Teachers' Perspectives on the Issues and Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored some issues and challenges encountered by MAPEH teachers in implementing inclusive education at Bagabag National High School, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines. Using purposive sampling, nine teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis generated three major themes: (1) selecting appropriate strategies and reinforcement, (2) recognizing diverse and individualized learning needs, and (3) viewing the teaching of learners with disabilities as a rewarding profession. Findings revealed that most teachers feel unprepared to teach learners with disabilities due to the absence of formal training, limited instructional materials, inadequate facilities, and insufficient stakeholder support. Despite these barriers, teachers demonstrated resilience by adapting strategies and fostering supportive learning environments. The study highlights the need for sustained professional development, improved resources, and policy-driven support to strengthen inclusive education practices. Recommendations include capacity-building programs, adequate funding, and strengthened collaboration among teachers, school leaders, and the Department of Education.

Keywords: inclusive education, instructional challenges, teachers' perspective, learning disabilities, MAPEH teaching

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is recognized globally as a fundamental principle for ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities. It emphasizes the right of every student to participate in regular classrooms, receive individualized support, and benefit from learning experiences that accommodate their unique abilities and needs (UNESCO, 2020; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2019). In the Philippines, this principle is reinforced through **Republic Act No. 11650**, which mandates the establishment of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers across all school districts, municipalities, and cities. The law provides the necessary funding, sets standards, and institutionalizes services to ensure learners with disabilities are not excluded from mainstream education. This legal framework reflects the state's commitment to transitioning from segregated and integrated education systems toward fully inclusive environments where learners with special needs are educated alongside their peers.

Despite the progressive nature of such policies, the implementation of inclusive education in Philippine public schools remains complex and uneven. Schools often encounter challenges related to limited instructional materials, inadequate facilities, insufficient funding, and a lack of human resources specialized in special education (Flores & De Vera, 2022; Macapagal, 2022). Teachers frequently face difficulties in differentiating instruction, providing appropriate reinforcement, and motivating learners with diverse abilities due to insufficient pre-service training and limited opportunities for professional development in inclusive pedagogy (Cagayat & Dagasdas, 2021; De Guzman & Llaneza, 2023). These challenges are compounded by the need to balance the learning requirements of students with disabilities with those of their peers, often resulting in instructional strain and frustration for teachers.

The role of teachers in inclusive education cannot be overstated. Their attitudes, preparedness, and pedagogical competence significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusion, as they are responsible for implementing individualized strategies, assessing student progress, and fostering an equitable classroom environment (Cho & Choi, 2020; Evans, 2020). Moreover, research highlights the importance of teachers' intrinsic motivation and professional fulfillment, which can sustain commitment to inclusive practices even in the face of systemic challenges (Santos & Villanueva, 2021). However, gaps remain in understanding how teachers perceive and navigate these challenges within the context of general education classrooms, especially in schools with limited resources and support systems.

At Bagabag National High School, MAPEH teachers are increasingly expected to accommodate learners with disabilities in regular classrooms, often without specialized training or sufficient instructional resources. Understanding the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and the professional supports they need is essential to improving inclusive education practices. Therefore, this study aims to explore (a) the issues and difficulties experienced by MAPEH teachers in implementing inclusive education and (b) how they navigate these challenges to support learners with disabilities. The insights generated will contribute to the development of targeted professional development initiatives, resource allocation strategies, and policies designed to enhance the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education in Philippine public schools.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Inclusive Education: Concept and Legal Framework

Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating all learners—regardless of their abilities, disabilities, socioeconomic background, or cultural identity—within mainstream classrooms, ensuring equal access to quality education and opportunities for participation (UNESCO, 2020). The fundamental principle behind inclusive education is equity, emphasizing that learners with disabilities have the right to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers while receiving tailored support that addresses their unique learning needs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2019). Inclusion extends beyond mere physical presence in the classroom; it encompasses participation, engagement, and learning outcomes, making it a holistic approach that addresses social, emotional, and cognitive development (Armstrong, 2021).

In the Philippine context, the implementation of inclusive education is reinforced by Republic Act No. 11650, which mandates the establishment of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers in all school districts, municipalities, and cities. The law provides funding, establishes standards, and institutionalizes services for learners with disabilities (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). Despite these legal frameworks, schools often face challenges in translating policies into practice due to resource limitations, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate institutional support (Flores & De Vera, 2022). These gaps underscore the importance of understanding teachers' experiences and perspectives as they serve as the primary implementers of inclusive education programs.

2.2 Teacher Preparedness and Professional Competence

Teachers play a pivotal role in the success of inclusive education. Effective inclusion requires teachers to possess not only content knowledge but also pedagogical competence in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and assessment strategies tailored to learners with diverse needs (Cho & Choi, 2020). Several studies indicate that teachers often feel unprepared to handle learners with disabilities due to limited pre-service training and insufficient opportunities for continuous professional development (Cagayat & Dagasdas, 2021; Serafica et al., 2023).

A study by Macapagal (2022) highlighted that general education teachers often struggle to modify lesson plans or adapt teaching strategies to accommodate students with learning disabilities. Similarly, Aquino et al. (2019) emphasized that teachers require holistic strategies that consider cognitive, emotional, and motivational aspects of learners with disabilities to foster meaningful engagement. Teacher preparedness is further complicated by the diverse profiles of learners with disabilities, including differences in cognitive functioning, communication skills, and socio-emotional development. This necessitates ongoing professional development programs that combine theoretical knowledge with practical classroom strategies.

In the Philippine context, research shows that although many teachers have a general foundation in education, relatively few have formal special education training. This gap affects their ability to identify individual learner needs, implement individualized education plans (IEPs), and employ adaptive teaching methods (Pimentel, 2021; Ognase & Maslang, 2024). Teachers' limited competencies often result in reliance on standard instructional strategies that may not be effective for students with disabilities, which can impede academic progress and social inclusion.

2.3 Challenges in Instructional Strategies and Classroom Management

One of the primary challenges teachers face in inclusive classrooms is the selection of appropriate instructional

strategies and reinforcement methods. Heterogeneous classes require differentiated instruction that accommodates varying learning styles, abilities, and paces. Teachers often report difficulty in designing lessons that address the spectrum of needs in a single classroom (De Guzman & Llaneza, 2023). Motivation and engagement emerge as critical factors for learners with disabilities, yet teachers often lack the skills to implement effective motivational strategies (Agran et al., 2020).

The literature indicates that inclusive classrooms demand flexible teaching approaches, including scaffolded instruction, cooperative learning, and multi-sensory teaching methods (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2019). Teachers must also employ reinforcement strategies that align with individual learning goals. However, research in the Philippine setting has found that many teachers rely on generalized methods, primarily due to limited access to updated teaching materials, assistive technologies, and specialized training (Flores & De Vera, 2022; Macapagal, 2022). This aligns with the study's findings where MAPEH teachers expressed challenges in identifying and applying suitable teaching strategies.

Effective classroom management is another critical component. Managing diverse learners in a single setting can create instructional strain, especially when teachers are required to balance the learning needs of students with disabilities and the academic expectations of the broader class (Cho & Choi, 2020). Studies emphasize that inclusive classrooms necessitate individualized support, frequent formative assessments, and adaptive behavioral management techniques to maintain an optimal learning environment (Evans, 2020).

2.4 Recognizing and Responding to Individual Learner Needs

Understanding the unique needs of learners with disabilities is essential for designing meaningful educational experiences. Individualized assessment and continuous observation allow teachers to tailor instruction, monitor progress, and provide timely interventions (Jones et al., 2017; Evans, 2020). Teachers often find it challenging to identify students' specific needs due to the absence of formal assessment tools and training in interpreting learning profiles.

Parental involvement emerges as a key factor in supporting inclusive education. Research indicates that collaboration between teachers and parents enhances understanding of learners' needs, facilitates home support, and promotes holistic development (Bartolome et al., 2020).

Teachers who effectively engage parents report improved student motivation, participation, and learning outcomes. However, inconsistent parental engagement remains a challenge, particularly in rural or resource-constrained settings, which further complicates teachers' efforts to implement individualized strategies (Flores & De Vera, 2022).

Moreover, recognizing learners' diverse needs is not limited to cognitive or academic considerations; teachers must also account for socio-emotional, behavioral, and physical requirements. Santos and Villanueva (2021) emphasize that inclusive education requires educators to develop empathy, flexibility, and creativity, enabling them to provide responsive instruction that nurtures both academic and personal growth.

2.5 Teachers' Motivation and Professional Fulfillment

Despite the challenges associated with inclusive education, many teachers report a sense of personal and professional fulfillment when working with learners with disabilities. Studies highlight that inclusive teaching can enhance teachers' instructional skills, problem-solving abilities, and professional resilience (Santos & Villanueva, 2021). Teachers often derive intrinsic satisfaction from witnessing students' progress and achievements, fostering a positive cycle of motivation and commitment to inclusive practices.

In the Philippine context, teachers' dedication is often supported by their desire to provide equitable learning opportunities, even in the absence of adequate resources or systemic support (Flores & De Vera, 2022). This intrinsic motivation underscores the importance of teacher well-being and professional recognition in sustaining inclusive education initiatives.

2.6 Gaps in Resources and Stakeholder Support

Resource limitations—including outdated curriculum guides, insufficient instructional materials, lack of assistive devices, and inadequate facilities—pose significant barriers to effective inclusive education (De Guzman & Llaneza, 2023; Maslang et al, 2021). Additionally, the lack of trained personnel, including specialized educators, exacerbates these challenges. Stakeholder support, particularly from school administrators, local government units, and parents, remains inconsistent, affecting program implementation and student outcomes (Bartolome et al., 2020).

Research suggests that multi-level collaboration between teachers, administrators, parents, and policy-makers is essential for sustainable inclusive education (Cho & Choi, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Schools with strong stakeholder engagement report higher success in implementing inclusive practices, including better classroom accommodations, improved teacher preparedness, and increased learner participation.

2.7 Synthesis

The literature demonstrates that while inclusive education is widely endorsed and legally mandated, its implementation in the Philippines faces persistent challenges. Teachers' limited training, insufficient instructional materials, inadequate resources, and inconsistent stakeholder support hinder the effective inclusion of learners with disabilities. At the same time, teachers' dedication, resilience, and intrinsic motivation remain critical enablers of inclusive practices. Addressing these gaps requires targeted professional development, resource allocation, stakeholder collaboration, and systemic support to equip teachers with the skills and tools necessary to provide equitable, responsive, and high-quality education for all learners.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to explore MAPEH teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding inclusive education. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the lived realities of teachers, grounded in their narratives.

3.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Bagabag National High School, Bagabag, Nueva Vizcaya, during the 2024–2025 academic year. The school operates regular classes without dedicated SPED sections, making it an ideal context for examining inclusive education challenges.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

Nine MAPEH teachers—both junior and senior high school—were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criterion was: teachers must have experience teaching learners with disabilities in regular classes.

3.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting 20–40 minutes. An interview guide, developed based on recent literature on inclusive education, was used to ensure systematic data gathering. Interviews were conducted in Filipino to facilitate clearer communication.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, defining themes, and final report writing.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure the protection, privacy, and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the principal of Bagabag National High School, and informed consent was secured from all nine MAPEH teachers who participated in the interviews. Participants were fully briefed on the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study, and were assured that their involvement was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without penalty. To maintain confidentiality, respondents' identities were anonymized using pseudonyms, and all interview data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Furthermore, the study respected the professional and personal boundaries of participants, ensuring that sensitive information regarding teaching practices or challenges was handled with discretion. Ethical guidelines outlined by the Philippine Department of Education and principles of research integrity, including transparency, honesty, and non-maleficence, were strictly followed throughout the study to safeguard the welfare of all participants and uphold the credibility of the research.

4. Results and Discussion

Through thematic analysis of the interview data, three major themes emerged that describe the issues, challenges, and experiences of MAPEH teachers in implementing inclusive education at Bagabag National High School.

4.1 Theme 1: Selecting Appropriate Strategies and Reinforcement

Teachers consistently expressed the difficulty of selecting and applying effective instructional strategies in heterogeneous classrooms, particularly when learners with disabilities are integrated into general education settings. Their responses revealed that while they recognize the importance of differentiated instruction, they struggle to identify suitable approaches tailored to the specific needs of students with disabilities. Ms. M highlighted this challenge:

> *"You have a limited teaching approach when teaching heterogeneous classes that include students with disabilities."* — Ms. M

This sentiment was echoed by several participants who noted a lack of formal training in special education. Most

teachers rely on trial-and-error methods, intuition, or general classroom practices, which may not always accommodate learners requiring specialized support. The absence of explicit guidelines or updated teacher manuals intensifies uncertainty in selecting the most appropriate instructional strategies.

Teachers also emphasized that motivation is a critical element for student engagement and academic success. However, they found it challenging to motivate learners with disabilities without adequate tools, background knowledge, or exposure to evidence-based strategies. Some expressed concern that traditional reinforcement methods may not be effective for learners with developmental or cognitive challenges:

> *"Motivating them is difficult because we don't really know what specific strategy works for each disability."*

These findings align with literature stating that teachers often experience difficulty modifying instruction due to insufficient training in inclusive pedagogy (De Guzman & Llaneza, 2023; Macapagal, 2022). Inclusive settings demand adaptive and responsive instruction, which requires teachers to be knowledgeable about disability types, learning profiles, assistive technologies, and behavioral interventions (Agran et al., 2020).

The lack of training contributes to teachers' feelings of instructional inadequacy. Without a strong foundation in inclusive methods, many default to generalized strategies that may not fully address the needs of students with disabilities. This supports Aquino et al. (2019), who emphasized holistic, learner-centered approaches for diverse student populations, and Nachiappan et al. (2018), who underscored the importance of teacher resourcefulness in designing engaging and responsive activities.

Furthermore, several teachers expressed frustration over the absence of updated curriculum guides and teaching resources, limiting their instructional options. The reliance on outdated or incomplete materials restricts creativity and makes it challenging to construct meaningful learning experiences.

Overall, this theme reflects the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities, where teachers are expected to deliver inclusive instruction without sufficient preparation, training, or material support.

4.2 Theme 2: Recognizing Special Needs of Learners

Another major theme that emerged is the challenge of recognizing and responding to the unique learning needs of students with disabilities. Teachers repeatedly emphasized the emotional, instructional, and professional demands of working with diverse learners in one classroom. Mr. P expressed this difficulty:

> *"It is very difficult to determine their needs… they have particular needs that must be addressed individually."* — Mr. P

Teachers acknowledged that each learner with a disability has a different learning profile, requiring individualized attention, pacing adjustments, and tailored instructional activities. However, due to the absence of formal assessments, limited training, and lack of specialist support, identifying specific needs becomes a significant challenge. Mr. M also shared:

> *"Depending on the demands of our pupils, we must create various activities."* — Mr. M

This indicates that teachers are aware of the importance of differentiated instruction but feel overwhelmed by its implementation. Designing varied activities for students with disabilities, while simultaneously meeting the curricular expectations for regular learners, puts teachers under considerable cognitive and emotional strain.

These findings align with Evans (2020), who argues that effective inclusive education requires continuous assessment, contextualized planning, and flexibility—skills that teachers need to develop through ongoing professional training.

A recurring sub-theme under this category is the importance of parental involvement. Teachers noted that parental support significantly influences student progress:

> *"You must work more. Parents also play a role in helping their children reach their full potential."* — Ms. Y

This supports Bartolome et al. (2020), who assert that meaningful parent–teacher collaboration enhances learning outcomes for students with disabilities. However, teachers reported inconsistent parental cooperation, which further complicates their ability to plan appropriate interventions.

Hence, this theme reveals that teachers recognize the nuances of learner diversity but feel constrained by limited training, lack of assessment tools, insufficient specialist support, and inconsistent stakeholder engagement.

4.3 Theme 3: Teaching Special Learners as a Rewarding Job

Despite the challenges, teachers highlighted a strong sense of fulfillment and intrinsic motivation in working with learners with disabilities. Many expressed joy upon witnessing even small improvements in learners' skills, behavior, or participation. Ms. G articulated this sentiment:

"We must assist them in developing and improving their abilities... We help them manage their learning disabilities." — Ms. G

This response reflects a deep sense of purpose and the belief that teaching goes beyond academic instruction—it involves guiding learners toward independence, confidence, and social participation.

Teachers also emphasized that working with students who have disabilities helps them grow professionally by expanding their patience, creativity, and adaptability. This resonates with Santos and Villanueva (2021), who found that teachers often view inclusive education as an opportunity for personal and professional development, despite its complexities. Another teacher, Ms. Z, described moments of pride when her students successfully participated in school activities:

"I can make impossible things happen, allowing them to join activities despite their disability." — Ms. Z

Her statement reflects the teachers' dedication to ensuring that learners with disabilities experience meaningful inclusion—not just in academics, but also in extracurricular and social activities. This aligns with current educational frameworks that define inclusion as the full participation of all learners in varied learning experiences (UNESCO, 2020).

The emotional satisfaction derived from these experiences appears to compensate, to some extent, for the practical challenges teachers encounter. This theme illustrates that while teachers need more support and training, they retain strong professional commitment and empathy—critical attributes for inclusive education practitioners.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that MAPEH teachers at Bagabag National High School face multiple challenges in implementing inclusive education for learners with disabilities. Teachers reported feeling inadequately prepared due to limited training and exposure to special education strategies, which affects their confidence and instructional effectiveness. Additionally, the study revealed that instructional materials, school facilities, and funding are insufficient to support inclusive learning, creating further barriers for both teachers and learners. General education classrooms often lack the necessary structures and support mechanisms to accommodate students with disabilities, and low stakeholder engagement—including limited parental involvement and community support—hinders the successful implementation of inclusive programs. Despite these challenges, teachers consistently demonstrated commitment, resilience, and a sense of fulfillment in assisting learners with disabilities, highlighting their dedication to fostering equitable and supportive learning environments. Overall, the study underscores the need for systemic improvements, professional capacity building, and strengthened institutional and community support to enhance the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education.

6. Recommendations

To address the identified challenges, the study recommends a multi-faceted approach to strengthen inclusive education. First, professional development programs should be enhanced, offering regular training in inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, classroom accommodations, and behavioral management strategies to equip teachers with the skills and confidence to meet diverse learner needs. Second, schools should be provided with sufficient material and human resources, including updated curriculum guides, assistive devices, and adequate funding, to facilitate effective inclusive teaching. Third, hiring and training qualified personnel with special education expertise should be prioritized, and current teachers should receive in-service training to expand their competencies. Fourth, stakeholder collaboration should be strengthened through active engagement of parents, local government units, and community groups to provide a supportive network for learners and teachers. Finally, the Division of Nueva Vizcaya should establish monitoring and review mechanisms, conducting periodic evaluations to ensure compliance with RA 11650 and assess school-specific needs. Collectively, these measures aim to create an inclusive, responsive, and sustainable educational environment that maximizes opportunities for learners with disabilities.

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