflection on balancing challenges and rewards in inclusive classrooms.

Subthemes # 1 Adaptive differentiated Instruction

Teacher 1 noted the use of multisensory approaches and creating daily inclusive activities, while Teacher 3 shared applying clear, simple instructions with visual cues and adjusting task difficulty according to learners' abilities. Teacher 4 frequently employed manipulatives and differentiated tasks, particularly in mathematics, to accommodate learners with varying levels of understanding. Teacher 5 described shifting to visual-centered teaching for deaf learners, using a Total Communication approach to combine signs, speech, and visuals. Teachers 6 and 7 emphasized breaking lessons into smaller steps, providing individualized support, and offering positive reinforcement, allowing learners to succeed at their own pace. In terms of lesson modification, teachers commonly simplify instructions, chunk tasks, and provide additional time or alternative materials.

Theme # 2 Teacher Burden and Workload in Managing SNED Learners in Mainstream Classroom

Teachers experience responsibilities, time demands, and emotional labor when accommodating learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms. These challenges foster personal growth and inclusive practices; they also strain instructional performance and classroom management. Teacher 2. "It can reduce my instructional time and disrupt instruction. (children fighting and quarreling inside the class)." Teacher 3. "It takes more time and patience as a teacher to accommodate various learners in a mainstream classroom. The challenges mentioned significantly affect my teaching performance because the strategies implemented at school are not reinforced at home, resulting in slower progress for the learner. I conduct one-on-one



reading tutorials and dedicate additional time to supporting the learner with special needs. Teacher 7 "These challenges can slow down lessons and test classroom management, but they have also made me more patient, flexible, and creative in keeping the classroom positive and inclusive. During a math lesson, one learner kept roaming around and shouting while I was teaching. It disrupted the flow of the lesson and made it hard for others to focus. I had to pause, redirect the learner calmly, and give step-by-step guidance, which slowed the lesson but ensured all learners stayed safe and engaged."

Subtheme 1: Increase Time and Effort in Instruction

Teacher 2 "It can reduce my instructional time and disrupt instruction. For example, children fighting and quarreling inside the class." Teacher 3 "It takes more time and patience as a teacher to accommodate various learners in a mainstream classroom. The challenges mentioned significantly affect my teaching performance because the strategies implemented at school are not reinforced at home, resulting in slower progress for the learner. I conduct one-on-one reading tutorials and dedicate additional time to supporting the learner with special needs. However, after several days without classes, we often must revisit and relearn previously practiced lessons due to the lack of follow-up and parental support, which can be time-consuming. This situation ultimately impacts and delays the learner's overall progress and development." Teacher 6 "These challenges require extra time, patience, and flexibility, which can make lesson planning and classroom management more demanding."

Theme # 3 Collaborative Resilience in Inclusive Education

This is the ability of the teachers in school to work together to achieve the goal intendedly for learners and the whole school community, working together may overcome challenges, and persist in supporting learners with special needs despite obstacles such as time constraints, parental resistance, or lack of resources. Teacher 1 "By conducting school-based SNED orientation/talk to let them aware of the context of inclusive education and orienting the way of handling diverse learners. Other teachers are not confident to handle this type of teaching, but they are willing to learn and take the challenge." Teacher 2 "Collaborating with general education teachers and professionals involve sharing of data, co-planning lessons and implementing individualized education program accommodations. My co-teacher and administrator go with me in communicating properly with the parents in person. I experienced harsh words from the parents but in the end, they realized to accept the truth." Teacher 4: "Communicate with them wholeheartedly the challenges you encountered. When it comes to collaborating with my colleagues, I think the challenges there is the availability of time. So, to overcome it the school principal plan a SLAC session to share everyone knowledge."

Subtheme # 1 Support Systems and Professional Empowerment

Direct support from the heads of schools, specialists, and peers through training, resources, and mentoring, enables teachers to survive challenges in inclusive classrooms and strengthens their confidence and effectiveness. Teacher 1 "By conducting school-based SNED orientation/talk to let them aware of the context of inclusive education... Other teachers are not confident... but they are willing to learn and take the challenge." "I was sent in some SNED related seminars by my principal... it will be a big help in SNED school programs implementation. I am inspired to continue my duty..." Teacher 2 "It is effective leadership, strategic communication and comprehensive planning." Teacher 3 "Teachers received support from school administrators by conducting various training. Special Needs Training program... support from school administrators and tips from peers... has been very helpful."

"The training and skills shared by my peers have given me the confidence..." Teacher 4: "...the school principal plan a SLAC session to share everyone knowledge." "Need to have lots of resources like activities suited for them and happy to know our school has provision of instructional activities."

Theme # 4 Teacher and Learner Resilience in Mainstream Classrooms

Plays a pivotal role in supporting inclusive education practices despite continuing challenges. This resilience is evident in how teachers unceasingly adapt their methodologies and how learners persist in overcoming their individual difficulties. Persistence and commitment of teachers. Teacher 1 "Every one of us prepared an anecdotal record of our learners." Teacher 2 "If the result is low, it is the time to modify my instruction strategies." Teacher 3 "If a learner shows slow progress, I provide additional support through one-on-one tutorials, particularly in reading and comprehension." Teacher 4: "Through this we can have our adjustment through remediation that we can give simple activities to them, but the concept is there." Teacher 6: "I adjust by identifying areas of difficulty, modifying lessons, providing extra support, and using different strategies to address each learner's needs."

Subtheme # 1 Adaptive Coping and Emotional Resilience in Inclusive Classrooms



Teachers and learners develop the ability to adjust, persevere, and respond positively despite challenges in inclusive settings. Teacher 1 “Like in autism spectrum when occupational therapy taken the progress likely measure by a learner’s progress in having control in sensory motor, behavioral aspects. And when their grades and classroom observation is positively advancing. The focus of the SNED learner, they must be in good mood and high spirit condition to carry on the task. I watch documentation and videos for deeper enlightenment. FSL Knowledge and different teaching strategies the UDL or differentiated activities.” Teacher 2 “Assessing learning progress for students with special needs include tracking progress against individualized education program goals... engaging in frequent, consistent observation to tailor instruction... If the result is low, it is the time to modify my instruction strategies. Applying inclusive strategies often faces major obstacles... Lack of teacher training is the hindrance... I used manipulative toys, scrabbles and cubes. Effective professional development... I learned in the training that there is no discrimination instead give them the right of education.” Teacher 7 “I assess learners with special needs through observations, quizzes, and tasks. I adjust lessons and provide extra support based on their progress. Challenges like large classes, varying abilities, and behavior issues can make assessment harder. So, I use multiple methods and adapt tasks to accurately measure each learner’s progress.”

CONCLUSION

Study findings underscore that teacher adaptability and commitment are essential methodology for an effective inclusive education. Revealed in thematic analysis that teachers who demonstrate flexibility in instructional strategies remain responsive to diverse learner needs, and employ differentiated approaches, are better positioned to develop equitable and meaningful learning experiences. Similarly important is the teachers’ solid sense of commitment, which withstand their efforts to support all learners despite varying classroom demands and complexities.

The study also shades light on significant challenges that hinder the full realization of inclusive practices. Recurring themes point to limited resources, inadequate instructional materials, and insufficient training opportunities as critical obstacles that restrain teachers’ ability to implement inclusive strategies effectively. These constraints necessitate teachers to rely heavily on personal initiative and improvisation, which, while commendable, may not always be sustainable or sufficient.

While teacher adaptability and commitment serve as solid foundations for inclusive education, systemic support in the form of adequate teaching and learning resources, structured training, and continuous professional development, is vital to strengthen and sustain inclusive educational practices. Addressing these challenges will not only enhance teacher effectiveness but also ensure that inclusive education is fully realized in practice, benefiting all diverse learners.

By providing continuous, need-based training aligned to inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and behavior management to enhance teacher capability and confidence, inclusive education can be very evident when it comes to implementation. Ensuring sufficient provision of instructional learning resources, reducing class size where possible, and establishing clear, responsive policies that support inclusive practices at all levels. Institutionalize regular collaboration through Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, co-teaching opportunities, and multidisciplinary teamwork to support shared problem-solving. Develop structured programs that actively engage parents and caregivers, fostering shared responsibility in supporting learner development. Allow curriculum adaptation to better respond to diverse learner needs, ensuring relevance and accessibility in different classroom contexts. Introduce mechanisms such as workload redistribution, provision of teacher aides, and psychosocial support to reduce burnout and sustain teacher effectiveness. Encourage the use of performance-based, and assessment strategies that focus on learner growth rather than comparison.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Principals, Head teachers, and Officer In-Charge play a vital role in implementing inclusive education as a continued, system-wide practice rather than a one-time initiative. This must be supported with transparent policies to achieve the purpose of inclusive education.
2. Teachers will be more responsive if they engage in continuous professional development (CPD). It is essential because it turns inclusive education from an idea into a real classroom practice. Through ongoing learning, teachers improve their skills and respond effectively to diverse learners' needs.
3. Teachers shall be trained on the Comprehensive Inclusive and Differentiated Instruction Training Program with Structured Reflective Practice. This training equips teachers with the ability to translate inclusive principles into daily classroom actions.



4. School shall promote Collaborative and Multidisciplinary Support Systems through the principals. Establish strong partnerships among teachers, parents, specialists, and community stakeholders to co-create individualized learning supports. Active engagement of the PTA and SNED families is vital in ensuring that interventions are relevant, culturally responsive, and learner centered.
5. Ensure Equitable Allocation of Resources. Schools and the division office should provide adequate instructional materials, assistive devices, and learning resources tailored to diverse learner needs. Equitable distribution of these resources is essential to bridge gaps and support meaningful participation of all learners.
6. Enhance Inclusive Classroom Practices. Teachers are encouraged to integrate differentiated instruction, flexible teaching strategies, and inclusive classroom management approaches that balance structure with empathy.
7. Adopt Data-Informed and Inclusive Assessment Systems. Implement assessment practices aligned with Universal Design for Learning by utilizing multiple evidence sources such as IEP data, portfolios, observations, and performance tasks. Continuous data-driven reflection will support real-time instructional adjustments and ensure learner outcomes.
8. Amplify Learner Voice and Agency Encourage SNED learners to actively participate in decision-making processes related to their learning. Empowering learners fosters independence, confidence, and a sense of belonging.
9. Sustain a Culture of Inclusion and Shared Responsibility. Inclusive education should be upheld as a collective commitment. Continuous collaboration among all stakeholders will transform challenges into opportunities, ensuring that diversity becomes a foundation for innovation, equity, and meaningful learning experiences.

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