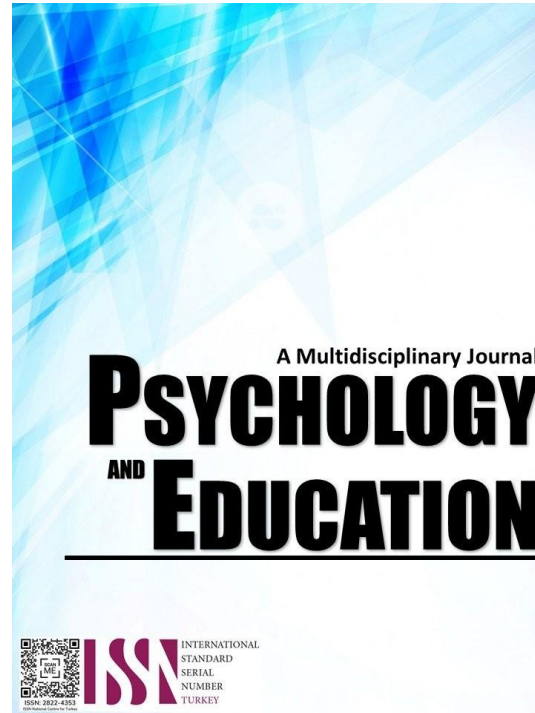


SILENT WITNESSES: MASTER TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN ASSESSING INCLUSION DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS



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Silent Witnesses: Master Teachers' Lived Experiences In Assessing Inclusion During Classroom Observations

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Abstract

Inclusive education, mandated globally and in the Philippines through Republic Act No. 11650, continues to pose challenges in classroom observation, where master teachers often rely on subjective judgment due to the absence of clear frameworks. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of master teachers in assessing inclusion during classroom observations, focusing on how identity, prior encounters, and classroom signals shape their professional self-understanding. Anchored on Karl Weick's Sensemaking Theory, a qualitative phenomenological design was employed to capture the essence of these experiences. Data were gathered through four focus group discussions involving twelve master teachers from the Division of Sarangani, with semi-structured interviews eliciting reflections on role-shaped perceptions, reliance on prior experiences, and attention to classroom signals. Thematic analysis revealed that lived experiences strongly define professional identity, with inclusion perceived as authentic interaction rooted in values of equity, respect, and compassion rather than compliance with rubrics. Teachers attended to signals such as learner participation, emotional safety, differentiated instruction, and respectful communication, while prior encounters with diverse learners sharpened sensitivity to exclusion and fostered empathy, fairness, and resilience. Findings emphasized that inclusion is understood as progress rather than perfection, sustained through reflection and adaptation. The study concludes that master teachers' lived experiences are indispensable in shaping meaningful assessments of inclusion, underscoring the need for context-responsive observation frameworks, mentoring practices, and support systems to bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities, thereby ensuring that inclusive education is both authentic and sustainable.

Keywords: *master teacher, lived experiences, assessment, inclusion, classroom observation*

Introduction

Master teachers and supervisors worldwide face a critical challenge: ensuring the quality of inclusive education without adequate support systems. Despite international policies advocating equity and inclusion, these instructional leaders often operate without clear standards, sufficient training, or resources to evaluate inclusive practices effectively. The absence of structured observation frameworks forces them to rely on subjective judgment, creating inconsistencies in feedback and undermining teacher development. This systemic gap reflects a troubling reality in global education systems, where inclusion remains more aspirational than operational (Judijanto & Al-Amin, 2024; Deroncela-Acosta & Ellis, 2024).

Research from different countries highlights the complexity of evaluators' roles in inclusive education. In Israel, Kimhi and Bar Nir (2025) reported that supervisors struggle to reconcile theoretical inclusion models with practical realities during classroom observations, resulting in fragmented evaluations. In Australia, Finkelstein, Sharma, and Furlonger (2021) found that master teachers face challenges in applying observation tools that adequately capture inclusive strategies such as differentiated instruction and collaborative learning. Similarly, in Canada, Specht et al. (2024) revealed that despite progressive policies, evaluators experience tension between maintaining accountability and providing supportive feedback, leading to inconsistencies in teacher development. These findings underscore that evaluators' experiences are pivotal yet underexplored in global inclusion discourse.

In the Philippines, inclusive education is mandated by Republic Act No. 11650 and aligned with global frameworks such as the UNCRPD. However, implementation remains fraught with challenges. Recent systematic reviews reveal that while teachers generally express positive attitudes toward inclusion, they lack adequate training and resources to translate these attitudes into effective practice (Tagyamon et al., 2025). Moreover, studies show that excessive workloads, insufficient assistive technologies, and inconsistent policy enforcement hinder the realization of inclusive classrooms, particularly in rural areas where resource constraints are most severe (Chitiyo et al., 2024). Master teachers and supervisors, key figures in instructional leadership, often lack clear guidelines for assessing inclusive practices, leading to subjective interpretations and inconsistent mentoring. This ambiguity not only affects teacher growth but also undermines the integrity of inclusive education in schools.

Despite the growing body of research on inclusive education, there is limited phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of master teachers and supervisors as observers of inclusive classrooms. This gap leaves critical questions unanswered: How do they interpret inclusion during observations? What challenges and ethical dilemmas do they encounter? How do these experiences shape their professional identity and leadership roles? Without such insights, observation practices risk remaining superficial, teacher development may stagnate, and inclusive education goals could remain aspirational rather than achievable.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of master teachers in observing inclusion in the classroom. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do master teachers' lived experiences shape their professional self-understanding as they interpret inclusive practices during classroom observations?
2. What classroom signals do master teachers attend to, based on their lived experiences, when forming their judgments about inclusion?
3. How do master teachers' lived experiences influence the way they draw from their previous encounters when assessing inclusive classroom environments?

Literature Review

Lived Experiences and Professional Self-Understanding

Teachers' lived experiences are pivotal in shaping their professional identity and interpretive stance toward inclusive practices. To begin with, Ligestad et al. (2023) demonstrated that encounters with diverse learners compel educators to reconcile personal convictions with institutional mandates, thereby transforming their professional self-concept. Their findings underscore that inclusion is not a static pedagogical adjustment but a dynamic process that reconfigures teachers' sense of purpose.

Building on this perspective, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2021) articulated that inclusive pedagogy positions teachers as agents of change, requiring them to reimagine their roles in heterogeneous classrooms. Their work revealed that professional self-understanding evolves through the negotiation of equity and accountability, a tension that resonates strongly in the Philippine context, where teachers balance policy directives with lived realities.

In relation to this, Sumagang and Balano (2025) contextualized the issue within the Philippine setting, showing that general education teachers working with learners with special needs cultivated empathy and resilience, thereby reframing their professional identity into one rooted in advocacy. Their study substantiates the claim that lived experiences foster a moral imperative for inclusion, positioning it as a professional ethos rather than a compliance measure.

Extending this argument, Valentos and Junsay (2025) illuminated how personal encounters with cultural and linguistic diversity informed Filipino teachers' reflections on inclusive practices. These reflections reinforced their identity as inclusive practitioners, demonstrating that lived experiences accumulate over time to shape interpretive frameworks.

Moreover, Sharma and Loreman (2020) reinforced this perspective by examining how prior exposure to inclusive practices enhances teachers' confidence and self-efficacy. Their findings revealed that lived experiences serve as anchors for professional self-understanding, enabling teachers to perceive themselves as competent facilitators of inclusion.

Similarly, De Boer et al. (2020) corroborated this by reviewing literature on teacher attitudes toward inclusion, concluding that positive lived experiences foster professional growth while negative encounters often engender resistance. This duality highlights the transformative potential of lived experiences in shaping professional identity.

Synthesizing these findings, the literature affirms that lived experiences are transformative, shaping teachers' professional identity and interpretive practices. For master teachers, such experiences constitute the interpretive foundation upon which judgments of inclusion during classroom observations are constructed.

Classroom Signals as Interpretive Cues

Teachers interpret inclusion through observable classroom signals such as student participation, peer collaboration, differentiated instruction, and emotional engagement. To illustrate this, Ligestad et al. (2023) revealed that subtle cues of belonging—like equitable participation and peer acceptance—were decisive in shaping teachers' judgments. These signals functioned as markers of authentic inclusion, distinguishing genuine practices from superficial compliance.

Expanding on this perspective, Florian and Spratt (2020) interrogated the role of classroom signals, demonstrating that teachers attend to indicators of learner engagement and responsiveness as evidence of inclusive practice. Their framework suggests that lived experiences sharpen interpretive sensitivity, enabling educators to discern nuanced signals of inclusion.

In the Philippine context, Valentos and Junsay (2025) contextualized these insights, showing that teachers who attended to signals of cultural responsiveness and learner engagement were more adept at interpreting inclusion. Their findings underscore that classroom signals are not merely observable behaviors but interpretive cues shaped by lived experiences.

Furthermore, Sumagang and Balano (2025) substantiated this by noting that teachers often relied on signals of empathy, adaptability, and resilience when assessing inclusion. These signals reflected the lived realities of diverse classrooms, where inclusion is experienced through subtle interactions rather than overt practices.

In addition, Sharma and Loreman (2020) reinforced the argument by demonstrating that teachers' sensitivity to classroom signals is contingent upon prior exposure to inclusive environments. Teachers with richer lived experiences were more likely to recognize subtle cues of belonging and participation.

Likewise, Norwich and Koutsouris (2020) examined dilemmas in inclusive education, revealing that teachers often relied on signals of student engagement and peer acceptance to evaluate inclusion. Their study highlighted the interpretive complexity of classroom signals, which require lived experience to be meaningfully understood.

Viewed holistically, these studies affirm that classroom signals are indispensable interpretive cues. For master teachers, lived experiences sharpen their ability to decode these signals, enabling them to discern authentic inclusion during classroom observations.

Drawing from Previous Encounters in Assessing Inclusion

Master teachers' assessments are cumulative, informed by prior encounters with diverse learners and classroom contexts. To begin with, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2021) emphasized that teachers' prior experiences serve as interpretive anchors, enabling them to recognize patterns of inclusion and exclusion across different contexts. This continuity strengthens their ability to assess inclusive environments not as isolated events but as evolving practices shaped by historical and personal encounters.

Building on this, Lagestad et al. (2023) noted that teachers often rely on accumulated experiences when interpreting inclusive practices. Their study revealed that teachers' prior encounters with diverse learners informed their judgments, enabling them to contextualize current observations within a broader trajectory of professional experiences. This suggests that lived experiences provide continuity and depth in teachers' assessments of inclusion.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education's guidelines on classroom observations (DepEd Memorandum No. 89, s. 2025) institutionalize reflective practice, encouraging teachers to draw from previous experiences when evaluating inclusion. This iterative process allows master teachers to contextualize current observations within a broader trajectory of professional encounters.

Furthermore, Valentos and Junsay (2025) highlighted that Filipino teachers often draw from prior encounters when assessing inclusion. Their study revealed that teachers' judgments were informed by accumulated experiences, enabling them to recognize patterns of inclusion and exclusion across different contexts. This suggests that lived experiences provide continuity and depth in teachers' assessments of inclusion.

In addition, Sumagang and Balano (2025) emphasized that teachers' prior encounters with diverse learners informed their professional identity and interpretive practices. Their study revealed that teachers often relied on accumulated experiences when assessing inclusion, enabling them to contextualize current observations within a broader trajectory of professional encounters.

Similarly, Sharma and Loreman (2020) corroborated this by showing that teachers' prior experiences influenced their confidence and interpretive lens. Positive encounters predisposed teachers to assess inclusion favorably, while negative experiences often led to skepticism.

As a body of evidence, these studies underscore that master teachers' assessments are cumulative, informed by prior encounters with diverse learners and classroom contexts. For master teachers, lived experiences provide continuity and depth, enabling them to contextualize current observations within a broader trajectory of professional practice.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design to explore master teachers' lived experiences in observing inclusion. Following Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative inquiry enables an in-depth understanding of how individuals construct meaning from experience, while phenomenology, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), captures the essence of these perceptions. This approach examines how master teachers interpret inclusive practices through role-shaped understandings, past experiences, and attention to classroom indicators.

Participants

This study employed purposive sampling to deliberately select participants with direct experience of the phenomenon, ensuring rich and relevant insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were gathered through four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), each with three master teachers, consistent with Krueger and Casey's (2015) recommendations for effective group size. Participants were chosen based on three criteria: (1) current service as master teachers in public schools, (2) direct experience conducting classroom observations in inclusive education, and (3) engagement in mentoring, coaching, or supervisory roles related to inclusive instructional practices.

Instrument

This study positioned the researcher as the primary instrument, consistent with qualitative research, where data collection and interpretation rely on the researcher's direct engagement with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A semi-structured interview guide



was used, containing open-ended questions grounded in Sensemaking Theory and designed to elicit master teachers’ lived experiences related to their role-shaped perceptions, reliance on prior experiences, and attention to specific classroom indicators during observations of inclusive practices. The instrument was reviewed and validated by experts in inclusive education and qualitative research to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study’s objectives.

Procedure

Data collection began with participant orientation, informed consent, and assurances of confidentiality. Semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (45–60 minutes) explored master teachers’ experiences of inclusive practices, using open-ended questions in private or online settings. Sessions was audio-recorded, supplemented with field notes, and transcripts were verified through member checking. Data collection continued until saturation, supported by reflexive journaling to ground interpretations. All data were securely stored to uphold ethical standards.

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis of Focus Group Discussion data, guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework. The process involves familiarization with transcripts, coding meaningful statements, and refining codes into themes that capture master teachers’ experiences of inclusive practices. Both inductive and reflective approaches ensure themes emerge naturally while remaining tied to the study’s framework. Analytic memos were document insights throughout, culminating in a narrative that integrates participants’ voices with interpretive discussion.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles for qualitative research to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants. Prior to data collection, participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study’s purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and informed consent was obtained before their participation. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from transcripts and reports. Audio recordings, transcripts, and related research materials were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Given the focus on professional experiences, care was taken to create a respectful and nonjudgmental environment during Focus Group Discussions, allowing participants to share their perspectives openly. The study also observed principles of trustworthiness through member checking, reflexive journaling, and accurate representation of participants’ views, ensuring that findings reflected their lived experiences with integrity and respect.

Results and Discussion

Master teachers’ lived experiences strongly shape how they understand and interpret inclusive practices. Their professional identity is defined not by rubrics but by reflection and genuine interaction with learners, echoing findings that teachers’ identity in inclusive education evolves through values of equity and diversity (Galgao et al., 2025). Past encounters sharpen their recognition of inclusion, with learner silence and overlooked voices serving as subtle indicators of exclusion, consistent with Manubag’s (2023) study on Filipino teachers’ sensitivity to classroom signals.

Table 1. *Lived Experiences and Professional Self-Understanding*

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Emerging Themes</i>	<i>Significant Statements (P1–P5)</i>
Professional Identity Shaped by Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lived experiences define professional self-understanding - Inclusion seen beyond rubrics and standardized measures - Deep reflection and interpretation of practices 	P1: “Being a teacher is not only about teaching lessons but also about understanding each child... true inclusive practice is seen in actual interaction, not just on paper.” P2: “My lived experiences... helped me recognize what inclusive teaching looks like in real classroom situations.” P3: “I encountered specific indicators such as differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, and assessment strategies.” P4: “It is a deeply internalized observation... not only by checking boxes... but complex acts of interpretation.” P5: “Inclusion is deeply personal... shaped my identity as a teacher who values diversity.”
Recognition of Inclusion Through Past Encounters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of exclusion through learner silence - Comparing past and present practices - Importance of differentiated strategies - Sensitivity to overlooked voices 	P1: “Children became quiet when they were not noticed... I immediately notice if there are children being left behind.” P2: “Past encounters allow me to compare what I observe now with what I experienced before.” P3: “Observed positive learning interactions when using differentiated materials.” P4: “I identify inclusive practice by looking at how a teacher manages the social and cognitive environment.” P5: “I recall moments when group work seemed inclusive but certain voices were missing.”
Guiding Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belief in universal learning 	P1: “Every child can learn, but not in the same way and not on the same day.”



and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> potential - Respect, equity, compassion - Ethical and philosophical lens - Learner-centered values 	<p>P2: "Every learner deserves equal participation, respect, and support." P3: "Respect, diversity, compassion, and learner-centeredness guide us." P4: "Interpreting inclusive teaching behaviors is an exercise in applying ethics... pedagogy and philosophy." P5: "I believe students can learn regardless of circumstances." P1: "I don't judge right away... my approach is supportive, giving feedback that is practical and encouraging."</p>
Influence of Challenges and Successes with Diverse Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empathy and fairness in judgment - Supportive and reflective feedback - Belief in long-term learner growth - Parental involvement as support - Inclusion as continuous progress 	<p>P2: "Challenges make me more understanding, fair, and reflective." P3: "Every child is capable of learning with the right support, especially with parents' involvement." P4: "I am both empathetic and demanding... I should observe that learners grow over years, not just in a month." P5: "I judge teaching behaviors with empathy... inclusion is not perfection but progress."</p>

Guiding beliefs such as respect, compassion, and the conviction that "every child can learn" provide the ethical lens through which teachers interpret inclusive behaviors. This aligns with Siton (2024), who found that educators' commitment to inclusion is grounded in moral responsibility. Challenges and successes with diverse learners foster empathy, fairness, and reflective feedback. Teachers see inclusion as progress rather than perfection, reinforcing the idea that it is a continuous journey requiring patience and adaptation.

Lived experiences cultivate reflective professional identity, sharpen recognition of subtle exclusion, anchor inclusive practices in values, and transform challenges into empathy and resilience. Together, these insights affirm that inclusion is dynamic, values-driven, and sustained through continuous reflection and adaptation.

Table 2. Classroom Signals as Interpretive Cues

Themes	Emerging Themes	Significant Statements (P1-P5)
Classroom Atmosphere and Signals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safe and relaxed environment - Emotional safety and belonging - Learner comfort and confidence 	<p>P1: "I look at the classroom atmosphere. Are the children relaxed? Are they smiling? Are they afraid to speak?" P2: "I pay attention to classroom signals such as student participation, teacher-student interactions, and how learning activities are adapted." P3: "My challenge is to strengthen the belief in differentiated strategies." P4: "I pay attention to students who share and act naturally with one another." P5: "Signals like laughter, encouragement, and respectful dialogue tell me whether students feel a sense of belonging." P1: "I immediately notice who is active and who is not participating." P2: "The learner behaviors I notice first include student engagement, confidence in participation, and whether all students feel included." P3: "I notice participation and interaction... whether students are confident to speak and collaborate respectfully." P4: "I ignore the teacher first. Instead, I observe the students' behavior—whether they make eye-to-eye contact with one another." P5: "A primary sign of inclusion is a student's willingness to struggle out loud—students who participate, ask for clarifications, or admit they are stuck." P1: "I look at whether the teacher uses different strategies, gives wait time, moves around the classroom, and uses positive language." P2: "I interpret a teacher's actions as inclusive when I observe differentiated instruction, flexible methods, and positive responses to diversity." P3: "I interpret inclusive practice through differentiated instruction, varied materials, positive reinforcement, and fair questioning." P4: "If the teacher welcomes diversity, avoids discrimination or favoritism, and supports learners with different needs." P5: "When a teacher adapts materials or tasks to meet various learning needs, I interpret these as inclusive practices." P1: "I notice who the teacher often calls... are they always the same students?" P2: "Classroom interactions such as respectful communication, cooperative learning, and equal attention to all learners catch my attention." P3: "Patterns such as consistent participation only from high-performing learners, and balanced participation among all members." P4: "Positive and respectful language, learners working cooperatively, and rules being assigned to ensure inclusion." P5: "If a few students dominate while others remain quiet, I pay close attention to that silence."</p>
Learner Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation and engagement - Confidence and self-regulation - Eye contact and peer interaction 	
Teacher Actions and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differentiated instruction - Positive reinforcement - Avoidance of favoritism - Adaptation of materials 	
Classroom Interactions and Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respectful communication - Cooperative learning - Balanced participation - Rules ensuring inclusion 	

The thematic analysis shows that classroom atmosphere is a primary signal of inclusion. Teachers emphasized safe, relaxed environments where learners feel free to participate (P1, P5). This aligns with recent findings that emotional safety and belonging are



essential markers of inclusive classrooms, as highlighted in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST)-based observation frameworks (DepEd, 2026).

Learner behaviors such as participation, confidence, eye contact, and willingness to “struggle out loud” (P2, P4, P5) were consistently noted. These behaviors reflect inclusion by showing that learners feel supported and valued. Manubag (2023) found that Filipino teachers interpret learner engagement and silence as subtle indicators of inclusion or exclusion, reinforcing the importance of attentiveness to student behavior.

Teacher actions and strategies were also central. Participants highlighted differentiated instruction, flexible methods, positive reinforcement, and avoidance of favoritism (P1–P5). These practices are consistent with Siton (2024), who reported that inclusive teaching is guided by ethical values and learner-centered strategies, ensuring all students are accommodated.

Classroom interactions and patterns such as respectful communication, cooperative learning, balanced participation, and sensitivity to silence were emphasized (P2, P3, P4, P5). Galgao et al. (2025) similarly concluded that inclusion is revealed in everyday classroom interactions, where equity and respect are practiced.

Table 3. *Drawing from Previous Encounters in Assessing Inclusion*

Themes	Emerging Themes	Significant Statements (P1–P5)
Drawing from Lived Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Past encounters as foundation for assessment - Reflection on diverse learners and strategies - Inclusion seen beyond lesson plans 	P1: “My lived experiences serve as the foundation of my assessment... I look at whether the classroom is welcoming, whether there is differentiation, and whether all children have the opportunity to learn.” P2: “My lived experiences influence how I draw from previous encounters by allowing me to reflect on past classroom situations and apply those lessons.” P3: “From my observations, I have learned that inclusion is not only about placing students together... but about ensuring that every learner feels valued, respected, and supported.” P4: “I pay attention to differentiation. I understand that silence may mean processing difficulty, disinterest, or a particular way of communicating.” P5: “These encounters shaped my self-understanding as an educator committed to equity and belonging.”
Insights from Past Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying effective vs. ineffective strategies - Equity and differentiated instruction - Empathy in assessment 	P1: “In my past observations, I saw what was effective and what was not... I make sure there are adjustments depending on learners’ needs.” P2: “Insights from my past observations help me identify effective strategies and areas that need improvement.” P3: “My insights show that inclusion means equity—providing what each learner needs to succeed.” P4: “I intentionally use what I have learned about learners, classrooms, and teaching strategies to show improvements in instruction.” P5: “Because I’ve seen both successes and struggles, I assess current practices with empathy... I value incremental progress toward inclusivity.”
Recalling Previous Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggling readers and diverse learning paces - Silent learners needing varied strategies - Cooperative learning and flexible grouping 	P1: “I remember a learner who was quiet but participated when given visual materials and small group activity.” P2: “I recall previous situations where inclusive strategies either succeeded or failed.” P3: “I recall situations where differentiated instruction and flexible grouping helped struggling learners to actively participate.” P4: “Some situations include slow reading by certain learners... struggling readers, while others skim quickly.” P5: “Past encounters where students felt unsafe or disconnected helped me realize that inclusion is not only academic but also emotional.”
Impact of Experiences with Diverse Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holistic evaluation (academic, emotional, social) - Sensitivity to learner needs - Inclusion as belonging and growth 	P1: “Because of my experience with diverse learners, my evaluation is more holistic... I check if there is respect for diversity, accommodations, and if children feel valued.” P2: “My experiences with diverse learners make me more sensitive to learner needs, classroom dynamics, and the importance of inclusive practices.” P3: “Teachers use differentiated strategies, and all students are given equal opportunities to learn and grow.” P4: “I provide differentiated tasks and let them feel that they belong.” P5: “Past challenges with students who struggled due to language, disability, or cultural differences make me more attentive to subtle signs of inclusion.”

Master teachers’ lived experiences strongly influence how they draw from previous encounters when assessing inclusive classroom environments. The analysis shows that teachers use past situations as a foundation for judgment, reflecting on diverse learners and strategies to ensure inclusion beyond lesson plans. For example, P1 and P2 emphasized that lived experiences allow them to identify effective strategies and apply lessons learned, while P3 and P5 highlighted equity, belonging, and empathy as guiding principles. This

is consistent with Galgao et al. (2025), who found that teachers' professional identity in inclusive education is shaped by continuous reflection on past encounters and the need to adapt strategies for diverse learners.

Insights from past observations also sharpen teachers' ability to distinguish effective from ineffective practices. P1 and P4 noted that they intentionally use prior knowledge to adjust strategies and support learner growth, echoing Manubag (2023), who reported that Filipino teachers rely on past experiences to recognize subtle signals of exclusion and refine inclusive practices.

Recalling previous situations, such as struggling readers or silent learners, helps teachers interpret current classroom dynamics. P5 stressed that inclusion is not only academic but also emotional, aligning with Siton (2024), who found that educators' reflections on past challenges deepen their sensitivity to learners' emotional and cultural needs.

Experiences with diverse learners foster holistic evaluation. Teachers assess inclusiveness not only in terms of academic support but also emotional safety, respect, and belonging. This reinforces the view that inclusion is a dynamic, evolving process requiring empathy, fairness, and continuous adaptation.

Conclusions

The findings of this study affirm that master teachers' lived experiences are central to how they interpret and assess inclusion during classroom observations. Their professional self-understanding is shaped not by rigid rubrics but by reflective engagement, ethical values, and authentic interactions with learners. Past encounters sharpen their sensitivity to subtle signals of exclusion, such as learner silence or overlooked voices, while guiding beliefs in equity, compassion, and the conviction that every child can learn provide the moral lens through which they evaluate inclusive practices. Classroom signals—ranging from learner participation and emotional safety to differentiated instruction and respectful communication—serve as interpretive cues that master teachers decode through accumulated experiences, allowing them to contextualize current observations within broader professional trajectories. Ultimately, inclusion is understood as a dynamic and values-driven process sustained through empathy, resilience, and continuous reflection rather than as a fixed compliance measure. These insights highlight the pivotal role of master teachers in bridging the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, underscoring the need for structured frameworks that respect professional judgment while ensuring consistency and fairness.

Policymakers and the Department of Education should develop clear and standardized observation frameworks for inclusive education that balance accountability with professional discretion. Alongside this, sustained training programs must be provided to master teachers to strengthen their ability to recognize classroom signals and apply inclusive strategies effectively. Equitable distribution of resources, particularly assistive technologies, should also be prioritized to support inclusion in rural and resource-constrained schools. School leaders and supervisors are encouraged to institutionalize reflective practices in classroom observations, ensuring that evaluators draw from past encounters while maintaining fairness. Collaborative mentoring systems should be strengthened so that master teachers can share their lived experiences with novice teachers, thereby fostering a culture of inclusion and professional growth.

Master teachers themselves should continue cultivating empathy, fairness, and resilience in interpreting inclusive practices. They are encouraged to document and share their experiences to contribute to collective learning and refinement of observation practices, while engaging in ongoing professional development to deepen their sensitivity to classroom signals and strengthen interpretive judgment. Future researchers should expand phenomenological inquiries to include perspectives of novice teachers, learners, and parents to provide a holistic view of inclusion. Further studies should investigate the impact of structured observation frameworks on teacher development and learner outcomes, as well as explore the ethical dilemmas evaluators face in balancing accountability with compassion during classroom observations.

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