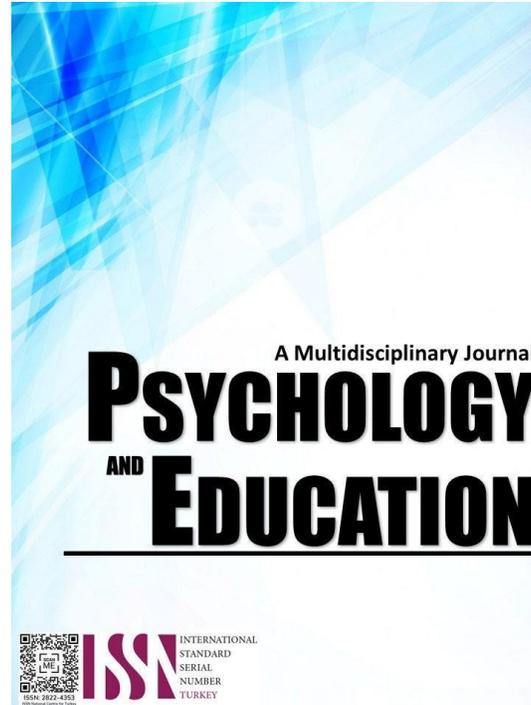


EXPLORING TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES



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Exploring Teachers' Strategies in Supporting Students with Learning Difficulties

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Abstract

Inclusive education presents both challenges and opportunities, particularly in rural settings where resources and specialized training are limited. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences, perceptions, and instructional practices of elementary teachers working with students with learning difficulties in the Lupon East District, Division of Davao Oriental. The study aimed to understand how teachers adapted their strategies to address diverse learner needs and foster inclusion in a resource-constrained environment. Guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, and Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model, the research employed purposive sampling to select seven general education teachers. Participants responded to semi-structured, open-ended online questionnaires that facilitated an in-depth exploration of their instructional approaches and the challenges they faced. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Findings revealed that teachers consistently applied differentiated instruction by modifying content, employing multimodal teaching strategies, and varying assessments to accommodate diverse learning styles. They also used flexible grouping, peer collaboration, and culturally responsive methods to promote inclusion. Motivational strategies such as positive reinforcement, achievable goal-setting, and consistent encouragement were essential in fostering students' confidence and self-efficacy. Despite their commitment, participants identified significant barriers, including limited instructional resources, lack of formal special education training, and time constraints. These factors hindered the sustained implementation of inclusive practices. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted professional development, improved resource allocation, and stronger homeschool partnerships to support inclusive education in under-resourced rural contexts. These findings offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to enhance equitable learning opportunities for students with learning difficulties.

Keywords: *learning difficulties, differentiated instruction, inclusive education, teaching strategies, sociocultural theory*

Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a global priority, affirming every learner's right to quality education regardless of physical, intellectual, social, or emotional differences. According to UNESCO (2020), inclusive education is a key driver for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. However, its implementation varies significantly across contexts. High-income countries often benefit from robust infrastructure, specialized training, and supportive policies, whereas developing nations face persistent challenges in resourcing, accessibility, and professional development (Ainscow, 2020). Even in well-resourced systems, meeting the complex needs of students with learning difficulties (LDs) remains a demanding task.

In the Philippines, significant strides have been made toward inclusive education through legislation such as Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013) and Republic Act No. 11650 (Inclusive Education Act of 2022). These policies promote the integration of learners with disabilities and mandate the establishment of inclusive learning centers. Despite these efforts, gaps in implementation remain—particularly in rural and underfunded areas—due to limited teacher training, insufficient educational resources, and low community awareness (Department of Education [DepEd], 2021).

In the Division of Davao Oriental, teachers encounter localized challenges in putting inclusive policies into practice. Rural schools often lack trained special education personnel, assistive technologies, and customized instructional materials. As a result, teachers are frequently expected to support students with LDs without formal training in special education. Many rely on intuition, experience, and peer collaboration to address academic and emotional needs, placing considerable pressure on them to continuously adapt and innovate in their instructional approaches.

This study is grounded in three theoretical frameworks to examine how teachers address these challenges. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) underscores the importance of guided learning within the Zone of Proximal Development, supporting structured, interactive instruction. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997) highlights the role of self-efficacy and motivation—factors that are especially critical for learners with LDs. Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model (2001) advocates for flexible, student-centered teaching that responds to learners' individual readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. Anchored in these frameworks, the study investigates how teachers in the Lupon East District support students with learning difficulties and the barriers they encounter in implementing inclusive educational practices.

Research Questions

This study explored the strategies employed by teachers to support students with learning difficulties (LDs). Focusing on classroom

practices within the Lupon East District, the research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how educators adapt their instructional methods to meet diverse learning needs in inclusive settings. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What instructional strategies do teachers in the Lupon East District use to support students with learning difficulties?
2. How do teachers assess and group students with learning difficulties to facilitate effective learning?
3. In what ways do sociocultural and peer factors influence the learning engagement of students with learning difficulties?
4. How do teachers build the confidence and motivation of students with learning difficulties?
5. What are the most significant challenges teachers face in supporting students with learning difficulties?
6. What training or support do teachers need to enhance their instructional practices for inclusive education?

Literature Review

Students with learning difficulties (LDs) require adaptive and responsive teaching approaches to succeed in inclusive classrooms. Inclusive education promotes equitable access to learning opportunities by addressing diverse learner needs through strategies such as differentiated instruction. Grounded in Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model (2001), this approach involves modifying content, process, and product based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. In the Philippine context, it has been widely implemented to support diverse learners (DepEd Tambayan, 2023). Multisensory and scaffolded instruction also play a vital role in helping students with LDs by engaging various sensory modalities and providing step-by-step support.

Assessment and grouping practices are equally essential for meeting individual learning needs. Teachers utilize formative assessments—such as quizzes, observations, and performance tasks—to monitor progress and identify gaps (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Flexible grouping strategies, including both homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings, allow for tailored instruction and peer support. These align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which emphasizes the role of social interaction and guided learning within the Zone of Proximal Development.

Sociocultural and environmental factors significantly influence student engagement. Positive peer interactions, inclusive classroom climates, and structured group activities foster emotional security and a sense of belonging. Culturally responsive teaching, which integrates students' cultural contexts and lived experiences into instruction, also increases relevance and engagement (Gay, 2010; Hornby, 2011). Family involvement and home-school collaboration further enhance student outcomes, especially for learners with LDs.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997) highlights the importance of building self-efficacy and motivation—critical components for students with LDs. Teachers nurture these through praise, goal-setting, timely feedback, and modeling. These strategies promote resilience and support the development of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), helping students persist through academic challenges.

However, teachers often face significant barriers to implementing inclusive practices. These include limited training in special education (SPED), lack of instructional resources, large class sizes, and time constraints (Sharma et al., 2012). Such challenges are especially prevalent in rural settings, where infrastructure and access to professional development are limited. This study contributes to the literature by examining how teachers in the Lupon East District navigate these constraints while striving to support students with learning difficulties.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative design, which is appropriate for exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and instructional practices of teachers working with students who have learning difficulties. Phenomenology focuses on understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018), making it particularly relevant for examining how teachers perceive and respond to diverse needs within inclusive classrooms.

Participants

The study involved seven (7) elementary school teachers, selected through purposive sampling from the Lupon East District, Division of Davao Oriental. Participants had varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from less than two years to over thirty years, and were teaching across different grade levels from kindergarten to Grade 6. The selection criteria required that participants were currently engaged with students identified as having learning difficulties, regardless of whether they had formal training in special education. This ensured that the participants had firsthand experience addressing diverse learner needs in inclusive settings.

Instrument

To capture teachers' instructional practices and experiences, the study utilized a semi-structured online questionnaire composed of open-ended questions. The questions were developed based on three theoretical foundations: Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction Model, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. These frameworks ensured that the instrument addressed not only pedagogical approaches but also the social and emotional dimensions of inclusive teaching.

The questionnaire explored key areas such as instructional adaptation, assessment practices, student grouping, peer interactions, family engagement, and motivational strategies. Its open-ended format encouraged reflective, detailed responses. To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to expert review by two specialists in inclusive education and qualitative research. Their feedback informed revisions to improve clarity, alignment with research objectives, and overall coherence.

Administering the questionnaire online provided participants with flexibility to respond at their convenience, using familiar digital platforms. This approach supported the collection of rich, contextually grounded data from educators working in rural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedure

Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire anonymously to promote openness and candor in their responses. Prior to participation, they were fully informed about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained via an electronic agreement form embedded within the survey.

The questionnaire was distributed through secure and commonly used digital platforms such as Gmail, Google Forms, and Facebook Messenger, enhancing accessibility and convenience. Data collection was conducted over a two-week period, giving participants adequate time to reflect on and respond thoroughly to each question.

The online format allowed for efficient data organization and reduced researcher bias, as participants could respond independently and at their own pace. This helped preserve the authenticity of their narratives and enhanced the reliability of the qualitative data.

Data Analysis

The collected responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which involved: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. Through this systematic process, emerging patterns and recurring concepts were identified, coded, and organized into key themes. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the study's guiding theoretical frameworks and existing literature to deepen the understanding of how teachers support students with learning difficulties in inclusive educational settings.

Ethical Considerations

This study upheld ethical research standards throughout its process. Participants were informed of the study's aims, procedures, and focus on inclusive education prior to their participation. Consent was obtained digitally, ensuring that participants made an informed and voluntary decision to engage in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Confidentiality and anonymity were prioritized: no identifying information was collected, and responses were anonymized to protect privacy. All data were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. The use of an online format allowed participants to respond from comfortable settings and on their own schedules, encouraging thoughtful reflection and supporting participant well-being.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings organized according to the study's research questions. The data are categorized into four thematic sections: (A) Instructional Strategies, (B) Sociocultural Context and Support Systems, (C) Self-Efficacy and Motivation, (D) Challenges and Support Needs. The results highlight teachers' experiences, instructional practices, and perspectives in addressing the needs of students with learning difficulties.

Section A: Instructional Strategies

(Aligned with the Differentiated Instruction Framework)

This section explores how teachers modified instruction to address the diverse learning needs of students with learning difficulties. The discussion is organized into three key areas: instructional modifications, assessment strategies, and student grouping. These themes reflect the core principles of differentiated instruction, as articulated by Tomlinson (2014).

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Key Themes from Responses</i> |
|------------------------------------|---|
| How do you modify your strategies? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiated instruction • Flexible approaches • Multimedia, visuals, simplified tasks |
| Assessment tools used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Diagnostic assessment • Use of manipulatives |
| Student grouping strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative testing strategies • Flexible grouping • Homogeneous and heterogeneous groups • Grouping by interest, skills, learning style |

Instructional Modifications

Participants described how they adapted teaching strategies to accommodate individual learning styles and abilities. Differentiation was implemented through adjustments to content, instructional process, and learning products.

“I always try to understand each student's unique needs first, especially those who experience learning difficulties. I modify my teaching strategies by applying differentiated instruction—this means I adjust the content, process, and even the products of learning based on the student's ability and interest. For example, I might give simpler tasks or more structured guidance to those who need it.” (Participant 6)

Another teacher emphasized using a wide variety of instructional tools to cater to multiple intelligences and learning preferences:

“I use a variety of teaching methods like visual aids, hands-on activities, and discussions. Students learn in different ways some are visual learners, others need to move or hear things repeatedly. Tools like graphic organizers and educational technology help make lessons more accessible. Most importantly, I stay patient and flexible.” (Participant 3)

These instructional strategies reflect Tomlinson's (2014) model of responsive teaching and are supported by evidence suggesting that multisensory learning enhances retention and engagement for students with learning difficulties (Hall, 2002).

Assessment Strategies

Participants reported using a variety of both formal and informal assessments to monitor student progress and tailor instruction accordingly. Observations, diagnostic tools, and alternative assessments were commonly employed.

“I rely heavily on assessments to truly understand what my students need. I start by observing their behavior and performance in class. I often use diagnostic assessments to identify their strengths and weaknesses early on, which helps me tailor my instruction.” (Participant 4)

“I provide a variety of activities and alternative testing options to make sure all students, especially those with learning difficulties, have a fair chance to show what they know. Some do better with manipulatives or performance-based assessments; others need extended time or simplified instructions.” (Participant 7)

These responses illustrate inclusive assessment practices. As Black and Wiliam (2009) argue, formative assessments should serve as tools for learning, not just grading. Alternative assessments ensure accessibility and equity by giving students multiple ways to demonstrate understanding (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014).

Student Grouping

Teachers employed flexible grouping strategies based on readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Groups were often fluid, with changes made to suit instructional goals or student needs.

“I adjust group compositions depending on the lesson's objectives, students' needs, and even their interests. I always consider their individual strengths and weaknesses, especially when supporting students with learning difficulties.” (Participant 6)

“Sometimes I form homogeneous groups when I want to focus on specific skills or provide targeted support. Other times, I use mixed-ability groups so students can help one another and learn collaboratively.” (Participant 5)

Other teachers described grouping by interest, using random assignments, or letting students choose partners to build motivation and agency:

“To keep things dynamic, I sometimes apply random grouping or interest-based grouping. I also let students choose their own groups occasionally. What's important is creating a safe, fair, and engaging environment.” (Participant 1)

Research supports such flexible grouping strategies. According to Tomlinson (2001), grouping by readiness, interest, or learning profile enhances learning outcomes, while Gregory and Chapman (2013) emphasize its role in fostering collaboration and student autonomy.

Section B: Sociocultural Context & Support Systems

(Grounded in Sociocultural Theory)

This section explores the environmental, cultural, and social factors that support or hinder learning for students with learning difficulties.

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Key Themes from Responses</i> |
|--|--|
| Classroom support for collaborative learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and structured learning space • Group tasks and peer interaction • Clear roles |
| Peer impact on learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support and tutoring |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Parental/guardian involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of exclusion • Importance of teacher guidance |
| Cultural/community influences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open communication • Reinforcement at home • Active involvement • Contextualized lessons • Influence of language, values, and family expectations |

Classroom Support for Collaborative Learning

Participants emphasized the importance of creating inclusive and structured environments that promote collaborative learning, especially for students with learning difficulties.

Participant 1 highlighted the need to establish a safe and welcoming classroom environment:

“As a teacher, I made it a priority to create a classroom environment that supported every learner, especially those with learning difficulties. I knew that for my students to feel safe, engaged, and ready to learn, the physical and emotional space had to be clear, structured, and welcoming.”

Participant 7 discussed how strategic classroom arrangements helped maintain focus:

“I often placed students with special needs in spots where they could focus best—sometimes that meant sitting them near the front so I could assist them more easily. I made sure the classroom was well-ventilated and free from distractions that could overwhelm or discourage them.”

Participant 6 described encouraging peer collaboration through group work:

“I encouraged peer collaboration through group activities, structured discussions, and building a strong sense of classroom community.”

Participant 4 emphasized the benefit of assigning clear roles:

“I assigned clear roles during group work to give every student a purpose, ensuring no one felt left out. When students felt emotionally safe, they were more likely to participate and take academic risks.”

Research supports those inclusive and structured classroom environments enhance engagement and academic performance among students with learning difficulties (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). Flexible seating, clear routines, and opportunities for peer collaboration promote emotional safety and equitable participation (Tomlinson, 2014; Vaughn & Bos, 2012). Peer-supported learning and defined roles further help foster inclusion and reduce isolation (Friend & Bursuck, 2019).

Peer Impact on Learning

Participants reflected on both the positive and negative impacts of peer interactions on students with learning difficulties.

Participant 2 described using peer tutoring as an instructional strategy:

“As a teacher, I encouraged peer support by implementing peer tutoring and remedial instruction strategies to help students who were struggling.”

Participant 3 explained the importance of structure in peer collaboration:

“To maximize the positive and reduce the negative, I carefully designed group activities, assigned roles, and taught students how to collaborate respectfully and supportively.”

Participant 1 noted the benefits of peer assistance, while also acknowledging challenges:

“I provided support and guidance to my students, especially through peer tutoring and group work. This helped them understand the material better and made them feel more comfortable asking for help. But I also noticed that negative peer influences, like bullying or exclusion, could make things harder for some students. I worked to create a friendly and supportive environment where everyone felt safe and encouraged.”

Participant 6 spoke to the emotional and developmental impact of peer relationships:

“Students with learning disabilities can experience classroom challenges that may negatively impact their social and emotional development. Mentors can positively influence their mentees by providing emotional support, serving as role models, and helping them develop specific skills.”

These insights align with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that learning is inherently social. Peer tutoring and cooperative learning improve academic outcomes and social integration (Topping, 2005). However, bullying and exclusion can be significant barriers (Wentzel,

1998), underscoring the importance of structured collaboration and a safe learning environment.

Mentorship also contributes to students' socio-emotional development and self-efficacy (DuBois & Karcher, 2014).

Parental/Guardian Involvement

Participants consistently emphasized the critical role of parents and guardians in supporting students with learning difficulties.

Participant 1 discussed the effects of home support:

“By actively engaging in their child’s school life, creating a supportive home environment, and fostering a positive attitude toward learning, parents can significantly influence their child’s academic and social success.”

Participant 2 reinforced the importance of follow-up at home:

“I encouraged parents and guardians to follow up with their child at home.”

Participant 6 stressed ongoing parental involvement:

“Parents need to be actively involved and take charge of their child’s education. Through regular communication and collaboration with teachers, they can develop educational plans tailored to their child’s needs.”

Participant 4 emphasized two-way communication:

“There must be open communication with the teacher.”

Participant 3 noted strategies for reinforcement at home:

“Supporting these students includes reinforcing routines at home, providing extra practice, encouraging effort, and communicating with the teacher about their child’s progress.”

Parental involvement is a key factor in academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Reinforcement at home and regular parent–teacher communication promote consistent learning and student accountability (Epstein, 2001; Jaynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014). Collaborative educational planning enhances students' individualized support, while open communication ensures parents remain engaged and informed (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Cultural/Community Influences

Participants highlighted how students' cultural and community backgrounds shape learning experiences and emphasized the value of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Participant 1 stressed the impact of cultural background on engagement:

“Cultural and community influences affect everything from learning styles and communication preferences to motivation and participation. Understanding these factors is crucial for educators to create inclusive and effective learning environments.”

Participant 4 shared how local context shaped instruction:

“I contextualized lessons based on their environment to make learning more meaningful.”

Participant 6 reflected on personal experience:

“When I was a student, my parents’ active involvement and regular follow-up motivated me to stay engaged. Their support made me more consistent in submitting requirements and doing my best.”

Participant 7 discussed integrating students' backgrounds into lessons:

“I made lessons culturally responsive by including diverse perspectives and using examples connected to students’ everyday lives.”

These reflections echo the core principles of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Contextualizing content based on students' backgrounds increases relevance and motivation, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Family and cultural expectations can positively shape academic behaviors (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Incorporating real-life examples and diverse perspectives into teaching ensures that students feel seen, respected, and engaged (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

Section C: Self-Efficacy & Motivation

(Based on Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory)

This section explores how teachers cultivate self-efficacy and motivation in students with learning difficulties. Participants emphasized the importance of consistent encouragement, feedback, individualized support, and social-emotional strategies. These efforts align with

Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, which highlights the reciprocal interaction between behavior, personal factors, and the environment in shaping learning and motivation.

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Key Themes from Responses</i> |
|---|---|
| Building student confidence/motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating small milestones • Positive reinforcement • Promoting a growth mindset |
| Response to feedback, praise, reinforcement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating impact of specific and timely feedback • Reinforcement boosts confidence |
| Overcoming learning challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized strategies • One-on-one support • Peer collaboration and family engagement |

Building Student Confidence and Motivation

Participants consistently emphasized the role of encouragement, achievable goal-setting, and recognition of progress in fostering motivation and engagement.

Participant 4 stated:

"I build confidence and motivation by providing positive reinforcement, setting achievable goals, offering consistent support, and celebrating small successes to foster a growth mindset."

Participant 2 emphasized recognition of even small contributions:

"By giving them a chance to participate in class activities, I praise them every time they achieve—even the small ones."

Participant 7 incorporated multimedia to inspire students:

"By using motivating videos."

Participant 5 explained:

"I build student confidence and motivation by using encouraging phrases and rewards. I recognize their efforts with positive affirmations, reinforcing their progress and growth."

Participant 1 emphasized a holistic, inclusive approach:

"To build the confidence and motivation of students with learning difficulties, I focus on creating a supportive and inclusive environment, celebrating their efforts and successes, and fostering a growth mindset that emphasizes progress over perfection."

Participant 6 highlighted the value of normalizing struggle:

"Celebrate small victories and praise students for genuine effort. Reassure them that struggling with new tasks is normal and not a reflection of their worth. Open communication boosts self-esteem immensely."

Participant 3 shared:

"Provide consistent encouragement, highlight their strengths, and help them recognize their own growth. Give positive feedback on every activity."

These responses align with research showing that growth mindset, positive reinforcement, and small success celebrations enhance motivation and resilience (Dweck, 2006; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Multimodal strategies, including video-based learning, also support engagement through varied learning channels (Mayer, 2009). Highlighting strengths and effort fosters self-belief and sustained motivation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Response to Feedback, Praise, and Reinforcement

Participants reported that students with learning difficulties responded best to clear, specific, and consistent feedback, tailored to their individual needs.

Participant 4 shared:

"Students with learning difficulties often respond positively to specific, constructive feedback and reinforcement, which boosts their confidence."

Participant 6 elaborated:

"They benefit greatly from positive and specific feedback, particularly when it's consistent and personalized. Immediate feedback helps them understand progress and make adjustments. Positive reinforcement builds confidence and motivation."



Participant 3 noted the need for differentiated approaches:

“A student with autism might respond well to visual cues and clear, consistent feedback, while one with emotional challenges may benefit more from verbal praise and recognition of effort.”

Participant 2 observed:

“The students are more motivated to participate and learn when they feel supported and encouraged.”

These insights reinforce the importance of individualized feedback and reinforcement, as supported by research on differentiated instruction and inclusive pedagogy (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Simonsen et al., 2008). Tailoring feedback methods to students’ learning and emotional profiles increases participation and self-efficacy (Allday & Pakurar, 2007; NCII, 2014).

Overcoming Learning Challenges

Participants shared the strategies they used to help students overcome academic and emotional challenges, highlighting the importance of personalized instruction and collaboration.

Participant 3 explained:

“A student struggling with reading improved after consistent one-on-one support using visual aids, which built their confidence and skills over time.”

Participant 2 observed the motivation that followed achievement:

“When my students overcome their difficulties, they feel much more motivated.”

Participant 4 described attention challenges:

“The biggest challenge was maintaining focus. Sitting through traditional lectures was difficult.”

Participant 1 reflected on broader classroom challenges:

“Classroom management, engagement, differentiated instruction, and limited resources are challenges that can be addressed with strategic approaches, collaboration, and focus on student needs.”

Participant 6 shared a supportive mindset:

“The best way to address learning challenges is to stay positive and supportive. Focus on their strengths instead of weaknesses to foster a growth mindset.”

Participant 5 described effective support strategies:

“I paired the student with a peer for reading practice and maintained communication with parents to reinforce strategies at home.”

These approaches are supported by research that highlights the effectiveness of individualized instruction, visual supports, and peer tutoring in improving learning outcomes (Torgesen, 2002; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003; Topping, 2005). Emotional support and family involvement also play crucial roles in helping students overcome challenges and sustain motivation (Epstein, 2001; McMaster, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2006; Dweck, 2006).

Section D: Challenges & Support Needs

This section outlines the challenges teachers encountered in supporting students with learning difficulties and the types of training and support they identified as essential for improving instructional practices. These findings underscore systemic gaps in resources and preparation, echoing the broader literature on inclusive education.

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Key Themes from Responses</i> |
|-------------------------|---|
| Major challenges faced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resources • Student behavioral issues • Lack of specific training |
| Training/support needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED and inclusive education training • Use of assistive technologies |

Major Challenges Faced

Participants shared that addressing diverse learning needs, sustaining engagement, and providing individualized instruction within constrained classroom settings were among their most pressing challenges. These were often compounded by a lack of training, inadequate materials, and emotional exhaustion.

Participant 3 noted:

“The most significant challenges include addressing diverse learning needs, maintaining engagement, and providing individualized support within limited time and resources.”

Participant 1 emphasized a lack of pedagogical preparation:

“A major issue is the lack of pedagogy and didactics to support learners with learning disabilities. This gap in skills directly impacts instructional quality.”

Participant 6 highlighted the emotional demand of teaching:

“The most significant challenge when supporting students with learning difficulties is maintaining patience in dealing with them.”

Participant 4 added that material and behavioral barriers were common:

“Teachers often face issues such as inadequate teaching materials, lack of time, and behavioral problems when working with students who have learning disabilities.”

These responses align with existing literature, which documents that teacher often struggle with addressing diverse learning needs within resource-constrained environments (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Rose et al., 2012). A recurring concern is the absence of specific training

for working with students who have learning disabilities, which limits the quality of instruction (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Additionally, maintaining patience and managing behavior add significant emotional strain, making sustained engagement difficult (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Other obstacles include inadequate instructional materials and limited planning time, which reduce the capacity for inclusive and differentiated practices (Mitchell, 2014; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2007)

Training and Support Needs

Teachers identified a strong and urgent need for professional development in inclusive education. Their recommendations focused on formal training in SPED, assistive technologies, trauma-informed practices, and access to instructional materials. Many also stressed the importance of engaging parents as collaborative partners.

Participant 1 suggested:

“Training in differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and trauma-informed teaching would enhance my instructional practices.”

Participant 2 emphasized comprehensive support:

“We need complete instructional materials, strong parental support, and proper training about inclusive education.”

Participant 7 highlighted the relevance of SPED training:

“As a general education teacher, I believe having SPED training is incredibly important. It helps me better understand and support the unique needs of my students.”

Participant 3 expressed interest in specific tools:

“I want to enhance my instructional practices by attending trainings on assistive technology integration.”

These perspectives are strongly supported by research that identifies professional development in SPED, differentiated instruction, and assistive technologies as key components of effective inclusive teaching (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Rose et al., 2012). The call for trauma-informed teaching is also growing in recognition as essential in inclusive classrooms where students may face emotional and psychological challenges (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016). Access to adequate instructional resources and meaningful parental involvement further strengthens instructional efforts and improves student outcomes (Epstein, 2001; Mitchell, 2014).

Conclusions

The study revealed that teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting students with learning difficulties through the use of differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, and inclusive classroom strategies. Despite facing challenges such as limited resources, time constraints, and insufficient formal training in special education, many educators adapted their practices with resilience, empathy, and personalized support to address the diverse needs of their learners. Teachers also recognized the importance of cultural responsiveness, collaboration with families, and fostering student motivation through positive reinforcement and encouragement. These findings align with the study’s objectives of exploring sociocultural, instructional, and motivational factors influencing inclusive teaching practices.

Based on these insights, it is recommended that educational institutions provide targeted professional development in special education, trauma-informed instruction, and assistive technology to enhance teacher preparedness. Additionally, increasing access to diagnostic tools, manipulatives, and adaptive learning materials is essential to improving classroom effectiveness. Strengthening home-school

partnerships through parent workshops and regular communication, along with the implementation of structured peer collaboration, can further support student engagement and learning outcomes. These actionable recommendations have practical implications for teacher training programs, inclusive education policies, and future research aimed at improving the educational experiences of students with learning difficulties (American Psychological Association, 2020).

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