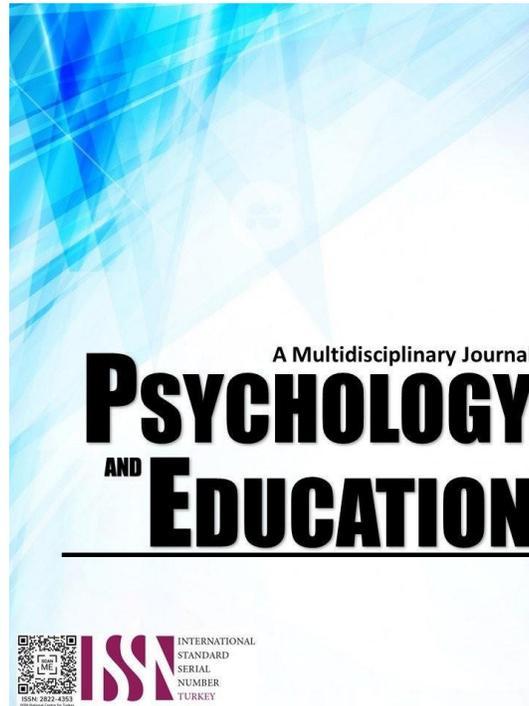


SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM: TEACHER PRACTICES, STRATEGIES, BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES OF WEST I AND WEST II DISTRICTS



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Special Education Program: Teacher Practices, Strategies, Beliefs and Attitudes of West I and West II Districts

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of the Special Education Program (SPED) in public elementary schools within the West I and West II Districts, focusing on teachers' practices, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes. Conducted at Sgt. Miguel Canoy Memorial Central School, NAPOCOR Elementary School, and Suarez Elementary School, the research utilized a phenomenological approach to gain deeper insights into teachers' real-life experiences in inclusive classrooms. During the fourth quarter of 2025, qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions, offering a comprehensive view of the challenges and strengths associated with SPED implementation. Findings revealed that while teachers commonly used strategies like differentiated instruction, peer learning, and individualized support, they also faced barriers such as limited training, a lack of resources, and large class sizes. Despite these hurdles, many educators showed strong dedication and positive attitudes toward inclusive education. The study emphasizes the importance of ongoing training, enhanced support systems, and more effective implementation of policies to enhance SPED services. It offers practical insights for teachers, school leaders, and policymakers committed to creating more inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: *special education (SPED), phenomenological approach, qualitative research, lived experiences, differentiated instruction*

Introduction

Special education programs played a vital role in promoting equal learning opportunities for all students, particularly those with diverse learning needs. In the Philippines, the movement toward inclusive education gained significant momentum, fueled by the Department of Education's commitment to delivering quality education for every Filipino learner. This study examined the implementation of special education in three public elementary schools in Buru-un Sgt. Miguel Canoy Memorial Central School, NAPOCOR Elementary School, and Suarez Elementary School are located within the West I and West II Districts. These schools implemented the Special Education (SPED) program to support the integration of learners with disabilities into regular classrooms, fostering both participation and academic growth in an inclusive and supportive environment.

The MATATAG Curriculum, introduced through DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024, reinforced this inclusive direction by emphasizing holistic development, 21st-century skills, respect for diversity, and global citizenship. Although the curriculum provided a foundation for inclusive pedagogy, its success largely depended on the commitment, competence, and attitudes of teachers.

These goals aligned with various national and international mandates such as the Salamanca Statement, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the Enhanced Basic Education Act (RA 10533), and the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA 7277), all of which recognized education as a right for all learners, regardless of ability.

Despite these strong policy frameworks, the implementation of SPED varied across schools due to constraints such as insufficient resources, inconsistent teacher training, and differing perceptions of inclusion. Teachers played a crucial role in overcoming these challenges by designing instructional strategies, adapting lesson plans, and cultivating inclusive classroom environments. Their readiness to support learners with special needs and their attitudes toward inclusive practices significantly influenced the success of such programs.

This study explored how teachers in the West I and West II Districts fulfilled their responsibilities in inclusive settings. It focused on their teaching practices, instructional strategies, and personal beliefs and attitudes toward inclusive education. By examining the day-to-day realities of SPED implementation, the research provided insights into the strengths and challenges faced by educators. Conducted during the fourth quarter of the School Year 2024–2025, the study contributed to broader efforts in strengthening inclusive education in the region and enhancing support for both teachers and learners.

Through the analysis of how teachers responded to the needs of learners with disabilities and navigated the challenges of implementing inclusive education, the study uncovered the everyday realities of SPED in public schools. It provided valuable insights into existing practices and formulated recommendations for enhancing teacher development, improving support systems, and reinforcing inclusive education policies in the region.

The research also presented meaningful findings on how teachers supported learners with special needs, emphasizing their instructional approaches, levels of preparedness, and personal commitment to inclusion. In addition, it identified the common challenges educators encountered in delivering SPED services, offering a clearer picture of inclusive education in the selected districts.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to explore how the Special Education (SPED) program has been implemented in selected public elementary schools in three public elementary schools in Buru-un–Sgt. Miguel Canoy Memorial Central School, NAPOCOR Elementary School, and Suarez Elementary School are located within the West I and West II Districts during the School Year 2024-2025. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To describe the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. age;
 - 1.2. sex;
 - 1.3. highest educational attainment; and
 - 1.4. position/designation.
2. To identify the practices employed by teachers in implementing Special Education in public elementary schools.
3. To describe the instructional strategies used by teachers in addressing the diverse needs of learners in Special Education settings.
4. To recognize the beliefs held by teachers regarding the implementation and value of Special Education.
5. To assess the attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education and the delivery of Special Education services.

Methodology

Research Design

A phenomenological research design was used in this study. It investigated and comprehended the lived experiences of teachers in the West I and West II Districts as they implemented Special Education (SPED) programs. According to Creswell (2020), phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that aims to capture the essence of human experiences as reported by those who have experienced them firsthand. By putting away preconceptions and assumptions, this approach made it possible to examine participants' viewpoints in great detail and gain a more genuine knowledge of their experiences.

Through this design, the study sought to gain deep insights into the subjective experiences of teachers, specifically how they understand, practice, and respond to the demands of inclusive education. It aimed to uncover the meanings, challenges, and personal interpretations teachers associate with their roles in supporting students with special needs. This method is deemed appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to focus on individual perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and strategies that were often embedded in the real-life contexts of classroom teaching. By emphasizing rich, descriptive narratives, the phenomenological approach helped illuminate the complex realities and responses of implementing special education, offering a holistic understanding of how inclusive practices are experienced and enacted in everyday school settings.

Participants

This study was conducted during the 2024–2025 school year and focused on three public elementary schools located within the West I and West II Districts of Iligan City, namely: Suarez Central School, Sgt. Miguel Canoy Memorial Central School and NAPOCOR Elementary School. These schools were selected because they offered Special Education (SPED) programs in West I and West II districts. Among the participating schools, Suarez Central School is the only SPED-implementing school in the West I District that has one SPED teacher. In the West II District, Sgt. Miguel Canoy Memorial Central School had four SPED teachers, while NAPOCOR Elementary School had two SPED teachers actively engaged in SPED instruction. This brought the total number of participants to seven SPED teachers.

A purposive sampling method was employed, consistent with the qualitative phenomenological design of the study. This approach allowed for the intentional selection of participants who had firsthand experience and direct involvement in the implementation of SPED in their respective classrooms. Participants were included since they were currently teaching learners with special needs, had previously done so, or were actively participating in the planning, development, or delivery of SPED-related programs. This method ensured that the data gathered represented authentic, experience-based perspectives on the realities of inclusive education. All participants gave their informed consent prior to their participation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, providing rich qualitative insights into the teachers' instructional strategies, professional beliefs, and the challenges they encountered in implementing SPED within the mainstream classroom setting.

Procedure

The researcher employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing open-ended instruments to gather rich, detailed narratives and insights into the lived experiences of teachers involved in implementing the Special Education Program (SPED). Two methods were used to collect data: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to explore each participant's personal teaching experiences, instructional strategies, beliefs, and the challenges they encountered in supporting learners with special needs. These interviews offered the flexibility to probe deeper into specific issues while maintaining a consistent structure across participants. On the other hand, focus group discussions allowed for collaborative dialogue

among teachers, encouraging them to reflect on shared experiences and uncover additional perspectives on inclusive teaching practices within their respective schools.

In support of these instruments, audio recordings played a vital role in the data-gathering process. With the participants' informed consent, all interviews and FGDs were recorded using a digital voice recorder. This ensured that the data collected was accurate, complete, and free from interpretation errors during note-taking. The audio recordings enabled the researcher to transcribe participants' responses verbatim, preserving the richness and context of their experiences. Recording also allowed the researcher to focus on actively listening and engaging with participants during the sessions rather than being preoccupied with extensive note-taking. The recorded data was later processed and analyzed using NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, which helped in organizing responses, coding themes, and identifying recurring patterns related to SPED practices, strategies, beliefs, and challenges in the West I and West II Districts. Prior to initiating the data collection process, the researcher secured official approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of Iligan City. Potential participants who met the inclusion criteria were informed about the purpose and scope of the study and were asked to provide written informed consent to participate voluntarily.

The researcher presented the results of the study and asked their insights about the findings. The Focus Group Discussion was done to ensure consistency in data collection, build trust with participants, and create a safe and respectful environment for open dialogue. This process enabled the researcher to uncover recurring patterns and gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' practices, beliefs, and the obstacles they faced in implementing inclusive SPED programs in public elementary schools.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as its primary method for examining qualitative data. This approach allowed the researcher to identify, interpret, and organize recurring themes drawn from participants' narratives. A four-phase process was followed to ensure a systematic and credible analysis of the information gathered.

Phase 1: Data transcription and organization. All interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were transcribed verbatim to maintain the authenticity of participants' responses. The researcher also compiled observation notes, which were carefully reviewed, organized, and grouped based on their relevance to the study's objectives and emerging patterns from the data.

Phase 2: Coding and Thematic Development. The transcribed data and observation notes were imported into NVivo and Otter.ai to support systematic coding. Initial codes were generated through close reading and iterative analysis, focusing on core areas such as teachers' practices, attitudes, beliefs, instructional strategies, and challenges in implementing SPED. These codes were then clustered into broader categories and refined into key themes representing shared and divergent experiences among participants.

Phase 3: Cross-validation and triangulation to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data from individual interviews and FGDs were cross-validated. The researcher compared and triangulated insights from different sources to ensure consistency, confirm emerging themes, and minimize potential researcher bias. This process helped strengthen the validity of the interpretations drawn from the data.

Phase 4: Interpretation and integration of findings emerging themes were interpreted in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, including Jean Piaget's Constructivist Learning Theory, Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory, and Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the protection of the respondents, their personal information will be kept confidential, and their consent to participate in the study will be considered voluntary. The researcher sought approval for ethical considerations from the ethics committee prior to conducting the study. They were clearly informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they retained the freedom to withdraw at any point without any negative repercussions. The confidentiality of their contributions was rigorously protected; all identifying information was removed to ensure their privacy. Prior to commencing data gathering, formal authorization was obtained from relevant school administrators and district authorities. This study adhered fully to the ethical guidelines established by the Department of Education and the institution's research protocols, thereby reinforcing the research's credibility and ethical integrity.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the major findings of the study on the implementation of the Special Education (SPED) Program in the West I and West II Districts. The results are organized thematically, based on recurring patterns identified through thematic analysis. The themes include Teaching practices in inclusive classrooms, Instructional strategies used, Teachers' beliefs toward SPED, and Teachers' attitudes and challenges. Each theme is discussed in conjunction with supporting qualitative data and interpreted in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

Demographic Profile of Teacher Participants

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the teacher-participants in the study, which include their sex, age, length of service, position, and highest educational attainment. Understanding these variables provides context for interpreting their practices,

strategies, beliefs, and attitudes toward the implementation of Special Education (SPED) in the West I and West II Districts of Iligan City. The presence of experienced teachers, those with advanced educational attainment, and formally designated SPED teachers suggests a foundational readiness for inclusive practices. However, the concentration of new teachers and absence of male counterparts may indicate a need for enhanced mentoring programs, gender-balanced recruitment, and continued professional development to ensure the sustainability and equity of SPED initiatives.

Table 1. *Profile of the Participants*

<i>Demographic Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Sex	Female	7	100
	Male	0	0
Age	20–29 years old	1	14
	30–39 years old	2	29
	40–49 years old	4	57
Length of Service	1–5 years	3	43
	6–10 years	2	29
	11–20 years	0	0
	21 years and above	2	29
Position	Special Education Teacher I	4	57
	Teacher I	2	29
	Teacher III	1	14
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	2	29
	College Graduate (With MA units)	2	2
	Master's Degree/ MA units	3	43
Total		7	100

Teacher-Participants (N=7)

Sex of the Participants

All seven participants (100%) were female. This finding aligns with the broader trend in the teaching profession, particularly in basic education, where female teachers dominate the workforce. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022), women comprise the majority in the education sector, particularly in elementary schools. This is further supported by the study of Sadker and Zittleman (2023), who noted that teaching remains a highly feminized profession, especially at the early childhood and elementary levels, often due to gendered perceptions of caregiving roles.

Age of the Participants

The distribution of participants was in the 40–49 age group (57%), indicating a significant presence of mid-career educators with established teaching experience. The rest were distributed between 30–39 years (29% %), and one participant aged 20–29 (14%), suggesting the inclusion of early career teachers who bring fresh perspectives and evolving teaching approaches to SPED. This distribution suggests that many SPED teachers are in the mid-career stage, which, according to Huberman's (2023) professional life cycle theory, is a phase where educators become more confident, reflective, and committed to refining their instructional practices. Mid-career teachers are also more likely to have developed effective classroom strategies, especially in handling diverse learners, including those with special needs.

Length of service of the Participants

In terms of teaching experience, most participants had between 1 and 5 years (43%), while 29% had 6–10 years, and another 29% had over 21 years of service. Interestingly, there were no participants with 11–20 years of service, showing a potential gap in mid-level experience. According to Ingersoll and Strong (2022), early-career teachers (1–5 years) often face challenges in classroom management and adapting to inclusive practices, highlighting the need for targeted professional development. Conversely, long-serving teachers usually have institutional knowledge and resilience that contribute significantly to the effective implementation of SPED programs (Darling-Hammond, 2023).

Position of the Participants

More than half of the participants (57%) held the position of Special Education Teacher I, while the others included Teacher I (29%) and Teacher III (14%). This shows a concentration of formally designated SPED professionals. As emphasized by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2023), having specialized teachers in inclusive settings is critical for meeting the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. The presence of Teacher I and Teacher III in the group also suggests that general education teachers are actively involved in inclusive education, reflecting the current direction of the Department of Education's inclusive policy.

Educational Attainment of the Participants

The majority of the participants had advanced academic qualifications, with 43% holding a Master's degree or MA units and 29% having completed a bachelor's degree. The remaining participants were college graduates with some MA units. This educational profile

is consistent with the Department of Education's thrust to enhance teacher qualifications to improve instructional quality. According to Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2021), teachers with graduate-level training are more likely to implement research-based practices and adapt teaching strategies for diverse learners, which is crucial in SPED.

Teacher's Practices in Implementing Special Education

"Describe your daily teaching practices when working with students with special Needs.

Teacher 1 and participant 1 shared that in her daily teaching practices with students with special needs, she begins with a structured morning routine and warm-up activities. These initial tasks help set the tone for the day, providing learners with a sense of stability, focus, and readiness for classroom engagement. Such routines are particularly important for students with special needs, as they promote predictability and support smoother transitions into academic tasks.

Teacher 2, participant 2, includes creating a conducive and supportive learning environment, allocating ample time for struggling learners, and using differentiated instruction tailored to their unique needs. I also implement effective classroom management strategies to maintain a positive and productive classroom atmosphere.

Teacher 3, participant 3, I apply differentiated instruction by providing the same lessons, skills, and competencies but adjusting the level of task difficulty to match each student's abilities and learning style.

Teacher 4, participant 4, my daily teaching practices with students with special needs are highly individualized and flexible, designed to create a structured, routine, and stimulating learning environment. I use each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) as a guide to ensure that instruction aligns with their specific learning goals and accommodations.

Teacher 5, participant 5, I implement a structured daily routine and use multisensory teaching strategies to address the diverse needs of my learners. I provide individualized instruction and incorporate visual aids, assistive technology, and positive reinforcement to promote engagement and support meaningful learning experiences.

Teacher 6, participant 6, stated that when working with students with special needs, the approach should be structured, individualized, and inclusive. I ensure that each learner receives the necessary support to succeed by modifying lessons through differentiated instruction, incorporating hands-on activities, and providing calm-down spaces or breaks as needed.

Teacher 7 and participant 7 focus on creating an inclusive and individualized learning environment where students feel comfortable, safe, and respected. I align all activities and instruction with each learner's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to meet their unique needs and goals.

Three teachers (Participants 2, 3, and 6) shared how they consistently applied differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse student needs. This involved modifying lesson complexity, pacing, and delivery to suit each learner's unique profile ensuring that content remains accessible and meaningful to all.

Three teachers (Participants 2, 3, and 6) shared how they consistently applied differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse student needs. This involved modifying lesson complexity, pacing, and delivery to suit each learner's unique profile, ensuring that content remains accessible and meaningful to all. These teaching practices align with the principles highlighted by Tomlinson (2023), who emphasized that differentiated instruction is not merely a set of techniques but a mindset rooted in respect for individual learning paths. Additionally, this approach reflects the Multiple Intelligences Theory by Gardner (2020), which advocated for varied instructional strategies that cater to different learner strengths whether linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, or interpersonal.

The integration of differentiated instruction as observed among the teacher-participants is also supported by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, 2022), who asserted that inclusive pedagogy is most effective when educators anticipate and respond to a wide range of learning differences. Their work underscores that instructional flexibility, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, is fundamental to inclusive education. Moreover, the use of individualized techniques corresponds with the emphasis in DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024, which encourages learner-centered and flexible teaching practices under the MATATAG Curriculum. This policy reflects a national commitment to addressing diverse learning needs, especially for students with disabilities.

These findings further echo the practices discussed in Burgess et al. (2021) and Ramos and Escueta (2020), who demonstrated that differentiated strategies significantly improve engagement and learning outcomes in inclusive classrooms. The implementation of such strategies by Participants 2, 3, and 6 not only aligns with best practices but also exemplifies how committed educators translate inclusive education policies into meaningful classroom experiences.

"I apply differentiated instruction by providing the same lessons, skills, and competencies but adjusting the level of task difficulty to match each student's abilities and learning style," reflected Participant 3.

This practice is closely aligned with Tomlinson's Differentiated Instruction model (2022), which emphasizes the importance of structured routines and tailored activities to meet the needs of diverse learners. By incorporating morning routines and warm-up exercises, teachers create a supportive environment that prepares students, especially those with special needs for meaningful learning experiences throughout the day, which advocates for adjusting content, process, and product based on student readiness, interests, and

learning profiles. Such approaches foster equity and engagement, particularly in classrooms with diverse cognitive and behavioral profiles. These insights underscore the importance of equipping teachers with training and resources to design flexible lesson plans. Strengthening teachers' capacity for differentiation through workshops and mentoring can support more inclusive classroom experiences for learners with disabilities.

Based on the responses, several key themes emerged in the teachers' daily teaching practices while working with students with special needs. Participants 2, 3, and 6 consistently emphasized their use of differentiated instruction, modifying lessons, content, and activities to accommodate each learner's unique abilities, learning styles, and pace. This approach ensures that all students are actively engaged and can access the curriculum in a meaningful way. These findings align with Tomlinson (2023), who stated that differentiated instruction is rooted in the belief that each student's learning path is valuable (2022), emphasizing the importance of structured routines and tailored activities to meet the needs of diverse learners. By incorporating morning routines and warm-up exercises, teachers create a supportive environment that prepares students, especially those with special needs, for meaningful learning experiences throughout the day. Inclusive education flourishes when teaching strategies are designed to meet diverse needs through flexible and responsive instruction.

Meanwhile, Participants 4, 5, 6, and 7 emphasized the importance of individualized instruction, using Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) as a foundation for planning and delivering lessons. These teachers tailor their teaching to the specific goals, accommodations, and support services outlined in each student's IEP, thus promoting student-centered learning. This supports the findings of Ramos and Tan (2025), who reported that the lack of effective use of IEPs in many classrooms in the Philippines remains a barrier to successful special education (SPED) implementation. By centering their teaching practices on IEPs, these educators demonstrate their commitment to addressing the individualized needs of students, as encouraged by the inclusive education frameworks promoted by DepEd (2024).

Participants 1, 5, and 6 highlighted the importance of structured routines, noting that consistency and predictability helped reduce anxiety and enhance focus for learners with special needs. Establishing clear daily routines supported behavior regulation and fostered a productive learning environment. This finding aligns with the work of McLeskey, Rosenberg, and Westling (2020), who emphasized that predictable classroom structures play a vital role in promoting emotional stability and managing behavior effectively in inclusive classroom settings. Such routines help students with special needs feel secure, understand expectations, and engage more confidently in learning activities.

Additionally, Participants 2, 6, and 7 expressed a strong commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive classroom environment where students felt safe, respected, and valued. Their goal was to cultivate a positive atmosphere that promoted emotional well-being, active participation, and social acceptance. Loreman (2021). *Inclusive Education: Supporting Diversity in the Classroom*. This edition emphasizes inclusive classroom practices that promote academic access while fostering emotional well-being and a sense of belonging, making it a strong source for research on Special Education implementation. Research has noted that inclusive classrooms not only provide academic access but also nurture a culture of belonging and emotional security.

Moreover, these practices reflected a shared understanding among the teachers of the importance of flexibility, individualization, and inclusivity in addressing the diverse needs of learners with special needs. Tomlinson (2023) emphasized that effective teachers should adjust not only the content but also the environment and learning processes to support diverse learners equitably. Collectively, the participants' responses demonstrated a holistic approach that combined academic support, emotional care, and structured teaching strategies to promote success for every learner.

Can you share specific examples of successful activities or teaching methods you've used to accommodate diverse learners?

Teacher 1, Participant 1, I have used multisensory learning activities.

Teacher 2, Participant 2, I utilize hands-on group work and active learning to encourage participation.

Teacher 3, Participant 3, I implement differentiated reading activities tailored to learners' levels and needs, grouping students accordingly.

Teacher 4, Participant 4, I emphasize structured routines, predictable transitions, and visual clarity for learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Teacher 5, Participant 5, I incorporate music-based learning, fine motor tasks, and sensory breaks.

Teacher 6, Participant 6, I use task analysis, breaking tasks into small, manageable steps.

Teacher 7, Participant 7, I employ hands-on activities like clay modelling, along with visual schedules and social stories.

Teachers shared a variety of successful practices and methods to accommodate the diverse needs of learners with special needs. They frequently emphasized the importance of multisensory and hands-on learning activities. For instance, Teacher 1 employed multisensory techniques, while Teachers 2, 5, and 7 integrated interactive methods such as group work, role-playing, clay modeling, and music-based learning to encourage active participation and engagement. This approach is supported by Sousa (2022), who emphasized that

multisensory and experiential activities can significantly enhance brain engagement and learning retention, especially in inclusive classrooms. Who asserted that multisensory instruction helps reinforce learning by engaging multiple pathways in the brain, making content more accessible for students with diverse needs. Individualized instruction and task breakdown were also emphasized. Teacher 3 differentiated reading instruction based on performance levels and specific needs, particularly for learners with hearing impairments. Teacher 6 utilized task analysis, breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps, such as teaching students how to tie their shoelaces. Similarly, Teacher 7 employed task breakdowns and individualized plans to guide instruction.

These strategies align with the findings of Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen (2023), who emphasized that breaking complex skills into sequenced steps helps students with learning difficulties develop greater independence and mastery. Furthermore, Teachers 4 and 7 highlighted the use of structured routines and visual supports, especially for students with autism. They provided clear instructions, predictable transitions, and visual schedules to help students navigate daily tasks more smoothly. This aligns with the recommendations of Dettmer et al. (2023), who emphasized that structured routines and the use of visual aids play a crucial role in enhancing predictability, reducing anxiety, and supporting task performance among learners with autism spectrum disorder.

Teachers 5 and 7 demonstrated effective behavioral strategies and provided social-emotional support in their approaches. They utilized social stories, behavioral interventions, and reward systems to manage behavior, promote self-regulation, and reinforce learning in meaningful ways. This is consistent with the findings of Wong et al. (2022), who highlighted that social stories and positive behavior support strategies are effective in improving behavioral and emotional outcomes for students with special needs, especially those with autism spectrum disorder.

Moreover, these practices reflect a commitment to inclusivity, flexibility, and responsiveness to the individual needs of learners. The teachers emphasized the importance of adaptive strategies, learner-centered planning, and supportive classroom environments to ensure the success of every child. Tomlinson (2023) similarly highlighted that responsive teaching and differentiated planning are essential for accommodating the diverse readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of students.

Strategies Used for Special Education

How do you collaborate with other teachers, parents, and specialists to develop strategies for special education?

Teacher 1, Participant 1, uses co-teaching and inclusive practices.

Teacher 2, Participant 2, holds monthly collaboration sessions with co-teachers to plan and share ideas, as well as parent-teacher conferences and consultations.

Teacher 3 and Participant 3 emphasize the importance of strong collaboration and positive relationships. They maintain regular and open communication with parents to coordinate support and ensure coordinated efforts with specialists.

Teacher 4 and Participant 4 discuss lesson plans and classroom management with colleagues, utilizing calls, emails, and conferences to keep parents engaged. They also work to ensure coordinated support with specialists.

Teacher 5, Participant 5, collaborates with general education teachers and fellow Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers from other schools. They work closely with parents to share observations and provide home support. They acknowledge the challenge of collaborating effectively due to undiagnosed learners.

Teacher 6 and Participant 6 said that this builds ongoing communication with other teachers, as well as communication through messenger and phone calls.

Teacher 7 Participant 7, has regular meetings every Tuesday and Thursday with SNED teachers to share strategies. They also communicate via texts, phone calls, and one-on-one meetings to update and strategize. They highlight limited access to specialists due to financial constraints but strive to reinforce the recommended strategies when provided.

These findings reflected the critical role of collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists in supporting inclusive education. As Friend and Cook (2023) emphasized, effective collaboration among professionals and families enhances the quality of educational planning and delivery for students with special needs. Likewise, Loreman (2024) noted that sustained, open communication between educators and parents is essential for building trust and ensuring consistency across school and home environments. Moreover, collaboration fosters professional growth and shared responsibility, which is key to delivering inclusive and holistic support (Villa & Thousand, 2024).

Teacher collaboration is common among all respondents. Teachers 1, 2, and 5 emphasized co-teaching and inclusive practices, as well as participating in shared lesson-planning sessions where they discuss and align their strategies. Teachers 2 and 7 mention that they hold regular meetings with fellow Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers, typically occurring on a weekly or monthly basis, to exchange ideas and reflect on best practices. Teacher 4 specifically discusses the alignment of lesson plans and classroom management strategies with peers, while Teacher 6 highlights the importance of fostering collaboration through open and ongoing communication using digital tools. Collaboration with parents is consistently emphasized by Teachers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

This collaboration often involves parent-teacher conferences, home-school consultations, and the use of various communication

methods, including phone calls, text messages, emails, and one-on-one meetings. Teachers recognize that maintaining frequent and open communication with families helps to ensure consistent support for students both at school and at home. Collaboration with specialists poses challenges for several respondents due to limited access and financial constraints. Teacher 5 notes that many students remain undiagnosed, making it difficult to implement targeted interventions. Similarly, Teacher 7 mentions that collaboration with specialists is rare, although she utilizes the resources available to her. Teacher 4 stresses the importance of utilizing student records and assessments to monitor progress, especially when direct specialist support is unavailable. The responses indicate that teachers actively seek to build partnerships, maintain regular communication, and engage in shared planning to develop and refine special education strategies. Despite some limitations in specialist involvement, these educators demonstrate resourcefulness and a strong commitment to providing individualized support for their students through ongoing collaboration.

DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024, recognizing the particular context and educational concerns of diverse learners, DepEd said the MATATAG Curriculum would be "contextualized" to implement various inclusive education programs, such as, but not limited to, Special Needs Education (SNEd), "The Special Curricular Program (SCP) will complement the MATATAG Curriculum to cater to the needs of learners with potential, skills, and talents," DepEd stated. It added DepEd stated that the core principle of the MATATAG Curriculum is inclusive education. Its goal is to "nurture holistically developed Filipino youth, equipped with 21st-century skills, in an inclusive learning environment, ready for employment, entrepreneurship, or higher education, and who will find joy in lifelong learning."

What role does technology play in supporting your teaching strategies for special education? Can you provide examples?

Teacher 1 Participant 1, utilized speech-to-text tools and assistive technologies to enhance reading and writing, making learning more accessible for students with language or motor challenges.

Teacher 2 Participant 2, used educational videos and printed worksheets to improve comprehension among students.

Teacher 3 Participant 3, employed PowerPoint presentations, televisions, speakers, and computers to deliver personalized learning experiences and strengthen communication and listening skills.

Teacher 4 and Participant 4 integrated technology to tailor instruction and enhance communication among stakeholders, utilizing collaborative tools to facilitate coordination among teachers, parents, and specialists.

Teacher 5 and Participant 5 selectively used technology based on learners' sensitivities, applying tech platforms to communicate with parents, track student progress, and utilize educational apps, flashcards, and video modeling.

Teacher 6 Participant 6, used pre-recorded lessons to increase accessibility and personalize instruction, while also leveraging adaptive tools to address specific learning needs.

Teacher 7 and Participant 7 incorporated gamified tools, such as PowerPoint, ClassDojo, and Kahoot, to foster engagement and reinforce learning through interactive experiences.

Based on the responses from seven teachers, the most effective strategy used in special education was integrating technology to personalize instruction, enhance accessibility, and engage learners with diverse needs. This aligns with the findings of Okolo and Bouck (2020), who highlighted that assistive technologies help remove barriers and provide equitable access to learning for students with disabilities.

Reflecting this, Teachers 3 and 6 shared how they use PowerPoint presentations, pre-recorded lessons, and multimedia tools to tailor instruction to students' individual learning paces and preferences. Supporting this approach, Al-Azawei, Serenelli, and Lundqvist (2022) emphasized that digital tools promote personalized learning by offering multiple ways to present content, consistent with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Teacher 4 further stressed the importance of technology in customizing instruction to ensure all learners can access materials, a view echoed by Tomlinson (2023), who noted that effective differentiation involves adjusting not only content but also the methods and tools used for instruction. To enhance engagement, Teachers 2 and 7 reported using educational videos, ClassDojo, Kahoot, and gamified presentations to boost motivation and participation, which aligns with Westling and Fox's (2021) assertion that interactive and gamified learning platforms improve student involvement and knowledge retention in inclusive settings.

Teacher 4 emphasized technology as a means to tailor instruction and ensure that all students could access learning materials, a concept supported by Tomlinson (2023), who noted that effective differentiation includes modifying not only the content but also the process and tools used to deliver instruction. For interactive and engaging learning, Teachers 2 and 7 noted the use of educational videos, ClassDojo, Kahoot, and gamified presentations to increase student motivation and participation. This was consistent with Westling and Fox (2021), who stressed that engaging tools and gamified learning platforms can enhance participation and learning retention in inclusive classrooms.

Regarding the selective and thoughtful use of technology, Teacher 5 emphasized choosing tools carefully, considering students' sensitivities to colors, sounds, and visual stimuli, while balancing screen time with hands-on, structured activities. This approach is supported by Loreman (2023), who underscores the importance of adapting learning environments to meet the sensory needs of students

with exceptionalities. Additionally, enhanced communication and progress monitoring were highlighted by Teachers 4 and 5, who used digital communication platforms to maintain regular contact with. Lastly, enhanced communication and progress monitoring were addressed by Teachers 4 and 5, who utilized communication platforms to stay in touch with parents and track learner progress. Ramos and Tan (2025) also found that regular collaboration and digital communication with families strengthened the implementation of inclusive education.

Beliefs about Special Education

How do you perceive the impact of special education on both students with special needs and their peers?

Teacher 1, Participant 1, Fosters academic growth and encourages independence, as educators recognize that special education plays a crucial role in supporting the individual academic progress of students with special needs.

Teacher 2 and Participant 2 mentioned that teachers engaging in learning with peers who have disabilities foster an inclusive environment, strengthen collaboration, and enhance the sense of community within the classroom.

Teacher 3, Participant 3, Special education provides essential support that significantly enhances social interaction, communication skills, and emotional development for students of all abilities. By creating tailored learning environments, special education fosters meaningful connections among peers, encourages effective self-expression, and nurtures emotional resilience. This holistic approach not only benefits students with special needs but also enriches the learning experience for their classmates, ultimately promoting an inclusive and supportive community.

Teacher 4, Participant 4, Contributes to the Development of a more equitable learning environment. Educators recognize special education as a valuable approach to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive in a fair and supportive setting.

Teacher 5, Participant 5, Inclusive education empowers students with special needs to learn side by side with their peers, significantly enhancing mutual respect and shared experiences. This approach not only benefits individual students but also strengthens the entire learning community.

Teacher 6, Participant 6, Special education is crucial for nurturing emotional development and cultivating effective communication skills. This targeted approach not only supports students with diverse needs but also enriches the social experiences of all students, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive.

By embracing this approach, Teacher 7 and Participant 7 empower every individual to thrive, creating a community where all voices are heard and valued. Special education creates a fair and equal learning environment. It encourages teachers, students, and parents to work together and share responsibilities. This teamwork helps everyone succeed.

Academic Growth and Independence: Teacher 1 Emphasizes academic growth and independence. Teacher 5: Assisting students in gaining confidence and independence. Teacher 6: Enhanced academic performance leads to increased self-confidence and emotional growth. Teacher 7: Boosting self-esteem and fostering independence. There is a common belief that special education enhances academic performance, confidence, and learner independence. Inclusive environment / Learning together, Teacher 2. Students with special needs learn alongside their peers in regular classes. Teacher 4: Promoting Understanding and Creating a More Equitable Learning Environment. Teacher 5: Fostering an inclusive space where every learner can thrive. Teacher 7: Creating a Supportive and Inclusive Environment.

This leads to the shared belief that special education promotes inclusivity and facilitates learning among peers. Empathy, social skills, and Emotional growth: Teacher 3 - Raising awareness and developing social responsibility. Teacher 5: Peers learn empathy and understanding from each other. Teacher 6: Improved social communication skills and emotional development. Teacher 7: Fostering empathy and promoting collaboration. Teachers believe that peers benefit from learning empathy, while students with special needs experience emotional and social growth.

Teachers consistently recognized the positive impact of special education on both students with special needs and their peers. They highlighted how it fosters academic achievement, emotional resilience, and social integration while nurturing empathy and inclusivity. For them, special education is more than just support it is a transformative practice that enriches the entire classroom experience. By promoting equity and collaboration it creates a compassionate and inclusive environment where all learners can thrive. Overall, teachers agree that special education fosters academic growth, independence, and self-esteem, which aligns with the findings of Florian (2022) and Avramidis and Norwich (2021). Many educators also emphasize the inclusive nature of special education, supporting the perspectives of Booth and Ainscow (2023) and UNESCO (2023), who advocate for learning environments that celebrate diversity and promote shared participation.

Furthermore, the emotional and social benefits—such as enhanced empathy and communication skills—are frequently recognized, reflecting the research of Jordan et al. (2022) and Staub and Peck (2021). Lastly, several teachers highlighted how special education advances equity and collaboration within the school community, consistent with the views of Friend and Bursuck (2022) and Ainscow (2021).

In your opinion, what are the key factors that contribute to the successful implementation of special education?

Teacher 1, Participant 1, there should be specialized training and a professional development attitude towards special education.

In my opinion, the key factor that contributes to the implementation of special education is collaboration among parents, the receiving teacher, and the IEP team.

In my opinion, the key factors that contribute to the successful implementation of special needs education are strong teachers, training, differentiated instruction, inclusive practices, positive collaboration and teamwork, parental involvement, and a commitment to teaching learners with disabilities. It aims to address students' different needs and promote full participation in the learning environment.

Teacher 4, Participant 4, for the successful implementation of special education, focuses on key factors such as clear goals and objectives, collaboration and communication, and effective attitudes towards special education.

For me, the Successful implementation of special education requires an individualized approach, qualified educators, an inclusive environment, parental involvement, access to resources, ongoing professional development, collaboration among stakeholders, and regular assessment of student progress.

In my opinion, Teacher 6 and Participant 6 create an inclusive and accessible learning environment, where a school culture reduces stigma and encourages peer instruction.

Teacher 7, Participant 7, in my opinion, here are some five factors. First, the individual educational plan should be tailored to the student's needs and have clear, measurable goals. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists, if available, should foster open communication and a team-based approach. Three, teacher training and professional development, ongoing training in special education practices, and strategies, and using assistive technology for an inclusive and supportive learning environment, there should be differentiated instructions, classroom modifications, and multiple means of learning. Five key qualities of a special education teacher: flexibility, patience, empathy, and seven behavioral and emotional support. And lastly, clear expectations and consistent reinforcement.

Commonly identified contributions to the successful implementation of special education, as mentioned by Teachers 1, 3, 5, and 7, emphasize the importance of specialized teacher training and professional development. These elements equip educators with the competencies needed to support diverse learners (Florian & Rouse, 2020; Friend & Bursuck, 2022). Collaboration and teamwork, highlighted by Teachers 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7, are equally vital, as effective communication among teachers, parents, administrators, and specialists fosters a supportive educational network (Ainscow, 2021; Villa & Thousand, 2023). Teachers 3, 5, 6, and 7 also underscored the creation of inclusive environments that reduce stigma and promote peer interaction key to successful inclusive practices (Booth & Ainscow, 2021; UNESCO, 2023). Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and differentiated instruction, cited by Teachers 3, 5, and 7, are essential in addressing the unique needs of students with disabilities (Tomlinson, 2021; Turnbull et al., 2020).

Positive teacher attitudes, noted by Teachers 1, 4, and 7, significantly influence inclusive outcomes, as mindset, empathy, and adaptability are foundational in supporting diverse classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2023). Parental involvement, emphasized by Teachers 2, 3, 5, and 7, reinforces learning through shared responsibility and ongoing communication (Hornby, 2023). Access to resources, assistive technologies, and emotional/behavioral support, as noted by Teachers 5 and 7, enhances inclusive effectiveness (Mitchell, 2024). Finally, Teachers 4, 5, and 7 emphasized the importance of setting clear goals, monitoring progress, and using consistent reinforcement practices, which are critical to educational accountability and student development (Friend & Bursuck, 2023).

Attitudes toward Special Education

What motivates you to implement special education practices in your teaching?

Teacher 1, Participant 1, I believe in equal education for all students.

Teacher 2, Participant 2, my motivation for implementing special education practices in my teaching comes from my passion for helping my learners and witnessing their progress in school.

Teacher 3, Participant 3, I am motivated to implement special education practices in my teaching because of my goals and plans for my learners in the inclusion program. I aim to help them integrate into regular classes whenever possible; if that isn't feasible, I want to ensure they can live independently within society.

Teacher 4, Participant 4, my motivation to implement special education practices stems from a commitment to providing all students with a meaningful and educational experience.

Teacher 5, Participant 5, I am motivated to implement special education practices in my teaching because I believe every child deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their full potential. Witnessing my learners make progress, no matter how small inspires me to adapt my strategies and ensure they receive the support they need. The joy and confidence they gain as they achieve milestones drive me to continue improving my teaching methods.

Teacher 6, Participant 6, I am motivated by my belief in equal education for all. I strive to create an environment where all students

can reach their full potential and thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Teacher 7, Participant 7, I am driven by the idea that education should be accessible to everyone, regardless of diverse learning needs, disabilities, or abilities. Education should be inclusive for all students, who must feel valued and respected. My passion for helping students succeed gives my work greater meaning, as I provide support that fosters independence and inclusion.

The participants clearly show that the teachers possess strong commitment and compassion toward inclusive education. Many, like Teachers 1 and 6, are motivated by a belief in equal educational opportunities for all, reflecting UNESCO's (2021) and Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2022) emphasis on equity and valuing every learner. Teachers 2 and 5 express a genuine passion for teaching and a desire to see student growth, which aligns with Tomlinson's (2021) view that even small progress is meaningful.

Teacher 3 focuses on long-term inclusion and learner independence, a goal supported by Turnbull et al. (2023), who highlight preparing students with disabilities for life beyond school. Teachers 4 and 7 emphasize purpose and moral responsibility, echoing Avramidis and Norwich's (2021) argument that attitudes grounded in empathy and ethics are essential for success in inclusive settings. Together, their insights reflect learner-centered mindsets and a shared dedication to creating supportive, inclusive environments where every child is valued and empowered.

How does your attitude towards inclusion influence the way you interact with students with special needs?

Teacher 1, Participant 1, I treat every learner with dignity and respect.

In an inclusive education setting, when working with learners who have special needs, I am encouraged to adapt to challenges and develop strategies that enable learners with and without disabilities to learn together.

Teacher 3, Participant 3, my attitude toward inclusion greatly impacts and influences the way I interact with learners who have special needs. As a teacher, my ideas, perceptions, and attitudes are crucial in implementing the Special Education (SPED) program.

Teacher 4, Participant 4, a positive and inclusive attitude translates into a teaching approach that is individualized, respectful, collaborative, and empowering for students with special needs.

Teacher 5, Participant 5, my positive attitude towards inclusion influences how I interact with learners and specialists. It helps me to be patient, understanding, and adaptable in my teaching methods. I make a conscious effort to ensure that every learner feels valued, respected, and supported on their unique learning journey. Positive reinforcement is a key part of my approach; I celebrate every achievement, no matter how small, to boost their confidence and motivation. Believing in their potential drives me, and watching them grow and succeed is incredibly rewarding. It inspires me to continue making a positive impact on their lives.

Teacher 6, Participant 6, my belief in inclusion directly shapes how I interact with students with special needs by fostering respect, encouraging them, and maintaining high expectations.

Teacher 7, Participant 7, I believe that every student, regardless of their abilities, should have the opportunity to participate fully. This belief influences my interactions with them, where I first emphasize their strengths and abilities. I then build a supportive and inclusive environment, use differentiated instruction to promote social and emotional growth and collaborate with parents.

The participants revealed that many teachers share a positive outlook on inclusion, deeply influencing their approach to students with special needs. Teachers 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 emphasize respect, dignity, and the importance of individualized support, reflecting the inclusive principles highlighted by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2022), who argued that valuing all learners equally is fundamental to inclusive pedagogy. Teacher 1 focuses on treating learners with dignity, while others promote empowering, strengths-based practices that recognize each child's potential. Teacher 6 reinforces this by fostering high expectations and encouragement, consistent with Rosenthal and Jacobson's (2023) findings, which indicate that teacher expectations have a significant impact on student performance.

Meanwhile, Teachers 2 and 3 reflect on how their personal beliefs influence inclusive practices: Teacher 2 adapts methods to meet diverse needs, and Teacher 3 underscores the importance of mindset in effectively implementing special education, echoing Avramidis and Norwich's (2022) emphasis on the critical role of teacher attitudes in successful inclusion. Collectively, these educators demonstrate a respectful and inclusive mindset characterized by empathy, high expectations, and individualized support, nurturing a classroom culture where students with special needs feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that teachers in the West I and West II Districts are making sincere and thoughtful efforts to welcome learners with special needs into their classrooms. Many of them have gone beyond the traditional teaching methods, embracing differentiated instruction, tailoring lessons to suit individual needs, and doing their best to make learning more inclusive and meaningful. Their creativity and dedication are evident. However, these efforts are not without challenges. Teachers often find themselves trying to meet the needs of every learner without the adequate training, resources, or support they truly need. While their hearts are in the right place, the tools to implement inclusive practices effectively are sometimes lacking.

The study also shed light on the positive beliefs that many teachers hold toward inclusive education. Their willingness to embrace

diversity stems not only from their professional responsibilities but also from deep compassion and understanding. Still, the reality of large class sizes, limited teaching aids, and minimal assistance in managing inclusive classrooms creates a sense of hesitation and, at times, frustration. Their desire to do more is evident, but the system needs to catch up with their commitment. Moreover, the lack of consistent institutional support and professional development stands out as a pressing concern. Teachers are eager to learn, adapt, and improve, but limited access to training, especially on specific disabilities and effective inclusive strategies, leaves many feeling underprepared. The absence of SPED specialists, therapists, and structured collaboration further isolates them in their efforts. It's not just about one teacher doing their best, it's about building a network of support around them.

This study highlights a vital truth: inclusive education is not just a strategy; it's a shared responsibility. Teachers can only do so much on their own. For inclusion to truly work, schools, communities, and policymakers must come together to support the people at the forefront of change, our educators. When teachers are equipped, encouraged, and empowered, every learner, regardless of their abilities, is given a real chance to succeed.

Based on the results and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the implementation of Special Education (SPED) in inclusive settings: strengthen teacher training and professional development programs by focusing on inclusive education strategies, differentiated instruction, and the use of assistive technologies, with regular workshops and learning action cell (LAC) sessions implemented across districts; enhance resource allocation for SPED by providing schools with sufficient instructional materials, adaptive devices, and classroom accommodations to support learners with special needs; deploy more SPED-trained personnel and support staff in mainstream schools, institutionalizing collaborative teaching models between SPED and general education teachers; develop a strong monitoring and evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of inclusive practices and identify areas for improvement, ensuring that school heads and SPED coordinators are trained in inclusive education leadership; promote community and parental involvement in SPED programs through awareness campaigns and stakeholder dialogues to dispel misconceptions and promote acceptance of learners with disabilities; support teacher well-being by creating policies and programs that address mental health and workload concerns, offering access to counselling, collaboration time, and recognition of efforts to boost morale and performance; and encourage inclusive student initiatives, such as programs that allow SPED learners to assume leadership roles, engage in peer mentoring, and participate in inclusive extracurricular activities to nurture empathy, build confidence, and strengthen social integration among all students.

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