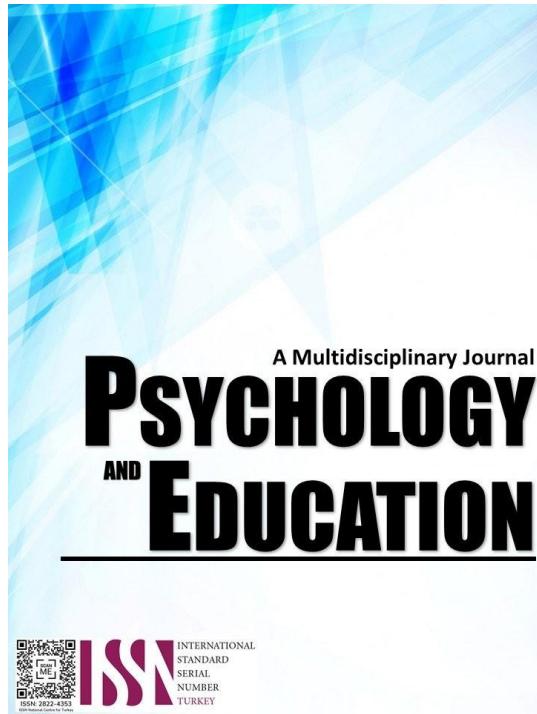


NAVIGATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' NARRATIVES OF TEACHING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



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Navigating Inclusive Classrooms: English Language Teachers' Narratives of Teaching Students with Special Needs

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Abstract

Promoting equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN), has become a global priority. Focused on inclusive education, this study explores secondary English teachers' lived experiences and challenges in supporting students with special needs in mainstream classrooms at Lutayan National High School. Participants were selected based on having at least five years of teaching experience and three consecutive years managing classes, including students with SEN. Employing a transcendental phenomenological research design, this qualitative study utilized semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to gather in-depth insights, guided by Moustakas' approach to phenomenological inquiry. The findings revealed thirteen (13) emerging themes from the responses on the secondary English teachers' lived experiences and contexts in inclusive education in English classrooms. They were all synthesized from 132 formulated meanings, 82 initial themes, and 45 clustered themes. It examines teachers' pedagogical strategies, behavior support, emotional rewards, student success, roles as inclusive educators, and ability to manage expectations and set achievable goals. Key challenges identified include insufficient classroom resources, inadequate teacher training, the need for greater collaboration, and social exclusion and bullying issues. Despite these challenges, English language teachers view themselves as evolving, inclusive educators, lifelong learners, advocates for special education, and collaborators overcoming obstacles in inclusive education. To meet these issues, this research proposes a Teacher Competency Enhancement Program (TCEP) that addresses immediate instructional and institutional challenges and supports the long-term development of English teachers as leaders in inclusive education. The results underscore the need for continuous training, enhanced collaboration, and greater organizational support. Future research is recommended to explore the impact of differentiated instruction and teacher collaboration on inclusive education and the role of institutional policies in shaping successful inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: *english language, language teachers, special needs, inclusive classrooms, qualitative inquiry*

Introduction

Inclusive education is a global concern that seeks to provide an atmosphere where all students, regardless of background or ability, may flourish and belong by offering equal learning opportunities to all students, including those with impairments. Teachers worldwide lack resources and training, which results in poor instruction and reliance on inappropriate materials (Pokrívčáková, 2015; Pinel et al., 2016; Dostal et al. (2017)). Teachers encounter challenges when teaching deaf children in English due to their limited vocabulary and lack of practical experience. Inclusive education aims to provide a setting where all students, regardless of background or ability, may thrive and feel like they belong.

In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, language teaching encounters several challenges, such as inadequate teacher training. Teachers often find it difficult to teach students who are deaf. The limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation of some hearing-impaired students make it hard for teachers to communicate effectively. This is not an isolated problem, as evidenced by Adi et al. (2017) and Aprilia (2013). Even personalized approaches, such as using audiovisual materials and addressing the hyperactivity of some of these special needs students, make it hard for teachers to provide effective instruction. Desmita and Machrus (2019) and Upa and Mbato (2020) offer these as better, more inclusive pedagogical strategies.

Lack of specialized resources, poor infrastructure, and in-service training on inclusive practices are only a few major obstacles secondary English teachers encounter while implementing inclusive education (Aubakirova & Bakbergen, 2022; Barnido, 2018). These problems make it difficult for instructors to successfully fulfill the varied requirements of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), especially when combined with overcrowded classrooms and a lack of family support (Bingol, 2022; Holmqvist & Petersson-Bloom, 2022). As a result, teachers are often under-equipped to navigate the complexities of inclusive classrooms. The inclusive education policies in the Philippines state that teachers should accommodate learners with special educational needs. They should embrace the diversity in their classrooms and find ways to make it possible for every learner to reach their full potential. The challenge is that all too often, in the United States, the Philippines, and likely in other countries, teachers are placed with little or no preparatory training into classrooms with a huge range of learner abilities (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2012).

Moreover, for four (4) consecutive years, Lutayan National High School has reported the highest number of students with difficulties and disorders in the Sultan Kudarat Division, rising from 200 to 514 between the 2021-2024 school years based on the Learner Information System. This increase contributes to many struggling readers and students achieving average grades of 79 or below, impacting their English language learning outcomes. While global and regional research highlights significant challenges in inclusive education, gaps remain in understanding the barriers English teachers face in the Philippine context. Few studies address how systemic



and practical issues intersect to impact language teaching for students with special needs.

Lutayan National High School has implemented a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program since 2021, thus implementing inclusive education. This study examined secondary English teachers' lived experiences, teaching strategies, challenges, and aspirations in implementing inclusive education for students with special educational needs. It explored barriers such as resource gaps, overcrowded classrooms, limited training, and successful strategies like differentiated instruction and audio-visual aids (Aubakirova & Bakbergen, 2022; Upa & Mbato, 2020). The findings aimed to guide the development of a program to enhance teaching practices and improve inclusivity in English classrooms.

Despite international momentum toward inclusive practices, implementing Inclusive Education (IE) in the Philippines remains complex. There are gaps in creating a unified framework for inclusive practices, including English language teaching (MacBeath et al., 2005; DepEd Order No. 44, 2021). Legislative efforts have not led to a coherent approach, hindering effective involvement from the school community and making it challenging to educate students with special needs in English and other subjects. With the preceding information, the researcher was motivated to study the lived experiences of English language teachers in teaching students with special needs in mainstream classrooms from August 2024 to March 2025 at Lutayan National High School.

Research Questions

This study thoroughly characterized the lived experiences of English language teachers in teaching students with special needs in mainstream classrooms in Lutayan National High School. It answered the following questions:

1. What are secondary English teachers' lived experiences and contexts in inclusive education in English classrooms?
2. How do English language teachers describe the contexts of their lived experiences in teaching students with special needs?
3. How do English language teachers view themselves in the future concerning their experiences teaching students with special needs?

Literature Review

Language Teaching among SSNs in the Mainstream Classrooms

Through inclusive education, students with special needs can attend regular classrooms with their classmates. Giving underprivileged groups, including people with disabilities, equal chances is its main goal (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). As McManis (2017) points out, inclusive education focuses on the competence of students with disabilities and promotes their involvement in the academic and social life of the school. According to a recent study by Bakoc et al. (2025), inclusive education improves the academic outcomes of students with disabilities and increases their social integration and self-esteem. Creswell and Poth (2018) add that inclusive classrooms, where students with special needs learn alongside their peers, significantly improve social and academic skills, furthering the goal of enhancing teaching effectiveness through adapted materials and methods. In support of this, Sánchez (2024) emphasize that inclusive education fosters positive peer interactions and promotes individualized learning opportunities that cater to diverse student needs.

Combining students with special needs (SSNs) into mainstream classrooms presents significant challenges for language teachers, who often face hindrance in adapting their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of the students. Bond et al. (2017) highlight the covert and overt barriers that hinder the active participation of students with disabilities, stressing the difficulties that teachers encounter when trying to accommodate SSNs. Likewise, Roberts and Simpson (2016) highlight that educators continue to cope with a lack of materials, substandard professional development training, and inadequate support structures, which hampers their efforts towards more inclusive teaching.

Johnson et al. (2024) highlights that to cope with the different learning needs of SSNs, 'disability inclusive' pedagogical techniques must be taught to educators through adequately designed professional training workshops on inclusive education, which confirms the earlier assertion made by Hayes and Bulat (2017) on the need for training SSN teachers that meets international standards and frameworks for guiding teaching in language classes designed for special needs students. Llego (2022) highlights that the Philippines has actively pursued inclusive education programs aimed at delivering quality education that is both equitable and culturally relevant. However, significant improvements are still needed in the availability of resources and teacher training to address diverse disabilities adequately. Similarly, Beltran et al. (2025) underscore the challenges faced by the Philippine education system in fully implementing inclusive education.

Arias et al. (2021) urge caution because variations in terminology from one country to another hinder the understanding of policies relating to inclusion in education (IE), particularly concerning the comparability of practice and outcomes. They call for better teacher preparation and increased collaboration among nations. Meanwhile, Hossian et al. (2020) found that inclusive education in the region is still developing, with a significant gap in resources and curriculum modifications.

Experiences of Teachers with SSNs in the Mainstream Classrooms

Teachers in inclusive education cannot use a single strategy to teach all students. They must choose from a repertoire of effective instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students, including those with disabilities (Lewis, 2018). In the same way,



Carter and Hughes (2024) emphasize that flexible teaching is required for inclusive classrooms. In these classrooms, teachers adjust their methods to support diverse learners and student groups that are made up of individuals with some sort of disability. As noted in the recent work by Carter and Hughes, the outcomes are 'positive' for both groups.

The diverse necessities of teaching shape the experience of teachers. Thus, support and training become essential. For inclusive education to be effective, it seems almost trite to say that teachers need strategies and resources to support all students in their charge, particularly those with special needs (Shareefa, 2016). A teacher's experience with SSN largely depends on how they were prepared and the support available to them. Mlolele et al. (2023) noted that many practitioners did not possess the appropriate strategies to implement an inclusive approach, raising the concern for more focused pre-service training on special education within teacher education programs. Similarly, Salleh and Woppard (2019) advocate for appropriate professional development with inclusive pedagogy for all educator practitioners.

Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) investigated teachers' experiences with inclusive education in Namibia. They identified barriers to effectively merging SSN into mainstream classrooms as insufficient teacher support and resources. In addition, a lack of specific training and materials detailed by Miranda et al. (2022) also obstructs the appropriate integration of special needs students into the general education system in Guatemala. Ochieng (2024) reports that in Kenya, teachers experience barriers related to large class numbers coupled with inadequate opportunities for professional advancement, adversely impacting the adoption of inclusive approaches to teaching.

In the studies conducted by Oralbay (2022) and Alcosero et al. (2023), the focus is on teachers' notions and attitudes towards working with students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. These studies highlight the experiences of English junior high teachers who work with students with special needs in an inclusive education setting. It is exciting that Alcosero et al. (2023) conducted their focus group discussions with teachers with direct experience teaching students with special needs in the Philippines. Here are some of the key findings from both studies. Teachers have positive attitudes about inclusive education, but this does not translate into effective pedagogy because of a lack of training and resources.

Even when teachers feel good about inclusion and have had experiences that help them support the concept of inclusion, they report not having the training to understand the nature of disabilities well enough to make the necessary adjustments in their instruction and assessments to "shift gears" in effective ways for the very diverse types of learners found in their inclusive classrooms.

Context of Experiences of Teachers with SSNs in the Mainstream Classrooms

Hayes and Bulat (2017) stress the need for accessible, high-quality training aligned with international best practices to support teachers in inclusive education effectively. Similarly, a study by Espeño et al. (2024) highlights the importance of culturally responsive training and institutional support in creating effective inclusive classrooms and addressing the diverse needs of students with special needs.

Moreover, Ecoben (2019) pushes for integrating specialized special and inclusive education courses into teacher training programs. These courses would help teachers deal with the not-so-simple task of teaching SSNs. Alcosero et al. (2023) make a similar argument for the Philippines: they say the country needs comprehensive teacher training programs that equip these professionals with the skills necessary to serve the diverse populations that now inhabit our schools. Bautista and Ramos (2024) make the case for and study the effects of a sister initiative that integrates inclusive education strategies into teacher education programs.

Moreover, Mauch and Santana (2017) emphasizes addressing poverty and gender bias to make education more inclusive for SSNs. In the Philippines, Kilag et al. (2024) point out that financial and gender issues create big barriers to the access of quality education by SSNs. They advocate for a framework of policy that is more inclusive of all kinds of people, especially those in challenging contexts. Garcia et al. (2024) studied a much bigger, more national issue. He focused on who needed to be better trained and involved in the big push for all kinds of people to access an inclusive education. Currently, Garcia thinks, very few teachers have adequate training to push for and achieve this right genuinely. Garcia's study raises the question: Who are the teachers? Who are the communities that get better at being communities for SSNs?

Oralbay (2022) strikes at the heart of the problem of insufficient training and resources, particularly in junior English classrooms. He and other researchers have found that teachers need specific pedagogical adjustments to effectively support students with significant support needs (SSNs).

In another recent study, Magnússon (2020) addresses the inclusive education elephant in the room, how varying regional interpretations of such policies affect implementation at the ground level. He goes further and argues that the answers to why such different policies exist are partially found in societal attitudes and the amount of institutional support teachers in those regions receive.

Adewumi and Mosito (2019) and Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) examine the wider context in which teachers must deal with students with SEN. They look specifically at the South African context, where the teachers they worked with reported challenges such as very limited training and insufficient resources. Despite these challenges, some teachers reported using creative strategies, like remedial work and teaching aids, to support the students with SEN.

View of Language Teachers about Teaching SSNs



Teachers of languages are at the forefront of including students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. They play a central role. Their views on this matter reflect a commitment to creating supportive environments for both students with disabilities and students who speak a language other than English. Language teachers are agents of inclusion. Language teachers, like other teachers, embrace diversified instruction, teaching students who are different from them in appearance and speech. Language teachers' views on the teaching of SSNs reflect a firm tilt toward a commitment to inclusive practices that make marginalized groups feel welcomed and respected.

Language teachers are key figures in establishing an inclusive education atmosphere. They help students from all backgrounds feel like they belong and are a part of the class, particularly those with disabilities and other special needs. McManis (2017) argues that seeing the potential in all our students is important, especially those who have to work harder just to keep up. When we look at Garcia et al. (2024), they point out that language educators have to become inclusive educators. If we are not practicing inclusive language education, teachers are doing a disservice to our students.

Teachers of languages have varied outlooks on how students with special needs should be taught, and those outlooks are often molded by the teachers' backgrounds and the kind of support they have received. Samuels (2017) suggests that inclusive education offers many good things, such as fostering student equality. It can also add some complications to the mix (she mentions, as examples, slower overall learning progress and classroom disruptions caused by diversely abled students. Inclusion NB (2012) maintains that it is "vital" to provide the folks who teach our languages with professional development and the resources they would need to teach diversely abled students confidently.

Nimante and Kokare (2022) and Leijen et al. (2021) explore language teachers' perceptions of their competencies in teaching students with SEN. Nimante and Kokare (2022) find that while teachers have the necessary competencies, they acknowledge significant gaps in adapting the curriculum and identifying learning difficulties. Teachers lack confidence in inclusive teaching practices, and their perceived competencies correlate with their age, experience, and education. Language teachers who understand the noble art of respecting our students' diverse intelligences and learning conditions and working with those conditions to craft even better kinds of learning opportunities for instructors and students.

The perceptions of language instructors regarding SSN teaching stem from their instruction and available support frameworks. In multi-level classes, language pedagogues have a particularly challenging problem in implementing lesson plans that deal with the different needs of their students (Bond et al., 2021). Moreover, Reyes et al. (2023) found that teachers in the Philippines expressed a need for more specialized training and better resource allocation to teach students with disabilities effectively. This is a case where block training methods are accessible, and Hayes and Bulat (2017) argue for holistic, reasonable, and thoroughly thought-out training programs without commercial intentions. That gap reveals that those teachers do not receive sufficient guidance and resources, and the appropriate professional development to construct welcoming, supportive, inclusive learning environments pedagogically tailored to all learners.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological qualitative research approach to deeply explore secondary English teachers' lived experiences preparing for and implementing inclusive education. As described by Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is a suitable methodology because it focuses on understanding individuals' lived experiences, emphasizing their perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of specific phenomena. This approach enabled a comprehensive analysis of how teachers adapt their teaching strategies to meet diverse student needs while navigating the challenges and successes of inclusive education in their unique contexts. By collecting data directly from natural settings, this study sought to uncover the essence of these experiences, providing rich insights into teachers' practices, interactions, and reflections.

Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach is particularly relevant as it provides a structured method for exploring lived experiences through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. This approach emphasizes epoché, where researchers set aside their biases to focus entirely on participants' perspectives, ensuring the authenticity and depth of the findings. Utilizing Moustakas' framework, this study explored the essence of teachers' experiences, capturing their challenges, strategies, and the impact of inclusive education on their professional practices.

Participants

The study utilized English teachers of Lutayan National High School, Sultan Kudarat, for the school year 2024-2025. Participants were purposefully selected based on specific criteria: being permanent teachers at Lutayan National High School for at least five (5) years as English teachers, having handled students with special needs education in inclusive classrooms for three (3) consecutive years, and manifesting willingness and ability to participate in interviews. These criteria ensured that participants possessed the requisite experience, training, and context to provide valuable insights into implementing inclusive education.

Purposeful sampling was justified as it allows for the selection of participants who are most knowledgeable and experienced in the



phenomenon under investigation, aligning with Patton's recommendations (2015). Collecting data from experienced teachers ensures the richness and depth necessary for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013). Each participant's insights were voice-recorded to contribute to qualitative data collection. These recordings also provide an accurate and comprehensive record of the interviews for transcription and analysis, ensuring reliability in capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences.

Instrument

In this study, data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide as a research instrument to gather in-depth qualitative data on the lived experiences of secondary English. The researcher developed the interview questions based on a review of relevant literature and aligned with the research objectives, particularly focusing on teaching strategies, challenges, and perceptions related to inclusive education for students with special educational needs (SEN). Then, subjected to a content validation process to guarantee their accuracy, clarity, and relevance. Moustakas (1994) notes that interview questions must be carefully designed to be broad, open-ended, and specific to the phenomenon, leaving room for other insights beyond what has been specified.

The interview guide's questions sought responses from participants based on their experiences, that is, English language teachers describing their experiences with teaching students with SEN. In addition, probing or follow-up questions can strengthen response elaboration, which is vital in addressing the initial response provided by the participant. This approach helps respondents stay focused on the research objective while allowing them to tell their story in detail (Moustakas, 1994).

A trial interview was conducted to assess the clarity, organization, suitability, and even the adequacy and objectivity of the interview guide. All directions were considered clear enough. However, some parts needed to be improved for comprehensibility. The instructions as to how the participants responded shaped their experiences, and so the participants succeeded in responding to the questions and did so to the best of their ability. Challenge-neutrality objectives were successfully achieved within the one revision made to the question on challenges.

Based on this feedback, the interview guide was refined by clarifying directions, improving organization, balancing item distribution, and enhancing neutrality. These adjustments ensured a clear, well-structured, and effective tool for gathering meaningful data on inclusive education.

Procedure

The researcher conducted the following steps during the study. The initial step of this investigation involved obtaining the Graduate School Dean's permission to conduct the study. Following this, the researcher sought consent from the Sultan Kudarat Division through a letter endorsed by the Adviser. Upon approval, a letter was sent to the School head of Lutayan National High School. After that, participants for the in-depth interview were selected based on specific inclusion criteria. Next, the researcher talked to the participants about the interview.

Following expert validation of the interview guide, a pilot or trial interview was conducted to test the questions and refine the research approach. The interview was conducted after the participants and the researcher agreed. During the interview, the researcher recorded the participants' answers. Then, the researcher analyzed the data using Moustakas' steps. Moustakas' gathering procedure in phenomenological research follows a detailed process grounded in Max Van Manen's approach, which is widely used in qualitative research (Van Manen, 1990).

The actual in-depth interviews were held face-to-face at Lutayan National High School, Tamnag, Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat, where the school is located. Participants signed informed consent forms. Then, interviews were recorded and transcribed using Moustakas' (1978) method, which includes familiarization, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and developing a detailed description.

The validators for this study were selected based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure their qualifications and relevance to the validation process. Validators must hold a master's or doctoral degree in education, specializing in curriculum development, English language teaching, or inclusive education, and have at least five years of professional experience in teaching, research, or curriculum design related to these fields (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, they must possess familiarity with qualitative research, particularly phenomenological approaches, to effectively assess the alignment of the research tools with the study's objectives (Creswell, 2013). Validators should also have direct involvement in inclusive education initiatives, such as teaching or program development, ensuring contextual understanding and relevant feedback. Lastly, they must express willingness and availability to provide constructive feedback within the required timeframe, ensuring a reliable and thorough validation process (Stahl & King, 2020).

Data Analysis

The researcher followed Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach in analyzing the data, which involves several systematic steps to understand the participants' lived experiences deeply. First, the researcher engaged in *epoché* (bracketing) by setting aside personal biases and preconceptions to maintain an open and unbiased perspective focused solely on the participants' narratives. This was followed by *horizontalization*, where all significant interview statements were identified and treated equally. These statements were then examined and clustered into codes and themes that revealed patterns and meanings common across the participants'



experiences.

After coding, the researcher developed a textural description outlining what the participants experienced in teaching students with special needs. This was followed by a structural description, which described how the experiences occurred by exploring the surrounding context and conditions. Afterwards, the researcher created a descriptive narrative synthesizing the themes to describe the phenomenon's essence. Finally, the researcher engaged in member checking, returning to the participants to validate the interpretations and ensure the accuracy of the explanation of the phenomenon, confirming that the findings genuinely reflect the lived experiences of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered strictly to ethical standards outlined by the SKSU Ethics and Review Committee, particularly concerning participant rights and data handling. When conducting a study on the lived experiences of English language teachers teaching students with special needs in mainstream classrooms at Lutayan National High School, several ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure the integrity and protection of participants.

Informed consent is very important. All teachers received detailed information covering the study's objectives and procedures and the implications of their participation, including the freedom to withdraw at any stage with no repercussions. This ensures their voluntary participation and adequate insight into the study (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, confidentiality was upheld by preventing the disclosure of identifying details of the teachers or students involved in the study to safeguard them from possible negative outcomes (Silverman, 2017). Discussing potentially challenging experiences can be emotionally taxing for teachers, so researchers should create a supportive environment and be ready to offer assistance if needed (Berg, 2009). Respecting participants' autonomy is crucial, meaning teachers should feel free to share their experiences without pressure (Patton, 2015).

Ensuring non-discrimination is also important to reflect diverse teacher experiences. Researchers should strive to include a wide range of teachers from different backgrounds to gain a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences (Mertens, 2014). Cultural sensitivity is also essential, particularly in a local context like Lutayan National High School, to respect local customs and educational practices (Chen et al., 2020).

Objectivity and transparency in data collection and analysis are vital to ensure the study is conducted fairly and accurately (Silverman, 2017). Finally, feedback should be provided to participants after the study to share the results, allowing teachers to see how their experiences contributed to the research (Patton, 2015). Adhering to ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants ensured that the study was conducted responsibly, benefiting both the teachers and the broader educational community.

Results and Discussion

This section reveals the presentation and discussion of the findings. The emerging themes are constructed from the English language teachers' lived experiences and contexts in inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. After collecting the data, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to explore the experiences of English language teachers in teaching students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. The process involved identifying key statements, developing initial themes, identifying clustered themes, and determining the emerging themes.

The Emerging Themes on the English Language Teachers' Lived Experiences in Teaching Students with Special Needs in Mainstream Classrooms

Eight (8) emerging themes were articulated through a comprehensive and detailed process of data analysis and interpretation. These themes were synthesized from 55 formulated meanings, 28 initial themes, and 20 clustered themes.

Theme 1. Support Systems and Influences

This theme is characterized by shared teaching strategies, mentoring and peer learning, supportive leadership, consistent home-school communication, family participation in learning, cultural understanding and respect, inclusive peer interactions, social skills development, and student empowerment. These quotes illustrate how support systems and external influences help sustain teachers' dedication and effectiveness in inclusive classrooms.

Hm... kahit ganyan ang nangayari, bilang guro nanagtuturo sa inclusive na classroom kapag may students with special needs na halimbawa nahirapan, ahm... ina adjust ko yung... lesson plan ko para maging mas visual at interactive. Nagpapatulong ako sa ibang guro kung anong strategy ang gagamitin ko. [Even though this happens, as a teacher in an inclusive classroom, whenever I see students with special needs struggling, I adjust my lesson plan to make it more visual and interactive. We took extra time together. I ask other teachers for help in deciding which strategy I should use...] P1: L6-11

May estudyante ako na may visual impairment na determined to learn... So, I started using materials with enlarged font size so she could see the text. When we have our discussion, I also, ahm, make it a point that ah... I can dictate the text that she cannot read clearly. Kahit kulang ako sa training nagiging madali dahil we work collaboratively. [I had a student with visual impairment who was



determined to learn...I started using materials with enlarged font sizes to make the text more accessible for her. During discussions, I also made it a point to dictate the text she could not read clearly, ensuring she could follow along and actively participate. Even though I lack training, it becomes easier because we work collaboratively.] P3 L77-84

Support systems and influences play a critical role in the successful implementation of inclusive education, particularly in language learning contexts. Collaborative professional support creates opportunities for teachers to share effective practices, reflect on classroom experiences, and co-develop instructional approaches that are responsive to learner diversity. It emphasizes the value of shared strategies, co-teaching, and mentorship among educators. When teachers collaborate, they exchange effective practices that enhance inclusive language instruction and meet diverse student needs (Friend et al., 2022). Mentorship and peer learning contribute to continuous professional growth and foster a community of practice within schools that promotes inclusive ideals (Booth & Ainscow, 2020).

Theme 2: Teacher Impact and Personal Growth

This theme focuses on the increased empathy and patience, growth in professional competence, collaborative professional support, parental and family engagement, social and emotional development, emotional rewards and challenges, reflective insights and realizations, stress and fatigue management, coping strategies and self-care, and sense of achievement. These statements showed that the experiences and personal development teachers gain from teaching students with special needs help deepen their commitment and professional fulfillment:

But when I attended the seminar about SNED, I learned to make it a point to take a few minutes to breathe and reflect on what went well. This helps me stay calm and refocus.". It reminded me that every student, no matter their challenges, deserves a chance to shine, hm, yung experience na yun, it strengthened my commitment as an educator. And it is a big help in engaging with the parents. [But when I attended the seminar about SNED, I learned to accept and love them. It reminded me that every student, no matter their challenges, deserves a chance to shine. That experience truly strengthened my commitment as an educator.] P1 L70-72

So, I try my best to make the classroom... Ah, you know, more welcoming and supportive for them. Sometimes, dealing with stress through reflection, self-care, and support from colleagues and parents helps me stay strong and effective as a teacher. Ah, like, iba iba kasi yung way nila na matuto, so I give extra guidance or... ahm, encourage them to work with their classmates. [I try my best to make the classroom more welcoming and supportive for them. Sometimes, I adjust my teaching style because they all learn differently. I provide extra guidance and encourage them to work with their classmates.] P4 L291-296

Inclusive teaching nurtured teachers' empathy, patience, and emotional connection with students, leading to more compassionate pedagogy (Jennings & Greenberg, 2019). It also enhanced reflective practice and professional growth in areas like differentiated instruction and collaboration (Meijer & Watkins, 2019). Despite challenges, teachers found fulfillment and purpose in their roles (Day & Gu, 2014), developing resilience and coping strategies to sustain their well-being (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Theme 3: Student Outcomes and Influence

This theme centers in the mastery of core skills, improvement in academic performance, development of emotional regulation, building interpersonal skills, self-advocacy skills, initiative in learning tasks, verbal expression improvement, use of alternative communication methods, peer acceptance and inclusion, and collaboration and teamwork skill.

These statements showed how teachers used emotional rewards to boost self-esteem and motivation. By praising effort and celebrating progress, teachers helped students build confidence, encouraging continuous improvement and success, particularly in language learning:

I have realized, honestly, that patience and kindness matter more than any lesson plan. Teaching students with special needs can be emotionally demanding, but taking time to reflect and practice self-care helps me stay strong and focused. Kasi yung feeling na yun, yung sense na may nagmamasakit sa kanila, it's something na dadalhin nila way longer than any grammar rule I teach... I have realized that patience and kindness matter more than any lesson plan. Because of that feeling, that sense that someone genuinely cares for them, they will carry far longer than any grammar rule I teach.] P7L418-420

Kapag iniisip ko 'yung experience ko sa pagtuturo ng students with special needs, sobrang fulfilling pag nakikita ko yung progress nila kahit maliit, ang laki pa rin ng impact...at the end of the day, mas nananaig yung inspiration. Seeing my students improve academically and socially motivates me. When they gain confidence and succeed, my teaching methods make a difference in their lives. [There is a deep sense of fulfillment when I witness their progress, even if it is small, it still has a big impact... at the end of the day, the inspiration outweighs everything else.] P4 L343-347

Teachers reported consistent improvements in core academic skills due to personalized instruction and targeted support while also observing enhanced communication, self-confidence, and independence among students (Light & McNaughton, 2014). These positive outcomes, including stronger peer relationships and a greater sense of belonging (Smith & Okolo, 2021; Tampubolon et al. (2023), affirm that inclusive classrooms support not only cognitive development but also emotional and social well-being, empowering students to actively participate and succeed.

Theme 4. Emotional and Cognitive Reflections

This theme underscores personal emotions, techniques for calming and focus, analyzing teaching experiences, adapting strategies for improvement, identifying stress triggers, developing coping mechanisms, perspective-taking toward students, and building compassionate relationships. These statements demonstrate the roles of an inclusive teacher as classroom manager, mentor, guide, and scaffolding expert:

I realized that simpler language, visuals, and more hands-on activities could better support their learning. I have learned that when I feel overwhelmed, pausing to take deep breaths or a short break helps me stay calm and handle difficult moments more effectively with my students. P3: L23-26

Every student... they learn in their way, right? And as a teacher, I have to be flexible and willing to adjust my methods to ensure no student is left behind. P4 L400-402

Through reflective practice, teachers critically assessed and refined their strategies, promoting continuous professional growth and emotional regulation. They reinforce the emotional highs and lows of inclusive education. While it brings stress and fatigue, it also offers profound moments of joy, fulfillment, and pride when students succeed against the odds. They also managed the mental demands of inclusive classrooms by developing coping strategies like peer support and self-care (Hadar et al., 2020), while building stronger emotional connections with students, which enhanced trust, instruction, and classroom relationships (Siegel, 2016; Tampubolon et al., 2023).

Theme 5. Physical and Mental Challenges

This theme highlights long teaching hours and multitasking, stress due to lack of training or preparation, anxiety about failing to meet students' diverse needs, feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt, mental exhaustion from continuous adaptation. Below are key insights from their responses:

The mental challenge I have noticed related to this work is emotional exhaustion. Sometimes, fatigue sets in when dealing with them. Sometimes stressful in meeting individual needs. P1 L443-445

Mentally, I have faced the challenge of constantly adapting my teaching methods to meet my students' diverse needs, which can be overwhelming at times. Physically, the emotional and mental demands of providing continuous support can be draining, especially when balancing the individual needs of each student. P3 L455-458

While English teachers in inclusive classrooms gain motivation from purpose and recognition, they also face significant physical and mental challenges. The emotional investment required to support diverse learners combined with the constant need for adaptation and individualization, can lead to stress, fatigue, and burnout. Inclusive teaching can lead to burnout due to long hours, constant adaptation, and emotional demands (Lindqvist et al., 2022). Teachers often feel stressed and unprepared when supporting diverse learners (von der Embse et al., 2020), and struggle with role conflict as they juggle multiple responsibilities beyond teaching. These challenges highlight the need for better mental health support, manageable workloads, and ongoing training to sustain teacher well-being.

Theme 6. Rewards and Motivations

This theme revolves-around witnessing student improvements, emotional fulfillment from making a difference, confidence gained through experience, and Motivation from student appreciation. These comments emphasized how rewards and motivations maintain teachers' commitment:

The most rewarding aspect of teaching students with special needs is when you witness their progress by achieving their goals. P1 L496-497

One of the most rewarding things para sa akin is makita konga ga progress ang mga students ko, bisan gamay lang. Nang kung may estudyante nga budlay sa communication pero nagaka-confidence na siya mag express... or kung may bata nga daw gapanghinali lang sa una, tapos subong active na siya sa klase. [One of the most rewarding things for me is seeing my students make progress, even just a little. Like when a student who used to struggle with communication starts to gain confidence in expressing themselves... or when a child who used to be very quiet is now actively participating in class.] P4 L513-516

English teachers in inclusive classrooms stay motivated through intrinsic rewards like a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment when they see the positive impact of their work (Gu & Day, 2019). Student progress, even in small steps, boosts their emotional resilience and validates their teaching efforts (Aldrup et al., 2022). Recognition from peers and opportunities for professional growth also increase their motivation by making them feel valued and supported (Collie, 2021). These rewards, the emotional, professional, and relational help sustain teacher commitment in inclusive settings.

Theme 7. Classroom Environment and Inclusion

This theme centers on creating a non-threatening and welcoming atmosphere, promoting respect, empathy, and acceptance among peers, flexible seating arrangements and mobility-friendly spaces, positive behavior reinforcement strategies, encouraging peer support



and cooperative learning, and balancing individual attention with group engagement. These comments highlighted how a supportive classroom environment and inclusive practices play a crucial role in sustaining teachers' dedication to their students:

Halimbawa, may students na mahina ang pandinig or madaling madistract, so nilalagay ko sila sa harapan or malapit sa akin. Tapos, may iba naman na mas comfortable pag nasagilid lang, kaya binibigyan ko rin sila ng option. Hindi pwedeng one-size-fits-all. [For example, there are students who have hearing difficulties or get distracted easily, so I place them in front or near me. Then, there are others who feel more comfortable staying on the side, so I also give them that option. One-size-fits-all doesn't work.] P3 L647-65

With proper accommodations such as differentiated instruction, peer support, and a positive classroom culture, it is possible to create an inclusive setting where all students can thrive. P4 L659-661

A positive classroom environment fosters emotional safety, encouraging engagement and confidence among students with special needs. Respectful, proactive management supports order and student responsibility. Adapting instruction to diverse learning needs ensures meaningful access to learning for all students (Sutherland et al., 2020). Additionally, welcoming, non-threatening environment that promotes empathy and positive peer interaction supports student engagement and emotional well-being (García-Carrión et al., 2019; Donohue & Bornman, 2015).

Theme 8. Completeness of Experience Sharing

This theme stresses the personal reflections on growth and change, awareness of inclusive education's realities, and the connection between professional and personal identity. These reflections highlighted how sharing full and sincere experiences helps reinforce teachers' dedication to inclusive education:

When reflecting on my experiences teaching students with special needs, I feel pride, empathy, and a sense of being challenged. Their resilience and determination inspire me and push me to adapt and find new ways to support them constantly. P3 L345-348

Okay, it is acknowledging that each student has different strengths, challenges, and learning styles. Working with students with special needs has helped me grow personally and professionally. P6 L418-42

Authentic narratives and emotional honesty capture the depth of teachers' lived experiences in inclusive classrooms. Participants shared challenges, vulnerabilities, and moments of joy with honesty and openness. This level of authenticity enhances the credibility of qualitative data and allows for richer, more nuanced understanding of inclusive practices. These help teachers express the emotional and moral aspects of inclusive teaching, fostering empathy and trust (Mortari, 2015; Mordal-Moen & Green, 2012). Reflection allows educators to examine their identity, improve practices, and better meet student needs (Cohen & Griffiths, 2021).

The Emerging Themes on the Contexts of English Language Teachers' Lived Experiences in Teaching Students with Special Needs in Mainstream Classrooms

Three (3) emerging themes were described through a comprehensive and detailed data analysis and interpretation process. They were synthesized from 36 formulated meanings, 29 initial themes, and 11 clustered themes.

Theme 1: Challenges and Limitations

This theme emphasizes the environmental barriers, limited accommodations, negative attitudes, lack of sensitivity, access to teaching aids, communication gaps, and limited professional support. These statements highlight the obstacles that hinder teachers from fostering a fully inclusive classroom:

...honestly, support from school admins, access to assistive tech, and 'yung specialized training talaga for teachers, ah super essential yan when teaching students with special needs. [Support from school administrators, access to assistive technology, and specialized training for teachers are essential in teaching students with special needs.] P4 L729-731

Dahil sa dami ng estudyante sa isang klase, mahirap magbigay ng individualized support para sa students with special needs. [Because there are so many students in one class, it's difficult to provide individualized support for students with special need.] P7 L907-909

Inclusive language instruction for students with special needs presents opportunities for growth and notable challenges. Physical barriers such as narrow pathways, inaccessible furniture, and a lack of assistive technology limit inclusive participation in many educational settings. Research by Alasim and Paul (2019) indicated that students' ability to access learning materials and participate fully in class activities depends heavily on the physical environment, which often remains unaddressed in under-resourced schools.

Theme 2: Support and Resources

This theme highlights peer assistance, interdisciplinary collaboration, availability of assistive technology, and use of adapted learning materials. These reflections highlighted that adequate support and access to resources are essential in sustaining teachers' dedication to inclusive education.

Another one is yung kakulangan sa suporta sa teknolohiya or lack of support in technological needs like ah tablets, videos, or tv, then laptops. Kinakailangan din naman yan dito syempre marunong na sila gumamit high-tech naman ang mga kabataan ngayon no bata



pa marunong na kahit may mga disability, in which they can use our technology this time. [Another challenge is the lack of support for technological needs, such as tablets, videos, TVs, and laptops. These are essential because, nowadays, even young students are already familiar with technology. Despite their disabilities, they can still benefit from using technology to enhance their learning experience.] P6 L880-884

Dahil sa dami ng estudyante sa isang klase, mahirap magbigay ng individualized support para sa students with special needs. [Because there are so many students in one class, it's difficult to provide individualized support for students with special need.] P7 L907-909

Inclusive education thrives in environments where teachers have the tools, knowledge, and emotional backing to support students with special needs. Collaborative teamwork refers to the cooperative engagement among teachers, support staff, specialists, and other professionals to meet the diverse needs of students. Educators can better share expertise, solve challenges, and create more inclusive environments with strong collaboration. Effective, inclusive education relies on strong support and access to essential resources. Key elements include interdisciplinary collaboration (Liasidou, 2015), availability of teaching aids like assistive technology (Alnahdi, 2014), and ongoing professional development to build teacher skills and confidence (Florian & Beaton, 2018). Emotional and administrative support from school leadership also plays a crucial role in maintaining teacher motivation and preventing burnout (Prather-Jones, 2017). Together, these factors create a sustainable foundation for inclusive teaching practices.

Theme 3. Collaboration and Encouragement

This theme focuses on team teaching practices, collaborative lesson planning, guidance from experienced teachers, emotional encouragement from colleagues, recognition of teacher efforts, motivational feedback, and collective decision-making. The statements below show the role of collaboration and encouragement:

Working closely with my colleagues has made a difference in how I approach teaching students with special needs. We share strategies, support each other emotionally, and set common goals, which makes me feel more confident and effective in the classroom. This collaboration keeps me motivated, especially during challenging times. P2 L541-544

And ah, I believe... Working with peers in lesson planning and co-teaching helps us create more inclusive lessons for all students. P3 L1010-1013

These highlighted the critical role of collaboration and encouragement among educators in enhancing teaching effectiveness, especially when working with students with special needs. Peer collaboration fosters teamwork through shared lesson planning and co-teaching, enabling teachers to pool knowledge and strategies for diverse learners (Smith & Brown, 2021). Mentorship and support provide less experienced teachers with guidance and emotional encouragement, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing professional confidence (Ampomah et al., 2024). Through positive reinforcement, recognizing teachers' efforts and providing motivational feedback sustains morale and commitment, which is vital in challenging teaching contexts (Garcia & Martinez, 2020).

The Emerging Themes on the Views of English Language Teachers about Themselves in the Future concerning their Experiences in Teaching SSNs in Mainstream Classrooms.

Four (4) emerging themes were articulated through a comprehensive and detailed data analysis and interpretation process. They were synthesized from 41 formulated meanings, 27 initial themes, and 14 clustered themes.

Theme 1. Future Career Vision

This theme is focused on how educators will view themselves in the future and their experiences teaching students with special needs. It centers on an emotionally resilient, flexible thinker, innovative problem-solver, resourceful planner, student-centered, results-driven, and committed advocate. These quotes demonstrate how they view themselves:

Ahm... I envision my educational future as focused on creating more inclusive learning environments. Kasi, with my experience teaching English in a mainstream classroom, I have seen how important it is to adapt and grow. I will keep... Ah, improving my teaching strategies, working closely with my co-teachers. P3 L1003-1006

Bilang isang English teacher sa mainstream classroom, nakikita ko ang future ko sa edukasyon na mas nagiging inclusive at innovative. Gusto kong mag focus pa sa special education o inclusive teaching para masiguradong lahat ng estudyante, kahit ano pa ang kakayahan nila ay may pantay na oportunidad sa pagkatuto. [As an English teacher in a mainstream classroom, I see my future in education becoming more inclusive and innovative. I want to focus more on special education and inclusive teaching strategies to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, have equal opportunities to learn.] P4 L1014-1018

Through the experiences of English language teachers teaching students with special needs, educators envision themselves as more reflective, adaptive, goal-oriented, and emotionally resilient practitioners. These teachers were committed to continuous learning, adjusting their methods, and using more effective techniques to support their students' growth. In the future, they envisioned themselves as flexible, creative, and resourceful educators who collaborate with colleagues and parents to ensure an inclusive, welcoming classroom environment. They learn to adjust strategies based on diverse student needs set clear, student-centered goals (Hattie, 2015), and develop emotional strength and empathy through challenges (Day, 2016; Mansfield et al., 2016).



Theme 2. Special Education Advocacy

This theme underscores teachers as flexible problem-solvers, instruction enhancers, supportive, compassionate listeners, student-centered, proactive, and inclusive leaders. These comments underlined how they view themselves as advocates for Special Education:

Kaya in the future, I really want to advocate for programs na... uhm, 'yung mga bata mismo ang makakatulong sa paggawa ng learning plans and activities. [That is why, in the future, I want to advocate for programs where students themselves can participate in creating learning plans and classroom activities.] P2 L923-926

The teachers envisioned themselves as instructors and mentors, continuously improving their practice and advocating for students with special needs. Rooted in their classroom experiences, teachers increasingly adopt advocacy roles beyond instruction. Skilled teachers continuously develop their instructional and behavioral strategies to support diverse learners. Their advocacy is reflected in effective use of differentiation, assistive technology, and inclusive behavior management (Shareefa, 2016).

Student-centered teachers prioritize individual student needs, showing empathy and flexibility in planning and instruction. Their proactive, learner-focused approach yields meaningful academic and emotional outcomes (Tomlinson, 2017; Boyle & Sharma, 2018).

Theme 3: Professional Aspirations

This theme focuses on the teachers' analytical, adaptable, dedicated learner, dynamic, progressive, team-oriented, collaborative, and relationship builder. The following statements show that they view themselves as lifelong learners:

I also envision mentoring other teachers, sharing best practices, and contributing to research on effective inclusive teaching. I aim to continue growing as an educator who fosters a supportive and empowering learning environment for all students. P4 L1022-1025

Also, I... I want to be more involved in teacher communities, whether online or through, you know, local organizations. Ang daming resources and insights na puwedeng makuha from other educators na may, ah, similar experiences. This will help me improve and adapt to my students' changing needs. Also, I want to be more involved in teacher communities, whether online or through local organizations. So many resources and insights can be gained from other educators with similar experiences. I feel like this will help me improve and adapt to the changing needs of my students.] P2 L997-1001

Teachers see themselves as lifelong learners who embrace educational innovations and technological advancements. They recognized the transformative role of digital tools in making the learning process more efficient and inclusive, especially for students with special needs. Teachers expressed a strong commitment to participating in continuous professional development, including attending seminars, workshops, and engaging with technology to better cater to the diverse needs of their students. Innovation in inclusive teaching stems from a reflective mindset that adapts to student needs (Loughland & Alonzo, 2019). Lifelong learners actively pursue professional growth through training and self-study, enhancing their skills in inclusive practices. This mindset promotes instructional effectiveness and resilience (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Theme 4. Learned Lessons

This theme highlights how teachers adjust and differentiate instruction, build student-centered approaches, learn patience and empathy, become more flexible and adaptive, trust students' potential and growth, value emotional presence, acknowledge learner backgrounds, and understand learner differences. The following participants' responses provided evidence supporting the emerging themes:

Patience as a teacher kay kung wala ka sina, kung mga special needs imo kaatubang, maka hambal ka gid nga maka walk out ka sa klase kay maubosan ka gid sang patience. [Patience is essential as a teacher because without it, especially when handling students with special needs, you might feel overwhelmed and want to leave the class.] P1 L911-913

Ahm... para sa akin, importante gid nga ma-embrace ta ang differences sang mga estudyante. May ara sila tagsa tagsa nga kusog kag kahinaan, so... dapat matutunan nila magrespeto ang isa't isa. Sa pagtudio sang may special needs, kinahanglan gid ya sang pasensya kag pagpadayon maam. [For me, it's really important that we embrace the differences of our students. Each one has their own strengths and weaknesses, so... they need to learn to respect one another. When teaching students with special needs, you really need patience and perseverance, ma'am.] P2 L1102-1105

Embracing learner diversity involved recognizing and responding to students' varied learning styles, backgrounds, and needs. Teachers learned to move beyond one-size-fits-all methods and adopt inclusive, responsive practices. Developing core teaching Values highlighted the deepening of teachers' empathy, patience, and student-centered mindsets. These values helped build stronger relationships and foster a more inclusive, supportive classroom culture (O'Connor et al., 2016).

Enhancing instructional strategies reflected a shift toward more flexible, differentiated teaching. Teachers adapted lesson plans based on student progress and needs, promoting equity and engagement (Tomlinson, 2017). The theme highlighted the key insights teachers gained from inclusive teaching. They realized the importance of knowing each student's background, being patient and empathetic, and adapting their teaching methods. These lessons helped them build stronger relationships, support diverse learning needs, and create a more inclusive and caring classroom environment.



Conclusions

This research explored the narratives of English Language Teachers (ELTs) in teaching students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, revealing fifteen (15) emerging themes that reflect their lived experiences, contextual realities, and future perspectives. These themes illustrate how English language teachers develop personally and professionally through inclusive teaching practices. Teachers gain a deeper understanding of student diversity, strengthen their emotional resilience, and foster a sense of fulfillment by supporting the growth of students with special needs. Their experiences are enriched by strong support systems, collaboration, and motivation, which help them navigate the physical, mental, and emotional demands of inclusive education.

Contextually, teachers operate in environments marked by both limitations and opportunities. Challenges such as limited resources, large class sizes, and diverse student needs often hinder the implementation of inclusive strategies. However, access to adequate support, materials, and a collaborative teaching culture enables them to sustain their efforts and improve instructional practices. These contextual themes highlight the need for institutional backing and consistent professional development to enhance inclusive teaching.

Looking ahead, English teachers envision themselves evolving as adaptable, skilled, and purpose-driven educators. Their aspirations include continued advocacy for students with special needs, ongoing learning, and improved teaching practices grounded in empathy and experience. They aim to strengthen their roles as inclusive practitioners who deliver instruction and influence school culture and policy.

Overall, the study underscores the vital role of English teachers in shaping inclusive learning environments. It emphasizes the need for systemic support, shared responsibility, and continuous reflection to ensure equitable education for all learners. Future research may explore how these themes apply across other subject areas and how institutional changes can better support inclusive education in public school settings.

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