

Lived experiences of inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges

Janette A. Roble, MAEd-SpEd*

Rivermont Schools, Northern Neck, 414 Main St., Warsaw, Virginia, USA, 22572

Cebu Technological University – Main Campus, Corner R. Palma St., Cebu City, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of 15 inclusive teachers at Liloan Central Elementary School during the 2025–2026 school year, focusing specifically on how they manage learners with behavioral challenges in general education settings. It examined four core areas: the strategies teachers use to address behavioral concerns, the difficulties they encounter in practice, the coping mechanisms they rely on, and the formal and informal support systems available to them. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design and guided by Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework for thematic analysis, data were gathered through one-on-one in-depth interviews. All responses were transcribed verbatim, coded line-by-line, and grouped into coherent themes that reflected the teachers’ firsthand classroom realities. The results revealed that teachers manage behavioral challenges through positive reinforcement, consistent classroom rules and routines, gentle verbal redirection, collaboration with fellow educators and specialists, and regular engagement with parents and school administrators. However, they also face significant hurdles: frequent classroom disruptions, heavy emotional and workload-related stress, and limited access to specialized training and learning resources. To adapt, teachers practice structured time management, engage in personal stress-relief activities, and turn to colleagues for emotional and practical support. The findings also highlighted that strong backing from school leaders, guidance counselors, and families is critical for consistent and effective behavior management. Based on these outcomes, the study concludes that inclusive teachers require targeted professional development, enhanced institutional support, and structured learning opportunities. A Behavior and Classroom Management Training Plan is proposed to strengthen their instructional skills, reduce burnout, and foster more inclusive, supportive learning environments for all learners.

Keywords: Special education, Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework, classroom management, inclusive teachers, Liloan Central Elementary School, phenomenological design.

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*Corresponding author / Email: janzroble40@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

An inclusive classroom welcomes all learners with different disabilities. Under different laws, Republic Act No. 7277, known as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (1992), and Republic Act No. 11650 or the Inclusive Education Act (2022) both emphasize the right to be acknowledged in regular schools and to receive equal opportunities in the classroom. This is another challenge for receiving teachers; aside from teaching academic content, they would also need to ensure they can manage and give support to the different behaviors of their learners. According to De Leon et al. (2024), receiving teachers are not yet fully prepared to handle inclusive classrooms. They have limited knowledge that makes them doubt their effectiveness in teaching learners with learning needs. Across different countries, behavior problems are nothing new. This is always a challenge in every classroom. In the United States, 58% of teachers encounter behavioral issues resulting in delayed teaching and learning (Lin et al., 2024). This situation is similar in Germany, where teachers encountered aggression (Robert Bosch Stiftung, 2023). About 70,000 Russian teachers also agreed that the classroom environment is mainly the reason why there is aggressive behavior in the classroom (Учительская газета, 2021).

In some parts of Asia, inclusive teachers face different levels of difficulties in addressing behavioral problems. Teachers learned to adjust classroom practices to be more engaging to their learners and, most importantly, work closely with their learners' parents (Patnaik & Subban, 2023). In Indonesia, one main distraction in an inclusive classroom is the behavior of other learners with disabilities. These learners often do not recognize classroom rules and have always been initiating fights (Kuswardani & Paramita, 2023). Also in Malaysia, an inclusive classroom does not always bring a positive attitude among teachers. Most often, teachers find it very challenging, especially with time constraints, work demands, and the absence of parental support (Ling & San, 2025). These scenarios prove that in different parts of the world, inclusive teachers face the most common problems, which are the behaviors of those learners with disabilities who are merged with the regular learners.

Similarly, in the Philippines, managing behavioral challenges in an inclusive classroom is also a struggle. As much as teachers want to establish positive behavior for their learners, they still struggle to balance strict discipline. (Espinal & Paglinawan, 2025). In Cavite City, to prevent disruptions, teachers impose collaborative learning. Regular students are paired with those with learning disabilities and help each other on academic tasks (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025). These studies manifest how inclusive teachers learn to adjust despite limited time and training.

In Liloan Central Elementary School, inclusive teachers find themselves burdened in dealing with learners' behaviors. They noticed that most learners who are tagged with disabilities in their classroom exhibit very challenging behaviors that interrupt classroom discussion. Parents of regular learners raised several complaints in the prefect of discipline office (POD), citing their child's stress over learners who misbehave in the classroom. Teachers also raised the same complaint, especially for learners who are really creating chaos in the classroom, resulting in lesson delays. LCES inclusive teachers confirmed that their training in inclusive classrooms does not exactly include managing behavioral challenges.

Looking closely at the available research online and other research journals, when it comes to behavioral challenges, much research focuses on the lived experiences of primary and secondary teachers handling behavioral problems, but none have explored how inclusive teachers manage learners with behavioral challenges within an inclusive classroom. Therefore, there is a dearth of knowledge in this area to be explored. The lived experiences of these inclusive teachers need to be included, as this will give voice to those inclusive teachers who struggle in silence.

Statement of the problem

This study was conducted to determine the strategies used by inclusive teachers in managing behavioral concerns, the challenges faced by inclusive teachers in their teaching, the coping mechanisms used by inclusive teachers, and the support systems (formal and informal) of inclusive teachers in Liloan Central Elementary School, Poblacion, Liloan, Cebu, Philippines for the school year 2025–2026. It aimed to find out the current gaps in terms of the strategies utilized in dealing with behavioral issues, challenges encountered in practice, coping methods, and support systems available to inclusive teachers in the setting of Liloan Central Elementary School. A behavior and classroom management training plan was provided based on the findings of the study to improve the engagement and effectiveness of inclusive teachers in inclusive classrooms, therefore leading to enhanced work performance and delivery of excellent education.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a phenomenological qualitative research approach to understand the lived experiences of inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges. This design was selected because it allowed the researcher to explore teachers' actual classroom experiences, including the strategies they applied, the difficulties they encountered, the ways they managed stress, and the support systems they accessed while addressing behavioral concerns. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to freely share their experiences, perspectives, and practices. The collected responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved becoming familiar with the interview data, identifying significant statements, developing codes, organizing related ideas into themes, and interpreting the findings based on the participants' shared experiences. The emerging themes provided a deeper understanding of the realities faced by inclusive teachers and served as the foundation for the proposed behavior and classroom management training plan. This study focused solely on inclusive teachers who directly handled learners with behavioral challenges in inclusive classroom settings. Parents and other stakeholders were not included, as the study specifically aimed to capture the teachers' perspectives and experiences.

The study was conducted in Liloan Central Elementary School, Barangay Poblacion, Liloan, Cebu, Philippines, a public elementary school which advocates the principles of inclusive education for various learners including students with special needs. The school was selected as the research site because of reports from the prefect of discipline and the school's Individual Development Plan (IDP) which pointed to behavior management as an area needing development. Thus, the LCES provided a suitable framework for investigating the tactics, problems, coping mechanisms, and support systems of inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioural challenges.

The participants of the study were fifteen (15) inclusive teachers from Liloan Central Elementary School who had direct experience in managing learners with behavioral challenges. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants based on the following criteria: actively teaching in an inclusive classroom, having at least one year of teaching experience, and having addressed learners with behavioral difficulties. Teachers lacking inclusive teaching experience, those not actively teaching, or those reluctant to engage were excluded. For the purposes of confidentiality, the participants were given codes (e.g. Inclusive

Teacher 1, Inclusive Teacher 2, etc.) instead of their real identities. The participants were described according to grade level handled and years of teaching experience to present various opinions. The sample size of fifteen participants was appropriate for a phenomenological study, which allowed for thorough investigation of experiences and sufficient data saturation in relation to teachers' strategies, challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems in dealing with behavioral concerns.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide as the primary instrument to collect data for this study. This guide was designed to explore the lived experiences of inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges. The interview focused on the following key areas: the management strategies used by inclusive teachers, the challenges they experienced, their coping mechanisms and well-being maintenance, and their utilization of support systems and resources in managing learners with behavioral challenges. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask consistent questions while still providing flexibility to probe further into the participants' responses, ensuring rich and in-depth data suitable for analysis using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. Furthermore, the interview guide was validated by a panel of experts, the research adviser, and representatives from the Department of Education to ensure its clarity, relevance, and appropriateness in gathering accurate and meaningful data for the study.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Graduate School, Cebu Technological University. All participants were fully informed about the purpose, objectives, and nature of the study before their participation. Informed consent was obtained through a signed consent form, which clearly outlined their voluntary participation. Participants were assured that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any form of penalty or consequence. Since participation was voluntary, their identities remained confidential, and the collected data were used only for research purposes. The confidentiality and privacy of all participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Personal information and collected data were treated as highly confidential and were stored securely by the researcher. Only the researcher had access to the raw data, which were used solely for academic purposes. Identifying details were removed or coded to protect participant anonymity in all reports and publications.

The study employed Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006) to analyze the lived experiences of inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges. The process was carried out as follows: The researcher first familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading all interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences, particularly in relation to the management strategies they used, the challenges they encountered, their coping mechanisms and well-being maintenance, and their utilization of support systems and resources. Next, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful statements from the transcripts. These codes reflected important aspects of the participants' experiences in managing learners with behavioral challenges. The researcher then organized the codes into potential themes by grouping similar ideas together. These themes represented recurring patterns in how inclusive teachers managed behavioral challenges, the difficulties they faced, how they coped with stress and maintained well-being, and how they utilized available support systems and resources. Afterward, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and were consistent with the participants' narratives. This step ensured clarity, coherence, and relevance of the emerging themes. The themes were then clearly defined and named based on the main variables of the study, namely management strategies, challenges experienced, coping mechanisms and well-being maintenance, and utilization of support systems and resources. Finally, the findings were written and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of

inclusive teachers and to support the development of a proposed behavior and classroom management training plan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the phenomenological study conducted among inclusive teachers at Liloan Central Elementary School. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006). The analysis involved familiarization, coding, and theme development to identify patterns related to teachers' strategies, challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems in managing behavioral challenges. The emerging themes provided insights that served as the basis for the proposed behavior and classroom management training plan.

Management strategies used by inclusive teachers

The study's first objective was to examine the strategies used by inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges. Using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006), the transcripts were coded and organized into patterns, resulting in three emerging sub-themes: positive reinforcement, setting clear rules and routines, and verbal reminders and redirection. Participants shared that they adapted their strategies based on learners' individual needs, behaviors, and neurodevelopmental characteristics, reflecting the use of personalized interventions aligned with Individualized Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).

The first sub-theme is "Positive Reinforcement" refers to the consistent use of rewards such as chips, points, stars, and verbal praise to encourage desirable behavior—even during classroom disruptions, noisy transitions, or group activity challenges—by acknowledging small improvements to motivate learners toward better conduct. Teachers shared that they select and evaluate this strategy by observing each learner's response patterns: for example, using tangible rewards for those who thrive on immediate feedback, and shifting to private praise for neurodivergent learners who find public recognition overwhelming. They also apply core Individualized Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) principles by linking rewards to specific, personalized behavioral goals. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

"For me, ma'am, positive reinforcement should never be absent. There are times when the class becomes very noisy, especially during transitions from one activity to another, but even then I still give positive reinforcement. When learners behave or follow instructions, I give them chips or points that they can accumulate. I really observe that even in difficult situations, their misbehavior lessens because they want to earn rewards." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P1

"In my class, ma'am, there are learners who sometimes suddenly misbehave, like running around or talking while class is ongoing. But when they see that there is a reward system, they become more focused. That is why I give them stars or points especially when they behave well during discussion or group activities." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P5

"There was a time, ma'am, during a group activity when a learner kept disturbing his groupmates. Instead of getting angry, I observed him and whenever I saw even small good behavior, I gave praise or reward. I really saw that he gradually improved." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P9

These accounts show that positive reinforcement is a consistent approach among inclusive teachers. Rather than simply giving rewards, teachers adjust the type and timing of reinforcement based on learners' individual needs, such as using tangible points for immediate

feedback or private praise for learners who may feel uncomfortable with public recognition. This personalized approach reflects the principles of Individualized Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), where strategies are aligned with specific learner goals. Participants viewed this practice as effective in improving behavior, maintaining focus, and reducing classroom disruptions. The findings are supported by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Classroom Management Theory (Kounin, 1970), which emphasize the role of structured reinforcement and proactive classroom practices in promoting learner engagement, self-regulation, and positive behavior. These findings are further supported by O'Quinn (2025), Aas et al. (2023), and Woodcock et al. (2022), who highlighted the importance of teacher experience, professional development, and self-efficacy in implementing effective and adaptive behavior management strategies in inclusive classrooms.

The second sub-theme is "Setting Clear Rules and Routines" involves establishing consistent expectations and predictable procedures to help learners understand classroom structures, manage transitions, and maintain focus. Teachers adapt these routines based on learners' needs, such as using visual schedules, posted rules, and repeated cues for those who require additional support. This practice aligns with Individualized Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) principles by identifying triggers and providing structured interventions to prevent challenging behaviors. The following statements from participants support this finding:

"In my classroom, ma'am, I always establish rules especially on the first day. But even with rules, there are times when they suddenly forget, like during recess transition or group work when they become noisy. That is why I always remind them of routines so they know what to do next." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P2

"There is a situation, ma'am, where if there is no clear routine, learners really struggle to follow instructions. That is why every day I have the same structure like greeting, lesson proper, activity, and closing so they remain consistent." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P6

"Sometimes, ma'am, when it is a new activity or lesson, some learners get confused and start playing instead of listening. That is why I really remind them of the rules before starting so their behavior is set." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P11

These accounts confirm that clear rules and routines form a core, consistently applied practice. Beyond setting uniform guidelines, teachers actively assess and adapt these structures to suit specific neurodivergent needs, such as using visual schedules for learners who struggle with verbal instructions, or adding extra transition warnings for those sensitive to change. This process of matching structure to individual requirements reflects key BIP competencies: designing environments that prevent challenging behaviors rather than only responding to them. The participants composed, systematic descriptions also show they recognize how consistent, tailored routines reduce confusion, ease anxiety, and keep lessons running smoothly even when learners are easily distracted. The findings are supported by Classroom Management Theory (Kounin, 1970), which highlights the importance of teacher responsiveness, consistency, and structured practices in maintaining classroom engagement and preventing disruptions. Related studies by O'Quinn (2025), Aas et al. (2023), and Galgao et al. (2025) further emphasize that teacher experience, professional development, and structured classroom routines contribute to effective behavior management in inclusive classrooms.

The third sub-theme which is "Verbal Reminders and Redirection" involves using calm, timely prompts and alternative tasks to gently refocus learners and address disruptive behavior without conflict. Teachers select how to deliver these cues based on each learner's needs: for those with auditory processing differences, they pair words with simple gestures; for those seeking attention, they use quiet, private reminders instead of public corrections. This targeted selection reflects core BIP skills, identifying the function of a behavior (such as seeking connection or needing movement) and matching the response to that specific purpose, rather

than using a uniform correction for all situations. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

“Sometimes, ma’am, during discussion, a learner suddenly stands up or talks while I am explaining. In that situation, I immediately give verbal reminders like ‘please sit down’ or ‘listen carefully’ so their attention is redirected.” –INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P3

“There are times, ma’am, when they lose focus, especially when the activity is already long. Instead of getting angry, I calmly remind them so the class is not disrupted.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P7

“If there are behavioral issues, ma’am, like constantly disturbing or not sitting still, I redirect them by giving tasks like ‘can you help your classmate’ so their attention is shifted to another task” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P12

These accounts confirm that verbal reminders and redirection are a consistent, immediate response used by inclusive teachers. Beyond applying generic corrections, teachers actively select and adapt their approach: they use calm, brief prompts for those easily overwhelmed, pair words with gestures for learners with auditory processing differences, or offer alternate tasks for those needing movement or connection. This ability to match the intervention to the specific behavior and learner needs reflects key BIP practice, addressing why a behavior occurs rather than only stopping it. The participants’ composed, thoughtful descriptions further show they prioritize keeping instruction flowing without escalating tension, making this strategy both effective for maintaining order and respectful of each learner’s unique profile. The findings imply that verbal reminders and redirection are effective strategies in managing behavioral challenges by promoting learner focus, preventing escalation, and maintaining classroom continuity. This is supported by Classroom Management Theory (Kounin, 1970), which emphasizes timely teacher responses and maintaining smooth classroom flow. The findings are further supported by O’Quinn (2025), Aas et al. (2023), and Rafailis and Marikit (2023), who highlighted the role of teacher experience, professional development, and adaptive strategies in addressing learner behavior in inclusive classrooms.

Challenges experienced by inclusive teachers

The study’s second objective was to disclose the challenges experienced by inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges. Using Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis (2006), the interview data were coded and organized into patterns that formed the main theme, Difficulties Encountered in Managing Learners’ Behavior in Inclusive Classrooms. Three sub-themes emerged: classroom disruption and misbehavior, lack of support and resources, and emotional and workload stress.

The first sub-theme is “Classroom Disruption and Misbehavior” includes inappropriate actions such as excessive noise, moving around, not staying seated, peer conflicts, and disengagement—all of which interrupt instruction, scatter focus, and often influence the conduct of other learners. Teachers noted these difficulties shift over time: when consistent, well-matched classroom practices are applied, disruptions gradually diminish across consecutive grading periods; without targeted adjustments or stable support, these behavioral challenges tend to persist or grow more frequent and intense. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

“Ma’am, sometimes during lesson proper, there are learners who suddenly make noise or run around even while I am explaining. It is very difficult to control because it affects the focus of the whole class.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P2

“There are learners, ma’am, who cannot stay in their seats, they keep standing or talking even while instructions are being given. It really causes disruption especially when many of them do it at the same time.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P5

“Sometimes, ma’am, during group activities, learners argue or do not get along, which interrupts the flow of the lesson.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P7

“There are times, ma’am, when they are not interested in the topic, their behavior suddenly shifts like they start playing or stop participating.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P10

“It is really difficult, ma’am, when one or two learners constantly disrupt because it affects the behavior of other learners.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P14

Taken together, these statements show that how much disruption teachers face over time depends heavily on how responsive their classroom practices are. When teachers notice what each learner needs and make small, steady changes to their routines or guidance, challenging behavior becomes easier to manage across grading periods. But when one-size-fits-all rules are used without adapting to individual needs, disruptions do not fade, they often get worse, create more stress for the class, and make it harder for learning to move forward. This makes clear that behavioral difficulties are not just about what learners do, but also about how well classroom practices meet their unique needs. The findings imply that classroom disruption and misbehavior require consistent and proactive management strategies to maintain engagement, order, and effective instruction in inclusive classrooms. This is supported by Classroom Management Theory (Kounin, 1970), which highlights teacher awareness and preventive interventions in managing learner behavior. Related studies by O’Quinn (2025), Aas et al. (2023), and Mokano and Letuma (2025) further emphasize the importance of teacher experience, professional development, and holistic approaches in addressing behavioral challenges.

The second sub-theme is “Lack of Support and Resources” which refers to the limited availability of training, instructional materials, and institutional assistance needed by teachers in effectively managing learners with behavioral challenges. It includes insufficient formal training on behavior management, lack of SPED materials and classroom resources, and the unavailability of immediate support from specialists or guidance personnel when needed. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

“Ma’am, sometimes it is very difficult because we lack training in handling behavioral problems. It feels like we just learn strategies on our own because there is no formal support.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P1

“There are instances, ma’am, where we need SPED materials or behavior tools but there are no available resources in the school.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P6

“Ma’am, support systems are not always available especially when we need immediate assistance from specialists or the guidance office.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P11

These statements show that teachers often rely on personal efforts and trial-and-error approaches due to limited training and resources. The findings indicate that consistent institutional support, including training and access to resources, strengthens teachers’ confidence and capacity to manage complex behavioral needs in inclusive classrooms. The findings imply that limited support and resources increase teachers’ challenges in managing behavioral concerns, highlighting the need for continuous training, institutional assistance, and adequate SPED resources. This is supported by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which emphasizes the role of external resources in reducing stress. Related studies by O’Quinn (2025), Aas et al. (2023), and Galgao et al. (2025) further highlight the importance of professional development, collaboration, and support systems in strengthening inclusive classroom management.

As the third sub-theme, “Emotional and Workload Stress” refers to the psychological and physical strain experienced by teachers due to continuous classroom demands, especially

in handling learners with behavioral challenges alongside other academic responsibilities. It includes feelings of frustration and emotional exhaustion when efforts seem insufficient, heavy workload demands in managing diverse learners, burnout due to new or challenging teaching situations, and the emotional drain caused by the need for constant patience in stressful classroom environments. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

“Ma’am, sometimes I really feel emotional stress because it feels like your effort is not enough but behavioral issues still happen every day.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P3

“It is very difficult, ma’am, because of heavy workload, and you still need to handle learners with special needs and behavioral issues.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P8

“There are times, ma’am, that I feel burned out because it is my first time handling this kind of class and there are many demands.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P12

“Ma’am, it is really emotionally draining because you need to always be patient even when the classroom situation is already very stressful.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P15

These accounts show that teacher stress is influenced not only by learner behavior but also by heavy responsibilities and limited support. The findings emphasize that strengthening teacher support systems and promoting well-being are essential in sustaining effective inclusive education. The findings imply that emotional and workload stress among inclusive teachers requires effective coping strategies and institutional support to prevent burnout and sustain teaching effectiveness. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings highlight the importance of adequate resources in managing stress. Related studies by O’Quinn (2025), Mercado and Regencia (2023), and Rafailles and Marikit (2023) further emphasize the role of support, resilience, collaboration, and self-care in maintaining teachers’ well-being.

Coping mechanisms and well-being maintenance of inclusive teachers

The third objective of the study was to determine the coping mechanisms and well-being maintenance of inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges. Using Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis (2006), the interview data were coded and organized into patterns that formed the main theme, Coping Strategies and Well-Being Practices of Inclusive Teachers. Three sub-themes emerged: seeking emotional support from colleagues, time management and workload prioritization, and personal stress-relief activities.

The first sub-theme is “Seeking Emotional Support from Colleagues” refers to the act of inclusive teachers turning to their fellow teachers for emotional comfort, shared understanding, and professional advice when experiencing stress or difficulty in handling learners with behavioral challenges. It involves sharing classroom experiences after class, expressing frustrations or challenges, and seeking guidance from more experienced colleagues to better manage difficult situations. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

“Ma’am, when I feel that the day is already very stressful, I really go to my fellow teachers because they are the only ones who truly understand our classroom situation.” - INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P2

“Sometimes, ma’am, after class we talk with co-teachers about challenging learners, and it feels lighter because you have someone to share your struggles with.” –INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P6

“There are times, ma’am, when I feel overwhelmed by classroom behavior, so I ask advice from experienced teachers on how to handle the situation.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P11

These accounts show that support from colleagues is a common and accessible coping strategy among inclusive teachers. Peer support helps reduce stress, validate experiences, and provide practical solutions to classroom challenges. However, while it strengthens resilience, it cannot fully address long-term stress without broader institutional support, adequate resources, and improved workload management. The findings imply that emotional support from colleagues strengthens inclusive teachers' coping capacity by providing validation, shared strategies, and resilience in managing behavioral challenges. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings highlight social support as an important resource in reducing stress. Related studies by O'Quinn (2025), Rafailes and Marikit (2023), and Pasumala et al. (2024) further emphasize the value of collaboration and collegial support in promoting teacher well-being and effective classroom management.

The second sub-theme, "Time Management and Workload Prioritization" refers to the strategies used by inclusive teachers in organizing their daily tasks and managing classroom responsibilities effectively despite heavy workloads. It involves prioritizing urgent concerns such as behavioral issues, scheduling activities to maintain classroom order, listing and organizing tasks, and allocating specific time for lessons to ensure smooth instruction. These practices help teachers maintain control of classroom flow, reduce confusion, and manage both academic and behavioral demands efficiently. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

"Ma'am, I really need to prioritize important tasks like lesson planning and behavior management because of the heavy daily workload." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P1

"Sometimes, ma'am, I really schedule activities so that everything will not happen at the same time because it is hard to handle the class when the flow is chaotic." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P5

"I prioritize urgent matters like behavioral issues before proceeding to academic tasks, ma'am." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P8

"There are days, ma'am, when I have many tasks, so I make a list of what to do first so I won't get confused." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P3

"I assign specific time for activities, ma'am, so classroom behavior is controlled and the lesson is not delayed." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P10

"Time management is really important, ma'am, because if you cannot organize it, you will get stressed and the class will become more chaotic." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P14

These accounts show that task organization, prioritization, and scheduling help teachers manage workload demands, reduce immediate stress, and maintain classroom effectiveness. However, these strategies provide short-term relief and must be supported by broader interventions to address long-term workload pressures and burnout. The findings imply that time management and workload prioritization help inclusive teachers manage competing academic and behavioral demands, reduce stress, and maintain classroom effectiveness. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings highlight planning and organization as effective coping strategies. Related studies by O'Quinn (2025), Galgao et al. (2025), and Rafailes and Marikit (2023) further support the role of structured planning, organization, and coping strategies in managing inclusive classroom demands.

The third sub-theme which is "Personal Stress-Relief Activities" refers to the strategies used by inclusive teachers to manage stress and restore emotional and mental well-being after a demanding day of handling learners with behavioral challenges. It involves taking time to rest, engaging in prayer or reflection, doing relaxing activities such as walking or listening to music, and intentionally disconnecting from school-related tasks to promote self-care and emotional recovery. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

“Ma’am after class, I rest for a while or stay quiet to release the stress from the whole day of teaching.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P4

“Sometimes I pray, ma’am, because that is my way to relax and regain patience. – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P7

“There are times, ma’am, when I go for a walk or listen to music after school to refresh my mind.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P9

“I make sure, ma’am, to disconnect from school work after hours because self-care is also important.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P13

These accounts show that personal stress-relief activities such as rest, reflection, prayer, exercise, and leisure provide immediate relief and help teachers regain focus. However, these practices address stress symptoms rather than underlying causes, highlighting the need for broader support systems and coping strategies. The findings imply that personal stress-relief activities support inclusive teachers in managing emotional fatigue, maintaining well-being, and building resilience. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings highlight self-care as an important emotion-focused coping strategy. Related studies by O’Quinn (2025), Mercado and Regencia (2023), and Rafailes and Marikit (2023) further emphasize the role of reflection, self-care, and stress management in sustaining teacher well-being.

Utilization of support systems and resources by inclusive teachers

The fourth objective of the study was to explore the utilization of support system and resources by inclusive teachers in managing learners with behavioral challenges. Using Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis (2006), the interview data were coded and organized into patterns that formed the main theme, Utilization of Institutional and Social Support Systems in Inclusive Education. Three sub-themes emerged: collaboration with fellow teachers and SPED coordinators, support from school administrators and guidance counselors, and engagement with parents and guardians in behavior monitoring and intervention.

The first sub-theme is “Collaboration with Fellow Teachers and SPED Coordinators” which refers to the cooperative efforts of inclusive teachers in seeking guidance, sharing experiences, and working together with colleagues and specialists to effectively manage learners with behavioral challenges. It involves asking assistance when difficult behaviors arise, conducting meetings to discuss learner concerns and intervention strategies, and exchanging best practices to improve classroom management. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

“Ma’am, when there are difficult behaviors that I can no longer handle, I really ask help from my fellow teachers or the SPED coordinator because they are more experienced in those situations.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P2

“Sometimes we have meetings with the SPED coordinator, ma’am, to discuss the learner’s behavior and possible strategies to apply in the classroom.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P6

“Collaboration is a big help, ma’am, because I learn the best approach for the learner when other teachers share their experiences.” – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P11

These accounts show that collaboration and professional guidance are important in managing behavioral concerns. However, when support is unavailable, teachers rely on personal experience, observation, and adaptive strategies to continue supporting learners, although this may increase their workload and stress. The findings imply that collaboration with fellow teachers and SPED coordinators strengthens inclusive teachers’ ability to manage

behavioral challenges through shared problem-solving, guidance, and professional support. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings highlight social support as an important coping resource. Related studies by O'Quinn (2025), Rafailes and Marikit (2023), and Pasumala et al. (2024) further emphasize the value of collaboration in enhancing teacher confidence and classroom management practices.

The second sub-theme, "Support from School Administrators and Guidance Counselors" refers to the assistance provided by school leaders and guidance personnel in addressing severe behavioral issues and ensuring proper intervention for learners with behavioral challenges. It involves reporting serious cases to the administration, seeking counseling and assessment support from guidance counselors, and requesting assistance in developing and implementing behavior management action plans. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

"Ma'am, when the learner's behavior is already severe, I report it to the principal or administration because proper intervention is needed." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P1

"The guidance counselor, ma'am, also helps in assessing and counseling learners with behavioral issues." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P5

"There are instances, ma'am, when I request support from the administration especially when a behavior management action plan is needed." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P8

These accounts show that institutional support is vital in addressing complex behavioral concerns through specialized guidance and formal assistance. However, when support is unavailable, teachers rely on personal strategies, documentation, and adaptability, which may increase their stress and workload over time. The findings imply that support from school administrators and guidance counselors strengthens teachers' capacity to manage complex behavioral challenges through professional guidance and institutional assistance. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings highlight external support as a key resource in reducing stress and improving intervention effectiveness. Related studies by O'Quinn (2025), Rafailes and Marikit (2023), and Pasumala et al. (2024) further emphasize the importance of school-based support systems in enhancing teacher confidence and inclusive classroom management.

The third sub-theme, "Engagement with Parents and Guardians for Behavior Monitoring and Intervention" refers to the active involvement of parents or guardians in communicating, coordinating, and cooperating with teachers to address learners' behavioral challenges. It includes maintaining regular communication about the learner's behavior, informing parents through calls or meetings to support intervention efforts, and encouraging collaboration between home and school in monitoring and improving the child's behavior. These are evident in the following statements of the participants:

"Ma'am, communication with parents is very important because if they are not aware of the learner's behavior in school, it is hard to resolve the issue." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P3

"Sometimes I call parents, ma'am, to inform them about their child's behavior and to coordinate intervention." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P7

"Parents are a big help, ma'am, when they cooperate in monitoring their child's behavior at home and in school." – INCLUSIVE_TEACHER P14

These accounts show that family involvement supports consistent interventions and learner progress. However, when parental support is limited, teachers rely on documentation, classroom strategies, and personal efforts to continue supporting learners, which may increase workload and stress. The findings imply that parent and guardian involvement strengthens behavior management through consistent communication, shared responsibility, and coordinated interventions between home and school. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings highlight family support as an

important coping resource. Related studies by O'Quinn (2025), Mokano and Letuma (2025), and Pasumala et al. (2024) further emphasize the role of home-school partnerships in improving behavioral interventions and learner outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the lived experiences of 15 inclusive teachers at Liloan Central Elementary School, Liloan, Cebu, Philippines, during School Year 2025–2026 using a phenomenological design and Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006). The study concludes that inclusive teachers rely on structured, learner-centered strategies, including clear rules and routines, verbal reminders and redirection, and positive guidance, to effectively manage learners with behavioral challenges and sustain meaningful classroom engagement. However, these efforts are consistently constrained by three key challenges: frequent classroom disruptions that interrupt instruction, heavy emotional and workload stress that erode long-term capacity, and persistent gaps in training, materials, and institutional assistance that limit how well needs can be met. To navigate these pressures, teachers use targeted coping actions: organizing tasks and priorities to stay on track, leaning on peer connection for shared understanding, and practicing personal self-care to reset daily strain, though these steps alone cannot fully prevent cumulative exhaustion or replace systemic support. The findings further confirm that strong, reliable partnerships with fellow educators, SPED coordinators, school administrators, guidance counselors, and parents are essential to strengthen interventions, align efforts across settings, and build the consistent support systems needed for both learners and teachers to thrive. A behavior and classroom management training plan was provided based on the findings of the study to improve the engagement and effectiveness of inclusive teachers in inclusive classrooms, therefore leading to enhanced work performance and delivery of quality education.

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