

Exploring The Perspectives and Challenges of Elementary Teachers in an Inclusive Program

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ABSTRACT: This phenomenological study explored the perspectives, practices, and challenges of 10 Public Elementary teachers in Parañaque City in implementing inclusive education, highlighting both their commitment and the systemic barriers they faced. Drawing from semi-structured interview responses, the research revealed that while teachers valued inclusion for its social, emotional, and ethical benefits, they struggled with time constraints, limited resources, and the complexity of addressing diverse learning needs. To accommodate learners with disabilities, teachers employed differentiated instruction, multi-sensory strategies, and collaborative approaches, often relying on peer support and self-reflection. However, the lack of specialized materials, assistive technologies, and professional development opportunities hampered effective implementation. In response, the study proposed a comprehensive framework on Strengthening Inclusive Education in Elementary Classrooms that emphasized four core components: curriculum and instructional adaptation, resource provision, teacher capacity building, and collaboration and support systems. When applied cohesively, these elements fostered inclusive school cultures, enhanced learner engagement, and empowered teachers to meet the needs of all learners. The findings underscore the urgent need for systemic support and targeted training to transform inclusive education from policy into practice.

KEYWORDS: collaboration, curriculum adaptation, elementary teachers, inclusive education, teacher capacity building

I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of inclusion, accessibility, and disability rights was not the sole responsibility of individuals with disabilities. Rather, it was a collective societal obligation that involved teachers, policymakers, families, communities, and institutions working together to dismantle systemic barriers. Placing responsibility solely on individuals with disabilities implied that they must adapt to an environment that was not designed with their needs in mind, which reinforced exclusion. True inclusion required shared accountability, where schools adopted inclusive teaching strategies, government agencies provided adequate policies and funding, communities fostered supportive attitudes, and families actively collaborated in the learning process. By shifting the burden from the individual to the broader society, inclusion became a shared mission, ensuring that persons with disabilities were not merely accommodated but fully empowered to thrive in equitable and accessible environments.

These were fundamental human rights that impacted the fairness and equity of society. Achieving genuine inclusion required collective effort where teachers, policymakers, families, and communities worked together to create environments that were welcoming and accessible to all. When debates arose that placed responsibility solely on individuals, whether teachers, parents, or people with disabilities themselves, they could create division and hinder progress. Instead, building an inclusive society demanded unity, empathy, and shared responsibility across all sectors, recognizing that inclusion benefited everyone, not just those with disabilities (Inquirer, 2025).

Inclusive education for learners with special needs did not happen by itself. According to Dalonos (2013, as cited in Allam and Martin, 2021), the 1959 United Nations General Assembly's Declaration of the Rights of the Child emphasized the importance of providing special treatment and education tailored to the unique needs of learners with disabilities. The declaration acknowledged that children with physical, mental, or visual impairments required specialized support to access quality education and develop their full potential. This foundational principle underscored the global responsibility to implement inclusive and adaptive educational approaches that addressed diverse learning needs. By advocating for individualized interventions and equitable opportunities, the declaration laid the groundwork for later policies promoting inclusive education and the rights of children with disabilities worldwide.

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Jardinez and Natividad (2024) emphasized that the Salamanca Statement underscored the importance of inclusive schools in eliminating discrimination, fostering inclusive environments, and ensuring equitable educational opportunities, particularly for learners with special needs. The statement, adopted in 1994 under UNESCO's leadership, called for a fundamental shift in education systems to embrace diversity and provide necessary support for all learners within Elementary settings. In the years following its adoption, the global community had actively promoted the inclusion of individuals with special needs, advocating for policies, teacher training, and resource allocation to facilitate their full participation in society. This movement continued to shape educational reforms, reinforcing the principle that inclusive education was essential for building more equitable and just societies.

However, the effectiveness of educating special education learners depended on a variety of interconnected factors, one of which was teacher readiness for inclusive education.

Several studies explored teacher readiness for inclusive education across various international contexts. For example, Zegeye (2022) found that Ethiopian primary teachers generally rated themselves as less prepared to teach diverse learners, highlighting concerns about their ability to implement inclusive education effectively. The study revealed that teachers' confidence in their inclusive teaching skills varied based on years of experience, suggesting that prolonged classroom exposure gradually enhances their ability to accommodate diverse learner needs. However, the study also pointed out that pre-service teacher training programs were insufficient in equipping teachers with the necessary competencies for inclusion. Without structured training and continuous professional development to address these gaps, general teachers might struggle to translate inclusive education policies into effective classroom practices, ultimately limiting the success of inclusive education initiatives.

The realization of inclusive education in the Philippines hinged on teachers' readiness and ability to address diverse learner needs. Laws such as Republic Act No. 11650 (Institutionalizing Inclusive Learning Resource Centers for Learners with Disabilities), Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), and Republic Act No. 9442 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disability) provided a legal framework that guaranteed learners with disabilities the right to inclusive education. These policies meant that learners with disabilities were accommodated in inclusive classrooms with appropriate support. However, their successful implementation depended significantly on general teachers' readiness to adopt inclusive practices. Teachers must be equipped with the skills, knowledge, and resources to modify instruction, differentiate learning activities, and foster an inclusive classroom culture. Without adequate training, support, and institutional commitment, the goal of full inclusion remained challenging, as teachers played a pivotal role in translating policies into effective classroom practices.

Moon (2023) found that general teachers generally had positive perceptions of inclusive education, indicating openness to accommodating diverse learners. However, the study emphasized the need for continuous professional development to keep teachers updated on best practices and evolving inclusive strategies. Without ongoing training and support, even well-intentioned teachers might struggle to implement effective inclusion methods.

Gonzaga, Plan and Aguipto (2024) shared that Elementary teachers faced challenges in implementing inclusive pedagogy due to limitations in training, resources, role clarity, and attitudinal barriers. They struggled with adaptive strategies, curriculum design insufficiencies, heavy workloads, unclear responsibilities, and preconceptions about inclusion's impact. To strengthen implementation, an understanding of teachers' capacity-building needs was required, and strategic recommendations should enhance competencies in differentiation, collaboration, and practical curriculum integration. Addressing these gaps in readiness could help general teachers drive quality inclusive learning as mandated.

Despite the growing implementation of inclusive education policies in the Philippines and around the world, there remained a significant gap in understanding the lived experiences, perspectives, and day-to-day challenges of Elementary teachers who were at the forefront of inclusive teaching. Much of the existing literature tended to focus on quantitative evaluations of inclusive practices or emphasizing the roles of special education professionals, leaving the voices of Elementary teachers underrepresented. Furthermore, limited qualitative research explored how these teachers navigate the realities of inclusive classrooms, particularly in contexts where training, resources, and institutional support were insufficient or inconsistent.

In the context of Parañaque City, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education. Many public schools face overcrowded classrooms, making it difficult for teachers to provide individualized support for learners with disabilities. The limited availability of resources and facilities, such as assistive technologies and accessible learning materials, further restricts the capacity of schools to meet diverse learner needs. Additionally, insufficient teacher training in specialized pedagogical approaches and inclusive practices weakens the ability of educators to manage heterogeneous classrooms effectively. Parental engagement also remains a concern, as some families struggle to actively participate in their child's education due to socioeconomic constraints and lack of awareness. These issues, coupled with widening socioeconomic disparities, underscore the pressing need for comprehensive frameworks and interventions that strengthen inclusive education practices in Parañaque City.

Thus, this study aimed to explore and understand the perspectives and challenges faced by Public Elementary teachers in implementing inclusive education in selected kindergarten schools in Parañaque City for the school year 2024-2025. Through a qualitative lens, the research sought to capture the teachers' personal experiences, beliefs, coping strategies, and perceived needs

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in relation to teaching learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms as basis for developing an action plan to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the perspectives and challenges of elementary teachers in an inclusive education?
2. What are the themes that emerged from the responses of the participants?
3. What insights can be derived from the responses of the participants?

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researcher utilized a phenomenological approach based on the philosophical foundation established by Edmund Husserl to explore and analyze the perspectives and challenges of Elementary teachers in implementing inclusive education which served as a basis for developing a framework to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education in Parañaque City. This approach, grounded in phenomenology, focused on the unbiased and systematic exploration of conscious experiences (Guarin, 2024). Purposive sampling was utilized to carefully choose participants who gave unique insights into the perspectives and challenges of Public Elementary teachers in inclusive education. The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews, complemented by an interview guide designed by the researcher. This study purposefully selected ten (10) Elementary teachers who had direct experience teaching in inclusive classrooms. Ten (10) participants were often sufficient to reach data saturation, the point where no new themes or insights emerged from additional data collection. Studies showed that saturation in thematic analysis could be achieved with as few as 6–12 participants (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). Additionally, many recent qualitative studies in education and inclusive practices used small samples (8–15 teachers) to explore themes in depth, making 10 participants consistent with accepted research practice (Saunders & Townsend, 2023).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1: What are the perspectives and challenges of Elementary teachers in an inclusive education?

The findings of the study reveal that elementary teachers in Parañaque City strongly support the principles and goals of inclusive education. Teachers consistently emphasized that inclusion fosters not only the academic growth of learners with disabilities but also cultivates essential values such as empathy, respect, collaboration, and tolerance among their peers. This dual impact reflects the broader social benefits of inclusion, positioning it as both a rights-based imperative and a developmental strategy that enhances the learning environment for all students. Such perspectives align with the social model of disability, which highlights that barriers to participation and achievement are not rooted in learners themselves but are constructed by social and institutional structures within schools (Kawuryan, Sayuti & Dwiningrum, 2021). By embracing inclusive practices, teachers in the study interpreted education as a transformative force that reduces stigma, celebrates diversity, and prepares students for meaningful participation in an equitable and inclusive society.

At the same time, the study highlights pressing challenges that teachers face in implementing inclusive education effectively. One of the most frequently cited issues is time management, as students with disabilities often require additional support, differentiated instruction, and customized materials. Teachers reported that balancing these individualized needs with whole-class instruction was a constant struggle, often leaving them stretched thin and unable to provide the same depth of support across all learners. These findings resonate with earlier research that has shown how the additional time required for lesson preparation, instructional delivery, and individualized interventions poses significant strain on teachers in inclusive classrooms (Bhroin and King (2020).

Resource limitations were another recurring theme. Teachers pointed to a lack of adaptive learning materials, assistive technologies, and trained support staff as significant obstacles. Without these resources, they felt they were left largely on their own to meet diverse needs with limited tools. Many also shared feelings of inadequacy, particularly when students' progress was not immediately visible, which negatively affected their confidence and sense of efficacy. These findings underscore what other scholars have identified as a critical gap in inclusive education, the shortage of institutional and systemic support that undermines teachers' efforts to sustain effective inclusive practices ((Beltran et al., 2025; Felipe, 2025).

Another barrier highlighted in the findings relates to parental attitudes. Teachers observed that denial of a child's condition or reluctance to engage in collaborative efforts with schools often disrupted the consistency of support strategies between home and school. This lack of cooperation limited the effectiveness of inclusive practices, echoing research showing that strong parent-school partnerships are essential for reinforcing learning and ensuring meaningful inclusion (Kuyini et al., 2020). Without family engagement, inclusive education becomes more difficult to sustain, even when teachers are committed.

Despite these challenges, the study found that teachers employed a range of coping strategies to manage the demands of inclusive classrooms. Differentiated instruction emerged as one of the most common practices, enabling teachers to adapt content, processes, and assessments to suit varied learning needs. Teachers also used multi-sensory approaches, incorporating visual aids, hands-on activities, and sensory-based strategies to enhance student engagement. Flexible lesson planning and peer mentoring—both among students and among colleagues, were also described as vital mechanisms for supporting inclusion. These findings are

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consistent with recent research in the Philippines, where teachers have been observed to use differentiated instruction, collaborative policy implementation, and supportive learning environments to accommodate diverse learners (Beltran et al., 2025; Felipe, 2025).

Nevertheless, teachers stressed the urgent need for sustained professional development. They called for hands-on workshops, training on behavior management and adaptive strategies for specific disabilities, as well as mentorship from experienced special education (SPED) professionals. This aligns with Bhroin and King (2020), who argued that preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms requires not only professional development but also comprehensive support systems and collaboration among stakeholders. Teachers require consistent access to training, resources, and structured guidance to feel confident and capable in meeting the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

Overall, the study illustrates that while elementary teachers in Parañaque City hold positive attitudes toward inclusion and recognize its holistic benefits, systemic barriers, such as inadequate resources, insufficient training, and limited collaboration, significantly constrain their ability to fully implement inclusive practices. Addressing these barriers requires not only enhancing teacher competence through targeted professional development but also strengthening institutional support mechanisms, resource provision, and parent-school partnerships. As UNESCO stresses, inclusive education cannot rest solely on teacher commitment; it requires a whole-system approach that ensures equity, accessibility, and sustainability. By investing in teacher preparation, expanding resources, and fostering collaboration, inclusive education in Parañaque City can move closer to becoming a transformative and sustainable practice that provides every learner, regardless of ability, with genuine opportunities to thrive.

Problem 2: What are the themes that emerged from the response of the participants?

The discussion highlights five interconnected themes that shape teachers' experiences in implementing inclusive education in elementary classrooms. These themes reflect both the potential and the barriers encountered in making education equitable and accessible for all learners.

The first theme, Challenges in Managing Diverse Learning Needs, shows how teachers struggle to balance the academic, behavioral, and social requirements of learners with and without disabilities. Participants reported difficulties in delivering individualized instruction, managing behavioral concerns, and pacing lessons for varied learners. For example, one teacher emphasized that certain tasks demanded extra attention for children with special needs, while another noted the challenge of maintaining instructional flow for the whole class. These difficulties often left teachers feeling inadequate when progress was slow, creating emotional strain. Such findings resonate with Bohndick et al. (2022), who note that inclusive classrooms create opportunities for equity but also impose greater demands on teachers, requiring specialized skills and support. As Gheysens et al. (2022) argue, the success of inclusive education also hinges on how effectively policies, resources, and support mechanisms are implemented at the systemic level.

The second theme, Resource Limitations, underscores the lack of adaptive materials, assistive technologies, and trained personnel. Several participants expressed that the absence of these supports limited their capacity to provide individualized learning opportunities, often leaving them overwhelmed. For instance, one participant highlighted difficulties in managing lessons without adaptive materials, while another emphasized the impact of not having access to appropriate assistive technologies. This aligns with Munchan and Agbenyega (2020) and Adams et al. (2023), who stress that many schools admit students with special educational needs without ensuring adequate resources, inadvertently contributing to marginalization rather than inclusion. These findings suggest that without systemic investment in resources and personnel, teachers' efforts toward inclusive practice are severely constrained.

The third theme, Curriculum and Instructional Adaptation, illustrates the proactive strategies teachers employ to meet diverse learner needs. These include differentiated instruction, multi-sensory approaches, flexible grouping, and assessment modifications. Examples include providing group and one-on-one support, as well as creating specialized classroom spaces such as sensory corners. Such strategies reflect teachers' commitment to equity and creativity in addressing student diversity. However, Griful-Freixenet et al. (2021) and Kuyini et al. (2020) emphasize that consistent and effective implementation of these practices depends on sufficient training and preparation. Without adequate professional development and support, teachers may struggle to adapt curriculum in ways that meaningfully engage all learners.

The fourth theme, Collaboration and Support Systems, highlights the importance of teamwork among teachers, parents, SPED specialists, and professional learning communities. Participants noted that open communication with parents, regular consultation with specialists, and peer mentoring were essential to sustaining inclusive practices. For example, one participant underscored that collaboration across home and school created consistency for learners, while another highlighted the importance of long-term mentoring relationships. These practices reflect the perspective of Katz, Sokal, and Wu (2021) and Moon (2023), who describe inclusion as a shared responsibility grounded in belonging, equity, and respect for diversity. Collaboration enhances both the effectiveness of inclusive practices and the sense of shared accountability among stakeholders.

The final theme, Professional Development Needs, identifies the gap between teachers' current skills and the demands of inclusive classrooms. Participants strongly advocated for training in behavior management, adaptive technologies, practical approaches to disabilities, and mentoring from experienced SPED professionals. Teachers valued hands-on workshops and

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ongoing guidance as essential for developing both competence and confidence. This finding echoes Clausen et al. (2022) and Kawuryan, Sayuti, and Dwiningrum (2021), who argue that professional development is critical not only for instructional effectiveness but also for building teachers' emotional resilience and commitment to inclusion.

In summary, the findings reveal that teachers are highly committed to the principles of inclusive education, recognizing its value in cultivating empathy, respect, and social integration among learners. However, systemic challenges, ranging from resource shortages and time constraints to insufficient training and parental resistance, limit their ability to fully implement inclusive practices. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that strengthens policy, ensures adequate resource provision, expands access to targeted professional development, and fosters collaborative networks among stakeholders. By addressing these interconnected factors, inclusive education can move beyond aspiration to become a sustainable reality that provides equitable, high-quality learning for all students.

Problem 3: What insights can be derived from the response of the participants?

The findings highlight the multifaceted and demanding nature of inclusive education, where teachers are required to balance curriculum delivery with individualized support, continuous assessment, and flexible instructional strategies. Managing diverse classrooms involves addressing behavioral challenges, adapting lesson pacing, and ensuring equitable attention to both learners with disabilities and their peers. These tasks demand adaptability, careful planning, and heightened sensitivity to varied learner needs.

A central insight is the significant impact of resource limitations. Teachers consistently reported insufficient access to adaptive materials, assistive technologies, trained personnel, and accessible facilities, all of which constrain the provision of individualized support. Such deficiencies risk limiting meaningful learner participation, underscoring the necessity of systemic reforms. Adequate funding, resource allocation, and the deployment of specialized staff are crucial to translate inclusion from policy to practice.

The study also emphasizes the role of curriculum and instructional adaptation. Teachers employed differentiated instruction, multi-sensory methods, flexible grouping, and assessment modifications to foster participation among all learners. These strategies reveal teachers' proactive efforts to create equitable opportunities and confirm that instructional flexibility is fundamental to successful inclusion.

Equally important is collaboration and support systems, where cooperation with colleagues, SPED specialists, parents, and peer mentors enables shared strategies and consistent support across contexts. This reflects the notion of inclusive education as a shared responsibility, strengthening both teacher confidence and classroom effectiveness.

Teachers further identified an urgent need for professional development, particularly in behavior management, adaptive teaching approaches, and assistive technology use. Workshops, hands-on training, and mentoring were viewed as vital for bridging the gap between current competencies and the complex demands of inclusive classrooms.

Finally, the responses reflect teachers' emotional and professional resilience. Feelings of inadequacy were common when learner progress was slow or resources insufficient. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrated dedication, flexibility, and a strong commitment to their learners. This resilience highlights the importance of providing not only resources and training but also emotional and professional support systems.

Overall, the findings reveal that the success of inclusive education depends on a complex interplay of instructional, systemic, and emotional factors. Equipping teachers with sustained training, sufficient resources, and collaborative networks is essential for creating inclusive classrooms where all learners can thrive.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that while teachers strongly support inclusive education and recognize its social and developmental value for all learners, they continue to face pressing challenges such as limited resources, insufficient training, and the difficulty of meeting diverse needs. Although they employ strategies like differentiated instruction, multi-sensory approaches, and collaborative practices, these efforts highlight the urgent need for systemic support, targeted interventions, and sustained professional development to make inclusive practices more effective and sustainable. The findings further underscore that inclusive education is not only a pedagogical approach but a multifaceted commitment requiring emotional resilience, instructional flexibility, and institutional backing, with teacher preparedness and well-being playing a critical role in fostering inclusive classrooms.

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