

**Crafting an inclusive education resource for elementary teachers:
Insights from Mandaue City educators**

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all, yet elementary teachers often face challenges due to limited practical resources. This study developed an inclusive education resource based on the experiences of ten teachers from Umapad Elementary School. Using a thematic qualitative research and online interviews, the study explored teachers' challenges, strategies, and classroom experiences. Findings showed that while teachers were committed to inclusive education, they faced difficulties addressing diverse learning needs, implementing differentiated instruction, and accessing training and materials. These challenges often affected their confidence and effectiveness in the classroom environment. To overcome these challenges, they used flexible teaching methods, peer-assisted learning, and collaboration with parents and school stakeholders. These approaches helped improve learner engagement and participation. These insights guided the creation of a practical inclusive education resource to support effective inclusive practices at Umapad Elementary School and similar educational context.

Keywords: Special education, practical inclusive education resource, thematic qualitative research, Mandaue City, Cebu.

Date Submitted: March 11, 2026

Date Accepted: March 18, 2026

Date Published: April 8, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Every child deserves equal opportunities to learn and grow regardless of abilities, backgrounds, or personal circumstances, a principle that underpins the commitment of educators to inclusive education in public elementary schools. Classroom experiences reveal both the challenges and the rewards of addressing diverse learner needs, as many teachers demonstrate strong dedication yet encounter limitations due to the absence of concrete guidance, practical strategies, and locally relevant resources. This disparity between established policies and actual classroom practices has significant implications for the quality of education and the holistic development of learners with special needs. Inclusive education has thus emerged as a global movement that promotes equality, diversity, and access to high quality education for all students. International frameworks such as UNESCO's Education for All guidelines (2020) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0502914>

Recommended citation:

Maglinte, J. A. (2026). Crafting an inclusive education resource for elementary teachers: Insights from Mandaue City educators. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 5 (2), 414-429.
<http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0502914>

Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) emphasize that education is a fundamental human right and that schools must nurture the potential of every learner. The experiences of countries such as Finland and Canada, which have institutionalized inclusive practices through national policies supporting tailored instruction, teacher collaboration, and integration of learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms, demonstrate that inclusion is both a moral obligation and a social imperative aimed at reducing educational inequities.

In the Philippine context, inclusive education is firmly grounded in legal mandates. Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution guarantees every citizen's right to quality education, while Republic Act No. 7277 or the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities and Republic Act No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 reinforce this commitment. Additional guidance is provided through DepEd Orders No. 72, s. 2009 and No. 44, s. 2021, which outline the delivery of educational programs and services for learners with disabilities within the K to 12 system. Despite these frameworks, public elementary schools, particularly in Mandaue City, continue to face persistent challenges in consistently implementing inclusive practices. Teachers manage classrooms composed of learners with diverse needs, including those with learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), visual or hearing impairments, and mild intellectual disabilities. Although many educators have participated in Special Education training, they frequently report that such preparation does not sufficiently equip them with the practical skills and comprehensive knowledge required for effective day to day inclusive instruction. Existing research further indicates that limited teacher capacity, insufficient instructional materials, and restricted access to sustained professional development constrain the translation of inclusive policies into meaningful classroom practices (Buabeng and Ntow, 2021; Dapudong, 2019). While previous studies have examined general attitudes toward inclusion or analyzed policy structures, there remains a scarcity of research that captures the lived experiences, challenges, and professional development needs of public elementary school teachers in Mandaue City. Likewise, there is a notable absence of context specific resources that can guide educators in implementing inclusive strategies suited to their classroom realities.

In response to these gaps, the present study seeks to explore the real world experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education, with particular attention to their challenges, perceptions, and professional development needs. The study aims to develop a comprehensive Inclusive Education Guide that serves as a professional development tool offering evidence based strategies, practical insights, and classroom ready approaches. Through this effort, the research endeavors to bridge the divide between policy and practice by empowering teachers to create learning environments that are inclusive, supportive, and responsive to all learners. Ultimately, the study contributes to both the professional growth of educators and the academic and social development of students with special needs, ensuring that every learner is recognized as capable and valued.

The theoretical foundation of this research is anchored in three complementary frameworks that collectively explain the dynamics of learning, interaction, and professional development in inclusive education. Lev Vygotsky proposes that learning is a socially mediated process shaped by interaction, culture, and language, with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development highlighting the difference between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance. This perspective underscores the importance of scaffolding and differentiated instruction, emphasizing that all learners can succeed when provided with appropriate support, environment, and encouragement. It also highlights the role of collaborative learning through peer interaction and shared experiences, reinforcing the idea that inclusive classrooms function as social communities where diversity becomes a resource for learning. Complementing this view, Albert Bandura explains that individuals acquire behaviors and attitudes through observation, imitation, and modeling. In inclusive classrooms,

teachers serve as models of empathy, patience, and acceptance, shaping learners' attitudes toward diversity. The concept of self-efficacy further emphasizes that teachers who believe in their capacity to influence outcomes are more likely to implement differentiated strategies and manage diverse classrooms effectively. In addition, Malcolm Knowles provides a framework for understanding teacher development, asserting that adults learn best when instruction is self-directed, experience based, and relevant to their professional contexts. This theory supports the need for context specific and responsive professional development that enables educators to address real classroom challenges, collaborate with peers, and engage in continuous learning.

Together, these theoretical perspectives offer a multidimensional lens that integrates learner centered and teacher centered approaches to inclusive education. Vygotsky emphasizes the social nature of learning through interaction and scaffolding, Bandura highlights the reciprocal influence of modeling and observation, and Knowles underscores the importance of ongoing professional growth. These frameworks are further strengthened by local and international legal mandates that institutionalize inclusive education as a right. Republic Act No. 10533 emphasizes accessibility and responsiveness to diverse learner needs, while DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 establishes the policy framework for the Inclusive Education Program. Republic Act No. 11650, s. 2022 affirms the provision of inclusive services for learners with disabilities, and Republic Act No. 9442 reinforces the protection of their right to quality education without discrimination. At the global level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2008) affirms inclusive education as a fundamental human right, aligning national efforts with international commitments. By integrating these theoretical and legal foundations, the study highlights the critical role of teachers as facilitators of learning and advocates for inclusion, with the expectation that its findings will inform the development of contextually relevant programs and policies in public elementary schools in Mandaue City.

Situating the study within both local and global frameworks, including the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, further reinforces that inclusive education is not only a pedagogical approach but also a social and moral responsibility. By capturing the lived experiences of teachers and translating these into practical and context responsive resources, the study aims to bridge theory, policy, and practice. In doing so, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education and supports the creation of classrooms where every learner is valued, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and practices of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education for learners with special needs in the Umapad Elementary School, Division of Mandaue City, during the School Year 2025–2026. By understanding how teachers navigated inclusive classrooms, the study sought to generate meaningful insights that served as the foundation for crafting Inclusive Education Resource. This resource was envisioned to strengthen teachers' inclusive practices and improved the learning outcomes of students with diverse abilities.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do public elementary school teachers describe their lived experiences in teaching learners with special needs within inclusive classroom settings?
2. What instructional strategies, classroom management approaches, and assessment practices do teachers employ to address the diverse learning needs of inclusion learners?

3. What challenges and barriers do teachers and school administrators encounter in implementing inclusive education in public elementary schools?
4. How do teachers collaborate with parents, specialists, and school administrators to promote inclusion and support learners with special needs?
5. What professional development needs and forms of support do teachers identify as essential to enhance their competence, confidence, and readiness in managing inclusive classrooms?
6. How can the insights and lived experiences of public elementary school teachers inform the development of a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource that strengthens inclusive practices and enhances the learning outcomes of learners with special needs in the North District, Division of Mandaue City, during the School Year 2025–2026?
7. Based on the findings of the study, what contextualized Inclusive Education Resource can be developed to support public elementary teachers in Mandaue City?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education for learners with special needs in the North District, Division of Mandaue City, during the School Year 2025 to 2026. The phenomenological design was deemed appropriate as it focused on capturing the essence of teachers' real life experiences, including their perceptions, challenges, and the meanings they assign to inclusive teaching practices. Rather than emphasizing numerical data or measurable outcomes, the study sought to describe and interpret teachers' insights, reflections, and professional journeys as they worked to enhance learning opportunities for learners with special needs. Through this qualitative perspective, the study highlighted teachers' voices by examining how they understand inclusion, adapt instruction, collaborate with colleagues and parents, and respond to diverse learner needs. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of how inclusive education policies are translated into classroom practices and provided a strong foundation for developing a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource grounded in authentic teacher experiences and professional realities.

The methodological flow of the study followed a systematic progression that integrated inputs, processes, and outputs to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis. The study began by examining key inputs, including the demographic profiles of participating teachers such as age, teaching position, years of experience, and training background, in order to contextualize the human resources involved in inclusive education. It also considered teachers' lived experiences and personal narratives, capturing their reflections, challenges, and strategies in addressing learners with diverse abilities. In addition, the school context was examined, including existing inclusive programs, support systems, and available learning resources, to understand how institutional factors either facilitated or constrained inclusive practices. Relevant policies and professional development opportunities were likewise reviewed to identify the structural and systemic support available to teachers. These inputs collectively provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' ability to translate inclusive education policies into effective classroom practices.

The process of the study involved several structured stages to ensure methodological rigor. Prior to data collection, permission and coordination were secured through formal approval from the Schools Division Superintendent and the heads of participating public elementary schools in the North District, Division of Mandaue City, thereby ensuring adherence to institutional protocols and ethical standards. Data were then gathered using open ended qualitative questionnaires administered through Google Forms, allowing teachers

handling learners with special needs to provide detailed and reflective responses in a flexible and accessible manner. Following data collection, responses were systematically organized, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, categories, and emerging themes aligned with the research questions. The final stage involved interpreting these themes to generate meaningful insights into teachers' lived experiences, challenges, strategies, and professional development needs, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education practices in real classroom settings. The output of this process was the development of a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource designed to translate policy into practical strategies, strengthen inclusive teaching practices, promote collaboration among teachers, parents, and administrators, and enhance the academic, engagement, and social emotional outcomes of learners with special needs. The flow of the study demonstrated how teachers' lived experiences and perceptions informed qualitative processes that ultimately led to the creation of this resource.

The study was conducted in Umapad Elementary School located in U.N. Avenue, Barangay Umapad, Mandaue City, with School ID 120003, which is part of the Division of Mandaue City established in 1970 and responsible for supervising both public and private schools in the city. The school is situated in the North District and actively implements inclusive education programs, serving learners with special needs formally identified in the Learner Information System under the category of Inclusion Learners. The research environment was considered appropriate due to its diverse student population representing various socio economic backgrounds and its active engagement in inclusive practices aligned with DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 and the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan. Teachers in this setting regularly engage in inclusive practices such as lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and individualized support, allowing the study to capture authentic experiences related to both successes and challenges, including resource limitations and instructional adaptation. The presence of learners with varying types and levels of disabilities further enabled the exploration of responsive and practical inclusive strategies.

The participants of the study consisted of classroom teachers from Umapad Elementary School who were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in teaching learners with special needs and implementing inclusive education programs. The study included a total of ten participants, representing 100% of the inclusive classroom teachers in the school. This complete inclusion ensured that the data accurately reflected the instructional practices and perspectives within the school, thereby providing a reliable basis for analyzing the study variables in relation to the teaching population.

The study utilized a semi structured interview guide administered through Google Forms as the primary research instrument. The instrument was designed to explore teachers' experiences, instructional strategies, challenges, collaboration practices, and professional development needs related to inclusive education. The use of an open ended format enabled respondents to provide rich and detailed qualitative data suitable for thematic analysis. The online administration allowed participants to respond at their convenience and reflect deeply on their experiences, thereby enhancing the authenticity and depth of responses. Although the use of Google Forms limited opportunities for real time probing, this limitation was addressed through optional follow up interviews and clarifications conducted via email, allowing the researcher to gather additional insights and ensure data richness. The collected responses served as the foundation for developing the contextualized Inclusive Education Resource, ensuring that it was grounded in the authentic voices and experiences of teachers.

Data gathering was conducted through a structured three stage process comprising the preliminary, data gathering, and post data gathering stages. During the preliminary stage, the research title was approved by the Dean of the College of Education of Cebu Technological

University Main Campus, followed by the submission of a formal request to the Schools Division Superintendent of Mandaue City for authorization to conduct the study. Upon approval, coordination with school heads was undertaken to identify qualified respondents, who were purposively selected based on their experience in inclusive education. Participants were then oriented through an online meeting conducted via social media platforms, where the purpose of the study, procedures, confidentiality measures, and participant rights were explained. They were assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 or Republic Act No. 10173 and established ethical guidelines. During the data gathering stage, open ended questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms, enabling respondents to provide detailed accounts of their experiences, strategies, and challenges, as well as their perceptions of professional development needs. In the post data gathering stage, responses were reviewed, organized, and coded to identify patterns and themes, followed by the application of thematic analysis. Letters of gratitude were subsequently sent to the Schools Division Superintendent and participating school heads to acknowledge their support.

The study employed thematic analysis following the six phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure a systematic and rigorous examination of qualitative data. Responses were organized and transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy. The analysis began with familiarization, where the researcher carefully read and reread the data to gain a comprehensive understanding. This was followed by the generation of initial codes through the identification of significant statements related to inclusive education. Codes were then grouped into potential themes that captured shared experiences, challenges, and strategies among participants. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research questions, after which they were clearly defined and named to reflect their essence. The final phase involved producing a narrative report supported by direct participant quotations, ensuring that authentic voices were represented. Manual color coding and categorization using Microsoft Excel were employed to organize and trace patterns in the data systematically. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged from additional responses, indicating that sufficient data had been collected to address the study objectives comprehensively. An interpretive guide was used to classify themes based on frequency of occurrence, wherein highly evident themes appeared in more than 75% of responses, moderately evident themes appeared in approximately 50% to 75%, and minimally evident themes appeared in less than 50%, providing a structured basis for interpreting the prevalence and significance of findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher applied the criteria proposed by Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985), encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through member checking, where summarized interpretations were shared with selected participants to validate the accuracy of the findings. Transferability was achieved through the use of thick descriptive narratives that allow readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail documenting the research process, coding decisions, and theme development. Confirmability was strengthened by minimizing researcher bias through reflective journaling and grounding interpretations solely on participants' responses. These measures enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings by ensuring that they accurately represented participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Formal approval was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of Mandaue City and the respective school heads prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose, procedures, and potential benefits of the study, as well as their rights, including voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participant information and ensuring that data

were used solely for academic purposes. All digital responses were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. The study complied with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 or Republic Act No. 10173 and adhered to the ethical research standards of Cebu Technological University Main Campus, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of this study are grounded in the qualitative data gathered from ten (10) purposively selected inclusive classroom teachers from Umamad Elementary School in the North District, Division of Mandaue City. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study employed a semi structured interview guide administered through Google Forms to capture the participants' lived experiences, instructional practices, challenges, collaboration efforts, professional development needs, and recommendations related to inclusive education. The responses were analyzed through thematic analysis following the procedures previously described in the methodology, allowing the identification of recurring themes and patterns directly aligned with the objectives of the study. In this chapter, the findings are interpreted in direct relation to the research questions, specifically those concerning how teachers describe their lived experiences in teaching learners with special needs, what instructional strategies, classroom management approaches, and assessment practices they use, what challenges and barriers they encounter, how they collaborate with parents, specialists, and administrators, what professional development needs they identify, and how their insights can inform the development of a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource. The discussion is therefore firmly anchored in the narratives of the participants and seeks to illuminate the actual conditions of inclusive teaching in a Philippine public elementary school context.

The first major finding of the study reveals that teachers' lived experiences in inclusive education are characterized by both fulfillment and difficulty. The participants consistently described inclusive teaching as a meaningful professional commitment that requires empathy, patience, fairness, and compassion, while also demanding constant adjustment, creativity, and emotional resilience. Their responses show that inclusive education is not merely viewed as a technical strategy for instruction but as a commitment to ensuring that every child is given the opportunity to participate and succeed regardless of disability, background, or learning pace. Participant 6 shared that teaching learners with special needs deepened her sense of empathy and reinforced her belief that every child has the potential to learn and succeed when provided with appropriate support and encouragement. This perspective was echoed by Participant 1, who stated that embracing learners with disabilities presents challenges, yet it is a deeply rewarding experience. These narratives indicate that teachers perceive inclusion not simply as a policy requirement but as a moral responsibility rooted in the belief that all children are capable of growth when appropriately supported.

The experiences of the participants also show that teachers are continually engaged in practical efforts to make learning accessible and meaningful for learners with special needs. Participant 7 explained that support is provided through clear instructions, simplified tasks, additional time to complete activities, visual aids, guided practice, and positive reinforcement, as well as communication with parents and close observation of learners to better understand their individual needs. Similarly, Participant 8 reported regularly using positive reinforcement, encouragement, and visual supports such as pictures to enhance learners' understanding. At the same time, Participant 2 acknowledged the complexity of the work, noting that it is a significant challenge because the teacher must carefully address the learner's individual needs in order to

help the learner keep pace with the lessons. These accounts show that inclusive teaching involves a daily balancing of learner support, instructional adjustment, and classroom realities. Teachers observed that when learners with special needs receive appropriate support such as simplified instruction, peer assistance, and positive reinforcement, they demonstrate meaningful academic and social progress. However, the participants also noted that some learners encounter adjustment difficulties, especially when peers are unaware of their conditions or when lesson demands exceed their present capacities. This suggests that effective inclusion requires not only teacher effort but also broader awareness, stronger support systems, and classroom environments that promote belonging and acceptance.

These findings are well supported by major educational theories and prior studies. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, especially the Zone of Proximal Development, provides a strong explanation for why teachers simplify tasks, provide guided practice, and scaffold instruction, since these strategies enable learners to perform tasks they cannot yet complete independently. The Universal Design for Learning framework likewise supports the participants' use of visual aids, multiple forms of access to content, and additional time so that barriers to learning are reduced for students with diverse needs. The teachers' reliance on positive reinforcement aligns with Skinner's Behaviorist Theory, which emphasizes the role of encouragement and reinforcement in strengthening desired behaviors, particularly for learners who need additional motivation and emotional support. The empathy and patience described by the participants also resonate with Carl Rogers' Humanistic Theory, which underscores the importance of acceptance, understanding, and a supportive environment in promoting learner development. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction model, which advocates flexible and responsive teaching based on learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Collectively, these perspectives affirm that inclusive education is most effective when teachers combine emotional sensitivity with adaptive and learner centered practices.

The second major theme demonstrates that teachers in inclusive classrooms employ varied instructional strategies, classroom management approaches, and assessment practices to address learner diversity. The findings show that inclusive teaching goes beyond content delivery and instead requires continuous adaptation of lessons, classroom procedures, and evaluation methods. Participant 10 stated that learning instructions and assessment tasks were adapted by simplifying them from complex to more manageable forms. This demonstrates the participants' recognition that learners with special needs require accessible pathways to engage with the curriculum. Participant 4 described managing a classroom with diverse abilities by establishing clear routines, implementing differentiated activities, and grouping learners strategically to provide support. The participant also used visual reminders, simple and clear instructions, and additional guidance for learners who needed it, while fostering teamwork and mutual respect so that each learner felt valued and included in a positive and well organized environment. In a similar manner, Participant 9 reported setting clear rules, consistent routines, and fair expectations for all learners, organizing learners into groups to promote peer support, modifying tasks according to individual abilities, and providing extra assistance when needed, while using positive reinforcement to make every learner feel appreciated in the classroom.

The participants also demonstrated flexibility in assessment practices to ensure fair and meaningful evaluation of learner progress. Participant 3 explained that progress was assessed through observations, checklists, short activities, and one on one assessments, with tasks modified by simplifying instructions, breaking activities into smaller steps, allowing additional time, and using visual or oral responses instead of written work. Participant 5 further noted the development of monitoring tools and individualized development checklists based on each learner's current status to better address specific learning needs. These findings indicate that teachers are making considerable efforts to ensure that assessment is responsive to learner

diversity rather than rigidly standardized. The combination of differentiated instruction, scaffolded tasks, visual supports, hands on activities, one on one guidance, flexible grouping, consistent routines, and modified assessments reflects a learner centered philosophy that attempts to make learning accessible, supportive, and meaningful for all students.

These classroom practices are strongly supported by both theory and research. Tomlinson (2017) affirms that differentiated instruction is essential in responding to varied learner strengths, challenges, and readiness levels. The participants' use of visual aids, demonstrations, and scaffolded instruction also aligns with inclusive approaches that emphasize multiple pathways to learning. Florian (2014) notes that structured and positive classroom environments promote participation and social emotional development among learners with disabilities, which is consistent with the participants' efforts to create organized, respectful, and supportive classrooms. The findings are also supported by recent studies indicating that inclusive classroom management practices emphasizing positive reinforcement, student involvement, and clear behavioral expectations significantly enhance engagement and foster meaningful learning in diverse settings (Intong et al., 2024; Pulos et al., 2024). In relation to assessment, the use of observations, checklists, summative assessments, and individualized evaluation is consistent with the Universal Design for Learning principles articulated by CAST (2018), which support accommodations such as simplified instructions, task chunking, extended time, and alternative response formats. At the same time, the participants' narratives show that although these strategies are effective, they require substantial time, effort, and resources, thereby revealing the practical constraints under which teachers implement inclusive education.

The third theme centers on the challenges and barriers encountered in implementing inclusive education in Philippine public elementary schools. The responses clearly indicate that large class sizes, diverse learner needs, varying learning speeds, behavioral and emotional concerns, limited instructional materials, and time constraints make inclusive teaching highly demanding. Participant 1 emphasized that large class sizes and varied learner composition make it challenging to provide individualized support to all students. Participant 7 similarly stated that learners progress at different learning speeds and that limited instructional materials and large class sizes make it difficult to provide sufficient individual attention. This participant also stressed that some learners have behavioral or emotional needs that require greater patience and specialized strategies. These findings suggest that while teachers are committed to inclusion, the realities of classroom diversity and resource limitations can significantly hinder their capacity to respond fully to each learner's needs.

The participants also acknowledged that support systems exist, although these are sometimes insufficient relative to the complexity of the challenges they face. Participant 3 stated that the school provides instructional materials for learners with special needs and that the Department of Education offers access to training programs that support Special Needs Education. Participant 9 reported that school administrators support inclusive teaching by providing training opportunities, resources, and instructional guidance, as well as by promoting collaboration among teachers. However, the same participant also noted that limited resources, large class sizes, and rigid schedules make it difficult to provide individualized attention to all learners, even when administrative support is present. Participant 5 added that through observing experienced teachers, several strategies have been learned to address inclusive education challenges, including differentiated instruction, visual and hands on activities, and lesson adaptation for diverse learning styles and abilities. These accounts suggest that although policies such as RA 10533, RA 11650, and the relevant DepEd Orders provide a legal and administrative framework for inclusion, the translation of these mandates into sustained classroom practice remains constrained by structural and contextual limitations.

The discussion of these barriers is supported by the broader literature on inclusive education. The participants' experiences reflect findings from recent studies showing that differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and institutional support are essential but often challenged by resource limitations and complex classroom conditions. Research cited in the manuscript indicates that despite persistent difficulties, the use of adaptive strategies significantly enhances learners' engagement and academic outcomes in inclusive settings (Pozas et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023; Sharma & Sokal, 2024). Thus, the current findings reinforce the conclusion that inclusive education cannot depend solely on individual teacher effort. Rather, it requires systemic support in the form of adequate materials, manageable class sizes, sustained professional development, and responsive administrative structures. The participants' narratives make clear that teacher commitment is strong, but its effectiveness depends on institutional conditions that enable teachers to operationalize inclusive practices more fully.

The fourth theme highlights the critical role of collaboration with stakeholders in supporting inclusive education. The teachers consistently emphasized that open and consistent communication with parents, consultation with specialists, and coordination with school administrators are essential for understanding and responding to learners' needs. Participant 6 explained that regular communication with parents regarding a child's progress and specific needs, consultation with specialists such as special education teachers or therapists, and coordination with school administrators for support or resources help ensure that learners receive consistent guidance and encouragement for success. Participant 4 similarly reported maintaining continuous communication with parents by providing feedback on learner progress and using a dedicated notebook to document activities and interventions. These responses indicate that collaboration serves as a practical mechanism for aligning support across home and school contexts.

The findings also demonstrate that collaboration contributes directly to improved learner outcomes and better instructional decision making. Participant 2 described a case in which effective collaboration among the classroom teacher, a SPED specialist, and the learner's parents led to significant improvement in academic performance after reading comprehension difficulties were identified. Through consultation, the teacher and SPED specialist developed modified reading activities and visual supports tailored to the learner's needs. Participant 10 reported maintaining open communication with parents by providing weekly updates and seeking information about strategies used at home. Participant 7 likewise noted consulting a colleague with specialization in special education to determine whether designed activities were appropriate for the learner. These narratives reveal that collaboration is not merely an ideal principle but an active and necessary dimension of inclusive practice that enhances instructional responsiveness, learner support, and shared accountability among stakeholders.

The importance of these collaborative efforts is strongly reinforced by the literature cited in the manuscript. Epstein's School Family Partnership Theory (2018) emphasizes that sustained communication between teachers and parents through updates, meetings, and shared monitoring strengthens learner progress, which is directly reflected in the participants' use of notebooks, feedback systems, and weekly communication. Friend and Cook (2017) further highlight that collaboration with colleagues and specialists improves instructional decision making, consistent with the teachers' accounts of consulting specialists and seeking verification of learning activities. Sharma and Sokal (2015) also show that administrative support through training and resources improves teachers' capacity to implement inclusive strategies effectively. In the Philippine context, Dizon and Sari (2020) affirm that coordinated teamwork among school stakeholders improves learner confidence, engagement, and academic outcomes. The present findings therefore substantiate the view that collaboration is a central

pillar of effective inclusive education and that stakeholder partnership is indispensable in addressing the complexity of learner diversity.

The fifth theme concerns the professional development needs of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The participants emphasized that effective inclusion requires specialized competencies, particularly in differentiated instruction, behavior management, assistive tools, disability specific interventions, and assessment accommodations. Participant 7 stated that staying informed involves attending workshops, reading educational resources, and collaborating with colleagues on inclusive teaching practices. Participant 2 similarly shared that best practices for teaching learners with special needs are maintained through continuous professional learning opportunities and ongoing connections with professionals in the field. These responses indicate that teachers recognize professional growth as essential to sustaining and improving their effectiveness in inclusive classrooms.

Other participants articulated more specific areas where professional development is needed. Participant 5 stated active participation in webinars, workshops, and seminars to learn from experts and observe practical classroom strategies, while also collaborating with experienced inclusion teachers to exchange ideas and gain insight from real life experiences. Participant 9 explained that training in differentiated instruction, behavior management, and the use of assistive tools would improve teaching effectiveness, and that participation in inclusive education training and access to relevant resources would increase confidence in managing diverse learners. Participant 1 also stressed that professional development should emphasize practical strategies, hands on experiences, and collaborative learning, with particular benefit expected from training on differentiated instruction, behavior management, and assessment accommodations for learners with special needs. These statements show that teachers do not simply need general awareness of inclusion. Rather, they need context specific, practice oriented, and sustained professional development that directly addresses classroom realities.

These findings are highly consistent with the literature cited in the manuscript. Florian and Black Hawkins (2019) note that targeted training improves teachers' ability to respond to learner diversity, while Tomlinson (2017) highlights the value of professional learning related to differentiation. Darling Hammond et al. (2020) further affirm that continuous and collaborative professional development enhances instructional practice, particularly when it is embedded in real teaching contexts. Philippine studies such as Alvarez (2021) and reports from SEAMEO INNOTECH likewise demonstrate that teachers who actively engage in trainings and professional communities become more confident and effective in implementing inclusive education. The present study therefore confirms that teacher readiness for inclusion depends not only on personal commitment but also on access to meaningful and sustained opportunities for learning, reflection, and professional exchange.

The sixth and final theme focuses on recommendations for the development of an Inclusive Education Resource. The participants consistently identified the need for clear guidance, structured strategies, resource provision, ongoing teacher training, and collaborative mechanisms that can strengthen inclusive practices in classrooms. Participant 8 emphasized that ongoing support from school administration and the availability of necessary materials are essential for effective inclusive classrooms. Participant 1 recommended regular teacher training on inclusive strategies, access to learning materials and assistive tools, strong collaboration with parents and specialists, and the fostering of a supportive school culture that values every learner. These recommendations reveal that teachers view inclusive education as a shared institutional responsibility requiring coordinated support rather than isolated individual effort.

Additional responses further clarify the kind of resource that would be most useful. Participant 5 suggested regular professional development focused on differentiated instruction, assessment accommodations, and classroom management strategies for learners with special needs. Participant 7 highlighted the importance of sharing insights on common challenges and effective strategies such as lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment modifications so that teachers can better support all learners, build confidence, and improve classroom outcomes. Participant 3 also stressed that practical strategies and solutions derived from real classroom experiences can help teachers support diverse learners more effectively and enhance learning outcomes. Taken together, these responses indicate that the proposed Inclusive Education Resource should be grounded in actual classroom realities and should provide practical, accessible, and contextually relevant guidance that teachers can immediately apply in their daily work.

The literature cited in the manuscript strongly supports these recommendations. Studies by Florian and Black Hawkins (2011), Ainscow (2020), UNESCO (2020), and relevant DepEd Inclusive Education Orders affirm that successful inclusive education depends on teacher preparation, access to appropriate resources, collaborative support, and practical classroom strategies. The participants' recommendations therefore provide a solid empirical basis for the development of a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource that can serve as a guide for improving inclusive teaching in Philippine public elementary schools. More importantly, these findings show that teachers themselves possess valuable experiential knowledge that can inform the design of meaningful professional support tools. By transforming their lived experiences into structured guidance, the proposed resource can help bridge the persistent gap between policy and practice in inclusive education.

Overall, the findings of the study provide a coherent and deeply contextualized understanding of inclusive education as experienced by ten (10) public elementary school teachers in Umapad Elementary School. Grounded in phenomenological inquiry and thematic analysis of data gathered through a semi structured interview guide administered via Google Forms, the results show that inclusive teaching is simultaneously meaningful and demanding, requiring empathy, adaptability, collaboration, and sustained professional growth. The teachers described lived experiences marked by both fulfillment and challenge, reported the use of differentiated instructional strategies, structured classroom management, and flexible assessment practices, identified major barriers such as large class sizes and limited resources, emphasized the importance of collaboration with parents, specialists, and administrators, and articulated clear professional development needs and resource recommendations. These findings directly address the objectives of the study and make a significant contribution to the understanding of inclusive education in a public elementary school context in the Philippines. They also provide a strong empirical foundation for the development of a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource that is responsive to teachers' actual needs and realities. In doing so, the chapter establishes a clear basis for the next section of the manuscript, particularly the formulation of conclusions, implications, and recommendations for strengthening inclusive education policy and practice.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education for learners with special needs in Umapad Elementary School, Division of Mandaue City, during School Year 2025-2026. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study captured teachers' experiences, instructional practices, challenges, collaboration efforts, and professional development needs through semi-structured interviews administered via Google Forms to teachers directly handling inclusion

learners. The data gathered provided a clear and grounded understanding of how inclusive education is practiced in a public elementary school setting and served as the basis for the development of a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource. The findings showed that inclusive education is experienced by teachers as both deeply meaningful and highly demanding. Teachers expressed fulfillment in supporting learners with special needs and in witnessing their progress, yet they also reported the persistent realities of increased workload, emotional strain, large class sizes, limited instructional materials, time constraints, insufficient specialized training, and the complexity of addressing diverse academic, behavioral, and developmental needs within one classroom environment.

The study further revealed that, despite these challenges, teachers actively employ a range of adaptive and learner-centered practices to make inclusive education possible in their classrooms. These include differentiated instruction, simplified tasks, visual aids, positive reinforcement, flexible classroom management strategies, and modified assessment practices such as observations, checklists, and alternative formats that allow fairer and more responsive evaluation of learner progress. Teachers also demonstrated commitment through structured yet flexible routines, peer support mechanisms, and supportive classroom environments that promote both academic participation and social-emotional development. These findings indicate that inclusive education is not implemented merely through policy compliance but through the daily initiative, empathy, patience, and professional commitment of teachers who work continuously to adjust instruction and create meaningful learning opportunities for all learners.

Equally important, the study established that collaboration with parents, school administrators, colleagues, and specialists is a significant factor in the effective implementation of inclusive education. Open communication, shared monitoring of learner progress, and administrative support were found to contribute positively to instructional effectiveness and learner support, although the findings also showed that inconsistencies in collaboration and limited resources continue to constrain practice. In addition, the study highlighted a strong need for continuous, practical, and context-specific professional development to improve teachers' competence and confidence in managing inclusive classrooms. The findings therefore underscore that inclusive education remains highly teacher-driven and resource-dependent, and that stronger support systems are necessary if schools are to fully realize the intent of inclusive education policies in actual classroom settings.

Taken together, these findings lead to the conclusion that the successful implementation of inclusive education in public elementary schools depends largely on how effectively inclusive education policies are translated into practical, classroom-based realities. The experiences of teachers in Umapad Elementary School affirm that inclusive education is achievable when appropriate instructional strategies, flexible assessment practices, supportive classroom management, and sustained stakeholder collaboration are present. At the same time, the study makes clear that these efforts must be reinforced by sufficient instructional resources, institutional support, and specialized training so that teachers are not left to shoulder the demands of inclusion alone. In this regard, the development of a contextualized Inclusive Education Resource grounded in teachers' lived experiences emerges as an essential response to the gap between policy and practice. Such a resource is necessary not only to provide practical guidance but also to strengthen the overall implementation of inclusive education in public elementary schools.

In view of these conclusions, the study affirms the value of a Contextualized Inclusive Education Resource that is firmly anchored in the realities of teachers' classroom experiences and aligned with the theoretical foundations of differentiated instruction, social constructivism, and inclusive pedagogy. A resource of this kind should offer practical strategies in curriculum

adaptation, teaching approaches, classroom management, parental engagement, professional development, and school support, thereby translating theoretical principles and policy mandates into actionable classroom practices. By doing so, it can help educators address diverse learner needs more effectively, foster both academic and social-emotional growth, and contribute to a more responsive and sustainable implementation of inclusive education in public elementary schools. Ultimately, the study affirms that strengthening inclusive education requires not only teacher commitment but also context-based guidance, collaborative support, and a sustained institutional effort to ensure that every learner is meaningfully included and supported in the school environment.

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