

Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing Inclusive Education in a Laboratory School in Tacloban City

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions, challenges, and coping mechanisms of teachers about the implementation of inclusive education in a laboratory school within Tacloban City. Eight teachers were interviewed in researcher-made semi-structured questions, and thematic analysis revealed a number of salient themes. They emphasize the need for tools, resources, and practical solutions for an effective practice; They highly value inclusivity and have inclusive principles and ethics, but they declare that inclusion is highly dependent on accessibility. They also experience difficulties, such as Limited Teacher Training and Preparedness, Inadequate Learning Resources and Assistive Technology, Structural Barriers (e.g., Big Class Size) Curriculum Rigidity and Assessment Challenges and policy-practice gaps, which impede full implementation. The study points out ways through which teachers manage or cope with these difficulties, including using adaptive pedagogy through the inclusion of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), personalized-structured supports, continuous professional development, and school-home partnerships. Together with such data, the findings also underline the forcibly critical importance of policy backing and funding, as well as targeting training programs to equip teachers and improve inclusive practices. These findings are important for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to help strengthen inclusive education and achieve learning equality for all learners.

Keywords: inclusive education; teachers' perspective; coping mechanism; differentiated instruction; Universal Design for Learning (UDL); laboratory school

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has gained global recognition as a vital framework for realizing the right to quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities, socio-economic background, or learning needs. It challenges the traditional segregation of students with disabilities from general education classrooms and promotes their full participation in mainstream settings. Central to this approach are respect for diversity, equitable access to learning, and the dismantling of systemic barriers that hinder student success (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021).

In the Philippines, inclusive education is supported by national policies such as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 and more recent initiatives like the establishment of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers under Republic Act No. 11650 (2022). These policies mandate that schools create learning environments that accommodate diverse learners. However, despite strong legal provisions, practical implementation—especially in public and regional schools—remains uneven due to challenges in resources, teacher preparation, and administrative support (Tisa et al., 2025; Vergara et al., 2025).

Inclusive education extends beyond merely placing children with special needs in regular classrooms. It requires the intentional redesign of teaching methods, classroom structures, curricula, and assessment tools to meet the varied needs of learners (Calumpang et al., 2025). This complex undertaking demands a collaborative and well-supported effort, with teachers positioned at the forefront of inclusive practices.

Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, competencies, and day-to-day strategies are critical in translating inclusive policies into effective classroom practice. Recent studies highlight that teacher readiness is strongly shaped by their training, attitudes toward students with disabilities, and self-efficacy (Abuda et al., 2025; Mergenio, 2024). Furthermore, school culture—together with leadership and the availability of resources—directly impacts the quality of inclusive implementation (Macapaz et al., 2024).

In the Philippine context, most research on inclusive education has centered on policy frameworks, student experiences, or administrative perspectives. There remains a limited body of literature examining the implementation of inclusive practices in specialized environments such as laboratory schools. These schools, designed to serve as training grounds for pre-service teachers, are expected to model exemplary instructional practices. Yet, little evidence exists on how they operationalize inclusive education, particularly in regional cities like Tacloban, where post-disaster recovery and ongoing resource constraints continue to shape educational realities.

The voices of teachers in these contexts are often underrepresented, despite their central role in delivering instruction and shaping inclusive learning environments. Understanding their experiences is crucial, as it can reveal systemic weaknesses and areas for capacity-building. Without these insights, stakeholders risk overlooking persistent barriers such as large class sizes, insufficient training, inadequate support systems, and limited parental engagement.

This qualitative research adopts a single case study design to examine the perspectives of teachers implementing inclusive education in a laboratory school in Tacloban City. By conducting an in-depth investigation of this single case, the study seeks to understand how inclusion is interpreted, the challenges encountered, the strategies applied, the supports received, and the ways teachers address the demands of inclusive teaching. Focusing on a laboratory school—a setting intended to model best practices—allows this research to generate insights that can inform pre-service teacher education, in-service training, and school-based policies aimed at sustaining meaningful and equitable inclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory-the triadic reciprocal causation of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors that interact with each other-inclusively. With respect to inclusive education, teachers' beliefs and attitudes for self-efficacy interact with their instruction and school environment to encourage or restrict inclusionary outcomes. Teachers assessing their capabilities for diverse teaching communication are likely to employ inclusive strategies, effectively, even under resource-constrained settings (Mergenio, 2024; Tisa et al., 2025). The position of Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) relates that intention to perform behavior depends on attitude toward that behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the transform of inclusive education, a teacher's desire to have inclusive practices is forged not only by personal attitude towards inclusion but from school culture, administrative support, and resource availability (Macapaz et al., 2024; Vergara et al., 2025).

These theories complement each other in understanding teachers' belief and perception regarding inclusion, their professional competencies, and the extent to which they perceived the support in their work context about inclusive teaching behavior. This context puts even greater emphasis on the combinations in a laboratory school setting where teachers are expected to model their best practices for students who are pre-service educators. Through this, the study seeks to understand how teachers' self-efficacy, attitudes, and environment act together or against each other in Tacloban City in facilitating or unsuccessfully incorporating the practical implementation of inclusive education.

3. Research Questions

This study explores the teachers the perspectives on implementing inclusive education in a laboratory school in Tacloban City, Leyte for School Year 2025-2026. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions.

1. What are the perspectives of teachers on implementing inclusive education in a laboratory school?
2. What are the challenges do teachers encounter in implementing inclusive education in a laboratory school?
3. What coping mechanisms do teacher employ on implementing inclusive education in a laboratory school?

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A single descriptive case study design was used to investigate Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing Inclusive Education as well as the challenges encountered and coping mechanism of teachers. A descriptive case study enables in-depth understanding of a specific real-world context, providing a holistic and nuanced view of how inclusive education unfolds in situ (Sibbald et al., 2021)

Data were collected through written interviews, using an open-ended question intended to draw out answers about teachers' perspectives on inclusive practices. Open-ended questions allow respondents to express their thoughts freely and meaningfully (Amberscript, 2023).

4.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at a laboratory school located in Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines. This school operates under the supervision of a higher education institution and serves as a training ground for pre-service teachers. It actively implements inclusive education practices and accommodates learners with diverse educational needs. The teaching staff comprises licensed and qualified professionals, many of whom have direct experience in managing inclusive classrooms. This setting were purposefully selected due to its demonstrated commitment to inclusive education and its alignment with the study's objectives.

4.3 Research Participants

A total of eight (8) teachers were selected from the Laboratory School for the academic year 2025–2026. Participants was chosen through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique suitable for qualitative research. Inclusion criteria will require that participants are actively teaching in inclusive classrooms and have relevant experience with inclusive education practices. Participants were from comparable grade levels and teaching contexts to ensure consistency and relevance. The sample size was deemed sufficient based on qualitative research norms, particularly in phenomenological studies, where data saturation will be prioritized over generalizability (Kaufmann, 2022).

4.4 Research Instrument

This study utilized a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide as the primary data-gathering tool. The guide will be carefully designed in recent literature on inclusive education and teacher perspective (Indreswari & Ediyanto, 2024; Panyasai & Ambele, 2025). To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed and validated by three (3) experts in the fields of education and qualitative research and then refined on the basis of a pilot study involving teachers in similar contexts to ensure clarity and relevance (Panyasai & Ambele, 2025). The finalized instrument will consist of three core open-ended questions, each followed by up to four probing inquiries designed to elicit well-rounded, in-depth responses.

The interview guide was consisting of three (3) major open-ended questions, each addressing key themes relevant to the study. In addition, there will be four (4) follow-up or probing questions designed to elicit deeper responses and gather more detailed insights from the participants.

4.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through written interviews using open-ended questions administered via Google Forms. This method has been chosen to accommodate the availability of teachers and provide flexibility, allowing participants to respond at their own pace and in a setting of their choice. The written format was expected to encourage more thoughtful and candid responses, which supports the study's goal of exploring teachers' perspectives on implementing inclusive education.

Prior to completing the written interview, each participant received an informed consent form explaining the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of their participation. This consent form will be provided both as a printed copy and via email. Participants may provide their consent either by signing and returning the physical or digital form, or by agreeing to an embedded consent statement within the Google Form before proceeding.

The open-ended questions was closely aligned with the study's research questions and will explore the following key areas:

- Teachers' understanding and perspectives on implementing inclusive education,
- Challenges encountered during the implementation of inclusive education, and
- Coping mechanisms and strategies employed to address these challenges.

All responses will be collected electronically, securely stored, and anonymized using pseudonyms to maintain participant confidentiality and data integrity.

4.6 Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis following the contemporary procedural and reflexive guidance of Braun and Clarke (2021). allowing for a deeper and more systematic examination of the data to be collected. The following steps was applied during the analysis process: (a) transcribing the data to capture all relevant details, (b) reading and re-reading the data to become thoroughly familiar with its content, (c) coding the data by identifying initial patterns and assigning labels, (d) searching for significant themes that emerge from the codes, (e) reviewing the identified themes to ensure consistency and accuracy, (f) defining and naming the final themes to clearly capture their essence, and (g) drawing conclusions and generating insights based on the thematic interpretation. This structured approach ensures a rigorous and meaningful analysis of the participants' perspectives.

(Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

5. Results and Discussions

A single descriptive case study was used to investigate teacher perspectives on the implementation of inclusive education in a laboratory school in Tacloban City. The design of the study permits an in-depth exploration of specific educational contexts and has been credited with providing rich contextual understanding of real-life phenomena (Mtisi, 2022). Data were collected from researcher-made semi-structured interviews and were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed for the systematic identification of key patterns and insights as they pertain to how inclusive education plays out against everyday classroom realities.

Thematic analyses, as presented by Braun and Clarke (2021), were conducted in search of common patterns and themes found in the participants' responses. Through a systematic process of coding and categorizing data, the findings were organized into key themes that reflect teachers' real-life experiences of and engagement with inclusive education. Hence, this would allow for a better understanding of how inclusive practices are perceived and implemented in the laboratory school, alongside the impediments to their proper implementation.

The findings of the study are further presented along the major themes arising from the analysis. The themes present a view of the opportunities and challenges that teachers experience in making their classroom inclusive. The opportunities are positive outcomes of inclusive practices, such as inclusivity, engagement, and respecting diversity. Their challenges focus instead on the limitations and difficulties facing teachers, particularly, pedagogical complexity in mixed ability classes, resource constraints, and structural barriers

The subsequent sections will discuss each of the identified themes comprehensively, illustrating the analysis with direct quotations from the participants' responses to support the findings' interpretation. Such insights create a context for understanding inclusive education in a laboratory school and suggest possibilities for enhancing instructional practices and policy implementation in schools of a similar kind.

1. Teachers' perspectives on implementing inclusive education in a laboratory school

Theme 1: Inclusivity

Inclusivity for teachers was a shared experience of learning and belonging where all students should be able to affirm that, regardless of capability, they are part of the classroom community.

Significant response 2: "Every learner has the right to be part of the class and learn together with his/her peers"

Significant response 5: "Inclusivity has everyone being able to feel they are belong regardless of their ability"

This is in line with the principle that such type education has normalizes diversity to make it a foundation of strength in promoting cohesion and acceptance in the society (UNESCO, 2020). Research shows that belongingness enhances student engagement while the same enables support among peers within an included environment.

Theme 2: Inclusive Ethics

Teachers viewed inclusion as ethical obligation; necessary provision of fairness and standing equally among all learners.

Significant response 1: "To give equal opportunity... after all, they are our students"

Significant response 7: "By ethics, nobody gets lost"

The moral aspect in inclusion foundationally rests on strong conviction of equity. Literature propounds inclusive practice must not only be driven by regulations but by values of justice and care (Ainscow & Miles, 2021).

Theme 3: Inclusion Dependent on Resources

Teachers agreed that no matter how strong the intention is in inclusion, it fails in the presence of appropriate materials or even assistive technologies.

Significant response 6: "It is a very noble idea... but if it is lacking facilities or access of technologies...it will be a failure"

Significant response 8: "Schools should be well stocked with sufficient materials for inclusion to work"

Inclusion without facilities and material resources remains theoretical. The absence of assistive tools or inability of classrooms to be accessible has been shown to undermine severely application of inclusive practice in studies conducted into low-resource contexts (UNESCO, 2020; Ainscow & Miles, 2021).

2.Challenges teachers encounter in implementing inclusive education

Theme 1. Limited Teacher Training and Preparedness

Teachers highlighted insufficient preparation for inclusive education:

Significant response 2: "We are not trained enough to handle learners with special needs" (P2).

Significant response 5: "I only know the basics... but in reality, I struggle with strategies for diverse learners".

This theme underscores a pressing gap in teachers' professional preparedness. Studies reveal that lack of targeted training leads to uncertainty and lower efficacy in handling inclusive classrooms (Carter & Abawi, 2022). Similarly, **Nguyen and Hall (2023)** emphasize that continuous professional development is essential for equipping teachers with adaptive strategies and evidence-based practices.

Theme 2: Inadequate Learning Resources and Assistive Technologies

Teachers narrated the lack of essential materials, adaptive tools, and inflexible infrastructure.

Significant response 6: "Limited resources and materials"; teachers feel frustrated when they lack tools to support strategies for inclusive practice.

Significant response 8: "It's hard to include everyone when we don't even have enough materials"

Resource scarcity is a primary barrier to inclusion at the global level. The lack of sufficient materials or the lack of technology keeps teachers from practicing inclusion (UNESCO, 2020; Ainscow & Miles, 2021).

Theme 3: Structural Barriers (e.g., Big Class Size)

Large classrooms made it impossible for teachers to help diverse learners efficiently.

Significant response 7: "Handling 40-50 Learners with Different Needs is Overwhelming."

Large class size inhibits the flexibility of instruction and personalized support. Research verifies that reduced class size improves even inclusion outcomes and teacher capacity (Sánchez et al., 2023).

Theme 5: Curriculum Rigidity and Assessment Challenges

Teachers struggled to balance curricular demands with inclusion:

Significant response 1: "the curriculum is so fast that it is impossible for learners with special needs to keep up" (P1).

Significant response 5: "Assessments are not always suited to my students"

A one-size-fits-all curriculum certainly creates barriers for learners who are supposed to be assessed differently and paced the way a particular learner wants. According to Garcia & Holloway (2023), the favorable environments of inclusiveness are allowed to infuse flexibility in both content and assessment to ensure equitable learning opportunities.

Theme 6. Policy-Practice Gaps

Teachers complained about the gaps between what policy promised and what occurred in practice:

Significant response 10: "The policy sounds good, yet we do not have implementation guidelines"

Significant response 11: "Inclusive education is there on paper, but not in our classrooms"

This theme says that the policies on inclusive education at the national level are not being translated into execution at the school level. Miller and Santos (2024) say that because of the absence of clear operational frameworks and monitoring systems, it leads to none of the inclusion policies coming into practice.

3. Coping mechanisms do teacher employ on implementing inclusive education

Theme 1: Adaptive Pedagogy / UDL Practices

Teachers applied flexible, scaffolded methods—such as scaffolding, varied representations, and differentiation—to support learners.

Significant response 8: "Use differentiated instruction, scaffolding and varied teaching strategies"

Significant response 3: "Accommodations and modifications in instruction"

By creating improved access and adaptability, teachers were putting UDL principles into practice. The training for UDL has been shown to enhance effective teaching in inclusive settings (Rusconi & Squillaci, 2023).

Theme 2: Personalized, Structured Supports

Visuals, step-by-step instructions, structured reinforcement, etc., were used to facilitate teacher learning.

Significant response 1: "Visual aids, step-by-step instructions, break down lessons into smaller parts; a consistent routine, and positive reinforcement"

Scaffolded, structured supports lessen learning barriers; such methods conform with UDL strategies and have been found by empirical evidence to support engagement (Rusconi & Squillaci, 2023).

Theme 3: Continuous Professional Development

Teachers actively sought out workshops, SPED programs, and online resources to augment their inclusive competencies.

Significant response 1: "Seminars and workshops, and online resources"

Significant response 3: "I enrolled in a SPED program"

Continuous PD works towards enhancing teacher efficacy in inclusive pedagogy; doing so would lead to meaningful changes particularly if the training is sustained and is embedded within the practice (Rusconi & Squillaci, 2023; MDPI Educ Sci, 2023).

Theme 4: School–Home Partnerships

Teachers partnered with parents in matters of instruction and learner progress.

Significant response 4: "Seek the cooperation of parents when needed"

Significant response 6: "Communicate to parents... strengths and things to improve"

The partnership between parents and schools contributes to inclusive education outcomes. Studies conducted show that a level of engagement for families intervention which is actively promoted enhances various learning outcomes for learners with different needs (Alkhawaldeh & ALshammari, 2024).

6. Conclusion

The research explored teachers perceptions in an inclusive education practices at a laboratory school and showed strong commitments to equity and diversity while facing enormous challenges. Teachers believe that everyone, including their pupils, should receive equal chances for inclusivity, but reality points to many barriers: Limited Teacher Training and Preparedness, Resource Constraints, Inadequate Learning Resources and Assistive Technology, Structural Barriers (e.g., Big Class Size) Curriculum Rigidity and Assessment Challenges and policy-practice gaps , which intervene in the effective implementation. In order to cope with this, teachers adopt adaptive teaching strategies, differentiated instructions, and personalized support and are also actively engaged in continuous professional developments with collaboration with parents in meeting the diverse needs of learners. The findings speak of stark contradictions between teachers' inclusive ideals and systemic constraints which underline the immediate need for enhanced institutional assistance, capital investment, and sustained training to meaningfully translate inclusive policy into practice in classrooms.

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