

Exploring General Education Teachers' Strategic Classroom Management in Inclusive Education

Charmaine Brylin M. Aguillon¹, Letecia E. Eludo, PhD.²

¹Master of Arts in Education Major in Special Education, University of Perpetual Help System DALTA, Las Pinas City, Philippines

²Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education, University of Perpetual Help System DALTA, Las Pinas City, Philippines

ABSTRACT: This study explored the lived experiences of general education teachers in applying strategic classroom management within inclusive education settings at Francisca Tirona Benitez Integrated School in Imus City, Cavite. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological design, the study examined how teachers manage diverse classrooms, the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the recommendations they provide to enhance inclusive practices. Seven general education teachers participated in in-depth interviews, and their responses were thematically analyzed. Findings revealed that teachers balanced curriculum demands with diverse learner needs through lesson modifications, differentiated activities, visual support, and anticipatory planning, demonstrating creativity, empathy, and professional judgment. However, systemic barriers, including overcrowded classrooms, limited training, scarce resources, and insufficient institutional support, often hindered their efforts. Teachers employed proactive classroom management strategies such as reinforcement, peer collaboration, and strategic grouping, emphasizing the role of shared responsibility and community involvement. Based on these insights, the study proposed the Aguillon Strategic Inclusive Classroom Management Framework, a multidimensional model integrating proactive instruction, supportive classroom ecology, continuous teacher development, institutional infrastructure, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. The framework underscored that sustainable inclusive education required aligning teacher innovation with structural investment and collective responsibility, offering practical guidance for fostering equitable, dynamic, and engaging learning environments for all learners.

KEYWORDS: classroom management, inclusive education, lived experiences, phenomenological study, general education teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education had become a global imperative in the 21st century, advocating for equitable and quality education for all learners, regardless of ability, background, or socio-economic status. Anchored in international declarations such as the Salamanca Statement and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, inclusive education promoted the integration of learners with disabilities into general education classroom settings. This approach emphasized the removal of learning barriers and the provision of appropriate support to ensure all learners could actively participate and achieve in school.

In the Philippines, inclusive education was reinforced by legal frameworks such as Republic Act No. 11650, also known as the Inclusive Education Act of 2022, which mandated the inclusion of learners with disabilities in general education schools. Supporting policies from the Department of Education, such as DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, further underscored the government's commitment to this agenda. These policies advocated for the transformation of mainstream schools into inclusive institutions that could accommodate the needs of all learners.

However, despite these supportive frameworks, the actual implementation of inclusive education remained a challenge, particularly at the classroom level. Many general education teachers entered inclusive classrooms without adequate preparation to meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. While inclusive education was a growing global priority, teacher education programs often fell short in equipping teachers with practical strategies for differentiation, behavior management, and individualized instruction. This lack of training could lead to uncertainty, stress, and ineffective classroom practices, especially when teachers were expected to accommodate a wide range of cognitive and behavioral profiles (Jabri, Alodat, Al-Hendawi, & Ianniello, 2025).

Building on this concern, another significant barrier was the lack of essential resources within inclusive classrooms. These settings frequently suffered from a shortage of essential resources such as assistive technologies, adaptive materials, and

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support personnel like paraprofessionals or special education co-teachers. Teachers might find themselves improvising with limited tools, which compromised the quality of instruction and learner engagement. Large class sizes further exacerbated the issue, making it difficult to provide personalized attention and maintain a structured learning environment (Taghap & Pabalan, 2025).

In addition to resource constraints, behavioral and social integration challenges also complicated classroom management. Managing classroom behavior and fostering social inclusion were among the most complex aspects of inclusive education. Learners with special needs might exhibit behaviors that disrupted learning or challenge traditional discipline methods. Teachers must balance empathy with authority, often without specialized behavioral training. Additionally, promoting positive peer interactions between learners with and without disabilities required intentional planning and ongoing support, which many teachers struggled to implement effectively (Sanchez, 2023).

Compounding these difficulties was the rigidity of standardized curricula. Often, such curricula lacked the flexibility needed to accommodate diverse learning styles and paces. Teachers were expected to meet curriculum benchmarks while also modifying content for learners with varying abilities. This dual responsibility could be overwhelming, especially when curriculum guidelines did not provide clear pathways for adaptation. As a result, some learners might be left behind or excluded from meaningful participation in classroom activities. They further stated that some parents expressed concern that inclusive classrooms might hinder their child's academic progress, especially if they perceived learners with disabilities as distractions. These attitudes could create tension between families and schools, undermining collaborative efforts. Moreover, societal misconceptions about disability and inclusion could influence classroom dynamics, affecting how learners interacted and how teachers felt supported in their roles (Taghap & Pabalan, 2025).

Beyond these classroom-level challenges, systemic issues also hindered the effective implementation of inclusive education. Although inclusive education was mandated by policy in many countries, its implementation frequently lacked coherence and support at the school level. Teachers might face unclear guidelines, inconsistent expectations, and minimal backing from administrators. Without strong leadership and institutional commitment, inclusive practices could become fragmented or tokenistic, leaving teachers to navigate complex challenges on their own (Jabri, Alodat, Al-Hendawi, & Ianniello, 2025; Taghap & Pabalan, 2025).

In the Philippine context, Torres et al. (2024) emphasized that the gap between policy and practice was most evident in the classroom, where teachers struggled with limited training, scarce resources, and a lack of clear strategic guidance on how to manage inclusive settings. While inclusion was the national goal, the lived experiences of teachers revealed persistent barriers such as large class sizes, insufficient individualized support, and the absence of professional development focused on special needs education. These issues pointed to a critical need for research that focused directly on teachers, their strategies, perceptions, and experiences in inclusive education environments.

Against this backdrop, the study was situated in Francisca Tirona Benitez Integrated School (FTBIS), a public institution in Imus, Cavite that implemented inclusive education. It sought to explore the lived experiences of general education teachers who were tasked with managing inclusive classrooms. Specifically, it examined how teachers developed and applied strategic classroom management techniques to support the learning of learners with special educational needs (SEN) alongside their typically developing peers.

By focusing solely on teachers as the primary participants, this study also aimed to highlight their central role in the success or failure of inclusive practices. It adopted a phenomenological approach to capture their authentic voices, challenges, insights, and recommendations. The findings were expected to provide evidence-based input for strategic classroom management framework that supported inclusive education at the classroom level.

In conclusion, while inclusive education was enshrined in law and policy, its realization depended heavily on the everyday actions and decisions of general education teachers. This study titled "Exploring General Education Teachers' Strategic Classroom Management in Inclusive Education," contributed to the local discourse on inclusion by shedding light on the realities faced by teachers and by identifying the strategic classroom management framework that could strengthen inclusive education implementation in Philippine public schools.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the lived experiences and challenges of general education teachers in managing inclusive classrooms, particularly in relation to training, school policies, collegial support, and administrative leadership?
2. What classroom management strategies and recommendations do general education teachers employ to effectively address the needs of learners in inclusive settings?
3. What core themes emerge from general education teachers' significant experiences in managing inclusive classrooms?
4. What insights can be drawn from general education teachers' lived experiences in using strategic classroom management?
5. What framework can be developed from teachers' responses to enhance their strategic classroom management?

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The study had been conducted using a qualitative phenomenological research design method as it was deemed the most effective way to uncover the everyday lives of general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms. In this paper, the use of phenomenology helped the investigator to know the perceptions, the comprehension, and the reactions of the general education teachers towards the management of the inclusive classrooms which cannot be fully represented by statistics or graphs. The production of data required a meticulous and moral procedure to collect copious, dependable, and legitimate accounts of the general education teachers' lived experiences in inclusive classrooms. The subjects of the study were general education teachers from Francisca Tirona Benitez Integrated School in Imus City, Cavite. Purposive sampling was employed in the selection of the participants, assisted by the criteria as follows: (1) Currently teaching in an inclusive classroom setting, (2) had at least three years of teaching experience, and (3) had participated in at least one training or professional development program related to inclusive education. Moreover, diversity regarding grade level, subject area, and teaching background was considered to obtain different points of view. The final number of participants was set with consultation of data saturation. The interviews had been analyzed by thematic analysis method.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1. What are the lived experiences and challenges of general education teachers in managing inclusive classrooms, particularly in relation to training, school policies, collegial support, and administrative leadership?

Teachers' experiences highlight that inclusive education is an ongoing process that demands constant adaptation, creativity, and emotional dedication, as they design, modify, and differentiate lessons to accommodate diverse learning needs. Acting as both planners and facilitators, teachers balance curriculum requirements with individual differences through flexible lesson planning, visual support, and alternative learning activities, practices supported by Shevchenko et al. (2020), who emphasize the dual pedagogical and empathetic roles of inclusive educators. However, systemic barriers such as overcrowded classrooms, scarce resources, and inadequate training, echoed by Torres et al. (2024) and Beltran et al. (2025), limit their effectiveness and contribute to stress and fatigue. In line with Mokhampanyane (2024) and Mpu and Adu (2021), the findings indicate that insufficient institutional and professional support can lead to burnout and decreased teaching quality. Teachers' emotional struggles, including feelings of exhaustion and inadequacy, further affirm Yildiz et al.'s (2021) observation that low institutional backing undermines morale and motivation. Although policies like Republic Act No. 11650 aim to strengthen inclusive education in the Philippines, the gap between policy intent and classroom realities remains evident, supporting Sijuola and Davidova's (2022) claim that inclusion is often better in theory than in practice. Ultimately, the findings underscore that while teachers are the primary advocates and implementers of inclusion, achieving sustainable and effective inclusive education requires comprehensive systemic reforms that align policy, training, and classroom support.

Problem 2. What classroom management strategies and recommendations do general education teachers employ to effectively address the needs of learners in inclusive settings?

Despite the challenges encountered in inclusive classrooms, teachers exhibited remarkable creativity and practicality by employing strategies such as reinforcement, peer collaboration, differentiated instruction, and strategic seating arrangements, demonstrating their adaptability and strong problem-solving skills. Their approaches highlight their dual role as both behavior managers and facilitators of supportive learning environments where diversity is respected, and every learner feels valued. This practice reflects Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process shaped by interaction and collaboration. The findings are consistent with studies by Sanchez (2023), Francisco et al. (2020), and Ahmad et al. (2022), who identified reinforcement, collaboration, and structured behavioral frameworks as key components of effective inclusive teaching. In the Philippine setting, teachers' creative use of peer tutoring and positive reinforcement, despite challenges like overcrowded classes and limited resources, demonstrates their resilience and deep commitment to inclusion. They also emphasized the need for continuous professional development, smaller class sizes, sufficient learning materials, and stronger institutional support, indicating that sustainable inclusion relies not only on teacher initiative but also on systemic and administrative backing. These insights echo the views of Eklund et al. (2020), Torres et al. (2024), and Beltran et al. (2025), who stress the importance of well-supported systems, collaborative efforts, and balanced workloads in maintaining inclusive education. Ultimately, the findings portray teachers as resourceful and dedicated advocates of inclusion, recognizing that meaningful and lasting success in inclusive education can only be achieved through shared responsibility and sustained institutional commitment.

Problem 3. What core themes emerge from general education teachers' significant experiences in managing inclusive classrooms?

The study reveals four interrelated themes that collectively illuminate the complex realities of teachers managing inclusive classrooms.

Theme 1: Teachers as Planners and Facilitators of Inclusive Practices emphasizes that inclusion begins with proactive planning and intentional design. Teachers play dual roles as both planners and facilitators, anticipating the diverse needs of their learners through lesson modification, adaptation, and the use of visuals. By simplifying tasks, breaking down instructions, and incorporating visual aids such as charts and graphic organizers, they adhere to the principles of Universal Design for Learning

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(UDL), which promotes multiple means of representation to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities. Teachers also prepare alternative worksheets and differentiated activities, ensuring that all learners, including those with disabilities, can participate meaningfully. This process reflects not just pedagogical expertise but also emotional sensitivity and ethical commitment, as teachers strive to create equitable learning environments despite limited resources. The findings are consistent with Condeza and Mongas (2025), who asserted that inclusive practices are grounded not only in skill but also in teachers' values of respect and equality; Torres et al. (2024), who highlighted the constraints imposed by overcrowded classrooms and lack of materials; and Mabeza and Villacruz (2025), who underscored the need for institutional backing to sustain proactive inclusivity planning.

Theme 2: Challenges in Managing Inclusive Classrooms exposes the systemic and structural barriers that undermine teachers' inclusive efforts. Overcrowded classes, behavioral challenges, and teacher exhaustion emerge as key obstacles, preventing teachers from offering individualized attention and maintaining a balanced classroom dynamic. The lack of formal training in special education, combined with limited access to resources and assistive technologies, forces teachers to rely heavily on improvisation and personal resourcefulness. This situation creates inequity and burnout, as inclusion becomes more aspirational than attainable in daily practice. Studies by Sepadi (2025) and Ahmad et al. (2022) affirm that the absence of institutional frameworks such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and differentiated instruction models leaves teachers ill-equipped to manage diversity effectively. Mabeza and Villacruz (2025) further highlight that teachers' improvisation, though creative, is unsustainable without administrative and material support. Hence, the theme underscores that inclusion is not merely a pedagogical issue but also a policy and resource problem that demands systemic solutions.

Theme 3: Strategies for Addressing Diverse Learner Needs reflect the ingenuity and adaptability of teachers in maintaining engagement and inclusivity despite these constraints. Teachers use reinforcement and motivation techniques, such as praise, rewards, and positive recognition, to shape behavior and encourage participation. These align with the principles of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which emphasize proactive encouragement over punishment. Furthermore, teachers foster peer collaboration and group learning, pairing learners of different abilities to promote mutual support and social development. Drawing from Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory, these practices allow stronger learners to assist peers within their zone of proximal development, thus fostering empathy, communication, and shared responsibility. Strategic grouping and seating arrangements also play a vital role, as teachers deliberately organize the classroom to enhance focus, manage behavior, and facilitate peer help. These strategies are consistent with Cortes et al. (2022), who found that motivation and social engagement are central to inclusive classrooms; Torres et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of teacher and learner collaboration; and Awini (2025), who noted that professional development enhances teachers' capacity to implement differentiated and flexible classroom structures.

Finally, Theme 4: Recommendations for Improvement captures teachers' collective call for systemic and institutional reforms to sustain inclusive practices. Teachers strongly advocate for continuous professional development, particularly with a focus on special education (SPED), rather than isolated workshops. Such ongoing training equips teachers with updated, evidence-based strategies for differentiated instruction, behavior management, and assistive technology use. As Peregil-Lubaton (2024) observed, many teachers in the Philippines possess only a moderate understanding of inclusive education, highlighting the urgency of targeted, practical, and context-based professional growth. Teachers also call for class size reduction to allow individualized attention and meaningful teacher-learner interactions—an appeal supported by Mpu and Adu (2021), who demonstrated that overcrowded classrooms hinder inclusive practices. Furthermore, teachers emphasize the need for more support staff, such as SPED coordinators and teaching assistants, to share instructional and management responsibilities. This resonates with Eklund et al. (2020), who found that inclusive education thrives when schools invest in collaboration, adequate staffing, and institutional support.

Across these themes, the study reveals that inclusive education is both a pedagogical endeavor and a systemic challenge. Teachers demonstrate dedication, creativity, and empathy as they plan, modify, and implement inclusive strategies; however, their efforts are often constrained by structural issues beyond their control. True inclusion, therefore, requires a shared commitment—where teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the community work collectively to provide the necessary training, resources, and support systems. Only through this synergy can inclusive education move from theory to sustained, meaningful practice, ensuring that every learner—regardless of ability—is given an equitable opportunity to learn, participate, and thrive.

Problem 4. What insights can be drawn from general education teachers' experiences in using strategic classroom management?

Based on the experiences and reflections of general education teachers, five key themes emerged that collectively illustrate both the strengths and challenges of strategic classroom management in inclusive education. These themes reveal that while teachers exhibit remarkable adaptability and empathy in fostering inclusion, systemic gaps continue to hinder the full realization of equitable learning environments.

Inclusion Begins with Proactive Planning.

Teachers consistently demonstrated that inclusivity begins long before instruction takes place—it requires deliberate anticipation of learners' diverse needs through proactive lesson planning. Participants described practices such as differentiated

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activities, lesson modifications, and the integration of visual aids to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities. These approaches align with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasize flexible and accessible instructional design for all learners. Jurado-De-Los-Santos (2021) found that teachers' adoption of proactive or reactive inclusion strategies is influenced by socio-demographic factors such as age, experience, and school context. The study further suggested that teachers thrive when supported by leadership, adaptable policies, and professional autonomy, allowing them to take ownership of inclusive planning. Similarly, the present findings reveal that Filipino teachers understand planning for diversity as foundational to both effective instruction and classroom management, as it minimizes behavioral disruptions while maximizing engagement.

Structural Barriers Hinder Effective Inclusion.

Despite teachers' resourcefulness, systemic barriers such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and inadequate training continue to challenge inclusive implementation. Participants described how improvisation and creativity became survival tools in the absence of institutional support, yet these same efforts also led to exhaustion and burnout. This tension highlights a persistent gap between inclusive education policies and their classroom realities. Jabri et al. (2025) identified similar structural issues, noting that the absence of professional training, rigid curricular frameworks, and weak administrative support are major obstacles to effective inclusion. The authors emphasized that these challenges stem not from teacher deficiencies but from institutional shortcomings that require policy reforms, resource investments, and broader public awareness. In both contexts, the data underscore the need for sustained systemic support to bridge the policy-practice divide in inclusive education.

Behavior and Motivation are Central to Inclusion.

Teachers highlighted that managing behavior and fostering motivation are integral to the success of inclusive classrooms. Participants employed praise, rewards, and parental collaboration as tools to encourage positive behavior and engagement, strategies consistent with the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, which promotes reinforcement over punishment. Such approaches recognize that inclusion is not merely academic but also emotional and behavioral. Lo's (2025) study in Indonesia supports these findings, showing that positive reinforcement and culturally responsive methods enhance motivation and reduce behavioral challenges, particularly in resource-limited contexts. The current findings affirm that teachers who intentionally cultivate motivation and self-regulation among learners create classroom environments conducive to inclusion and collaboration.

Peer and Parent Support Strengthen Inclusive Practices.

Teachers also recognized the power of community-based approaches, emphasizing peer-assisted learning and parental involvement as vital components of inclusion. Participants shared how pairing learners with different abilities promotes empathy and cooperation, while parent collaboration helps reinforce positive behavior at home. This finding aligns with the study of Paulite and Manue (2025), which demonstrated the effectiveness of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in improving reading comprehension, learner confidence, and social interaction. Their research shows that when structured and supported, peer and parental involvement extend the teacher's capacity, transforming the classroom into a collaborative ecosystem where inclusion thrives through shared responsibility. Similarly, the teachers' reflections highlight that inclusive education flourishes when it extends beyond the classroom to include the active participation of families and peers.

Sustainable Inclusion Requires Systemic Reform.

Finally, participants underscored that while personal commitment is essential, sustainable inclusion cannot depend solely on teacher innovation. Calls for continuous SPED-focused training, smaller class sizes, and additional support staff reflect teachers' understanding that effective inclusion is a systemic endeavor requiring administrative and policy-level backing. Torres et al. (2024) found that inconsistent implementation of inclusion in Philippine schools often results from insufficient training and overcrowded classrooms, limiting teachers' capacity for individualized support. The study recommended systemic reforms and equitable resource distribution to ensure that inclusion is both consistent and effective. These perspectives resonate with the current findings, affirming that institutional investment, not individual effort alone, is key to sustaining inclusive practices.

In sum, the findings portray general education teachers as resilient, adaptive, and deeply committed agents of inclusion who often transcend limitations to ensure that learners with diverse needs are supported. However, their experiences also illuminate that inclusion is not purely a pedagogical issue but a structural and systemic challenge. Sustainable inclusive education demands a coherent framework that integrates teacher innovation with institutional investment, collaborative networks, and policy reforms. When schools align professional development, administrative support, and classroom realities, inclusive education becomes not merely an aspiration but an attainable, enduring practice.

Problem 5. What framework can be developed from teachers' responses to enhance their strategic classroom management?

The Aguillon Strategic Inclusive Classroom Management Framework offers a comprehensive guide for teachers to effectively manage diverse and inclusive classrooms, particularly those with learners with special needs. Grounded in teachers' lived experiences, it promotes a balanced approach encompassing proactive lesson planning, supportive classroom ecology, continuous teacher development, institutional infrastructure, and shared responsibility. The framework encourages teachers to anticipate learner needs through modified lessons, visuals, and differentiated activities while fostering collaboration, reinforcement, and peer-assisted learning to build a positive and inclusive environment. It underscores the necessity of ongoing

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SPED-focused professional development and institutional support through smaller class sizes, adequate resources, and support staff. Ultimately, it calls for collective collaboration among teachers, parents, administrators, and policymakers to sustain inclusive practices. By integrating both classroom-based strategies and systemic reforms, the framework advances the goal of creating equitable, supportive, and sustainable learning environments for all learners.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study led to several key conclusions that collectively highlight the realities and requirements of inclusive classroom management among general education teachers. First, teachers demonstrate remarkable commitment, creativity, and empathy in managing inclusive classrooms; however, systemic barriers such as overcrowding, limited training, scarce resources, and insufficient institutional support hinder their effectiveness and contribute to stress and burnout, emphasizing the urgent need for structural improvements alongside individual teacher initiative. Second, teachers employ proactive and practical management strategies—including reinforcement, peer collaboration, differentiated instruction, and seating adjustments, that cultivate inclusive, socially mediated learning environments. Despite their resilience and adaptability, they strongly advocate for systemic support through continuous professional development, smaller class sizes, sufficient materials, and additional staff. Third, teachers lived experiences reveal four interrelated dimensions of inclusive classroom management: anticipatory planning, systemic challenges, strategic responses to diverse learner needs, and recommendations for improvement. These findings affirm that effective inclusion requires not only teacher ingenuity but also institutional interventions such as SPED-focused training, class size reduction, and stronger administrative and community partnerships. Fourth, while inclusive classroom management relies on proactive planning and adaptive strategies, structural constraints often force teachers to improvise, highlighting that sustainable inclusion necessitates systemic support and shared accountability, teacher innovation alone cannot compensate for the absence of institutional investment. Lastly, the Aguillon Strategic Inclusive Classroom Management Framework provides a holistic and multidimensional guide for promoting inclusion. By integrating proactive instruction, supportive classroom ecology, continuous teacher growth, institutional infrastructure, and collective responsibility, the framework underscores that equitable, engaging, and dynamic learning environments can only be achieved through coordinated efforts and sustained systemic support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher expressed profound gratitude and appreciation to all individuals who contributed to the successful completion of the study. Special acknowledgment was extended to Dr. Eduardo C. Zialcita, Dean of the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA - Las Piñas Campus Graduate Studies, for his professional guidance, and to Dr. Letecia E. Eludo, the researcher's adviser, for her unwavering belief and dedication. Gratitude was also given to Dr. Mary Argie Lyn Soriano, Dr. Nelita F. Belena, and Dr. Benjamin C. Siy, Jr., the chairperson, for their motivational support and constructive feedback. The UPHSD professors were appreciated for their encouragement in promoting teachers' professional growth. The researcher also thanked Sir Homer M. Mendoza, OIC Schools Division Superintendent of Imus City, along with Dr. Aida C. Bellon and Dr. Elmer M. Dayrit, administrators of Francisca Tirona Benitez Integrated School, for granting permission to conduct the study. Appreciation was given to Dr. Edward Padama, Prof. Bernardo N. Fernandez II, Ms. Genisis Lyn S. Torres, RPm, and Mr. Joven D. Bayeta, CHRA, RPm, for their assistance in validating the research instruments. The researcher also expressed heartfelt thanks to colleagues, friends, and family members, including Mr. John Christian O. Dumaraog, Ms. Krystelle Bea S. Dumaraog, Mrs. Loida J. Voces, Mrs. Jonallie F. Cualteros, Mrs. Gerlie Vhie C. Quilicol, Mrs. Cheriza U. Pardilla, Mrs. Maria Teresa B. Macahilas, Mrs. Kimberly Cate I. Arriesgado, and Ms. Donna Mae Raggmac, for their invaluable support and assistance. Deepest love and gratitude were extended to her sons, Dominic Uriel M. Aguillon and Tovy Brylle M. Aguillon, for being her inspiration and motivation to complete her graduate studies. Above all, the researcher gave thanks to Almighty God for providing strength, courage, and guidance throughout the journey.

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