EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Exploring the Challenges of Kindergarten Teachers in Inclusive Education

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Abstract

This study explored the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in implementing inclusive education in the District of Dinalupihan. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research captured the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of 13 public kindergarten teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The findings revealed six key themes: the need for effective identification and tailored support for diverse learners, challenges in creating inclusive classroom environments, the role of collaboration and community engagement, the importance of professional growth and access to resources, systemic and contextual barriers, and the critical role of specialist support. Teachers reported difficulties such as limited training, lack of resources, insufficient specialist access, and emotional strain, all of which hindered the delivery of inclusive practices. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience and a strong commitment to inclusive education. The study recommends localized training programs, strengthened collaboration, improved support systems, and responsive policies to bridge the gap between inclusive education ideals and classroom realities.

Keywords: *inclusive education, kindergarten teachers' challenges, training matrix*

Introduction

Inclusive education integrates learners of all abilities into regular classrooms, fostering environments where diversity is both celebrated and supported. It requires the collaboration of schools, educators, and families to ensure that learners with additional needs can fully participate in all aspects of school life (UNESCO, 2024). Inclusive education contributes to building a more equitable society by offering equal learning opportunities.

Despite global recognition of inclusive education, its practical implementation remains challenging, particularly in the Philippines. Often confused with mainstreaming, inclusive education goes beyond simply placing learners with additional needs into regular classrooms. It involves their full integration, providing appropriate support within the same learning environment. This distinction is crucial, as traditional educational models rely on segregation through specialized programs. Effective inclusion requires coordinated efforts among educators, administrators, and parents to create a learning environment that meets the needs of all learners (Catalyst Care Group, 2023).

Inclusive education is also a fundamental human right under International Human Rights Law. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 4, advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all (United Nations, 2023). In the Philippine context, this commitment is reflected in legislation such as Presidential Decree No. 603, Section 6, which affirms every child's right to an education suited to their abilities.

The Department of Education (DepEd) reinforces this commitment through policy directives, such as DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, which promotes inclusive education across all levels, and DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019, which provides a framework for inclusive practices in the K to 12 Basic Education Program. Republic Act No. 11650, enacted in 2022, further strengthens this foundation by mandating accessible and equitable primary education for learners with disabilities or additional needs (Llego, 2022).

However, while these policies provide a strong legal framework, significant implementation challenges remain, especially at the kindergarten level. Many teachers report feeling unprepared to meet the needs of diverse learners, citing limited training, inadequate resources, and a lack of specialist support. The EDCOM II Report (IDinsight, 2025) highlights systemic barriers such as insufficient localized training programs, a shortage of SPED resource teachers, and weak institutional backing, all of which hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education.

The Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 and NEDA's Ambisyon Natin 2040 emphasize the need for a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready education system. Yet, areas like Dinalupihan face obstacles threatening to realize these national goals. The alignment of this study with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and quality education for all, reinforces its national and global relevance.

Despite growing attention to inclusive education, research on kindergarten-level implementation in the Philippines remains limited. International studies by Yusof and Ismail (2020), along with the work of Hawthorne (2022), highlight common barriers, including insufficient training and support. Philippine-based research by Alcosero et al. (2023) and Epe et al. (2023) further confirms these issues, highlighting the lack of resources, professional development opportunities, and systemic support as major hurdles.

This study focuses on kindergarten teachers in Dinalupihan, Bataan—a district with the most inclusive education-implementing schools

in the province. With 28 public schools and 48 kindergarten teachers, the district offers a valuable lens through which to examine how inclusive education is practiced at the foundational level. Teachers in this setting play a critical role in shaping young learners' early understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

To address existing gaps, this research aims to identify the challenges kindergarten teachers face in Dinalupihan, such as instructional difficulties and resource limitations. The study will also propose a training matrix tailored to their identified needs. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform future policy decisions and program designs to strengthen inclusive practices, ensuring teachers and learners receive the support necessary for meaningful inclusion.

Research Questions

This study investigated the challenges kindergarten teachers face in the District of Dinalupihan during the implementation of inclusive education for the School Year 2024-2025. By identifying key barriers and difficulties in the process, the research aimed to understand the obstacles that hinder effective inclusion and to help teachers provide all learners, regardless of ability, with an equitable, high-quality education. Based on these findings, the study proposed a targeted training matrix that equips teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to foster an inclusive classroom environment. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges of kindergarten teachers in the implementation of inclusive education?
2. What teacher training matrix can be proposed based on the findings of the study?

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative method to gain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the experiences of kindergarten teachers implementing inclusive education. This approach was chosen because it facilitates exploring participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and insights, providing a rich, human-centered perspective on the complexities of inclusive teaching (Brannan, 2022). Qualitative research is well-suited for addressing the "how" and "why" questions behind complex phenomena, capturing the subtleties of human behavior and thought that quantitative methods may overlook (George, 2022). The flexibility of this method enables the discovery of themes and patterns within participants' narratives, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they encounter.

Participants

The study focused on 13 kindergarten teachers from public schools in the District of Dinalupihan who were actively engaged in inclusive education during the 2024–2025 school year. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they possessed relevant experience and knowledge regarding inclusive practices. Inclusion criteria included being employed by the Department of Education (DepEd), currently teaching kindergarten within the district, and having at least one year of experience working with diverse learners, particularly those with additional needs or requiring educational support.

Instrument

The primary data collection tool was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore the specific challenges kindergarten teachers face, their strategies, and their support in inclusive education settings. The interview guide was developed based on an extensive review of existing literature and relevant studies. To ensure its content validity, the guide was evaluated by a panel of experts: a registered guidance counselor and psychologist, the EPS Coordinator for Kindergarten at SDO Balanga, and the Director of the Quality Assurance Office and Counseling Program Head at BPSU. Their feedback led to refinements that improved the questions' clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. A pilot test was conducted with two kindergarten teachers outside the sample to assess the guide's effectiveness and allow further adjustments before data collection.

Procedure

The data analysis for this study followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), ensuring a structured and systematic approach to identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns within the dataset. Below is how each phase was applied:

The process began with Phase 1, familiarization with the data, where the researcher conducted an in-depth review of the interview transcripts. This phase involved reading and re-reading the data to immerse in the content and thoroughly understand the participants' responses. Notes were made to identify initial ideas, recurring themes, and potential areas of interest that could guide further analysis. This step ensured that the researcher was fully familiar with the data and could accurately capture the nuances of participants' experiences.

Phase 2 started when the researcher began the systematic coding of meaningful features of the data across the entire dataset. Each text segment was labeled with a concise code that captured essential aspects of the participants' responses, such as their experiences with inclusive education, challenges faced, and strategies employed. The initial coding process helped break down the data into manageable

chunks and allowed the researcher to begin organizing the data meaningfully.

Phase 3 involved searching for categories and potential themes by organizing the initial codes into groups based on similarities and patterns. These preliminary categories represented shared characteristics or meanings found across the data. The researcher explored connections between the codes, grouping them into broader categories reflecting emerging themes. This phase was iterative, requiring continuous refinement to ensure the themes accurately represented the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Phase 4 was the part when the researcher reviewed the preliminary themes by revisiting the data and checking for coherence and consistency. The researcher ensured that each theme captured the essence of the data and represented the nuances of the participants' responses. Any too broad or overlapping themes were redefined or separated to enhance clarity. This phase was critical for ensuring that the themes were well-structured and closely aligned with the data, and for confirming that the themes accurately represented the data set as a whole.

During Phase 5, the researcher defined and named each theme clearly, ensuring that the labels accurately captured the essence of the themes. Descriptions of each theme were created to highlight the scope and depth of the findings, ensuring that the thematic structure was coherent and comprehensive. The researcher aligned these themes with the research questions to ensure the data addressed the study's core objectives.

The final phase, Phase 6, involved producing the report. The researcher synthesized the findings into a narrative communicating the themes and their significance. This included weaving together illustrative data extracts from the interviews, with direct quotes from participants used to substantiate each theme. To ensure confidentiality, the participants were anonymized and coded numerically (e.g., P1, P2, P3). Visual aids such as thematic maps and word clouds were created to enhance the presentation of the findings, providing additional clarity and making the interpretation of the key patterns and insights more accessible.

Throughout the process, the researcher adhered to an iterative and reflexive approach, continuously reflecting on the analysis, revising themes as necessary, and seeking feedback from peers and experts to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. By following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, the researcher systematically analyzed the qualitative data and uncovered meaningful themes, offering valuable insights into the experiences of kindergarten teachers in implementing inclusive education.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The researcher began by immersing in the data through repeated reading of transcripts to familiarize and note initial ideas. Meaningful segments were coded systematically, capturing key concepts related to the challenges of inclusive education. Codes were then organized into broader themes based on similarities and patterns. As themes were developed and refined, no new insights emerged supporting the earlier determination of data saturation. Themes were clearly defined to reflect participants' perspectives and the study's objectives. Finally, findings were synthesized into a coherent narrative supported by participant quotations. Reflexivity and peer feedback enhanced the study's credibility and minimized bias.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards by securing institutional permissions and ensuring informed consent. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality measures in place, and their right to withdraw without repercussions. The researcher ensured no foreseeable risks to participants and allowed them to skip questions if desired.

Data Management and Confidentiality. All data, including audio files, transcripts, and notes, were stored securely on encrypted, password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and removing identifying information from all records and reports. Only anonymized data were used in the study's outputs, and all data will be permanently deleted after the completion of the research.

Trustworthiness of the Study. To enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, several strategies were employed:

Member Checking: Participants reviewed their interview transcripts for accuracy and completeness. Peer Debriefing: Colleagues and qualitative research experts reviewed the themes and interpretations, providing critical feedback. Triangulation: Data were compared across multiple participants to validate and refine emerging themes. These steps ensured the study's findings were reliable, authentic, and reflective of participants' experiences.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and analysis of the data collected through interviews. The responses were transcribed, coded, and grouped into themes to identify patterns and insights relevant to the research problem. The thematic analysis was used to categorize responses into key themes, providing a structured approach to understanding participants' perspectives. The findings are presented in six major key themes and seventy-seven supporting group codes that emerged from the participants' responses.

The primary key themes are the following: (1) The Compass of Understanding: Identification, Assessment, And Tailored Support (2) The Sanctuary of Learning: Creating Inclusive Environments (3) The Tapestry of Collaboration, Advocacy, and Community Engagement and Parent Support (4) The Forge of Growth: Empowering Educators Through Professional Growth, Cultural Competence and Right Resources (5) The Odyssey of Overcoming Barriers: Implementation Challenges, Transition Planning, Crisis Management, Technology Integration and Socio-Economic Factors with five sub-themes the Implementation Challenges and lastly, (6) The Pillars of Support: Specialists, Resilience, and Continuous Improvement. The emerging themes capture their experiences, concerns, and coping mechanisms. Each theme is discussed in detail, supported by participant narratives and relevant literature.

Lastly, this section presents a proposed training matrix to overcome the challenges and maximize the opportunities identified in the study. This matrix serves as a guide for strengthening inclusive education and offers valuable perspectives for educators, policymakers, and researchers in enhancing inclusive practices.

Major Key Theme 1: The Compass of Understanding Identification, Assessment, and Tailored Support

This theme highlights the essential process of early identification, developmental assessment, and the provision of individualized support for learners with diverse needs. This theme underscores the pivotal role of timely and accurate assessment in inclusive education while addressing systemic challenges such as a lack of tools, limited access to specialists, and inadequate training that hinder teachers from effectively supporting students through evidence-based strategies like Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These dimensions are explored through the following sub-themes: Early Identification and Developmental Assessment, Personalized Support Through Inclusive Pedagogy and Data, Structure, and Systematic Constraints in Inclusion.

Early Identification and Developmental Assessment. Identifying developmental needs early is crucial for providing young learners with the support necessary for their academic, emotional, and social development. Insights from participants highlight a pressing need for structured and timely assessments to recognize learning difficulties, developmental concerns, and differing levels of school readiness. Such assessments serve as a foundation for inclusive and effective teaching, enabling educators to tailor their approaches based on understanding each child's unique strengths and challenges.

One of the primary aspects emphasized is identifying and assessing additional needs. Participants highlighted that recognizing triggers of challenging behaviors often begins with a careful observation followed by a formal assessment. As shared and affirmed by the participants,

Participant 1: "I have two learners with special needs, identified through assessment... also, I have one learner exhibiting developmental concerns who has not yet undergone an assessment by a developmental pediatrician."

Participant 2: "I have one student with additional needs identified through class enrollment,"

Participant 12: "Through assessment, ma'am, we identified the learners with special needs."

These responses highlight the critical need for a structured and consistent process to identify learners who require additional support. Some children may be overlooked without formal assessments and fail to receive the necessary accommodations. Such findings align with existing research that emphasizes the long-term benefits of early childhood education and the importance of early detection of learning and developmental challenges.

The Department of Education (DepEd) reinforces the importance of early assessment and intervention through DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019, which encourages schools to identify learning needs early and provide appropriate support. This policy emphasis is echoed in the findings of Agyei (2023), whose study in Ghana demonstrated that early diagnosis of learning disabilities, when combined with timely and suitable interventions, significantly improved educational outcomes.

Participants also pointed out how children's prior educational experiences significantly affect their readiness for kindergarten, thus stated and observed,

Participant 9: "Some children come with strong foundational skills due to pre-kindergarten (day care) exposure, while others have limited or no formal learning experience."

This disparity in school preparedness challenges kindergarten teachers who must assess and support various developmental levels. Early assessment helps teachers differentiate instruction, identify learners who need support, and promote inclusive classroom practices. According to Myla et al. (2023), children who attend structured early learning environments develop foundational skills, such as language, problem-solving, and emotional regulation, that support smoother transitions into formal education.

Another essential concern raised by participants is the difficulty in recognizing developmental delays due to the limited availability of professional specialists. This was revealed and explicated,

Participant 9: "Another difficulty is identifying underlying developmental delays due to the limited availability of professional specialists for early assessment,"

Participant 13: "I told her that I have observed certain things about the child and that it would be better if he could be assessed by a

specialist. I can't say or diagnose that the child has a problem because I am not a medical specialist."

These challenges reflect the reality that while teachers are often the first to notice developmental issues, they are constrained by limited access to professional diagnostic support. Soma et al. (2023) emphasize that early intervention is essential for preventing minor developmental concerns from escalating into more serious learning barriers, and that teacher capacity and access to specialists are critical components of effective intervention. Moreover, Sharma (2024) underscores the importance of timely identification and effective intervention, which empowers educators to identify early indicators of learning difficulties and apply suitable teaching strategies. Achieving this goal necessitates a collaborative approach that brings teachers, parents, and policymakers together to foster inclusive, equitable, and academically supportive learning environments.

Participants also emphasized the importance of acting early when developmental concerns are detected, just like what was being shared,

Participant 13: "I hope they can provide assistance for the child, not for us, but for the child. For example, financial support to help them get assessed and taken to developmental pediatricians, as they really need that."

Educators expressed concern about the importance of early identification and ensuring that adequate support follows. The Early Intervention Foundation (2024) reinforces this perspective, emphasizing that early intervention is among the most effective strategies for setting children up for lifelong success. It enables the development of essential skills, addresses learning and behavioral challenges before they become more serious, and promotes long-term resilience.

Additionally, participants discussed their experiences with learners who have additional needs, noting and emphasizing that,

Participant 2: "Learners with disabilities or learning difficulties, such as autism, require personalized support, accommodations, and specialized teaching strategies,"

Participant 9: "Another difficulty is identifying underlying developmental delays due to the limited availability of professional specialists for early assessment."

These observations point to the necessity of teacher training and the availability of resources that support identifying and teaching learners with diverse learning needs. The study by Aktan (2020) supports this, noting that teachers trained in identifying and addressing learning disabilities are more capable of implementing strategies that cater to learners' unique learning profiles.

The insights shared by the participants highlight the multifaceted role that early identification and developmental assessment play in supporting inclusive education. Timely assessments enable teachers to recognize developmental challenges, tailor instructional strategies, and refer learners for appropriate interventions. These practices enhance immediate classroom outcomes and contribute to long-term academic success and social integration. When supported by policies, training, and resources, early assessment becomes a powerful tool for building a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

Personalized Support Through Inclusive Pedagogy ensures that learners with additional needs receive an equitable and meaningful education. Kindergarten teachers emphasized that addressing learners' unique challenges, especially those with additional needs, requires intentional strategies, early assessment, and professional collaboration. The participants' insights highlight the essential components of inclusive pedagogy: individualized education planning, differentiated instruction, engaging all types of learners, and promoting independence.

One of the primary strategies teachers identified was the need to develop Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These plans help tailor instruction and accommodations for learners with additional educational needs. A participant shared that learners require some help intended specifically for them, while another expressed a different concern about access to developmental assessments, as revealed

Participant 10: "require personalized support, accommodations, and specialized teaching strategies."

Participant 13: "First and foremost, I hope they can provide assistance for the child, not for us, but for the child. For example, financial support to help them get assessed and taken to developmental pediatricians, as they really need that."

These responses emphasize the importance of identification and planning as foundational steps toward supporting inclusive learning. This approach is supported by Aranjuez, et. al. (2025), who highlight the impact of early intervention through IEPs in preventing problems from escalating and fostering long-term academic and social success. Their findings reinforce that individualized plans provide structure for teachers while aligning educational goals with each learner's specific developmental needs.

Beyond individualized planning, participants also emphasized the necessity of differentiated instruction to address the broad spectrum of learning styles and paces in the classroom.

Participant 2: "Learners with disabilities or learning difficulties, such as autism, require personalized support, accommodations, and specialized teaching strategies."

Participant 6: "Teachers must employ differentiated instruction, collaborate with specialists, and foster a supportive environment to ensure all learners can thrive. Additional training in differentiated instruction and strategies for managing diverse classrooms is needed."

These insights reflect what Alhameedyeen (2023) identified in their study, which supports differentiated instruction as the key to improving student learning experiences and academic outcomes. They emphasize teacher training, the exchange of best practices, and integrating instructional strategies into curricula to accommodate learner variability.

Similarly, Gheyssens et. al. (2023) stress that a teacher's ability to modify instruction and assessment techniques is crucial in inclusive classroom settings.

Expanding on these points, Singh et. al. (2020) underscore how teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education significantly affect their implementation of inclusive practices. While positive attitudes correlate with greater inclusion success, persistent challenges such as limited resources and insufficient professional development often impede the development of such constructive mindsets. Engaging learners with additional needs was another vital point raised by participants, as experienced:

Participant 8: "One of the challenges I face in managing learners with diverse needs is that the main one is top kids bored by easy work while bottom ones can't follow the instructions."

Participant 9: "One specific challenge is differentiating instruction to meet these varied needs while maintaining engagement for the entire class. Additionally, I encounter difficulty in sustaining learners' attention in a world increasingly filled with digital distractions. Encouraging meaningful engagement with hands-on and exploratory activities requires continuous creativity, which can be mentally and physically demanding."

These reflections show that engagement requires content variation, creativity, energy, and adaptability. According to Mae and Galarosa (2025), employing engagement strategies such as interactionist classroom management helps prevent boredom and disengagement, particularly in inclusive classrooms. These strategies foster active participation and emotional connection to the material, vital for learners with different paces and interests.

In addition, Habib et. al. (2021) show that AI can personalize IEP development and streamline planning but stress the need for ethical use and teacher training. These findings relate to the study by emphasizing the importance of adaptive strategies and technological support in addressing the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers.

Finally, participants underscored the importance of fostering independence among learners with additional needs, as a hands-on approach was shared:

Participant 13: "To support the child with special needs, what I did, ma'am, was create different activities for him; I provided him with tasks that were different from those in the regular class. This is because he couldn't keep up with his peers. I also made sure to follow up with him at home, which his grandmother was able to do."

This proactive effort reflects an understanding that developing learner autonomy not only helps academically but also nurtures self-confidence and life skills. Kashefian-Naeeini and Kouhpeyma (2020) affirm that fostering independence is vital for long-term success. They argue that teachers play a crucial role in developing autonomy but caution that excessive control or lack of support can hinder learners' growth. Therefore, a balanced approach to encouraging responsibility while providing guidance is necessary.

The participants' responses reveal that personalized support is a cornerstone of inclusive pedagogy. Through IEPs, differentiated instruction, creative engagement methods, and strategies to build independence, teachers can create learning environments where all learners, regardless of their needs, are supported and empowered. These findings affirm the importance of professional training, systemic support, and collaboration with specialists to achieve inclusive and effective education.

Data, Structure, and Systematic Constraints in Inclusion. While inclusive education aims to create equitable and supportive learning environments for all learners, its effective implementation is often hindered by structural limitations, systemic inefficiencies, and resource constraints. The findings from this study emphasize the essential role of data in decision-making, the nuanced debate between inclusion and mainstreaming, and the significant impact of limited resources on teaching and learning outcomes. These interconnected factors reveal the complex realities educators face as they strive to create inclusive classrooms in under-resourced and structurally challenged settings.

One of the central aspects highlighted by the participants is the importance of data-driven decision-making. Teachers are expected to teach and consistently collect and analyze data to inform instructional practices, as explained and pointed out.

Participant 4: "It takes more time to ensure that the data collected about the progress of children with special needs is accurate..."

Participant 10: "ensuring the accuracy and fairness of assessments,"

Participant 9: "Extensive paperwork related to lesson planning, student profiling, and report submissions consumes a significant portion of my time. This affects my ability to fully focus on classroom preparation and individualized support."

These reflections highlight the ongoing tension teachers face in balancing instructional responsibilities with administrative tasks. While accurate documentation and learner profiling are critical for effective inclusive planning, they can become overwhelming without efficient systems and support. Dolezal (2024) emphasizes that data-driven decision-making is central to inclusive education, as it

enables targeted interventions, progress monitoring, and appropriate allocation of support services. However, without adequate administrative backing or reliable digital infrastructure, data management demands can impede rather than enhance classroom teaching.

Another key issue the study raises is the debate between inclusion and mainstreaming. It was further described that a real-life scenario involved parental denial and eventual placement in a Special Education (SPED) program:

Participant 12: "That happened last year when enrolling the child; it was noticed that he had additional needs. We first talked to the parents... They said it was possible to place him in a regular classroom. Then, when they accepted it after we explained the child's situation, they agreed, and the child received therapy in Orani."

"…because since we are in inclusive education, it is not allowed for them to refuse acceptance."

This narrative illustrates how decisions about placement are not only pedagogical but also deeply influenced by social dynamics and policy. It reflects the challenges of balancing legal mandates for inclusion with practical considerations about a child's needs. According to Lindsay (2020), inclusion requires significant systemic changes and cannot be effective through placement alone. While mainstreaming often focuses on physical integration, true inclusion demands curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and access to specialized services. The participant's experience reveals that in the absence of these supports, inclusion risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

Another major barrier identified in this study involves resource limitations. Teachers repeatedly mentioned the lack of appropriate materials, training, and institutional support needed to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.

Participant 6: "My first challenge is that I'm a new teacher, so I was still feeling my way around... especially when I found out that there were learners with additional needs that weren't disclosed during enrollment."

Participant 4: "Another challenge is the lack of resources and learning materials that are more suitable for them,"

Participant 12: "Because it's a barrio school... we lack materials. You need to provide and look for resources that you really can't obtain from the school or from the parents. In other words, you are the one who will provide and search for them."

These statements illustrate the direct impact of resource constraints on delivering inclusive education. Teachers are expected to adapt instruction, design personalized tasks, and support learners with special needs, yet often without access to appropriate teaching tools or support personnel. The issue is particularly acute in rural or low-income communities, where even basic materials are scarce.

Gonzaga et al. (2024) affirm that a lack of resources, whether in learning materials, specialized staff, or teacher training, is a major barrier to inclusive education. Their study found that inadequate resource allocation compromises teaching quality and student outcomes. They argue that systematic improvements such as investing in specialized tools, hiring qualified support staff, and funding teacher training are essential for translating inclusive policies into meaningful classroom practice.

These findings collectively suggest that while teachers are willing and often capable of implementing inclusive pedagogies, they are constrained by larger structural issues. Accurate data collection and analysis are crucial for responsive teaching, but they can become burdensome without proper systems. The inclusion versus mainstreaming debate reveals the complexity of placement decisions and the importance of contextual understanding and parent-school collaboration. Most significantly, the persistent lack of materials, training, and support infrastructure limits the ability of schools to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Major Key Theme 2: The Sanctuary of Learning: Creating Inclusive Environments

The theme underscores the classroom as a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where all learners, particularly those with additional needs, are given opportunities to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. Central to this is cultivating positive behavior, emotional well-being, and strong peer relationships, all of which contribute to a holistic learning experience. These principles are explored through three interrelated sub-themes: Proactive Behavioral Management and Support, Emotional Well-being and Mental Health, and Social Integration and Positive Classroom Culture.

Proactive Behavioral Management and Support. In inclusive education, managing classroom behavior requires more than discipline or corrective responses. It demands a proactive approach that prevents disruptions, supports emotional regulation, and promotes positive interactions. The findings of this study emphasize the significance of preparing educators to anticipate behavioral challenges and respond with empathy and structure. Effective behavioral management within inclusive classrooms hinges on three interrelated elements: creating supportive learning environments, addressing mental health needs, and managing emotional and behavioral challenges. These dimensions work collectively to foster a classroom climate conducive to the well-being and success of all learners.

One of the central factors identified in the study is the role of a supportive learning environment in minimizing behavioral issues and promoting inclusivity. A participant emphasized the importance of creating a space where learners feel safe and secure, stating the need for learners to thrive and stressed the necessity of adequate training for teachers, noting,

Participant 6: "foster a supportive environment to ensure all learners can thrive."

Participant 5: "There should be enough training on how to handle learners with special needs... those trainings will help us to be

prepared for the upcoming school years."

These statements highlight that proactive behavioral support begins with the overall atmosphere of the classroom. A positive environment characterized by clear routines, predictable structures, and emotionally safe interactions lays the foundation for preventing behavioral disruptions. Teachers must be equipped to design spaces where all learners, regardless of their background or needs, can feel included and understood (Learning Environment, 2020).

This finding is supported by Hawthorne (2022), who emphasizes that fostering supportive classroom climates requires consistent reflection and flexibility for educators. However, the study notes that without systemic support, such as sustained professional development, many teachers are left underprepared to make the necessary adjustments to build genuinely inclusive environments.

Likewise, Kibirige (2024) emphasizes strategies like Universal Design for Learning and inclusive assessments, stressing the importance of reflective practice and continuous teacher growth. These findings are relevant to this study as they underscore the need for emotional responsiveness and professional support in inclusive kindergarten classrooms.

Another core theme that emerged is the need to address the mental health needs of learners, particularly those with additional needs or unstable home situations. It was described how teachers are tasked with managing a wide range of learning styles and paces. Other participant illustrated how personal circumstances complicate support efforts:

Participant 3: "addressing behavioral and emotional difficulties."

Participant 12: "I can't communicate with the child's actual parents because they are separated... so I only talk to the grandmother."

These responses highlight that behavioral issues often stem from deeper emotional or psychological distress. To manage behavior effectively, teachers must understand the personal challenges their learners face, including trauma, separation, or neglect. The connection between mental health and behavior underscores the necessity of a holistic approach to classroom management that looks beyond surface-level actions and recognizes the emotional context of each learner.

Cambridge (2022) supports this conclusion by advocating for more accessible and comprehensive mental health services in educational settings. His study on counseling services at Cagayan State University identified a clear need for personalized and responsive guidance structures to support learners' emotional well-being. While his context focuses on higher education, the same principles apply in early childhood and primary settings—particularly within inclusive classrooms.

The third major concern raised by participants relates to emotional and behavioral challenges that disrupt learning and place pressure on teachers and the classroom environment. Such difficult experiences were discussed,

Participant 4: "addressing behavioral and emotional difficulties,"

Participant 12: "Sometimes they shout, hurt their classmates, and cause trouble during activities... The challenge there is how to resolve this conflict... and how to explain and ask for the patience of the other parents."

These real-world examples reveal how emotional dysregulation and aggressive behaviors can impact individual learners and classroom harmony. Additionally, Participant 6 confirmed that family circumstances, such as absent parents or limited communication, compound the challenge of managing these behaviors proactively.

The findings of Catubig et. al. (2024) align with this reality. Their study reveals that teachers often face overwhelming behavioral challenges, despite having limited training and support. They advocate for clear, structured behavioral intervention plans, empathetic communication strategies, and a collaborative school culture where teachers are supported in managing diverse student needs.

These collective insights demonstrate that while teachers are expected to manage behavior in inclusive classrooms, their success depends on more than personal effort. It requires consistent training, administrative support, and access to tools that allow for anticipatory rather than reactionary responses to behavior.

This theme emphasizes that managing student behavior in inclusive classrooms cannot be approached in isolation. It must be embedded within a broader framework of supportive classroom practices, mental health awareness, and structured emotional and behavioral strategies. The kindergarten teachers in this study recognize the value of proactive approaches but also highlight the challenges they face due to lack of training, family engagement, and institutional support.

For proactive behavioral strategies to be sustainable, they must be systematized across schools through teacher training programs, accessible mental health services, and coordinated interventions. Only when these structures are in place can inclusive classrooms function as safe, supportive, and productive environments where every learner is empowered to succeed academically, emotionally, and socially.

Emotional Well-being and Mental Health in Inclusive Classrooms. Emotional well-being and mental health are integral to implementing inclusive education. While access to curriculum and classroom integration are often emphasized in inclusion policies, learners' emotional safety, mental health, and social integration are equally essential for meaningful learning. This study reveals that teachers play a pivotal role in promoting emotional stability and mental health in their classrooms but also face challenges related to

training, family dynamics, and behavioral management. The findings highlight three interconnected sub-themes: the need for supportive learning environments, addressing mental health needs, and managing emotional and behavioral challenges in inclusive settings.

One core factor participants emphasize is the importance of supportive learning environments. These are classroom settings where learners feel safe, valued, and encouraged to express themselves. It is noted that the need to emphasize that inclusive classrooms must do more than accommodate academic needs—they must also nurture learners' emotional development, thus highlighting the importance of teacher preparedness, stating,

Participant 6: "foster a supportive environment to ensure all learners can thrive,"

Participant 5: "There should be enough training on how to handle learners with special needs... those trainings will help us to be prepared for the upcoming school years wherein... we will handle more learners with special needs in a normal classroom setting."

These reflections underscore that building a classroom environment conducive to emotional and academic growth depends on more than materials and policies; it depends on teachers' ability to form empathetic relationships and create predictable, nurturing routines. However, as participants pointed out, many teachers feel underprepared, especially regarding understanding and managing emotional difficulties in inclusive classrooms.

Hawthorne (2022) reinforces this, noting that supportive classroom environments require constant reflection and adaptive practices. Teachers must not only understand how to facilitate learning but also how to respond to complex emotional cues. Maintaining this emotional atmosphere becomes increasingly difficult without adequate professional development or systemic support.

Another prominent theme in the study is the challenge of addressing mental health needs, especially when family structures and communication barriers are involved. In addition to academic instruction, another participant provided a concrete example of communication barriers, stating,

Participant 12: "I can't communicate with the child's actual parents because they are separated... so I only talk to the grandmother."

These responses reveal that learners' mental health struggles are often connected to their family situations, which complicate the teacher's ability to provide consistent support or collaborate with caregivers.

Mental health concerns in inclusive classrooms are not isolated events; they influence learners' engagement, behavior, and learning capacity. When teachers are left to navigate these challenges without access to counseling services or specialist support, the burden on their role increases significantly.

In a study at Cagayan State University (Cambridge, 2022), it is emphasized that the a need for accessible and responsive counseling services tailored to learners' mental and emotional needs. While his research focused on higher education, the principles extend to basic education, where early intervention is critical. Cambridge proposed expanded guidance programs and improved counseling systems, equally relevant in elementary and kindergarten settings, especially for children with special needs.

Also, the emotional and behavioral challenges directly impact teaching effectiveness and classroom harmony. Participants described situations involving disruptive behaviors and emotional outbursts and the difficulty of addressing these while maintaining a safe space for all learners. It was observed that managing inclusive classrooms means,

Participant 4: "addressing behavioral and emotional difficulties."

Participant 12: "Sometimes they shout, hurt their classmates, and cause trouble during activities... The challenge there is how to resolve this conflict... and ask for the patience of the other parents."

Participant 6 further noted the emotional strain when dealing with learners from broken families, explaining that communication barriers and inconsistent home environments often make behavioral issues more difficult to address.

These examples demonstrate that emotional and behavioral regulation is often an unmet need among learners with special needs, and without appropriate support, both learners and teachers are affected. Such issues are not simply disciplinary concerns. They reflect deeper emotional struggles that must be addressed with compassion, patience, and structured support.

Catubig et. al. (2024) also highlight that educators are often unprepared to handle persistent behavioral issues, especially at the primary level. Their study reveals that teachers frequently struggle with insufficient resources and training, resulting in elevated stress and reduced effectiveness. The researchers advocate for enhanced collaboration among teachers, access to behavioral support programs, and investment in emotional regulation training to help teachers meet their learners' complex needs more effectively.

This theme highlights that emotional support is not supplementary. It is fundamental to inclusive education. Supportive classroom environments, responsiveness to mental health needs, and proactive management of emotional and behavioral challenges all contribute to learners' capacity to participate, grow, and succeed. The participants' voices reflect a deep understanding of learners' emotional needs and a shared concern over the lack of training, communication channels, and professional resources.

For inclusive education to truly serve all learners, systems must be in place to support the emotional well-being of both learners and

Rubilene N. Almeron

teachers. Schools must invest in teacher training, mental health services, and policies to allow emotional flexibility and empathy-driven responses. In doing so, classrooms can become safe, inclusive spaces where emotional growth and academic learning happen side by side.

Social Integration and Positive Classroom Culture*. Social* integration and a positive classroom culture are key to effective inclusive education. Beyond access to the curriculum, learners, especially those with additional needs, must feel emotionally safe, socially connected, and accepted by their peers and teachers. The findings from this study reveal that promoting a classroom culture where every child feels valued requires intentional strategies that encourage relationship-building, social-emotional learning, and a shared sense of community. Teachers play a vital role in nurturing environments that promote interaction, empathy, and inclusivity.

A foundational element of inclusive education is creating a positive classroom culture that ensures all learners feel supported and able to thrive. The importance of a supportive environment in a collaborative approach was highlighted,

Participant 6: "foster[ing] a supportive environment to ensure all learners can thrive,"

Participant 12: "As a kindergarten teacher handling inclusive education, my collaboration strategy is that I open up to them, and then I ask them for ideas on what can be done and what can be applied to the learners."

These insights highlight that inclusive education is about academic support and creating emotional and social spaces where all learners feel involved. Teachers who promote open communication, shared problem-solving, and peer collaboration foster trust and mutual respect in the classroom. This sense of community lays the groundwork for more effective learning, especially for children struggling with self-confidence or social engagement.

According to Learning Environment (2020), classrooms are essential environments where learners can thrive socially and emotionally. Teachers are pivotal in shaping these spaces through inclusive teaching strategies, positive reinforcement, and respect for diversity. However, as learners' needs evolve, adapting the classroom environment remains a constant challenge, particularly when managing varied learning styles and behavioral needs in inclusive classrooms.

In addition to a supportive atmosphere, fostering peer relationships and social skills development is critical for learners with special needs, as another experience shared and elaborated,

Participant 13: "Also, normal children naturally want socialization, but he really doesn't want that, and I find it very difficult to communicate with him."

".... This is because he couldn't keep up with his peers. I also made sure to follow up with him at home, which his grandmother was able to do."

These remarks reflect the challenge of supporting learners who struggle to engage socially despite being surrounded by peers. Positive peer relationships are crucial for developing effective communication skills, empathy, and emotional self-regulation. For learners with additional needs, these relationships can often be difficult to initiate and sustain, requiring teacher facilitation and modeling. Teachers must create structured opportunities for collaboration and social interaction while being sensitive to the needs of learners who may withdraw or isolate themselves.

Apaydın Demirci, et. al. (2022) confirm that peer relationships are vital for fostering emotional intelligence and social behavior regulation. Their study shows that strong peer connections enhance social-emotional learning (SEL) outcomes and support children's interpersonal development. The absence of such relationships may hinder a child's growth and sense of belonging, particularly in inclusive classrooms.

To further support peer interaction and emotional regulation, teachers also pointed to the importance of social skills development programs. These structured interventions aim to help learners—particularly those with developmental or communication challenges—develop the tools necessary to interact positively with others.

Participant 9: "Children with speech delays, learning difficulties, or behavioral concerns require specialized attention."

Participant 13: "First, the child has a speech delay; he does not communicate. Second, he excludes himself from his classmates, as if he has his own world... I find it very difficult to communicate with him."

These statements illustrate the importance of targeted support for learners who exhibit signs of withdrawal, delayed communication, or difficulty integrating socially. Without structured programs and consistent support, these learners risk further isolation and emotional detachment from the school community.

Linox (2023) supports the integration of SEL into early childhood education through dedicated social skills programs. His research highlights that early intervention in social-emotional development leads to improved academic outcomes, better relationships, and enhanced mental health. Furthermore, the study recommends that teacher training include SEL strategies to help embed social development into daily classroom practice.

Finally, peer relationships and social integration remain a central challenge for learners with special needs.

Participant 13: "He really doesn't want [socialization], and I find it very difficult to communicate with him,"

While also explaining the importance of consistent support both in and outside the classroom. These experiences demonstrate that successful social integration necessitates more than mere proximity to peers. It demands intentional facilitation, sensitivity to student needs, and follow-through across learning contexts.

The study by Pearl, et. al. (2022) reinforces this, showing that while learners with mild disabilities often struggle with peer acceptance, supportive environments, and peer-based interventions improve social behaviors and classroom inclusion. Their research highlights that structured social integration efforts significantly influence the emotional well-being and social behaviors of learners with additional needs.

This theme emphasizes that inclusion goes beyond physical placement. It requires a deliberate and structured effort to promote positive relationships, build classroom community, and address the social-emotional needs of all learners. The participants' experiences demonstrate that fostering a classroom culture based on collaboration, empathy, and open communication is crucial for ensuring that learners with special needs feel accepted and included.

However, the successful implementation of such a culture depends on teacher training, institutional support, and the availability of structured programs focused on social-emotional development. When schools commit to creating spaces where every child can engage socially and emotionally, inclusive education becomes achievable and transformative for both learners and educators alike.

Major Key Theme 3. The Tapestry of Collaboration, Advocacy, and Community Engagement and Parent Support

This theme refers to the vital connections between teachers, parents, and community stakeholders that support inclusive education. It highlights the need for strong communication, shared responsibilities, and mutual trust to help students with special needs thrive. Effective collaboration ensures consistency between home and school, while advocacy helps secure the resources, training, and policies needed for inclusion. Parent support and engagement are key to this process, especially when families are informed, empowered, and actively involved in their child's learning journey. Four sub-themes emerged from the findings: Collaboration with Families and Stakeholders, Advocacy and Community Engagement, and Parent Support.

Collaboration with Families and Stakeholders. In inclusive education, collaboration is not confined to the classroom. It extends to the family, the school, and the broader community. The success of inclusive practices is significantly enhanced when there is open, consistent communication between teachers, families, and other stakeholders who share a collective responsibility in supporting the child's educational journey. This theme highlights the critical importance of collaborative relationships bridging the gap between school and home and between educators to better support learners with diverse needs.

One of the key elements of inclusive education is establishing strong collaboration with families and stakeholders. Teachers in the study acknowledged that family involvement is essential yet not always easy to achieve. As remarked,

Participant 1: "Maintain open, consistent communication with parents. Because in reality, ma'am, some people really don't care; it's the teachers who truly suffer."

This statement reflects the emotional and practical strain on teachers when family engagement is absent or inconsistent. A participant described her approach to transparency, stating,

Participant 12: "When I spoke with the parent, I told them what I observed in the child based on the assessment results, and then I explained it."

These reflections highlight the delicate role teachers play in initiating and sustaining meaningful dialogue with families. In inclusive settings, such communication is vital for aligning strategies, monitoring progress, and ensuring that support systems are consistent across school and home environments. When families are disengaged or unaware of their child's educational needs, maintaining continuity and following through with interventions becomes more difficult.

Weist et. al. (2023) support this view, emphasizing that the collaboration between educators, families, and community partners is key to addressing learners' academic and mental health needs. Their research highlights that shared responsibility and a collective approach to problem-solving can help educators respond more effectively to complex challenges within inclusive classrooms.

Likewise, Bartolome and Mamat (2020) argue that active parental participation significantly improves children's academic performance and emotional development, reinforcing the importance of family-school collaboration in early childhood education.

In addition to family partnerships, the importance of collaborative teaching practices among educators emerged as a vital sub-theme. Inclusive education requires coordinated efforts within schools to design and implement strategies that accommodate all learners. Two participants shared their collaborative strategy:

Participant 12: "As a kindergarten teacher handling inclusive education, my collaboration strategy is that I open up to them, and then I ask them for ideas on what can be done and what can be applied to the learners."

Participant 11: "Teachers are working together to plan and develop strategies for meeting the needs of all learners."

Rubilene N. Almeron

These insights reveal the importance of teamwork, open dialogue, and shared problem-solving among educators. Teachers who collaborate are better equipped to design differentiated instruction, create inclusive lesson plans, and support one another in managing the daily complexities of inclusive education. Such collaboration fosters a culture of mutual learning, emotional support, and professional development within the school community.

Ariadna Victoria Abatayo, et. al. (2025) echo these findings, stating that consistent teacher collaboration strengthens instructional quality and builds a more inclusive classroom culture. Their research underscores that co-planning, peer observation, and strategy-sharing enhance teachers' capabilities and positively influence learner outcomes. More importantly, they advocate for institutional support that encourages collaborative spaces within schools, where teachers can continuously refine their approaches and share innovative solutions.

Inclusive education is a shared responsibility that requires strong, sustained partnerships among teachers, families, and colleagues. The participants' experiences highlight both the benefits and the challenges of fostering collaboration in real-world educational settings. Family involvement is pivotal to ensuring continuity of care and support for learners, while teacher-to-teacher collaboration enhances instructional effectiveness and emotional resilience.

For inclusive education to be effective, schools must establish systems and structures that promote open communication, foster trust, and ensure mutual accountability. Key components of this approach include allocating time for teacher collaboration, offering professional development focused on family engagement, and nurturing a school culture that values teamwork across all levels. When educators, families, and stakeholders collaborate meaningfully, they form a cohesive support network that empowers each child to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Advocacy and Community Engagement. Inclusive education cannot be fully achieved without the collaborative support of policymakers, community stakeholders, and local institutions. Teachers alone cannot shoulder the systemic and material challenges accompanying the inclusion of children with diverse learning needs. This theme emphasizes the urgent need for government action, equitable policies, and stronger community involvement to bridge the gap between inclusive ideals and practical realities.

Participants consistently emphasized the need for advocacy, social justice, and the mobilization of community resources to ensure that inclusive education is sustainable, equitable, and effective. A major concern raised by the participants was the role of teacher advocacy and agency in calling for systemic support and policy reform. A strong appeal was made.

Participant 12: "So, we really need the help of the government and those in higher positions. We should be able to communicate our needs to them, and hopefully, they can take action on it."

This statement reflects the lived experience of many teachers who feel under-supported and overburdened, particularly when implementing inclusive education without the necessary resources or institutional backing.

This call for action aligns with the findings of Llanos et al. (2024), who noted that while inclusive education is enshrined in national legislation in the Philippines, the lack of clear policy implementation, funding, and training continues to hinder its success. Their study emphasized the need for continuous professional development and stronger state-level accountability to support teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Also, Muega (2020) highlights that educators often struggle due to insufficient training and a lack of administrative support, which hinders the effective integration of inclusive practices.

The need to promote social justice and equity in education is closely tied to advocacy, as stated:

Participant 12: "There are always special children who require assistance; however, due to a lack of resources, we cannot provide everything."

This quote illustrates how inequities in resource access create barriers that disproportionately affect learners with special needs. Teachers recognize that inclusion must not be symbolic; it must guarantee that all children, regardless of ability or background, have access to quality education and support services.

Souto-Manning and Epley (2024) reinforce this position by asserting that equity and justice are core imperatives in early childhood education. Their study calls for inclusive systems that recognize diversity and actively respond to it by ensuring that educational settings reflect fairness, cultural responsiveness, and accessibility. By embedding these values in teacher training and practice, educators contribute to more socially just learning environments.

Beyond policy and institutional action, the study highlights the vital role of community involvement and support systems in enhancing inclusive education, where local engagement is emphasized.

Participant 12: "...that the barangay can identify who and how many children have additional needs, as well as assess their conditions."

This statement underscores the need for grassroots collaboration—where local governments, especially barangays, play an active role in identifying and supporting children with disabilities or learning differences.

Williams (2023) supports this approach, highlighting that a holistic, community-based strategy is crucial in improving educational outcomes, particularly in low-resource areas. His research in the Philippines revealed that community collaboration helps overcome literacy gaps and socio-economic barriers, leading to better learning environments and student performance. Schools that actively engage families, local leaders, and civic organizations are more likely to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

The importance of partnerships is also seen in the sub-theme of utilization of community resources, as explained,

Participant 12: "You need to provide and look for resources that you really can't obtain from the school or from the parents."

This reflection highlights the reality that schools often operate with limited resources and must rely on external contributions, both formal and informal, to supplement their educational delivery. Whether through donations, partnerships, or informal volunteerism, communities have the potential to become powerful allies in inclusive education when effectively mobilized.

According to Epe et. al. (2023), many teachers identify a lack of materials, assistive tools, and specialized services as key barriers to inclusion. Even when teachers possess theoretical knowledge or training, the absence of physical and human resources severely limits their ability to translate inclusive practices into action. The study advocates for stronger collaborations between schools and local institutions to fill these gaps and ensure that children with special needs are not left behind due to systemic inadequacies.

Similarly, Cucio and Roldan (2020) highlight successful inclusion in indigenous communities through collaboration between DepEd and local stakeholders, emphasizing culturally responsive education. These findings relate to the study by stressing the importance of resources and community involvement in supporting inclusive education for kindergarten teachers.

Finally, the broader theme of community engagement reinforces the importance of sustained, meaningful interaction between schools and the local context. There is an emphasis given to the necessity of perseverance:

Participant 12: "And so, you really have to persevere in finding your own resources."

The extraordinary efforts made by teachers to overcome institutional shortcomings reflect their deep commitment to inclusion. However, long-term and sustainable inclusive education cannot depend solely on individual perseverance. Achieving meaningful and lasting impact requires comprehensive community support and coordinated engagement across sectors, ensuring that inclusive practices are embedded within the broader educational system.

This theme highlights that inclusive education is a collective responsibility. While central to implementation, teachers cannot succeed in isolation. Governmental advocacy, grounded in equity and justice principles, must be supported by policies, funding, and training. At the same time, communities play a vital role in identifying needs, providing resources, and reinforcing inclusive practices at the local level.

The experiences shared by participants reveal that while inclusive education is a noble goal, its realization requires synchronized efforts across classrooms, households, barangays, and national leadership. A multi-level, community-centered approach supported by advocacy, collaboration, and resource-sharing can help bridge the persistent gaps between inclusive policy and practice, ensuring that all learners receive the support they deserve.

Parent Support. Parental involvement plays a vital role in the success of inclusive education, particularly in the early identification, intervention, and continued support for children with special needs. Teachers often act as facilitators not only of learning but also of collaboration between families and support systems. However, this collaboration can be affected by varying levels of awareness, emotional readiness, and access to resources. The study reveals that the success of inclusive education depends not only on teachers' efforts but also on the degree of parental understanding, acceptance, and active participation.

A prominent issue raised by participants was the challenge of parental resistance to acknowledging a child's additional needs. Teachers shared that parental denial often delays necessary interventions and limits the effectiveness of school-based support. Noted and indicated, initial conversations around developmental concerns are often met with hesitation or disbelief. This observation supported this.

Participant 3: "...and some parents may be in the denial stage."

Participant 12: "Before he got there, we managed to resolve the ongoing issue because they were really in denial."

These responses reflect the emotional complexity of families when confronted with the possibility that their child may require specialized support. Denial may stem from fear, cultural stigma, lack of awareness, or uncertainty about the future. Teachers, while empathetic, often find themselves navigating these emotional responses without formal training or adequate support.

Filipino, et. al. (2023) examined the spectrum of parental acceptance in the Philippines, noting that while some parents actively pursue help and interventions, others struggle with denial or a limited understanding of their child's condition. This lack of acceptance can hinder collaboration and delay early interventions critical for a child's development. Their study recommends educational programs to guide parents in understanding special needs and to promote open, supportive communication with schools.

As parents begin to process and accept their child's condition, their role can evolve into advocacy and empowerment, as reflected in

this transition:

Participant 12: "Then, when they accepted it after we explained the child's situation, they agreed... and the child received therapy in Orani."

This progression from initial resistance to proactive engagement demonstrates the power of clear, respectful communication between teachers and families. Once parents are informed and supported, they are more likely to seek therapies, push for services, and collaborate on academic planning.

This finding aligns with Kukreja (2020), who emphasized the impact of parent advocacy programs in early intervention. According to her study, initiatives like the Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) equip parents with the knowledge and confidence to advocate for their child's needs. Collaboration between parents, educators, and specialists creates a more robust support system, significantly improving developmental and educational outcomes for children with unique needs.

In addition to advocacy, the study also highlighted the need for parent support groups and networks to help families cope with the emotional and informational demands of raising children with special needs. The emotional burden parents often carry has been acknowledged,

Participant 12: "For the parents, it is difficult for them to understand... Of course, as teachers, we immediately think about how the parents will feel, right?"

This expression of teacher empathy underscores how educators teach learners and provide emotional reassurance and guidance to their families.

Support groups offer a safe space for parents to share their experiences, gain valuable insights, and access essential resources. They also foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation. Fernández et. al. (2024) highlight that when parents are actively involved and supported in their child's educational journey, they positively impact academic performance, emotional well-being, and social development. The study emphasizes the importance of consistent communication between teachers and families and the provision of tools and resources that help parents participate in educational planning.

Furthermore, Yildirim (2022) found that strong family-school collaboration and emotional understanding often support smooth transitions into kindergarten. While families of typically developing children may experience fewer hurdles, those navigating special education services usually face added stress. The study highlights the importance of establishing support systems, taking into account these diverse experiences, and preparing families for active participation in inclusive classrooms.

Similarly, Basister and Valenzuela (2021) propose a collaborative model to advance inclusive education in the Philippines, highlighting the need for partnerships among educators, families, and communities. Their model advocates for shared responsibility, ongoing professional development, and active engagement of all stakeholders. These findings are relevant to the present study as they underscore the critical role of collaboration and support networks in addressing the challenges kindergarten teachers face in inclusive education.

This theme emphasizes that inclusive education is most effective when families are informed, empowered, and emotionally supported. Teachers play a critical role in initiating these connections, addressing resistance with sensitivity, and guiding parents through acceptance and advocacy. However, systemic support is needed to sustain this relationship. Educational institutions must provide resources, parent education programs, and structured support groups that enable families to participate in their child's learning journey actively.

The study reveals that when parents move from denial to advocacy and receive the necessary emotional and institutional support, they become powerful allies in the success of inclusive education. Strengthening these family-school partnerships will improve individual learner outcomes and contribute to a more empathetic, equitable, and inclusive educational system for all.

Major Key Theme 4: The Forge of Growth: Empowering Educators Through Professional Growth, Cultural Competence and Right Resources

This theme emphasizes that teachers' capacity to implement inclusive education depends on sustained professional development, cultural responsiveness, and access to adequate teaching resources. It underscores the need to support educators emotionally and professionally by providing training, mentoring, and tools tailored to diverse learner needs. These priorities are reflected in three interrelated sub-themes: Professional Growth, Cultural Competence, and Resources for Educators.

Professional Growth. The successful implementation of inclusive education depends not only on policies or classroom resources but also on teachers' skills, confidence, and continuous development. As educators take on the responsibility of meeting the diverse needs of learners, professional growth becomes a priority for both individuals and institutions. The findings of this study highlight the crucial role of ongoing training, classroom experience, and peer support in shaping teachers' effectiveness in inclusive settings.

One of the most pressing concerns voiced by participants was the lack of formal training in special education. Teachers acknowledged the gap between the expectations of inclusive education and the professional preparation they received. This was noted, recommended, and affirmed.

Participant 1: "I support the child by just searching the internet because I don't have a background, so to speak, in the special needs of children, unlike in a regular class."

Participant 6: "It is recommended that teachers receive specialized training to better support learners with specific disabilities,"

Participant 12: "[Training] would greatly help in addressing the unique needs of all learners."

These responses point to a systemic issue: while teachers are mandated to implement inclusive practices, many lack the foundational knowledge to do so confidently. They rely on informal strategies and ad hoc solutions rather than structured, evidence-based approaches. This training gap affects teaching quality and limits student progress, particularly for those requiring tailored instruction or behavioral interventions.

Beltran et. al. (2025) support this observation, finding that a lack of targeted training and support in Philippine elementary schools remains a major challenge to inclusive education. Their study highlighted that while teachers strive to adopt differentiated instruction and inclusive strategies, insufficient preparation and limited backing from school leadership and communities often hinder them. Addressing this requires investments in professional development that go beyond theory and provide hands-on skills relevant to classroom realities.

Correspondingly, Ciampa and Reisboard (2024) consistently emphasized that such training enabled them to adapt their instructional methods and course content better to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. While educators may possess general teaching skills, the study revealed that without intentional training focused on cultural responsiveness, their ability to create inclusive and equitable learning environments remains limited. Also, the impact of teacher experience and training builds on this need by focusing on how teacher preparedness influences classroom success. New and early-career teachers face particular difficulties in adapting to the inclusive model, as admitted and expounded:

Participant 4: "My first challenge is that I'm a new teacher, so I was still feeling my way around at the beginning."

Participant 12: "There is also a lack of training... and I had no training on how to handle learners with additional needs."

These insights reveal that new teachers are often overwhelmed by the complexity of inclusive classrooms, especially when they are expected to address the additional needs without proper guidance. The lack of formal preparation strains these educators, potentially affecting retention, classroom climate, and learner outcomes.

Crispel and Kasperski (2020) emphasized that inclusive education depends heavily on teacher competence and confidence, which are directly tied to targeted professional development. Their study showed that teachers with training in special education are more capable of adjusting teaching methods, managing behavior, and fostering engagement for all learners. Conversely, educators often struggle to apply inclusive principles without this foundation.

Additionally, peer support and mentoring among Educators emerged as a vital strategy for bridging knowledge gaps and fostering professional confidence. Teachers reported seeking help from more experienced colleagues to navigate the inclusion challenges.

Participant 12: "For example, I consult with our Grade 1 teacher and other teachers who have attended seminars like MPAT,"

Participant 4: "Of course, they have a lot of experience in this field and I know they are experts, so I approach them right away."

These examples highlight the importance of informal learning networks within schools. Peer mentoring offers emotional support, practical strategies, and context-specific advice that formal training often lacks. It also contributes to a collaborative school culture where teachers are encouraged to learn from one another.

Kupila and Karila (2020) explored the impact of mentoring on early childhood educators, showing that structured peer support fosters resilience, reduces stress, and improves teacher retention. Their study found that mentorship facilitates professional growth and enhances schools' inclusive capacities by building shared knowledge and promoting reflective practice.

This theme underscores that teachers are at the heart of inclusive education, and their effectiveness relies on continuous learning, experience, and support. While many educators demonstrate commitment and adaptability, the lack of specialized training and formal preparation poses significant barriers. New teachers, in particular, face steep learning curves that are often eased only through peer collaboration and mentorship.

The findings of this study call for a systemic response: comprehensive and sustained professional development in inclusive practices, targeted support for novice teachers, and institutionalization of peer mentoring frameworks. When teachers are supported to grow professionally, they are better equipped to create inclusive, responsive, and effective learning environments where every child can thrive.

Cultural Competence. Inclusive education extends beyond addressing physical, cognitive, or emotional differences among learners; it also encompasses recognizing and valuing cultural diversity within the classroom. Cultural competence in teaching is vital for building equitable, respectful, and effective learning environments. In multicultural societies like the Philippines, where learners come from various ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, teachers must be equipped to incorporate cultural understanding into all

aspects of their practice. The findings of this study underscore the importance of adopting culturally competent approaches in teacher training, curriculum design, and classroom interactions.

One of the most recurring recommendations among the participants was the need for training in cultural competence in teaching. A participant shared the need for workshops with collaboration to various stakeholders.

Participant 6: "workshops on behavioral management, cultural competency, and special education practices..." "…. regular collaboration with stakeholders would foster a more inclusive learning environment."

These insights reflect the recognition that a deeper understanding of cultural contexts helps educators address not only academic needs but also learners' social-emotional and identity-based experiences.

In diverse classrooms, cultural competence is foundational to establishing trust and engagement. Teachers who are trained to acknowledge, respect, and integrate cultural differences into their teaching foster environments where learners feel seen, valued, and supported.

Eden (2023) supports this by highlighting strategies for promoting inclusivity and diversity in education. The study recommends integrating cultural awareness into professional development, utilizing inclusive materials, and fostering stronger educator-student relationships founded on mutual respect and cultural understanding.

Notably, Biana et. al. (2021) highlighted the need for cultural, linguistic, and indigenous competencies among early childhood educators to promote inclusive education. Their nationwide assessment of Philippine ECCD teachers found most at beginner to performer levels, with none skilled in these areas. While teachers respected diversity, they struggled to design and implement inclusive curricula, underscoring the need for targeted training, supportive policies, and professional learning communities.

For learners with additional needs, cultural sensitivity in special education is equally essential. Participant 6 noted,

"So, of course, as a teacher, you need to research,"

referring to the need for teachers to independently seek out information to support culturally responsive and inclusive practices. Teachers must consider how cultural values shape families' understanding of disability, seek intervention, and engage with schools.

This awareness allows educators to better support diverse learners without imposing assumptions or unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes.

Kushwaha et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of adopting ethical and culturally sensitive approaches in special education. Their research emphasizes practices that are not only evidence-based but also respectful of learners' cultural identities and community norms. They argue that cultural sensitivity is central to equitable education, particularly when working with learners who may already face marginalization due to disability or social status.

Cultural competence also requires intentional effort in curriculum design, ensuring that the materials and content used in the classroom reflect learners' backgrounds.

Participant 6 emphasized ongoing professional development, while another participant highlighted the openness of communication.

Participant 4: "Here, I try to maintain open communication with everyone. Co-teachers, parents, specialists, and administrators,"

To ensure that learning approaches are inclusive and relevant. These reflections point to a broader need to reimagine curriculum as a living framework that adapts to the identities of the learners it serves. Standardized content often neglects or misrepresents minority groups, contributing to feelings of exclusion and academic disengagement.

Thomas and Quinlan (2022) argue that many curricula overlook the lived experiences of racially minoritized learners, which can undermine student well-being and educational outcomes. Their study advocates for a shift toward culturally responsive curricula that intentionally reflect diversity, promote equity, and empower learners to see themselves represented in their educational experiences.

Ultimately, the study highlights the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices. A participant echoed the call for independent research and reflective practice, while another also referred to workshops.

Participant 12: "So, of course, as a teacher, you need to research."

Participant 6: "needed workshops."

These responses emphasize that responsive teaching requires both formal training and ongoing self-directed learning. Culturally responsive pedagogy improves classroom engagement and supports academic success by aligning instruction with learners' cultural frames of reference. It affirms identity and builds bridges between school and home life.

Tortola (2023) explored the implementation of culturally responsive teaching among Indigenous learners and concluded that CRT improves participation, enhances self-esteem, and fosters more meaningful learning experiences. The study supports the idea that

teachers create inclusive environments where learners feel empowered and understood when they incorporate culturally relevant materials and strategies.

Cultural Competence emphasizes that inclusive education must be grounded in an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Teachers are not only facilitators of content but also cultural mediators who must navigate a wide array of values, norms, and worldviews in their classrooms. From the need for targeted professional development to curriculum reform and culturally responsive teaching practices, the study underscores that cultural competence is a key pillar of effective and equitable education.

To build more inclusive learning spaces, schools must invest in teacher training on cultural sensitivity, provide resources for curriculum development, and foster a school culture that values collaboration with diverse families and communities. When educators embrace cultural competence, they improve academic outcomes and create classrooms where every learner, regardless of background, feels respected, included, and capable of success.

Resources for Educators. The success of inclusive education depends not only on teaching strategies and classroom practices but also on the resources available to educators and families. Teachers must be adequately supported through professional development, access to reliable data, and institutional backing, while parents must also be empowered to understand and participate in their child's educational journey.

A central issue identified in the study is the challenge of parental understanding and involvement, emphasizing the need for parent education and training programs. Participant 12 expressed concern over this, stating:

"For the parents, it is difficult for them to understand, and it's hard to explain. Of course, as teachers, we immediately think about how the parents will feel, right? Personally, I consider their feelings right away... even if you repeat it multiple times; they still don't get it. Then when you ask them to do something, they really can't do it."

This statement illustrates the communication gap between educators and parents and the emotional complexities involved in helping families understand and support their child's unique needs. Many parents may lack formal education or familiarity with learning differences, leading to confusion, disengagement, or hesitation in accepting support.

Igunnu and Gital (2024) found that parents with higher levels of education are more likely to offer academic support at home and foster a conducive learning environment. Their study underscores the importance of educational programs that guide and empower parents, regardless of their background, to participate meaningfully in their child's development.

Similarly, Burke (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of structured training programs for parents of children with disabilities, showing improved confidence, knowledge, and support strategies that directly enhance children's learning outcomes and independence. These findings suggest that schools must prioritize family education initiatives as part of inclusive efforts.

The theme also highlights the importance of utilizing data for continuous improvement in inclusive classrooms. Teachers discussed the need for accurate, reflective, and fair assessment practices that inform targeted interventions.

Participant 2 :"It takes more time to ensure that the data collected about the progress of children with special needs is accurate,"

Participant 10: "Assessment: Ensuring the accuracy and fairness of assessments."

These responses demonstrate that while data-driven teaching is a cornerstone of quality education, the process can be time-consuming and demanding, especially when combined with other teaching responsibilities. However, data is essential in understanding student progress, adjusting teaching methods, and ensuring learners receive appropriate support based on their needs.

Colby et. al. (2020) emphasized that collaborative data analysis enhances instructional quality by helping teachers identify student performance gaps and develop tailored strategies. Their research supports integrating student data into teacher training and professional dialogue, promoting a culture of reflection and ongoing improvement within schools. This approach aligns with inclusive education principles, ensuring decisions are based on real, contextualized learner needs rather than generalized assumptions.

Lastly, kindergarten teachers in this study emphasized the pressing need for support systems that help manage professional responsibilities. These systems are critical in balancing the demands of teaching, administrative tasks, and inclusive instruction.

Participant 9: "I still need to attend seminars even though I have been in kindergarten for 10 years,"

Participant 12: "A major challenge I face is managing administrative tasks alongside effective teaching."

These comments reflect the dual pressure educators experience—maintaining professional growth while being stretched thin by classroom and documentation duties. Without institutional support, even the most committed teachers may struggle to meet the high demands of inclusive teaching.

Chow et. al. (2023) identified several systemic issues that hinder inclusive education, including limited access to resources, lack of administrative support, and insufficient teacher training. They concluded that effective implementation requires ongoing professional development, collaboration among educators, and a strong support structure at the school and policy levels. Teachers must be trained

and empowered with time, materials, and administrative relief to serve diverse classrooms effectively.

Additionally, Gonzaga et al. (2024) found that a lack of resources, including support staff and specialized materials, hinders effective inclusive education. They suggest that improving resource allocation and staffing would help teachers better meet the needs of learners with special requirements. These findings highlight the importance of adequate resources in addressing challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in inclusive classrooms.

The theme highlights the importance of equipping teachers and parents with the necessary tools to support inclusive education effectively. Teachers must be backed by continuous training, data-informed practices, and institutional support systems that allow them to focus on responsive and inclusive teaching. At the same time, empowering parents through education and training programs enhances home-school collaboration, ensuring that learners receive consistent support in both environments.

The findings affirm that inclusion is not achievable through curriculum or teaching strategies alone. It is sustained by strong resource networks, informed decision-making, and a shared commitment among educators, parents, and school leaders to invest in the growth and success of every learner.

Major Key Theme 5: The Odyssey of Overcoming Barriers: Implementation Challenges, Transition Planning, Crisis Management, Technology Integration and Socio-Economic Factors

This theme captures the complex realities teachers face in executing inclusive education amid systemic constraints. It highlights challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, behavioral crises, weak transition systems, and socioeconomic inequities. Teachers are often left to navigate these barriers without sufficient institutional support, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated reforms, crisis preparedness, and equity-driven resource allocation to ensure meaningful inclusion. The following sub-themes illustrate the depth of these challenges: Implementation Challenges, Crisis Management, and Socio-Economic Factors.

Implementation Challenges. While the commitment to inclusive education is evident in policy and practice, its implementation in real-world classrooms presents numerous challenges. Teachers face complex and layered barriers, ranging from structural limitations to crises and inadequate access to technology, that impact their ability to meet the diverse needs of learners effectively. This theme examines the practical struggles educators experience and the systemic factors that influence inclusive teaching.

One of the most immediate and recurring issues for teachers is managing large class sizes, which hinders their ability to provide individualized attention.

Participant 6: "As a teacher, I have faced several challenges, including managing large class sizes."

Larger class sizes often result in reduced teacher-student interaction and limit the possibility of differentiated instruction. Teachers often struggle to identify and address the unique needs of each learner, particularly in inclusive settings.

This concern aligns with Juldiz (2025), who found that smaller class sizes improve teacher-learner interactions and engagement. In contrast, larger classes reduce the time and attention educators can devote to each student, leading to diminished support for those with special educational needs. Class size optimization is essential for inclusive strategies to be implemented effectively.

Another critical challenge lies in the enrollment process, particularly when parents withhold information about their child's condition. This issue was highlighted.

Participant 5: "We experienced challenges when it comes to the enrollment process, especially with parents who are not open about the condition of their child with special needs."

This lack of disclosure often delays early intervention, disrupts classroom planning, and limits the ability to develop individualized educational plans (IEPs). Ysseldyke et. al. (2023) discussed how inconsistent enrollment procedures and non-standardized identification of disabilities across districts create barriers to timely support. They argue for more effective coordination between families and schools to ensure early, accurate identification and support for learners with special needs.

Beyond enrollment, teachers face systemic challenges in implementing inclusive education itself. Participants remarked,

Participant 5: "…especially now that we are in an inclusive education setting,"

Participant 12: "Regarding the specific challenges encountered in inclusive education…"

These challenges often include insufficient training, a lack of appropriate materials, and difficulty in addressing a wide range of learner needs within a single classroom. Macabenta et. al. (2023) synthesized studies on Filipino teachers' experiences and found recurring obstacles, such as a lack of preparedness, limited professional development, and resource constraints. They emphasize the need for stronger collaboration between schools, parents, and communities to support inclusive practices effectively.

The challenges of inclusion are compounded during emergencies, making crisis management and emergency preparedness a key concern, thus, a fearful experience was shared.

Participant 5: "Sometimes, you feel afraid of your pupils because they throw things that could hit other children. As a teacher, you are always responsible for the safety of your learners."

These incidents highlight the vulnerability of both learners and teachers during behavioral crises. Del Valle Jr. (2022) found significant gaps in emergency preparedness in Philippine schools, emphasizing the importance of structured training, contingency planning, and support teams to ensure safety and continuity in inclusive classrooms. Strengthening crisis preparedness enhances both student protection and teacher confidence.

Building on this, crisis intervention and communication strategies are essential in managing behavioral disruptions and ensuring parental involvement. Also, an ongoing responsibility was highlighted.

Participant 12: "It's hard to deal with them because sometimes when they have tantrums, they literally disturb the class and even their classmates."

Participant 14: "As a teacher, you are always responsible for the safety of your learners."

Celerio and Andal (2024) highlighted how crisis leadership and behavioral competency frameworks from the Department of Education (DepEd) can enhance teachers' resilience and performance. They recommend empowering educators with motivational tools and institutional support to navigate emergencies effectively and maintain student engagement.

Crisis communication is particularly difficult when family dynamics limit access to parents.

Participant 14: "The difficulty or challenge is that I can't communicate with the child's actual parents because they are separated."

This lack of communication complicates crisis management and impacts the student's well-being. Ozmen et. al. (2020) explored how time constraints, disengaged parents, and language differences contribute to ineffective communication. They suggest adopting digital platforms and school-wide policies that prioritize clear, ongoing communication between families and educators.

Another layer of implementation difficulty involves transition planning for learners, especially those with special needs, moving between educational levels.

Participant 10: "Class enrollment: Appropriate placement to determine the best fit for each student,"

".… mapping learning styles, academic weaknesses, and strengths."

These efforts aim to ensure that learners are placed in environments where they can thrive. Martin et. al. (2020) examined the transition of learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and found that individualized support, structured routines, and trained teachers facilitate smoother transitions. However, challenges such as sensory sensitivities and inadequate teacher training persist. These findings underline the importance of tailored transition strategies for maintaining consistency and supporting learner development.

Lastly, technology integration and the use of assistive tools present both opportunities and barriers in inclusive settings, as explained,

Participant 6: "Maintaining student engagement in a digital or hybrid setup has been demanding… particularly for learners with limited access to technology or stable internet connections," and noted the importance of "access to assistive technology and learning materials."

Parveen and Ramzan (2024) explored the dual nature of educational technology—while digital tools enhance accessibility and personalization, challenges such as infrastructure gaps, digital literacy, and data privacy must be addressed. Similarly, Campado et. al. (2023) emphasized that assistive technologies enhance learning for learners with disabilities but require government investment, teacher training, and institutional support to be implemented effectively.

The theme reveals that inclusive education, though well-intentioned, is complex and fraught with real-world obstacles. Teachers operate within a system that demands responsiveness but often lacks the infrastructure, training, and policy alignment to support inclusive efforts. From managing large classes and behavioral crises to navigating technology gaps and uncooperative enrollment processes, educators face multifaceted burdens that can hinder effective teaching and learning.

Addressing these challenges requires a systemic approach, one that integrates policy reforms, strengthens teacher preparation, enhances school-family communication, and invests in infrastructure and technology. Only through comprehensive, coordinated efforts can inclusive education be fully realized in everyday classrooms, ensuring that all learners receive the quality education they deserve.

Crisis Management. Inclusive education does not only demand pedagogical readiness but also preparedness for crises that may disrupt safety, routines, or learning environments. Teachers managing classrooms with learners with additional needs face increased pressure during emergencies, both behavioral and situational. Crisis management in inclusive settings must encompass planning, real-time intervention, effective communication, and smooth transitions for learners across educational stages.

Teachers play an important role in ensuring classroom safety during unexpected behavioral incidents or emergencies, as it was recalled,

Participant 5: "Sometimes, there are times when you feel afraid of your pupils because they even throw anything inside the class that

could hit the other children... That's why I need to be constantly aware in my class for any unexpected instances that may arise."

This statement illustrates the dual responsibility educators carry not only as instructors but also as frontline protectors within the learning environment. Del Valle Jr. (2022) investigated emergency preparedness in schools in the Lagonoy South District, highlighting significant gaps between ideal safety protocols and actual readiness. The study emphasized the need for better planning, more rigorous training, and resource allocation to ensure a safe and supportive environment, particularly for learners with special needs. Emergency preparedness must be proactive, not reactive, especially in inclusive classrooms where behavioral crises are more likely to occur.

Closely tied to this is the need for crisis intervention strategies that enable teachers to manage in-the-moment behavioral disruptions without compromising classroom safety or continuity of learning. Such a situation was described, and constant responsibility was reiterated:

Participant 12: "It's hard to deal with them because sometimes when they have tantrums, they disturb the class and their classmates."

Participant 14: "As a teacher, you are always responsible for the safety of your learners."

Celerio and Andal (2024) explored the link between effective crisis leadership and teachers' work performance, emphasizing the importance of behavioral competencies and motivational strategies from the Department of Education (DepEd) framework. When teachers are supported by strong leadership, equipped with behavior management tools, and guided by a clear response system, their ability to manage crises improves, along with their morale and productivity.

Communication is another vital component in crisis management, particularly when learners come from complex family backgrounds, as noted,

Participant 14: "The difficulty is that I can't communicate with the child's actual parents because they are separated."

Meanwhile, Participant 12 emphasized their duty to maintain safety regardless of the communication gaps. Ozmen et. al. (2020) identified several barriers to effective parent-teacher communication during crises, including language differences, time constraints, and disconnection between schools and families. Teachers must often bridge these gaps through alternative strategies such as parent meetings, digital updates, and neutral, compassionate language. When communication is compromised, both student safety and emotional well-being can suffer, making clear, proactive strategies essential.

Beyond immediate incidents, teachers must also manage crises during school transitions, such as moving learners from preschool to kindergarten. This has been emphasized, together with the role of community support.

Participant 12: "appropriate placement to determine the best fit for each student,"

Participant 5: "the barangay can identify who and how many children have additional needs."

These insights show that transition management requires not only school readiness but also community involvement and early identification. Janus et al. (2022) found that successful transitions rely on effective communication among families, educators, and specialists, as well as school policies that prioritize early intervention and individualized support. Without these, learners with special needs may face emotional stress, academic delays, and poor adaptation to new environments.

Supporting transitions also involves individualized planning. There should be a mastery of every individual's learning style, along with the ability to determine what to develop and enhance for each learner to guide classroom placement and teaching strategies. This personalized approach enables learners to thrive by aligning instruction with their preferred modalities and developmental needs.

Participant 10: "mapping learning styles, academic weaknesses, and strengths"

Martin et al. (2020) examined transitions for learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), emphasizing that visual supports, social skills programs, and structured routines can significantly improve adaptation. However, the study also highlighted persistent barriers, including sensory sensitivities, social integration challenges, and teacher unpreparedness factors that amplify the importance of school-wide inclusion strategies.

In modern classrooms, the integration of technology and assistive tools is increasingly seen as both a support and a stressor during crisis scenarios. A participant acknowledged this particular issue.

Participant 6: "maintaining student engagement in a digital or hybrid learning setup has been demanding, particularly for learners with limited access to technology or stable internet connections."

Access and training gaps exacerbate the risk of exclusion during remote learning or emergency closures. Parveen and Ramzan (2024) highlighted the advantages of digital tools, including enhanced engagement, personalization, and flexibility—but also pointed to challenges such as infrastructure limitations and digital literacy. Addressing these requires thoughtful policy development, teacher training, and partnerships to ensure digital equity.

Equally important is the role of assistive technology, which bridges functional gaps for learners with special educational needs. The

same participant noted the lack of such tools as one significant challenge to adherence. It is necessary to meet learners' needs effectively, he further stated.

Participant 6: "Access to more teaching resources, such as assistive technology and learning materials…"

Campado et al. (2023) identified assistive technology as a transformative element in inclusive classrooms, improving communication, engagement, and independence for learners with disabilities. However, successful implementation depends on government funding, teacher training, and infrastructure support. Without these, assistive tools remain underutilized, particularly during crises when alternative forms of learning are essential.

The theme underscores the importance of readiness, responsiveness, and resilience in inclusive education. Teachers face an array of unpredictable challenges, including behavioral outbursts, communication breakdowns, digital divides, and transition disruptions, that demand proactive planning and ongoing support. Effective crisis management relies not only on individual teacher capacity but on systemic coordination involving school leadership, families, and community partners.

To build inclusive classrooms that can weather crises, schools must invest in comprehensive emergency preparedness, equip teachers with behavioral intervention strategies, establish robust communication channels, and leverage technology responsibly. In doing so, educational institutions can protect learning continuity, uphold student dignity, and ensure that even in times of crisis, inclusion remains a priority.

Socio-Economic Factors. Socio-economic disparities shape the landscape of inclusive education in profound ways, impacting everything from classroom practices to school policy implementation. Teachers operating in resource-constrained settings face a daily struggle to uphold equitable learning conditions for all learners, particularly those with additional needs.

One of the most pressing concerns is the impact of socioeconomic factors on learning, as learners come from different socioeconomic statuses and have diverse cultural backgrounds associated with their socioeconomic status.

Participant 6: "socio-economic factors further complicate the task of providing equitable and inclusive education,"

Participant 12: "…due to a lack of resources, we cannot provide everything."

These remarks reflect the reality that schools in underprivileged communities often lack access to essential materials, specialists, or assistive technologies necessary to support diverse learners.

Perales et. al. (2023) affirmed that disparities in income and infrastructure contribute to uneven access to quality education. Addressing these gaps requires targeted investments, policy reforms, and the equitable distribution of educational resources to ensure every student receives a fair chance at success.

These inequalities also take a toll on teachers' emotional well-being. Such dissimilarities and disparities among learners are considered a serious gap that makes every teacher help learners learn a great deal from them.

Participant 4 "As a new teacher, this is really where my strength and patience will be tested,"

Participant 12 "I feel that I still have gaps as a kindergarten teacher."

Emotional exhaustion, self-doubt, and burnout are common in teachers managing large, diverse classrooms without adequate support. Hyry-Beihammer, et. al. (2020) emphasized the emotional burden faced by teachers in inclusive settings, where the need to address various learning needs, manage behavioral issues, and maintain high instructional quality can become overwhelming. These challenges highlight the importance of emotional resilience and institutional support for teacher mental health.

Time management challenges further compound these pressures, as explained, and stressed by some participants.

Participant 4: "It takes more time to ensure that the data collected about the progress of children with special needs is accurate,"

while Participant 9: "balancing instruction for struggling learners and enrichment for advanced learners."

These time constraints are especially acute when teachers are expected to fulfill administrative requirements, personalize learning, and maintain student engagement in an increasingly digital world.

Thompson and Baumgartner (2020) highlighted how tools like portfolios, while useful, add considerable workload. Richards et. al. (2021) also noted that learners with learning disabilities require specific attention strategies, further stretching a teacher's time and resources.

In the face of these challenges, the role of school leadership becomes critical. This is a protocol where the principal handles parent communications and other procedures.

Participant 12: "If the parents already know that the child has special needs… the principal will talk to them about it."

Effective school leaders foster a culture of inclusion by promoting teacher collaboration, coordinating with parents, and allocating

Rubilene N. Almeron

resources in a manner that meets the needs of all stakeholders. Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) found that inclusive leadership, marked by collaboration, professional development, and stakeholder engagement, correlates with improved student outcomes and teacher satisfaction. Leadership can, therefore, either enable or hinder the practical realization of inclusion goals.

Similarly, Andaya et. al. (2021) highlighted the importance of leadership support and positive teacher attitudes toward mainstreaming learners with additional needs. However, their study also identifies challenges such as cultural and institutional barriers, an overemphasis on standardized assessments, and shortcomings in teacher training programs. These insights are relevant to this study as they emphasize the crucial role of school leadership and systemic support in addressing challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in inclusive education.

Equally important are the attitudes and beliefs of teachers, which directly shape how inclusive education is practiced. Admittedly, there is a must for continued learning as teachers should always be abreast of the new knowledge they need to acquire.

Participant 4: "They do things that sometimes make me doubt my chosen profession,"

Participant 12: "I still need to attend seminars even though I have been in kindergarten for 10 years."

Klehm (2020) emphasized that teachers with positive beliefs about inclusion are more likely to employ effective strategies, whereas those with negative views may unconsciously lower their expectations or withdraw support. Teacher training programs must therefore address these attitudes explicitly.

Navigating legal and ethical responsibilities also poses challenges, noting that issues with different learners should be taken with caution and with the help of a discerning eyes coming directly from a specialist or expert in the field.

Participant 12: "There is a real need for specialists in every school… it is not allowed for them to refuse acceptance."

This statement demonstrates teachers' awareness of legal requirements, including the right to a free and appropriate education for all learners. At the same time, it reveals their frustration with the lack of adequate resources and specialist support needed to implement these mandates effectively within the school setting.

Bell (2023) and Jenkins (2020) both stress the importance of specialized training for teachers to manage literacy difficulties, confidentiality, consent, and fairness. Teachers must be equipped to uphold their ethical duties while effectively addressing learners' complex learning needs.

With limited internal resources, many educators turn to the community and external agencies for help; thus, a proactive approach was highlighted.

Participant 12: "You need to provide and look for resources that you really can't obtain from the school or from the parents."

This statement points to a broader systemic need for partnerships beyond the school community, including collaboration with NGOs, local governments, and social service agencies. As Horner et. al. (2020) contended, sustainable, inclusive education—especially in low-resource settings—relies on strategic resource sharing and coordinated efforts with external partners to scale up effective interventions and ensure all learners receive the support they need.

Additionally, a 2021 article in the International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology notes that six out of fifteen studies in the Philippine context reported teachers lacking confidence and readiness to implement inclusive education, indicating a need for more robust support systems.

In addition, language barriers can obstruct both learning and parent-teacher communication, as mentioned,

Participant 6: "…overcoming language barriers,"

Participant 12: "…even if you repeat it multiple times; they still don't get it."

These experiences highlight the need for accessible communication strategies. Marinduque and Marquez (2025) offer actionable solutions, such as visual aids and multilingual materials, to bridge language gaps and improve communication with both learners and families.

Building peer mentoring programs and fostering teacher collaboration are also vital strategies in inclusive education. This has been added, observed, and emphasized,

Participant 11: "Teachers are working together to plan and develop strategies,"

Participant 12: "I consult with our Grade 1 teacher and other teachers who have attended seminars."

Participant 4: "I share with my co-teachers the problems I face…"

Bērziņa (2021) and Jiji et. al. (2020) highlighted the benefits of mentoring and co-teaching, including shared responsibility, cross-training, and stronger student support. These collaborative structures reduce isolation and encourage innovation.

Finally, supportive school policies are foundational to institutionalizing inclusive practices. Policies are considered the core which is particularly the task of the administrators and policymakers. There was this call for the policies to be enhanced or reinforced.

Participant 12: "We should be able to communicate our needs to them,"

Participant 6: "policies promoting smaller class sizes and increased funding."

Ainscow et. al. (2020) argued that local educational authorities (LEAs) must play an active role in creating inclusive environments through policy guidance, funding, and accountability. Effective policies can ensure that inclusion is not just a theoretical commitment but a lived reality in every classroom.

The theme of Socio-Economic Factors demonstrates that economic conditions, institutional support, teacher attitudes, and broader community engagement deeply influence inclusive education. Teachers are often placed in the difficult position of fulfilling inclusion mandates without the necessary tools or support systems. Emotional strain, communication barriers, and inadequate policy implementation exacerbate these challenges.

To move toward meaningful inclusion, education systems must address the root causes of inequality by investing in school resources, empowering school leaders, training teachers, and fostering intersectoral collaboration. When socioeconomic barriers are dismantled and policies are aligned with ground realities, inclusive education can become a sustainable and equitable model for all learners.

Major Key Theme 6: The Pillars of Support: Specialists, Resilience, and Continuous Improvement

This theme underscores the essential support structures that uphold inclusive education: access to specialists, the cultivation of student resilience, and the importance of continuous feedback and collaboration. It reflects how sustained inclusion relies on coordinated efforts among educators, families, and professionals to provide targeted interventions, emotional reinforcement, and consistent improvements in teaching and learning practices. This theme explores the multifaceted nature of these challenges through interconnected sub-themes: Roles of Specialists and Building Resilience.

Roles of Specialists. The successful implementation of inclusive education depends not only on classroom teachers but also on the presence and support of specialized professionals who offer expert guidance, targeted interventions, and critical assessments. In contexts where inclusive education is being adopted without fully developed infrastructures, the absence of specialists becomes a major barrier to meaningful inclusion.

One of the recurring concerns voiced by educators is the urgent need for specialist support, pointing out the difficulty of managing inclusive classrooms and stressing the importance of experts.

Participant 6: "…collaborat[ing] with specialists,"

Participant 1: "…without the additional assistance that comes from the specialist."

Participant 6: "…the child ended up in Central (SPED class),"

This highlights the role of specialists in making informed placement decisions. These accounts emphasize that general education teachers often lack the training or capacity to identify and respond to complex developmental and behavioral challenges on their own.

Dimant et. al. (2020) emphasized that early detection and proper support by specialists are critical for identifying neurodevelopmental conditions. Without these professionals in place, learners risk being misidentified or underserved, which can delay essential interventions that could significantly improve their outcomes.

The role of school psychologists and counselors is equally essential. noted,

Participant 12: "There is a real need for specialists in every school,"

Participant 5 advocated for better training, stating that "…those training will help us to be prepared for the upcoming school years."

These insights show that both direct support from specialists and teacher readiness fostered through expert-led training are crucial components of inclusive classroom practice.

Luevano et. al. (2020) support this perspective by highlighting the vital partnership between psychologists and educators. School psychologists not only support learners' mental health and socio-emotional development but also provide teachers with concrete strategies for classroom management and inclusion. Their collaboration helps tailor interventions and ensures the consistent application of support strategies across settings.

Specialists also include special education teachers, whose expertise provides critical scaffolding for both learners and mainstream educators. Participant 12 described how they consulted a SPED teacher at another school, saying,

"…I ask the SPED teacher at Central through the former principal."

This dependency reflects a systemic issue: while the expertise exists, it is often centralized and not readily accessible within every

school. Takala, et. al. (2020) underscored the unique role of special education teachers in facilitating the academic and social inclusion of learners with special needs. Their collaboration with general educators ensures that appropriate accommodations, individualized education plans (IEPs), and adaptive strategies are in place. The presence of these professionals in every school is not a luxury but a necessity for equitable, inclusive education.

In essence, what emerges across all sub-themes is the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between teachers, specialists, school leaders, and families to build a comprehensive support system around each learner. While teachers are at the forefront of instruction, specialists provide the depth of assessment, behavioral insights, and therapeutic strategies that ensure every child is understood and supported according to their context.

The roles of specialists highlight a fundamental truth of inclusive education: it cannot be done alone. General education teachers require sustained, structured support from a range of specialists, including psychologists, SPED teachers, and developmental experts, to effectively meet the diverse needs of their learners. The absence of such support leaves gaps in diagnosis, delays interventions, and places undue pressure on classroom teachers.

To bridge this gap, education systems must prioritize the deployment of specialists in every school, support interdisciplinary collaboration, and invest in continuous professional development. When these roles are fully integrated into the school ecosystem, inclusive education becomes not just an ideal but a functional and sustainable practice that uplifts every learner.

Building Resilience. In inclusive education, resilience plays a central role in ensuring both learners and teachers can thrive amid personal, social, and academic challenges. Resilience is not innate; it is nurtured through consistent support, open communication, and collaborative efforts between educators, families, and community partners.

Teachers often serve as the first line of defense in building resilience among learners, particularly those with special educational needs. The efforts to support a child through communication with the guardian were likewise highlighted:

Participant 12: "I always talk to the guardian about the importance of medication, as it can greatly benefit the child."

Participant 13: "For instance, I encountered this issue myself…"

These reflections underscore the importance of engaging families in supportive dialogues and making them partners in the student's development.

Krstovska (2023) emphasizes that fostering resilience in learners, especially those with unique needs, requires promoting physical and mental well-being, implementing tailored interventions, and ensuring inclusive activities are part of the learning process. Educators, caregivers, and professionals must be trained to act swiftly and compassionately, especially during times of crisis, to sustain student well-being and academic progress.

A vital mechanism for promoting resilience is maintaining continuous feedback loops between teachers and families.

Participant 9: "I regularly communicate with parents during Homeroom PTA meetings to provide progress updates and discuss strategies to support learning at home,"

Participant 12: "…I told them what I observed in the child based on the assessment results, and then I explained it."

These practices ensure that parents are not left in the dark and that learners receive consistent, aligned support across home and school. Walker and Legg (2020) found that timely, structured feedback fosters trust between parents and teachers, ultimately improving educational outcomes. By engaging families in a collaborative process, educators can reinforce classroom strategies at home and build a shared understanding of each child's learning trajectory.

However, family dynamics such as separation, single guardianship, or lack of parental presence can disrupt communication and consistency in student support.

Participant 12: "I can't communicate with the child's actual parents because they are separated."

Participant 13: "The mother seems to have left the child with the grandmother, and the father is a foreigner living in another country."

These situations complicate educational planning and emotional support for learners. Billanes (2022) explores how different family environments affect a child's emotional and behavioral development. Children from supportive family backgrounds tend to perform better academically and socially, while unstable or disengaged family situations can hinder learning. Teachers must recognize these dynamics and employ flexible, empathetic strategies to ensure that all children, regardless of their home situation, receive support in school.

To further bridge the home-school gap, schools must implement parent workshops and training programs that empower families to support their children's development. The emotional weight of this work was truly emphasized.

Participant 12: "For the parents, it is difficult for them to understand... we immediately think about how the parents will feel."

This insight reflects the emotional labor involved in parental engagement, especially when families may feel overwhelmed, unprepared, or uninformed about their child's educational needs.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2024) advocates for structured parent training programs that teach families how to support cognitive, social, and emotional development at home. These workshops not only boost student readiness but also empower parents, improving school-home relationships and fostering a culture of shared responsibility in inclusive education.

The theme reinforces that inclusive education requires more than academic accommodations. It demands a holistic approach to strengthening the emotional and social frameworks surrounding learners. Resilience is built through partnerships: consistent communication with families, individualized support for learners, awareness of family dynamics, and equipping parents with the knowledge and tools to engage fully in their child's learning.

Schools must adopt systems that normalize ongoing feedback, provide training opportunities for caregivers, and offer teachers the emotional and instructional support needed to navigate these complexities. When resilience is cultivated in all members of the educational community, learners, parents, and teachers alike, the foundation for sustainable, inclusive education is solidified.

Below is Table 1, which displays the KRA summary table.

Table 1. *KRA Summary Table*

Key Theme	Sub-Themes Codes	Key Findings	Anchored Theory/ Supporting Study
Major Key Theme 1: The Compass of Understanding: Identification, Assessment, and Tailored Support	Early Identification and Developmental Assessment, and	Teachers struggle with early identification and IEPs	Soma et al. (2023), DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019
	Personalized Support Through Inclusive Pedagogy	Lack the professional support, instructional tools, and structured systems required to effectively tailor instruction for learners with additional needs.	Gheyssens et al. (2023) Adult Learning Theory
	Data, Structure, and Systematic Constraints in Inclusion.	Lack of standardized data-driven processes, inefficient enrollment systems, and inadequate material and human resources.	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
Major Key Theme 2: The Sanctuary of Learning: Creating Inclusive Environments	Proactive Behavioral Management and Support	Kindergarten teachers face daily challenges managing a wide range of student behaviors in inclusive classrooms, particularly when supporting learners with emotional, developmental, or behavioral difficulties.	Catubig et al. (2024) Self-efficacy Theory
	Emotional Well-being and Mental Health	Teachers encounter significant challenges in managing students' emotional needs, including those stemming from family separation, trauma, or developmental conditions.	Hawthorne (2022) Ecological Systems Theory, (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
	Social Integration and Positive Classroom Culture	Teachers emphasized the importance of creating emotionally safe and welcoming environments where students with diverse needs can interact, build peer relationships, and develop social-emotional skills.	Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)
Major Key Theme 3: The Tapestry of Collaboration, Advocacy, and Community Engagement and Parent Support	Collaboration with Families and Stakeholders	Teachers face ongoing challenges in building effective partnerships with parents	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), Bartolome and Mamat (2020)
	Advocacy and Community Engagement	Teachers recognize the urgent need for stronger government action, local support, and community-based involvement	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), Epe et al. (2023)
	Parent Support	Parental involvement is essential in implementing inclusive education.	Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) Filipino et al. (2023)
Major Key Theme 4: The Forge of Growth: Empowering Educators Through Professional Growth, Cultural Competence and Right Resources	Professional Growth	Kindergarten teachers expressed a strong willingness to support inclusive education but felt inadequately prepared due to limited training in differentiated instruction, behavioral management, and special education practices.	Social Cognitive Theory (Albert Bandura, 1986),
	Cultural Competence	Kindergarten teachers acknowledged the importance of cultural awareness in addressing diverse student needs but reported limited	Beltran et al. (2025) Sociocultural Theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1978),

Rubilene N. Almeron

	Resources for Educators	training in culturally responsive teaching. Kindergarten teachers consistently cited the lack of access to specialized teaching materials, assistive technology, and parent education programs as major barriers to implementing inclusive practices.	Thomas & Quinlan (2022) Ecological Systems Theory (Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Igunnu and Gital (2024)
Major Key Theme 5: The Odyssey of Overcoming Barriers: Implementation	Implementation Challenges	Kindergarten teachers reported significant difficulties in executing inclusive education practices due to large class sizes, inadequate training, inconsistent enrollment processes for learners with additional needs, and insufficient crisis management protocols.	Ysseldyke et al. (2023)
	Crisis Management	Many teachers lacked formal training on how to de-escalate situations, ensure classroom safety, or communicate effectively with families during crises.	Billanes (2022) Campado et al. (2023) Burgess et al. (2025)
	Socio-Economic Factors	Teachers reported that poverty, lack of parental education, and limited access to basic learning resources significantly hindered the ability of students with special needs to participate fully in school.	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) Perales et al. (2023) Marinduque and Marquez (2025)
Major Key Theme 6: The Pillars of Support: Specialists, Resilience, and Continuous Improvement	Roles of Specialists	Teachers consistently emphasized the urgent need for developmental specialists, school psychologists, and SPED (Special Education) teachers	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), Dimant et al. (2020)
	Building Resilience	Teachers recognized the need to foster resilience among learners with additional needs	Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Burgess et al. (2025)

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study drew the following conclusions: kindergarten teachers are committed to inclusion but often remain under-supported. Teachers express a strong willingness to embrace inclusive practices and create supportive learning environments for all learners. However, their efforts are frequently constrained by limited access to suitable training, instructional materials, and ongoing institutional support. This lack of foundational resources undermines their capacity to implement inclusive education fully and highlights the urgent need for structured, ongoing assistance at both the school and policy levels. Creating inclusive environments in early childhood education remains a significant challenge. Although kindergarten teachers strive to foster inclusive and nurturing classrooms, their efforts are often limited by gaps in training, particularly in managing behavioral issues, and by insufficient mental health support systems. The absence of structured programs that address the emotional and social development of diverse learners further complicates their ability to build fully inclusive spaces. Collaboration is a cornerstone, but often overlooked. Effective inclusive education relies on strong collaboration among teachers, families, stakeholders, and the wider community. However, many educators face difficulties in this area due to inconsistent communication practices, limited parental engagement, and a lack of coordinated support, weakening the collaborative foundation required for successful inclusion. There is a pressing need for targeted, context-sensitive professional development. Generic training models often fail to meet the practical needs of kindergarten teachers. Educators require localized, kindergarten-specific training that reflects their daily classroom experiences and equips them with actionable strategies tailored to their learners' developmental needs and community context. Teacher well-being and mindset are essential to sustaining inclusive practices. It is therefore concluded that the following must be given consideration. The mental health, motivation, and sense of efficacy among teachers significantly influence the success of inclusive education. Addressing emotional burnout and reinforcing a positive mindset through embedded support systems and reflective practices is vital to maintaining long-term commitment and resilience in inclusive classrooms. Policy-practice gaps hinder the full realization of inclusive education. There is a disconnect between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities. Without concrete implementation strategies, monitoring, and accountability, inclusive education efforts remain aspirational rather than actionable.

In light of the conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) Bridge the support gap for inclusive education by institutionalizing a teacher support system. Establish a comprehensive, school-based system that offers kindergarten teachers continuous, needs-based professional development, access to inclusive teaching tools, and consistent administrative support. This system should focus on long-term empowerment rather than one-time interventions, ensuring that teachers are equipped to sustain inclusive practices over time. (2) Strengthen inclusive infrastructure and services for early learners. Improve physical and learning environments by enhancing classroom infrastructure, ensuring the presence of specialized personnel (such as SPED teachers, occupational therapists, and guidance counselors), and crafting clear, age-appropriate guidelines for inclusion in early childhood. These

actions must reflect both national legal mandates and the specific developmental and contextual needs of young children in local schools. (3) Foster inclusive collaboration through family and community engagement. Institutionalize structured parent-teacher programs, develop school-community partnerships, and provide multilingual and accessible communication platforms. These efforts should foster trust, enhance parental involvement, and promote a shared sense of responsibility among families, educators, and local stakeholders in supporting diverse learners. (4) Localize and personalize professional development for kindergarten teachers. Develop training programs that specifically target the day-to-day realities of kindergarten teachers in inclusive classrooms. Training should be practical, developmentally appropriate, and context-responsive—focusing on differentiated instruction, behavior support, and inclusive classroom management—while incorporating teacher voices and feedback into their design. (5) Integrating teacher wellness into inclusive education frameworks is essential for sustaining effective and equitable practices. Prioritizing teacher well-being involves embedding mental health support within professional development programs, including access to regular counseling services, peer support networks, and reflective practices that foster emotional resilience and motivation. Promoting a positive mindset toward inclusion depends on educators feeling valued, supported, and emotionally equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students. Without such support, the long-term success of inclusive education initiatives may be compromised. (6) To ensure effective implementation, national policy must be aligned with the realities of classroom practice through responsive and context-sensitive frameworks. Policymakers and DepEd planners are encouraged to utilize the study's findings—particularly the identified teacher challenges and proposed training matrix—to inform revisions of current inclusive education policies. This process should include the development of localized support mechanisms aligned with RA 11650 and DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019. These mechanisms must be supported by clear operational guidelines, robust monitoring systems, and accountability tools that reflect the real conditions within schools. Grounding these measures in the lived experiences and capacities of educators is essential to achieving meaningful and sustainable inclusive education. (7) Implement the proposed Training Matrix as a roadmap for inclusive capacity-building. Adopt the theme-based, kindergarten-specific training matrix developed in this study as part of division- or school-level INSET programs. This matrix directly responds to the real challenges faced by kindergarten teachers and offers structured, contextually relevant strategies to build confidence, readiness, and competence in delivering inclusive education.

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