

Inclusive Education in Practice: Teachers' Lived Experiences and Empowerment at a Selected National High School

Genalyn T. Pranada

University of Perpetual Help System- DALTA PHILIPPINES

Email address: julierosemendoza002@gmail.com

Abstract—This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of teachers in practicing inclusive education at Sabang National High School, with a particular focus on how empowerment influences their ability to accommodate students with diverse learning needs. Guided by five central research questions, the study examined how teachers perceive their roles, the support they receive, the challenges they encounter, and the impact of professional development and empowerment on inclusive teaching. Using semi-structured interviews with six teacher-participants, rich qualitative data were gathered and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that while teachers hold a deep commitment to inclusive education, their efforts are often hindered by limited resources, large class sizes, lack of specialized training, and insufficient institutional support. Nonetheless, when teachers felt empowered through leadership trust, involvement in decision-making, and relevant professional development they demonstrated greater confidence and creativity in implementing inclusive strategies. The study highlighted the importance of collaborative leadership, practical training programs, and sustainable support systems in fostering inclusive environments. It also emphasized that teacher empowerment is not merely a motivational tool but a structural necessity for inclusive education to thrive. The study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for teacher-centered reforms in inclusive education. It recommends targeted actions such as the formation of inclusive education committees, integration of co-teaching models, and investment in long-term professional growth opportunities. By foregrounding teacher voices, this research calls for systemic changes that recognize educators as pivotal agents of inclusive transformation in public schools.

Keywords— Inclusive education, teacher empowerment, professional development, lived experiences, qualitative research, Sabang National High School.

I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of inclusive education has become a global imperative, aiming to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their abilities, Socioeconomic backgrounds, or cultural contexts, have equitable access to quality education. At its core, inclusive education emphasizes diversity, equity, and participation, fostering a sense of belonging among learners. By embracing the principles of inclusivity, schools aim to create environments where all students, regardless of their unique challenges, can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. This vision aligns with the growing recognition that education is not merely a privilege but a fundamental right that must be accessible to all.

Teachers, as the cornerstone of this transformative process, are tasked with the monumental role of creating inclusive learning environments that cater to a wide array of learner needs. Their responsibilities extend beyond instruction, requiring them to adopt innovative pedagogies, foster collaborative relationships, and address systemic barriers that hinder equitable access to education. Despite these high expectations, the realities faced by teachers often include insufficient resources, a lack of professional development, and minimal institutional support. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to empower educators in fulfilling their critical roles in inclusive education.

At Sabang National High School, located in a resource-constrained and diverse community, the complexities of implementing inclusive education are magnified. Teachers in this context navigate a myriad of challenges, including catering to learners with disabilities, addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, and adapting to the Socioeconomic disparities among students. These realities demand not only resilience but also a profound commitment to innovation and adaptability. The lived experiences of these educators provide valuable insights into the practicalities of fostering inclusivity within the limitations of public school systems.

This study aims to document and analyze the lived experiences of teachers at Sabang National High School as they promote inclusive education. Through their narratives, the research seeks to uncover the strategies they employ, the barriers they encounter, and the support systems they require to succeed. By doing so, the study endeavors to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive education and inform policies and programs that prioritize teacher empowerment. The findings are expected to illuminate how teacher agency and capacity-building can bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable education system.

Moreover, this study is grounded in the understanding that inclusive education is a dynamic and evolving process. As educational landscapes continue to shift due to advancements in technology, changing societal norms, and global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of teachers becomes increasingly pivotal. This research not only captures the current state of inclusive education at Sabang National High School but also provides a forward-looking perspective on how teachers can be better supported to navigate future

challenges and opportunities. In doing so, it reinforces the idea that inclusive education is a shared responsibility, requiring the collective efforts of educators, policymakers, communities, and learners themselves.

Inclusive education has been globally recognized as a fundamental human right, endorsed by international frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which commits to "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all" (United Nations, 2015). In the Philippines, the educational landscape reflects this commitment through legislative and policy frameworks, including the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533). This act emphasizes the integration of all learners, particularly those with disabilities, into mainstream education, advocating for differentiated instruction and equitable resource distribution.

Further bolstering this commitment, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019, which mandates the inclusion of learners with disabilities within the K-12 Basic Education Program. These policies seek to eliminate barriers to education and promote an inclusive culture within schools. However, the gap between policy and practice remains significant, particularly in public schools where resources are often limited. Socio-cultural factors, teacher Preparedness, and infrastructure deficits compound the uneven implementation of inclusive education policies.

Teachers, as the primary agents of inclusive education, face myriad challenges in addressing these systemic issues. Studies have consistently shown that teacher empowerment is a critical factor in practicing inclusion. Recent studies have also focused on how digital tools and hybrid learning models can Support inclusive education. For example, Hernandez and Cruz (2022) explored the integration of assistive technologies in public schools in Southeast Asia, revealing their potential to enhance learning outcomes for students with disabilities while easing teacher workload. Meanwhile, Bautista and Reyes (2021) examined Filipino teachers' adaptive practices in multi-grade classrooms, emphasizing the importance of peer collaboration and shared resources in fostering inclusivity in resource-constrained settings. In the Philippine context, culturally responsive approaches are particularly crucial, as highlighted by Santos et al. (2020), who investigated community-based strategies to Support teachers in diverse classrooms.

Additionally, Navarro and Llamas (2023) investigated the role of school leadership in practicing inclusive education in public schools in rural areas. Their findings underscored the importance of leadership that prioritizes teacher Support, professional development, and fostering partnerships with local communities. This aligns with the challenges faced by Sabang National High School, where leadership can play a pivotal role in bridging resource gaps and encouraging teacher collaboration.

Moreover, the role of social-emotional learning (SEL) in inclusive education has gained traction. According to Velasco and Montemayor (2021), SEL frameworks enhance teachers' ability to address the holistic needs of learners, particularly those from marginalized groups. Their research demonstrated

that integrating SEL into teaching practices helps create more inclusive and supportive classroom environments.

Sabang National High School exemplifies these challenges and opportunities. Situated in a region marked by Socioeconomic diversity, the school's teachers often contend with limited resources and diverse learner profiles. Their ability to navigate these realities provides valuable insights into the practical application of inclusive education policies. By documenting their lived experiences, this study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusion and offers evidence-based recommendations to enhance teacher Support systems and professional development programs.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The questions below will guide the study's goal and assumptions.

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers at Sabang National High School in practicing inclusive education?
2. How do teachers perceive their empowerment in implementing inclusive education within their classrooms?
3. What Support systems, professional development opportunities, and leadership practices are available to teachers to enhance their capacity for inclusive teaching?
4. What challenges and barriers do teachers face in creating an inclusive learning environment for students with diverse needs?
5. In what ways do teacher empowerment and professional development contribute to the success of inclusive education at the school?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used a phenomenological qualitative research method, exploring the visible components of the phenomenon and obtaining new insights and a deeper understanding. To bring into light things that have become so "normal" that we are oblivious to what is going on at work and what is expected of us. It also has a close connection to qualitative research approaches in general (Vagle, M D.).

The investigation of the viewpoints about empowering teachers while they are promoting inclusive education, their roles, struggles, and experiences in the implementation of promoting inclusive education was a unique and fascinating problem.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter describes the presentation, evaluation and interpretation of data that were important in determining the lived experiences of teachers educating children with special needs in mainstream classes.

PROBLEM 1. What are the lived experiences of teachers at Sabang National High School in practicing inclusive education?

Research question 1 delves into the personal narratives and day-to-day realities of educators as they strive to implement inclusive teaching practices. It aims to uncover how teachers define and understand inclusivity within the context of their

classrooms and how these understandings influence their pedagogical approaches. Through this inquiry, the study explores the strategies they employ to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs, as well as the emotional, cognitive, and professional reflections that arise from these practices.

Moreover, this question seeks to illuminate the challenges teachers encounter, ranging from limited resources and large class sizes to a lack of administrative Support and societal misconceptions about inclusion. It also gives attention to the Support systems available to them, such as peer collaboration, training opportunities, and community involvement, and how these impact their ability to carry out inclusive teaching. By focusing on their lived experiences, the study aims to provide a nuanced and contextualized understanding of how inclusive education is practiced on the ground and how these experiences shape the teachers' professional growth, identity, and continued commitment to equitable and inclusive learning.

Table 1. The thematic analysis of the response of the participants lived experiences of teachers at Sabang National High School in practicing inclusive education.

Main Themes	Themes	Codes
Navigating Challenges in Inclusive Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructional Difficulties Emotional and Physical Strain Behavioral Management Diverse Cultural Backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum Adaptation, Lesson Modification, Teaching Load, Academic Planning, Instructional Materials, Learning Design Challenges Teacher Fatigue, Burnout, Emotional Workload, Stress Management Classroom Discipline, Behavior Intervention, Self-Regulation Issues Cultural Inclusivity, Intercultural Sensitivity, Multicultural Understanding
Adaptive Teaching Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated Instruction Contextualized and Localized Materials Peer and Individual Support Multimodal or Multiple Intelligence-Based Approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualization, Instructional Flexibility, Customized Learning Leamer-Centered Planning, Contextual Teaching, Relevance-Based Tasks Mentoring, Scaffolded Support, Personalized Help Varied Learning Styles, MI-based Planning, Diverse Learning Modalities
Emotional and Professional Fulfillment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moments of Success and Motivation Sense of Commitment and Purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Empowerment, Leamer Motivation, Capability Recognition Teacher Dedication, Intrinsic Motivation, Purpose-Driven Teaching
Commitment to Inclusive Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining Respect and Patience Discipline and Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Regulation, Respectful Dialogue, Teacher-Student Rapport Classroom Order, Inclusive Engagement, Behavioral Consistency

The description of teachers' lived experiences in practicing inclusive education at Sabang National High School,

particularly highlighting the realities they encounter in implementing inclusive practices, the personal and professional challenges they face, and the successes they experience in creating supportive learning environments for all students.

Table 1 shows the themes based on the participants' experiences. Several main themes and themes emerged. The main themes are Navigating Challenges in Inclusive Education, Adaptive Teaching Strategies, Emotional and Professional Fulfillment, and Commitment to Inclusive Values. The themes are Instructional Difficulties, Emotional and Physical Strain, Behavioral Management, Diverse Cultural Backgrounds, Differentiated Instruction, Contextualized and Localized Materials, Peer and Individual Support, Multimodal or Multiple Intelligence-Based Approach, Moments of Success and Motivation, Sense of Commitment and Purpose, Maintaining Respect and Patience, and Discipline and Participation.

PROBLEM 2: How do teachers perceive their empowerment in implementing inclusive education within their classrooms?

Research Question 2 examines the perceptions of teachers regarding their sense of empowerment as they carry out inclusive education. It seeks to understand the Extent to which they feel confident, supported, and equipped to meet the needs of learners with diverse abilities and backgrounds. The question investigates how various factors, such as access to professional development, involvement in decision-making, autonomy in instructional planning, and Support from school leadership, influence their feelings of agency and effectiveness.

This inquiry also explores how empowerment is linked to teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience when managing the complexities of inclusion. It looks into how teachers translate their knowledge, values, and training into classroom action, and whether they feel capable of advocating for inclusive practices amid systemic and institutional barriers. Moreover, it considers the role of peer Support, mentorship, and collaborative culture in reinforcing their belief in their ability to make a meaningful difference in inclusive settings.

By uncovering how teachers view their empowerment or lack thereof, this research question aims to shed light on the critical relationship between teacher agency and the successful implementation of inclusive education. Ultimately, it provides insights into what conditions are necessary to foster empowered educators who can sustain inclusive practices with confidence and purpose.

Teachers' perceptions of their empowerment in inclusive education at Sabang National High School will focus on their self-efficacy, professional agency, available support structures, and the enabling or limiting conditions within their school context. It will also highlight how these perceptions influence their commitment, creativity, and ability to nurture an inclusive learning environment.

Table 2 shows the themes based on how the participants perceive their empowerment in practicing inclusive education within their classrooms. Several main themes and themes emerged. The main themes are Personal and Professional

Identity, External Support and Resources, and Instructional Practices and Resources. The themes are Professional Values and Commitment, Self-Efficacy and Effectiveness, Training and Professional Development, Contextualized and Localized Materials, Strategy Integration, and Material Support.

Table 2. The thematic analysis of the response of the participants on how they perceive their **empowerment** in practicing inclusive education within their classrooms.

Main Theme	Themes	Codes
Personal and Professional Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Values and Commitment Self-Efficacy and Effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noble profession, student-centered, job responsibility Confidence levels, desire to be effective, self-ratings
External Support and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and Professional Development Contextualized and Localized Materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seminars, workshops, lack of formal training Admin reminders, rule implementation, supportive leaders
Instructional Practices and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy Integration Material Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity design, cooperative learning, flexibility Need for materials, school supplies

PROBLEM 3: *What support systems, professional development opportunities, and leadership practices are available to teachers to enhance their capacity for inclusive teaching?*

It will highlight how the presence or absence of relevant and sustained professional development impacts teachers' confidence and Preparedness in addressing diverse learner needs. Furthermore, this section will explore how inclusive leadership practices shape a culture of collaboration and shared accountability, providing a nurturing environment for inclusive practices to thrive. It will also emphasize the importance of localized Support mechanisms such as peer mentoring, provision of contextualized materials, and administrative backing in addressing the unique challenges of inclusive education. The availability of ongoing learning opportunities tailored to inclusive pedagogies is crucial in strengthening teachers' competence and sustaining inclusive efforts in everyday classroom practice.

Support systems, professional development opportunities, and leadership practices available to teachers at Sabang National High School will focus on the institutional, administrative, and collaborative structures that influence their capacity to implement inclusive education.

In summary, teachers at Sabang National High School experience varied levels of Support for inclusive education. While many benefit from LAC sessions, seminars, and in-service trainings, access is not consistent across all participants. Some schools provide adequate teaching materials and technology, but gaps remain, especially in assistive tools. School leaders are generally seen as supportive, though their effectiveness varies. Collaboration with other educators and specialists is present but not regularly practiced. Overall, Support systems and leadership play a vital

role, but their uneven implementation affects teachers' capacity to fully embrace inclusive practices.

Table 3. The thematic analysis of the response of the participants on support systems, professional development opportunities, and leadership practices are available to teachers to enhance their capacity for inclusive teaching.

Main Theme	Themes	Codes
Access to Professional Development and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in In-Service Training and LAC Sessions Relevance and Impact of Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LAC Participation, Division Training, In-Service Learning Updated Strategies, Skill Identification, Effective Instruction
Availability and Use of Instructional Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching and Technological Resources Utilization of Online Tools and Materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching Materials, Assistive Tech, Resource Availability Internet Support, Digital Access, Lesson Preparation Aid
Supportive Leadership and School Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership as Support System Challenges in Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supportive Principal, Leader Initiatives, Hands-On Leadership Leadership Pressure, High Expectations, Complex Roles
Collaboration and Collegial Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer and Specialist Collaboration Conditional Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher Cooperation, SPED Collab, Shared Practices Inconsistent Collab, Activity Dependent, Limited Support

Table 3 shows the themes based on how the participants on Support systems, professional development opportunities, and leadership practices available to teachers to enhance their capacity for inclusive teaching. Several main themes and themes emerged. The main themes are Access to Professional Development and Training, Availability and Use of Instructional Resources, Supportive Leadership and School Culture, and Collaboration and Collegial Support. The themes are Participation in In-Service Training and LAC Sessions, Relevance and Impact of Training, Teaching and Technological Resources, Utilization of Online Tools and Materials, Leadership as Support System, Challenges in Leadership, Peer and Specialist Collaboration, and Conditional Engagement.

PROBLEM 4: *What challenges and barriers do teachers face in creating an inclusive learning environment for students with diverse needs?*

Research question 4, explores the realities that teachers at Sabang National High School encounter as they strive to implement inclusive education. It seeks to describe the various challenges both systemic and personal that hinder their ability to accommodate learners with diverse needs in the classroom. These include insufficient training on inclusive practices, lack of access to appropriate teaching and learning materials, large

class sizes, and limited collaboration with SPED professionals. Moreover, some teachers face difficulty in managing the additional time and effort required to differentiate instruction while meeting curriculum demands. Others report a lack of clear policy guidance or administrative support, which adds to the burden of practicing inclusivity effectively. Through this question, the study aims to surface the underlying factors that limit teachers' capacity to foster an environment where all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, feel supported and valued.

Challenges and barriers faced by teachers at Sabang National High School in fostering an inclusive learning environment, particularly focusing on systemic limitations, resource constraints, instructional difficulties, and attitudinal or cultural obstacles that hinder the full implementation of inclusive education for students with varying needs and abilities.

Table 4. The thematic analysis of the response of the participants challenges and barriers faced by teachers at Sabang National High School in fostering an inclusive learning environment, particularly focusing on systemic limitations, resource constraints, instructional difficulties, and attitudinal or cultural obstacles that hinder the full implementation of inclusive education for students with varying needs and abilities.

Main Theme	Themes	Codes
Systemic and Instructional Barriers to Inclusive Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited Resources and Learning Materials Overcrowded Classrooms and Inflexible Curriculum Structures Teacher Overload and Emotional Exhaustion Lack of Professional Training and Development Personalized Teaching and Adaptive Strategies Policy Constraints on Student Discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of teaching materials and facilities, Absence of teaching resources, and Insufficient tools for learning activity modification Overcrowded classrooms, Inflexible curriculum, and Ambiguous institutional support Excessive administrative workload, Stress from managing behavioral issues, and Need to reduce non-teaching duties Inadequate training on inclusive practices, Demand for ongoing professional development, and Lack of institutional support for training Task adaptation for individual needs, Personalized instruction based on learning capability, and Private conversations as a behavior management tool Restriction due to child protection policies, Passive disciplinary approaches, and Teacher helplessness in behavior management

Table 4 shows the themes based on the challenges and barriers do teachers face in creating an inclusive learning

environment for students with diverse needs. Only one main themes and several themes emerged. The main theme was Systemic and Instructional Barriers to Inclusive Education. The themes are Limited Resources and Learning Materials, Overcrowded Classrooms and Inflexible Curriculum Structures. Teacher Overload and Emotional Exhaustion, Lack of Professional Training and Development, Personalized Teaching and Adaptive Strategies, and Policy Constraints on Student Discipline

Teachers across all responses emphasized that professional development enhances their ability to implement inclusive education by equipping them with strategies, knowledge, and confidence to address diverse learner needs. Likewise, teacher empowerment through support, resources, and trust motivates them to be more effective, innovative, and committed in inclusive settings. Success stories revealed that empowered and well-trained teachers positively impact learners' academic progress, discipline, and even career readiness. However, participants also identified gaps, such as the lack of training opportunities, facilities, and inclusive education resources, which hinder their full potential. Overall, the responses affirm that teacher empowerment and professional development are vital in realizing meaningful and sustainable inclusive education in schools.

Table 5. The thematic analysis of the response of the participants empowerment and professional development contribute to the success of inclusive education at the school.

Main Theme	Themes	Codes
Empowered Educators as Drivers of Inclusive Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Development Enhances Inclusive Competence Empowerment Fosters Confidence and Commitment Positive Outcomes Through Empowered Teaching Systemic Gaps and Recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training, Strategies, Preparation, Workshops, and Readiness Confidence, Motivation, Leadership, Support, and Effectiveness Achievement, Discipline, and Growth Facilities, Resources, Technology, Clarity, and Equity

Table 5 shows the themes based on the empowerment and professional development contribute to the success of inclusive education at the school. Only one main themes and several themes emerged. The main theme was Empowered Educators as Drivers of Inclusive Success. The themes are Professional Development Enhances Inclusive Competence, Empowerment Fosters Confidence and Commitment, Positive Outcomes Through Empowered Teaching, and Systemic Gaps and Recommendations

Theoretical Contribution and Implications

This study, grounded in the lived experiences of teachers at Sabang National High School, reveals that teacher empowerment and professional development are fundamental pillars in the practice of inclusive education. As reflected in the narratives of the participants, their ability to teach learners with diverse needs was closely tied to the support they received through training, access to resources, and institutional

trust. The participants emphasized that when teachers are equipped with the right tools and are given decision-making power, they are more capable of meeting the demands of inclusive classrooms.

From a theoretical standpoint, the insights of the participants support Social Constructivist Theory, which posits that learning is socially mediated and co-constructed. Teachers who are empowered are better able to scaffold learning in inclusive settings, creating environments where all learners regardless of ability feel valued and understood. The data also align with Transformative Learning Theory, wherein teachers, through reflective practice and critical professional development experiences, transform their perspectives and become more inclusive in both mindset and pedagogy.

Further, the participants' responses reflect the principles of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The challenges and growth they described illustrate how inclusive teaching is influenced not just by personal capacity, but by interactions within multiple systems such as school leadership, educational policies, and community expectations. Empowerment, therefore, is not limited to the individual teacher; it is shaped by the broader educational ecosystem that surrounds them.

These insights give rise to several practical implications. First, the findings highlight the urgent need for policy reform that centers teacher voice and leadership. Participants expressed that while they are willing and passionate about inclusion, they often lack the authority and support to make systemic changes. This underscores the importance of involving teachers in shaping school-wide and national strategies for inclusive education. Second, there is a clear call for sustained, relevant, and context-specific professional development. Many participants pointed to the lack of targeted training as a major barrier. They voiced a strong desire for workshops and seminars that address the realities of teaching learners with special needs especially in areas such as differentiated instruction, behavior management, and psychological support. This resonates with adult learning principles, which advocate for training that is practical, timely, and rooted in real-world application.

Third, the responses reveal the need to foster inclusive school cultures that affirm teacher agency. When teachers feel valued and trusted, they are more likely to innovate, advocate, and persist. Several participants spoke about the power of feeling supported by their colleagues and leaders, reinforcing the idea that inclusion is a shared responsibility, not just the task of SPED teachers. Finally, this study opens up avenues for further research particularly on how empowered teachers influence student outcomes in inclusive settings, and how long-term support impacts their retention and professional growth. The voices of the participants suggest that listening to teachers is key to advancing inclusive education in meaningful and lasting ways.

In summary, the findings of this research rooted entirely in the authentic voices and reflections of the participants offer not only a window into the current state of inclusive education in their context but also a theoretical and practical guide for transforming it. Their stories remind us that when teachers are empowered, learners thrive.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the study's finding:

1. Based on the lived experiences of the teacher-participants at Sabang National High School, inclusive education is not a fixed policy or strategy it is a lived, evolving, and deeply personal commitment. The teachers described a daily journey of adapting their teaching styles, adjusting learning materials, and emotionally supporting students with varying abilities. Despite institutional limitations, they showed a profound sense of responsibility and compassion for their learners. These experiences reveal that inclusive education is sustained not only by training and policies but also by the personal values and resilience of educators.
2. Teachers shared that empowerment in inclusive education manifests when they are trusted with decision-making, acknowledged for their efforts, and provided with avenues for professional growth. However, this empowerment is often inconsistently experienced. Some felt encouraged by school leadership, while others expressed frustration at the lack of genuine autonomy, insufficient communication between SPED and general departments, and top-down policies that fail to consider ground realities.
3. The study further reveals that professional development, while available, is not always tailored to the actual challenges teachers face in the classroom. The participants expressed a need for more practical, contextualized training that focuses on real-life scenarios, classroom management of diverse learners, and collaborative planning among general and SPED educators. The absence of consistent and relevant training opportunities limits their confidence and ability to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities

In light of the aforementioned findings and eidetic insights drawn from the narratives of the co-participants, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Teachers' narratives revealed a profound emotional and professional investment in inclusive education, often amidst insufficient resources and overwhelming responsibilities. To honor and build on these lived experiences, it is crucial for educational leaders and policymakers to engage directly with teachers in planning and decision-making. Schools should conduct regular focus group discussions (FGDs) and reflection sessions to surface real-time experiences and challenges of inclusive practice. Moreover, to mitigate the emotional toll, mental health services and wellness programs should be made available, particularly for teachers managing students with diverse and complex needs.
2. Empowerment, as expressed by participants, is not limited to being included in meetings or trainings it involves being entrusted with decision-making power and having one's voice genuinely heard. To support this, schools must form teacher-led inclusive education committees that actively contribute to curriculum planning, learner accommodations, and classroom strategies. Additionally, adopting shared leadership models, where teachers' innovations and inclusive practices are formally recognized by school heads, can cultivate a culture of empowerment. Creating a system of recognition for inclusive

teaching practices, such as awards or professional development credits, will further validate and encourage teacher initiative.

3. Participants voiced a need for more practical and localized professional development aligned with the realities they face in their classrooms. To address this, schools should institutionalize regular in-service trainings focusing on strategies such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), classroom management of diverse learners, and behavior intervention. Furthermore, peer coaching and mentorship programs between SPED and general education teachers must be promoted to encourage knowledge-sharing and collaborative problem-solving. School leaders should also encourage professional learning communities (PLCs) to foster continuous reflective practice and support among colleagues. These actions can build a sustainable and supportive environment for inclusive instruction.

REFERENCE

- [1]. Alampay, L. P., & Jocson, R. M. (2021). Parenting in the Philippines: A review of research literature from 2000 to 2020. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 54(1), 1-30.
- [2]. Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2008). Making Education for All inclusive: Where next? *Prospects*, 38(1), 15-34.
- [3]. Baker, P., & Thompson, R. (2019). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards inclusive education: A study of secondary school teachers. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 19(5), 87-102.
- [4]. Bautista, C. D., & Reyes, M. T. (2021). Adaptive teaching strategies in multi-grade classrooms: A case study of Filipino public schools. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Education*, 41(3), 315-330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2021.1346792>
- [5]. Belete, Y. K., Yesgat, S. G., & Tariku, M. E. (2024). Lived Experiences of EFL Teacher Educators on Collegial Professional Learning. *Zhongguo Kuangye Daxue Xuebao*, 29(3), 332-337. <https://zkdx.ch/journal/zkdx/article/view/129>
- [6]. Chen, L., & Zhang, X. (2023). School culture and teacher self-efficacy in inclusive classrooms: A comparative study. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 38(2), 131-145.
- [7]. Department of Education. (2018). Department Order No. 20, s. 2018: Policy guidelines on the implementation of inclusive education. Retrieved from https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DO_s2018_020.pdf
- [8]. Du Plessis, A. E. (2020). The Lived Experience of Out-of-field STEM Teachers: A Quandary for Strategising Quality Teaching in STEM? *Research in Science Education*, 50, 1465-1499. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-018-9740-9>
- [9]. Forlin, C. (2010). Teacher education for inclusive education: The case for a transformative approach. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(1), 593-603.
- [10]. Garcia, L., & Patterson, B. (2021). Student diversity and teacher empowerment in inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Diversity in Education*, 22(6), 215-229.
- [11]. Gonzales, R. L., & Navarro, P. D. (2023). Bridging the gap: Policy and practice in inclusive education in Philippine public schools. *Journal of Educational Policy and Practice*, 15(2), 85-101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2023.1342145>
- [12]. Graham, L. N. (2023). "ONE TEACHER AT A TIME": Professional Perspectives on Coaching and Mentoring in Early Childhood Education. (Master's Thesis). East Carolina University. <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/listing.aspx?styp=ti&id=41498>
- [13]. Harris, S., & Williams, M. (2020). Student-centered approaches and teacher empowerment: Bridging the gap in inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 56(2), 123-136.
- [14]. Helsel, B. E. (2023). Regular Education Teachers' Lived Experiences with Self-Efficacy in Light of the Endrew F. Decision of 2017 - A Phenomenological Study. (Doctoral Dissertation). Liberty University. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/4230>
- [15]. Hernandez, J. L., & Cruz, P. M. (2022). Assistive technology in inclusive education: Insights from Southeast Asian public schools. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 25(2), 205-218. <https://doi.org/10.1109/JETS.2022.134587>
- [16]. Hernandez, M., & Lopez, A. (2021). Transformational leadership and teacher empowerment in inclusive schools: A review of literature. *Educational Leadership Review*, 32(4), 170-185.
- [17]. HUGHES, R. C. (2018). Equity and Quality Education: Lived experiences of Teachers and Students. (Thesis). Monash University. <http://hdl.handle.net/10.4225/03/5adecc05f1476>
- [18]. Jackson, J. J. (2024). The Lived Experiences of In-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Education: A Hermeneutical Phenomenology.
- [19]. Johnson, K., & Murray, E. (2020). Collaborative teaching and teacher empowerment: A study of inclusive education in urban secondary schools. *Journal of Special Education*, 43(3), 228-245.
- [20]. Kilag, O. K., Morales, N. J., Marquita, J., & Laurente, J. (2023). Teacher-Led Curriculum Development: Fostering Innovation in Education. *Excellencia: International Multi-Disciplinary Journal of Education*, 1(4), 223-237.
- [21]. Kilag, O. K. T., Bariquit, I. A., Glipa, C. G., Ignacio, R. A. R. A., Alvez, G. U., Guilot, R. T., & Sasan, J. M. (2023). Implication of Individual Plan for Professional Development (IPPD) on Teachers' Professional Development and Career Advancement. *Basic and Applied Education Research Journal*, 4(1), 12-18. <https://doi.org/10.11594/baerj.04.01.02>
- [22]. Largent-Necessary, S. L. (2021). A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Efficacy in Career and Technical Education Coaching and Mentoring Programs. (Doctoral Dissertation). Liberty University. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2931>
- [23]. Mendoza, S., & Lee, H. (2019). Collaborative models for inclusive education: A case study of teacher-parent partnerships in the Philippines. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 17(1), 99-112.
- [24]. McNeal, Y. E. (2011). Teachers' lived experiences during a major school reform process: A phenomenological study. (Thesis). University of Phoenix. <http://pqdtopen.proquest.com/#viewpdf?dispub=3455555>
- [25]. Moran, R. J., Martin, R., & Ridley, S. (2024). "It Helped Me Open My Eyes": Incorporating Lived Experience Perspectives in Social Work Education. *Affilia*, 39(1), 78-93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08861099221107387>
- [26]. Nguyen, T., et al. (2021). The role of teacher empowerment in inclusive education: A qualitative study of secondary schools in Vietnam. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Education*, 28(4), 374-389.
- [27]. Oliveira, G. (2021). An exploratory study on the emergency remote education experience of higher education students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13112>
- [28]. O'Connor, J., & McCarty, T. (2022). Teacher support systems for inclusive education: An investigation of secondary school settings. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 26(3), 321-338.
- [29]. Phillips, J. S. (2022). A Phenomenological Study on Teachers' Lived Experience With Self-Efficacy Teaching Face-to-Face Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic. (Doctoral Dissertation). Liberty University. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/3455>
- [30]. Reich, J., Buttner, C. J., Coleman, D., Colwell, R. D., Faruqi, F., & Larke, L. R. (2020). What's Lost, What's Left, What's Next: Lessons Learned from the Lived Experiences of Teachers during the 2020 Novel Corona virus Pandemic. <https://doi.org/10.35542/osf.io/8exp9>
- [31]. Salendab, F. A., & Laguda, J. L. (2023). Learning Purposive Communication: A Personal Narrative Experience of Non-Teacher Education Students. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 4(5), 1682-1696. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.04.05.29>
- [32]. Santos, M. P., Delgado, A. F., & Villanueva, L. R. (2020). Community-based strategies for teacher support in diverse classrooms. *Philippine Journal of Inclusive Education*, 8(1), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.15294/PJIE2020.134589>
- [33]. Sarmiento, J. M. (2017). Teacher development and student achievement: Evidence from the Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Development*, 44(1), 143-161.

- [34]. Sharma, U., Loreman, T., & Forlin, C. (2020). Professional development needs and inclusive practices of teachers. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 20(4), 272–283. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12474>
- [35]. Slee, R. (2019). Belonging in an age of exclusion: The continuing struggle for inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(7–8), 909–922. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1602368>
- [36]. Smith, R., et al. (2020). Professional development and teacher readiness in inclusive education: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(2), 45–58.
- [37]. Stripling, L. E. (2023). Exploring Leadership Support and its Influence on Self-Efficacy: The Lived Experiences of Novice Teachers. (Doctoral Dissertation). Liberty University. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/4997>
- [38]. Syting, C. J. O., Amabao, J. C., Battad, Q. M. C., & Luarez, C. J. Z. A. (2024). The Lived Experiences of Senior High School Teachers in Teaching English and Language Arts during Pandemic Times. *International Journal Corner of Educational Research*, 3(2), 102–109. Retrieved from <https://journal.jcopublishing.com/index.php/ijcer/article/view/236>
- [39]. UNESCO. (2019). Making Inclusion a Reality: UNESCO's Commitment to Inclusive Quality Education for All. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373725>
- [40]. Vagle, M.D. (2025) *Crafting Phenomenological Research*. 2nd Edition, Routledge, New York. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315173474>
- [41]. Wang, T., et al. (2023). Assistive technology and teacher empowerment in inclusive classrooms: A review of current practices and challenges. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 17(1), 72–87.
- [42]. Williams, J., & Parker, D. (2022). Student-centered approaches in inclusive classrooms: Empowering teachers through innovation. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(5), 564–579.