

Voices of Inclusion: Navigating Inclusive Education to Foster Marginalized Learners' Inclusivity

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education plays a crucial role in ensuring that all learners regardless of background, identity, or ability receive equitable learning opportunities. However, challenges persist in fully understanding how teachers and marginalized learners experience inclusion within everyday classroom contexts. This study explores the lived experiences of Grade 4–6 Teachers and Marginalized Learners in implementing inclusive education. The data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions involving experienced teachers and marginalized learners. Findings revealed that inclusive education positively supports learners' academic, behavioral, and emotional development when classrooms foster respect, safety, and engagement. Teachers demonstrated empathy, adaptability, and innovation, yet faced persistent challenges such as shortages of instructional materials, large class sizes, outdated technology, limited institutional and community support, and inaccessible learning environments. These constraints often required improvised strategies that were time-consuming and unsustainable. Learners emphasized the value of kindness, fairness, interactive lessons, and supportive relationships but noted difficulties related to academic comprehension, emotional stress, and social exclusion often intensified by poverty and lack of resources. Overall, the study highlights that inclusive education extends beyond mere access; it requires well-supported, compassionate, and responsive environments. Strengthening teacher training, improving resource allocation, enhancing institutional collaboration, and implementing supportive policies are essential to meeting the diverse needs of marginalized learners and ensuring truly equitable and inclusive learning spaces.

Keywords: Challenges, Inclusive Education, Lived Experiences, Marginalized Learners

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education seeks to provide equitable learning environments for all learners, but marginalized groups often face systemic barriers, prompting global and national efforts to prioritize inclusivity. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizes inclusive education for all. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 10533 requires a learner-centered education system that is developmentally appropriate, adaptable to diverse needs, cognitive abilities, and cultural backgrounds, and ensures learners acquire essential competencies. This study investigates the live experience and challenges in implementing inclusive education by identifying barriers, evaluating strategies, and exploring the experiences of teachers

and marginalized learners. The findings aim to provide insights and recommendations to improve practices, policies, and school environments, promoting a more equitable educational system.

Zhu (2024) emphasized that, although there is a growing awareness of the importance of inclusive education, many teachers feel unprepared to address the diverse needs of their learners. This lack of preparedness often results in resistance to adopting inclusive practices, which negatively impacts the learning experiences and outcomes of marginalized learners. According to Borualogo (2019), 52.5% of elementary learners report experiencing physical bullying, while 60.6% face verbal bullying. Additionally, 49.6% of learners have been subjected to psychological bullying. Marginalized learners are disproportionately targeted, often due to factors such as race, disability, or socio-economic status.

Significant gaps remain in understanding how inclusive practices are applied in mainstream classrooms with limited resources. Studies show that while schools strive for inclusivity, they often face challenges such as inadequate resources, limited parental involvement, and insufficient teacher training (Beltran et al., 2024; Lebeco & Verano, 2023). Existing research tends to focus on policy frameworks or well-resourced settings, overlooking the day-to-day struggles of underfunded schools and the lived experiences of marginalized learners. In reality, these schools face barriers in providing basic teaching materials, extracurricular activities, and infrastructure improvements elements essential to a holistic education (Akadira, 2024, Fitri et al., 2025) This underscores the importance of exploring inclusive education through the lens of both teachers and learners, particularly in the diverse, resource-constrained schools of Prosperidad.

This study investigates the implementation of inclusive education by exploring the lived experiences of teachers and marginalized learners. It seeks to uncover the key factors that promote or hinder inclusivity and illuminate evidence-based strategies that foster equity and meaningful learning outcomes. The findings aim to contribute significantly to the development of inclusive practices that can transform classroom dynamics and inform education policy.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study aims to examine the implementation of inclusive education in the elementary setting, specifically in Prosperidad District, Division of Agusan del Sur, during the school year 2024-2025.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants in promoting inclusive education?
2. What are the challenges experienced by the participants on the issues in promoting inclusive education?
3. What intervention program can be made based on the results of the study?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and challenges of teachers and marginalized learners in fostering inclusive education. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of participants' experiences, emphasizing their perspectives, feelings, and meanings in real-life contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher collected data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, allowing participants to share their personal experiences, challenges, and strategies in promoting inclusive education. This approach provided rich, contextual insights into how teachers implement inclusive practices, how learners experience these practices, and the factors that facilitate or hinder inclusivity

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data analysis focused on identifying common themes and patterns that reveal the essence of participants lived experiences, offering a deeper understanding of the realities of inclusive education in school settings.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in eight schools within the Prosperidad District, Division of Agusan del Sur: Lucena Central, Sta. Irene Central, Las Navas, Sta. Maria, West Prosperidad, Asuncion, Doña Rosario, and La Suerte Elementary Schools. These schools differ in learner population, teacher availability, geographic location, and the challenges faced in supporting marginalized learners, reflecting the diverse realities of inclusive education implementation. Despite these differences, each school has developed distinct strategies to address learners' needs, providing valuable insights into practical, context-responsive approaches to inclusion. The schools were selected for their growing populations of marginalized learners, making them relevant for assessing inclusive education practices.

2.3 Research Key Informants

This study involved key informants selected to provide in-depth insights into the implementation of inclusive education in the Prosperidad District, Division of Agusan del Sur. Key informants included 16 teachers and 32 marginalized learners. The teachers were Grade 4 to Grade 6 advisers with at least one year of teaching experience, currently teaching in the study locale, and directly involved in inclusive education practices. Their daily engagement with diverse classrooms allowed them to share firsthand experiences, strategies, and challenges in fostering inclusion.

The learner key informants were purposefully selected from marginalized subgroups, including Indigenous Peoples, learners with disabilities, economically disadvantaged learners, learners with special educational needs, and LGBTQ+ youth. They were chosen based on their relevant experience and willingness to provide detailed accounts of their educational experiences. Focusing on these key informants enabled the study to capture rich, authentic perspectives on the challenges, strategies, and realities of inclusive education from those most directly affected.

2.4 Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made interview questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit the lived experiences of teachers and marginalized learners in promoting inclusive education. These questions were employed in focus group discussions and individual interviews, allowing participants to share detailed, personal insights on their experiences, challenges, and strategies. This approach provided rich, contextual data that captured the realities of inclusive education in diverse school settings.

To ensure validity and relevance, the interview guide underwent expert validation. A panel of five experts from the Division of Agusan del Sur including the Curriculum Implementation Division Chief, the Education Program Supervisor for Gender and Development/Child Protection Policy, a Master Teacher in Special Needs Education, the Indigenous Peoples Education Coordinator, and the District Supervisor reviewed the instrument. The guide was revised according to their feedback and re-evaluated to confirm alignment with the study's objectives and phenomenological focus.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the Division Superintendent of Agusan del Sur and the principals of selected elementary schools in the Prosperidad District before data collection. Using a researcher-made interview questionnaire with open-ended questions, the researcher conducted interviews and focused group discussions with teachers and marginalized learners, following informed consent and assent.

Sessions were audio-recorded and supplemented with notes to ensure accurate documentation. Transcriptions were analyzed progressively to identify emerging themes, which were then organized into thematic summaries reflecting the participants lived experiences. Findings were verified with key information to ensure credibility. Insights and recommendations were drawn based on the analysis, aligned with the study's objectives.

2.6 Data Analysis

The study employed inductive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGDs). This six-phase approach ensured a systematic exploration of participants lived experiences. First, the researcher familiarized the data by transcribing audio recordings and carefully reading the transcripts, noting initial impressions and potential codes. Next, significant features were systematically coded to identify important concepts and recurring expressions. These codes were then grouped into preliminary themes that captured key patterns across participants' responses.

In the fourth phase, the researcher reviewed and refined the themes for accuracy and relevance, ensuring they reflected the essence of the participants' experiences. Each theme was then defined and named, clearly representing a distinct aspect of the data. Finally, the findings were synthesized into a coherent narrative, linking themes to the study's research questions, objectives, and relevant literature (Caulfield, 2019). This method allowed the researcher to uncover recurring patterns, sentiments, and meanings in participants' discussions, providing a rich, structured, and credible interpretation of the experiences of teachers and marginalized learners in inclusive education.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1.1 Experiences of the Teachers in Promoting Inclusive Education

Theme 1: Academic and Behavioral Development of Marginalized Learners

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the academic and behavioral development of marginalized learners facing socio-economic, language, and emotional challenges (KI1, KI6, KI12, KI15). When classrooms are inclusive and emotionally supportive, learners demonstrate significant academic gains particularly in reading alongside increased participation, engagement, and retention. Initial shyness, fear, or hesitation gradually diminishes through consistent encouragement, culturally relevant instruction, and positive reinforcement, emphasizing the importance of empathy, patience, and meaningful support in fostering both academic and emotional growth.

To address specific learning barriers, teachers employ targeted interventions such as personalized reading support, simplified content, visual aids, integration of native dialects, and hands-on activities. These strategies not only improve learners' reading competencies but also cultivate confidence, initiative, and active classroom engagement (Choi et al., 2019; Wilton et al., 2019). One-on-one support and peer-assisted learning further enhance learners' socio-emotional development by promoting collaboration, persistence, and self-efficacy, illustrating the strong connection between academic and emotional growth (Siyabi et al., 2024)

Moreover, learners' engagement and behavioral improvement are closely linked to their sense of safety, value, and recognition within the classroom (KI4, KI15). When learners feel respected and supported, they exhibit greater focus, resilience, and cooperative behavior. By combining inclusive practices with teacher self-efficacy, educators create environments where learners can overcome challenges, build self-esteem, and develop social-emotional competence (Okech et al., 2021). Collectively, these findings highlight that

effective inclusive education requires an integrated approach that simultaneously nurtures learners' cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development, ensuring equitable and meaningful participation for all.

Theme 2: Barriers to Inclusive Education

Teachers' narratives revealed that deeply rooted systemic and contextual barriers hindered equitable learning for marginalized students. Socioeconomic struggles such as poverty, discrimination, and poor health often led to absenteeism, low motivation, and limited access to education, which were further compounded by insufficient teaching materials, specialized resources, and funding. Limited family and community involvement also weakened the continuity of support between home and school, highlighting that true inclusion extends beyond classroom efforts and requires systemic action to address inequality, improve resources, and foster stronger school-community partnerships.

Learners with physical disabilities or health-related issues faced significant classroom challenges, yet with proper support and adaptive strategies, meaningful academic progress was still possible (KI9, KI13). For instance, teachers reported providing individualized attention, nutritional support, and consistent encouragement, which allowed learners to participate and succeed despite health or disability-related obstacles. Similarly, students from low-income families experienced difficulties such as lack of school supplies, poor nutrition, and additional household responsibilities, which affected their attendance and engagement (KI4, KI10, KI13). These experiences underscored how poverty and socioeconomic disparities can limit learners' ability to benefit fully from inclusive education (Algolaylat et al., 2023; Thorén et al., 2020).

Teachers also highlighted the limitations of learning resources. While materials were provided by the school and DepEd, shortages, delays, and the need for differentiated or manipulable materials often required teachers to create their own to meet students' diverse needs (KI2, KI3, KI5, KI11, KI14). Resource constraints, coupled with overcrowded classrooms and limited time for individualized instruction, hindered the effective implementation of inclusive practices (Kenny et al., 2023).

Parent and community engagement emerged as another critical barrier. While some parents were supportive, many were difficult to reach or unaware of their role in their child's education (KI4, KI15). Limited parental involvement weakened learners' support systems, while insufficient community collaboration restricted opportunities for resource pooling and advocacy. Research suggests that active partnerships between schools, families, and communities are essential for fostering meaningful inclusion and shared responsibility for learners' academic and socio-emotional development (Eden et al., 2024).

Theme 3: Teacher Support, Motivation, and Initiatives

Teachers were central to the success of inclusive education, as their emotional commitment and proactive efforts helped bridge gaps in resources and support for marginalized learners. Despite limited means, teachers demonstrated that their dedication could create meaningful change by fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. They frequently took initiative by developing customized materials, adapting instruction to diverse learner needs, and providing personal support, such as food, school supplies, or emotional care, to address non-academic barriers (KI8, KI9, KI10, KI13, KI16). These actions not only enhanced learning and classroom management but also reinforced teachers' intrinsic motivation, as seeing learners succeed provided emotional fulfillment and strengthened their sense of purpose (KI4, KI5).

Teachers' intrinsic motivation was further evident in their consistent efforts to support learners facing multiple challenges. For instance, educators reported feeling inspired when marginalized learners actively

participated, displayed resilience, and demonstrated eagerness to learn, despite socioeconomic or health-related obstacles (KI4, KI5, KI9). This motivation reinforced their persistence and adaptive teaching practices, aligning with research highlighting that emotional fulfillment from supporting learners boosts teacher well-being, professional identity, and commitment to inclusive education (Nwosu et al., 2021). Innovation and teacher agency were also crucial in advancing inclusion. Participants described creating teacher-made materials, adapting available resources, and implementing improvised strategies to meet diverse learning needs (KI3, KI5, KI6, KI11). These actions illustrated a proactive approach, reflecting a growth mindset and the ability to sustain inclusive practices even when formal support and resources were limited. Research confirms that adaptive strategies and differentiated instruction enhance learning outcomes, particularly in diverse classrooms, underscoring the importance of teacher creativity and resourcefulness (Manzoor et al., 2022).

Teacher support, both in terms of materials and collaboration, significantly influenced instructional effectiveness and classroom management. Access to resources such as laptops, learning materials, and shared expertise enabled teachers to implement personalized strategies that improved student engagement and outcomes (KI1, KI4, KI5, KI9, KI14, KI16). When formal support was insufficient, teachers went above and beyond, using personal funds to provide food or school supplies, ensuring learners could participate fully and engage meaningfully in classroom activities (KI10, KI13, KI16). These efforts demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility and highlighted the intersection of teacher motivation, innovation, and practical support in promoting inclusive education.

Theme 4: Institutional and Peer Support Systems

Teachers emphasized that strong support from school leaders, colleagues, and institutions such as DepEd was essential in addressing the diverse needs of learners. Institutional support, including the provision of learning materials, teaching aids, laptops, and school supplies, enabled teachers to implement inclusive strategies more effectively and improved their teaching capabilities (KI1, KI3, KI8, KI9, KI14, KI16). Technical guidance and mentorship from principals and master teachers, alongside collaborative practices among co-teachers, facilitated knowledge sharing, skill development, and innovation in lesson planning and material creation (KI3, KI12, KI16). Peer collaboration, especially during professional development sessions like Learning Action Cells (LAC), allowed teachers to exchange strategies and adapt effective practices to their classrooms, reinforcing professional solidarity and enhancing instructional quality (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2020).

Support from external stakeholders, including parents and community members, complemented institutional efforts by addressing broader socio-economic challenges and promoting student welfare. Teachers highlighted that without coordinated backing, managing the needs of marginalized learners could be isolating and less effective. Research confirms that mentorship, coaching partnerships, and community engagement strengthen teachers' confidence, instructional practices, and the overall success of inclusive education initiatives (Kirkpatrick et al., 2019).

Theme 5: Inclusion, Anti-Bullying, and Respect Culture

Creating a culture of inclusion, respect, and anti-bullying was central to fostering safe and supportive learning environments. Teachers reported encountering various forms of bullying physical, verbal, relational, and bias-based discrimination linked to appearance, disability, gender identity, or socio-economic status which undermined students' confidence, participation, and sense of belonging (KI1, KI3, KI4, KI6, KI11, KI15). To address this, educators integrated anti-bullying programs, values education, and discussions on respect and inclusivity into classroom activities, while providing emotional support

and peer mentoring to promote understanding and acceptance (KI5, KI6, KI8, KI9, KI10, KI13, KI14, KI15).

Teachers also collaborated with school leaders, guidance counselors, and parents to intervene in incidents, reinforce positive behaviors, and provide holistic support to affected learners (KI6, KI10, KI13). Inclusive group activities and positive reinforcement strategies were used to rebuild self-confidence and ensure all students were actively engaged, particularly marginalized learners (KI3, KI5). These interventions not only mitigated the negative effects of discrimination but also modeled inclusive behaviors and encouraged empathy among peers (Hong et al., 2022; Finet et al., 2023).

Research highlights that fostering a positive school climate through coordinated anti-bullying measures, values integration, and stakeholder involvement is critical for effective inclusion (Sultan et al., 2020; Christodoulou et al., 2022). Teachers' proactive efforts in promoting respect, inclusion, and equitable treatment ensured that marginalized students were valued, supported, and fully engaged in the learning process, creating classrooms that reflected dignity, connection, and shared responsibility.

3.1.2 Experiences of Marginalized Learners in Promoting Inclusive Education

Theme 1: Inclusive and Respectful Classroom Environment

Creating an inclusive and respectful classroom was crucial for supporting marginalized learners who often experienced exclusion or unequal treatment. Teachers actively promote fairness, kindness, and participation while addressing bullying and fostering respectful dialogue, helping to build emotional safety and a sense of belonging. Students reported that being treated with dignity and empathy increased their confidence, engagement, and academic growth (KI1, KI13, KI23). Teachers served as moral role models, demonstrating kindness and approachability, which encouraged students to mirror these behaviors and reinforced empathy and acceptance as classroom norms (Löper & Hellmich, 2024).

Learners highlighted the importance of belonging, fairness, and inclusion in classroom activities. Opportunities to participate in discussions, group work, and school events helped students feel valued regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (KI4, KI5, KI6, KI9, KI11, KI13, KI21, KI22). This sense of inclusion strengthened student motivation, self-efficacy, and well-being, particularly for marginalized learners facing social or economic challenges (Howansky et al., 2021; Carter et al., 2023). Teachers who intentionally fostered identity-safe and equitable spaces promoted persistent engagement and positive learning experiences for all students.

Theme 2: Enjoyable and Engaging Learning Experience

Creating enjoyable and engaging learning experiences further enhanced participation and motivation, particularly for marginalized learners. Through interactive activities such as group games, collaborative tasks, and hands-on projects, teachers fostered vibrant classrooms that inspired curiosity, joy, and peer collaboration. Students reported that these dynamic strategies made lessons more accessible, strengthened friendships, and increased confidence in participating (KI2, KI4, KI5, KI7, KI8, KI12, KI20, KI21).

Positive classroom dynamics, including attentive listening, teacher support, and peer collaboration, reinforced trust and a sense of belonging. Playful and gamified activities enhanced learner engagement, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration while reducing barriers to participation (Viana et al., 2024). Teachers' efforts to make lessons understandable and inclusive encouraged students to take academic risks, express themselves, and engage meaningfully in learning (Shah et al., 2022). Overall, enjoyable and interactive learning experiences were instrumental in supporting both the academic growth and emotional well-being of marginalized learners, reinforcing a classroom culture of inclusion, respect, and engagement.

Theme 3: Instructional Clarity and Support

Clear, patient, and adaptable instruction was essential for supporting marginalized learners' academic success. Teachers used strategies such as simplified explanations, repeated examples, and translations into students' native language, like Bisaya, to ensure comprehension, particularly for learners facing language barriers, learning difficulties, or fast-paced English instruction (KI1, KI5, KI7, KI8, KI9, KI10, KI12, KI15, KI16, KI17, KI22). Learners reported that these strategies helped them understand lessons, solve problems, and follow instructions, even in subjects like Math where concepts were complex (KI8, KI17). Despite clear instruction, many learners still faced challenges with rapid lesson pacing, foundational skills, and cognitive demands. Teachers' efforts to reteach, provide additional examples, and maintain a calm, focused learning environment were critical for mitigating these barriers (Erbeli et al., 2020). Overall, instructional clarity, patient explanations, and adaptive teaching strategies promoted accessibility and inclusivity, enabling learners to engage meaningfully and progress academically.

Theme 4: Individualized and Peer Support Strategies

Individualized and peer support strategies complemented clear instruction by addressing learners' diverse academic and emotional needs. Teachers provided targeted assistance, adapted lessons, and encouraged group work to ensure all students could participate and succeed, regardless of socio-economic or academic disadvantages (KI11, KI16, KI18, KI21). Peer collaboration allowed learners to support one another, enhancing understanding and reinforcing inclusive classroom practices.

Emotional barriers, including shyness, fear of ridicule, or reluctance to ask questions, often limited participation (KI9, KI19, KI23). Teachers who fostered empathy, reassurance, and a non-judgmental classroom climate helped students feel safe, valued, and confident to engage. By combining individualized support, peer collaboration, and emotional guidance, educators created inclusive learning environments that encouraged risk-taking, self-expression, and academic growth (Amelia et al., 2024).

3.2.1 Challenges Experienced by the Teachers on the Issues in Promoting Inclusive Education

Theme 1: Instructional Material Challenges

Instructional material challenges significantly affect the delivery of inclusive education, particularly for learners with diverse and special needs. Teachers consistently experience shortages, delayed distribution, and the provision of outdated or generic instructional resources that fail to match the varied abilities of marginalized learners. These limitations hinder lesson implementation and often leave teachers unable to fully meet learning objectives (KI1, KI6, KI15). The problem is compounded by large class sizes and time constraints, which restrict teachers' capacity to design and prepare individualized materials effectively (KI2, KI5, KI11).

Due to the mismatch between available resources and learners' actual needs, teachers are compelled to localize, modify, and create their own instructional materials to ensure inclusivity (KI1, KI3, KI12). However, this process is often rushed, resulting in materials that may not fully address students' specific learning levels (KI2). Additionally, the lack of proper assessment tools makes it difficult for teachers to evaluate progress, particularly among learners with special needs, further weakening the effectiveness of instruction (KI9).

The inadequacy of culturally responsive and contextualized materials also emerges as a significant concern. Teachers report that most resources are designed for average learners and fail to reflect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of marginalized students, affecting engagement and comprehension (KI13, KI14). Consequently, educators rely on internet sources, self-funded printing, and personal purchases of manipulatives to compensate for insufficient institutional support (KI7, KI10, KI16). While

these efforts demonstrate dedication, they also expose systemic weaknesses in resource allocation, placing undue emotional and financial strain on teachers. This situation aligns with Ngema (2023), who emphasizes that sustained dependence on teacher improvisation leads to stress and burnout, jeopardizing the long-term sustainability of inclusive practices.

Theme 2: Teaching and Learning Delivery Constraints

Teaching and learning delivery in inclusive classrooms are further constrained by overlapping challenges related to class size, behavioral management, and the diversity of learner needs. Teachers struggle to differentiate instruction effectively due to overcrowded classrooms and the wide range of abilities present in a single learning environment (KI1, KI11). These conditions limit opportunities for personalized support and meaningful engagement, making it difficult for teachers to implement inclusive strategies successfully.

The need to continuously modify lessons and materials for each marginalized learner intensifies the burden on teachers, especially when preparation time is limited (KI2). Behavioral issues further complicate instruction, as teachers must simultaneously address emotional and behavioral concerns while sustaining lesson flow (KI4). These difficulties are exacerbated by insufficient parental and community support, which weakens continuity of learning beyond the classroom (KI12, KI15).

Resource inadequacy remains a persistent barrier, as teachers often rely on materials designed for average learners, leaving struggling students behind (KI13). When combined with time pressure and assessment challenges, these factors reduce the overall effectiveness of instruction and contribute to teacher fatigue. Overcrowding, insufficient training, and lack of structural support ultimately make inclusive education difficult to sustain, echoing the findings of Sharma and Sokal (2020), who identify these barriers as major obstacles to effective inclusion.

Theme 3: Assessment and Monitoring Difficulties

Assessment and monitoring posed significant challenges in inclusive classrooms due to the lack of appropriate tools and structured systems for evaluating the diverse needs of marginalized learners (KI2, KI9, KI13). Teachers often struggled to create assessments aligned with varying abilities and learning difficulties, resulting in rushed or improvised materials that limited accurate evaluation and timely feedback. This weakened their ability to track progress, identify learning gaps, and adjust instruction effectively.

Further compounding this issue was the shortage of institutional support and funding, which compelled teachers to rely on personal resources to provide suitable materials and assessment aids (KI10, KI13). The absence of consistent monitoring frameworks hindered early intervention and meaningful documentation of learner progress, reducing opportunities for responsive and equitable instruction. These findings highlight the pressing need for standardized, learner-centered assessment systems and adequate resource provision to strengthen inclusive education practices (UNESCO, 2020; Poly & Harishma, 2023).

Theme 4: Digital and Technological Barriers

Digital and technological limitations significantly hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education, particularly due to outdated ICT equipment and unreliable internet connectivity (KI13, KI16). Teachers reported difficulties using malfunctioning devices, which delayed lesson preparation and restricted their ability to create individualized materials for diverse learners. In response, many relied on personal resources and mobile data to access online materials, increasing both workload and financial strain (KI10, KI15).

These barriers reduced the consistent integration of digital tools, limiting students' access to engaging and differentiated learning experiences. Poor connectivity further constrained teachers' efforts to download instructional materials and utilize multimedia resources aligned with learners' needs (KI11). Studies affirm that insufficient ICT infrastructure and unstable internet access directly weaken instructional quality and inclusive practices, particularly in underserved settings (Batanero et al., 2020; Shikomera et al., 2023; Hidayati et al., 2024). These findings highlight the urgent need for institutional investment in updated technology and reliable connectivity to support equitable and inclusive learning environments.

Theme 5: Classroom Environment Constraints

The physical classroom environment significantly influences the success of inclusive education; however, many learning spaces remain structurally unsuitable for accommodating diverse learner needs. Teachers reported that rigid layouts and insufficient learning materials limit their ability to create flexible and supportive environments for marginalized and special needs learners (KI2, KI6). As a result, educators often take personal initiative by producing their own materials and modifying classroom designs, yet these efforts are time-consuming and rarely address deeper infrastructural shortcomings (KI8, KI14).

These constraints place additional strain on teachers while reducing the effectiveness of inclusive practices. Without adequate resources and systemic support, classrooms fail to become adaptive spaces that promote accessibility, participation, and belonging. Consistent with Nembambula et al. (2023), inclusive environments must be intentionally designed and properly resourced to meet varied learner needs. While teacher initiative reflects dedication, sustainable inclusion requires institutional investment in flexible classroom design, sufficient materials, and proper infrastructural support to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.

3.2.2 Challenges Experienced by Marginalized Learners on the Issues in Promoting Inclusive Education

3.2.1 Challenges Experienced by the Marginalized Learners on the Issues in Promoting Inclusive Education

Theme 1: Academic Struggles and Learning Challenges

Learners faced persistent academic difficulties in comprehending lessons, expressing ideas, and processing subject content, particularly in English and Mathematics (KI1, KI4, KI18, KI23). These cognitive barriers were closely intertwined with emotional challenges, including fear of making mistakes, low confidence, and anxiety, which further reduced classroom participation and willingness to engage (KI3, KI12, KI20). Struggles with complex vocabulary, abstract problem-solving, and unfamiliar academic language limited learners' understanding and contributed to hesitation in responding during class activities.

Despite these challenges, supportive teacher interventions played a critical role in mitigating learning barriers. When provided with additional guidance, assistance after class, and positive reinforcement, learners demonstrated increased confidence and gradual improvement in participation (KI11, KI13, KI17). Grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, these patterns underscore the importance of scaffolded instruction tailored to learners' current abilities. Consistent with Ghanta (2024) and Akol (2024), language complexity and subject-specific demands must be addressed through intentional teaching strategies such as simplified language use, peer support, and concrete representations, particularly in English and Mathematics. Addressing both cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning is therefore essential in helping marginalized learners overcome academic barriers and achieve meaningful engagement in inclusive classrooms.

Theme 2: Social Interaction and Peer Relationships

Peer bullying, social rejection, and discriminatory treatment emerged as significant barriers to inclusive participation, as learners frequently experienced teasing, exclusion from group activities, and verbal abuse based on physical appearance, academic ability, or personal traits (KI3, KI5, KI7, KI8, KI10, KI12, KI13, KI14, KI19, KI22, KI23, KI24) fostered feelings of fear, shame, and inferiority among marginalized learners, causing them to avoid speaking in class, joining group activities, and participating in school programs. Experiences of past humiliation and ridicule heightened their anxiety, diminished their confidence, and restricted both their social engagement and academic involvement, often resulting in emotional withdrawal and isolation. Although some teacher interventions helped reduce immediate harm, the continued presence of bullying highlights the urgent need for structured, school-wide initiatives that promote empathy, respect, and psychological safety. Supportive learning environments where mistakes are accepted and diversity is valued were shown to reduce learners' fear of judgment and encourage active participation (KI5, KI6, KI15, KI23). These findings align with Johnson et al. (2020), who assert that psychologically safe classrooms enhance communication and reduce social anxiety among marginalized learners. Likewise, Miço (2023) stresses the importance of targeted support for students at risk of exclusion, and Ilaltdinova et al. (2022) emphasize that authentic inclusion requires shifts in educators' attitudes and practices to foster acceptance of diversity. Creating such spaces is essential for rebuilding learners' resilience, strengthening self-esteem, and supporting meaningful peer relationships in inclusive classrooms.

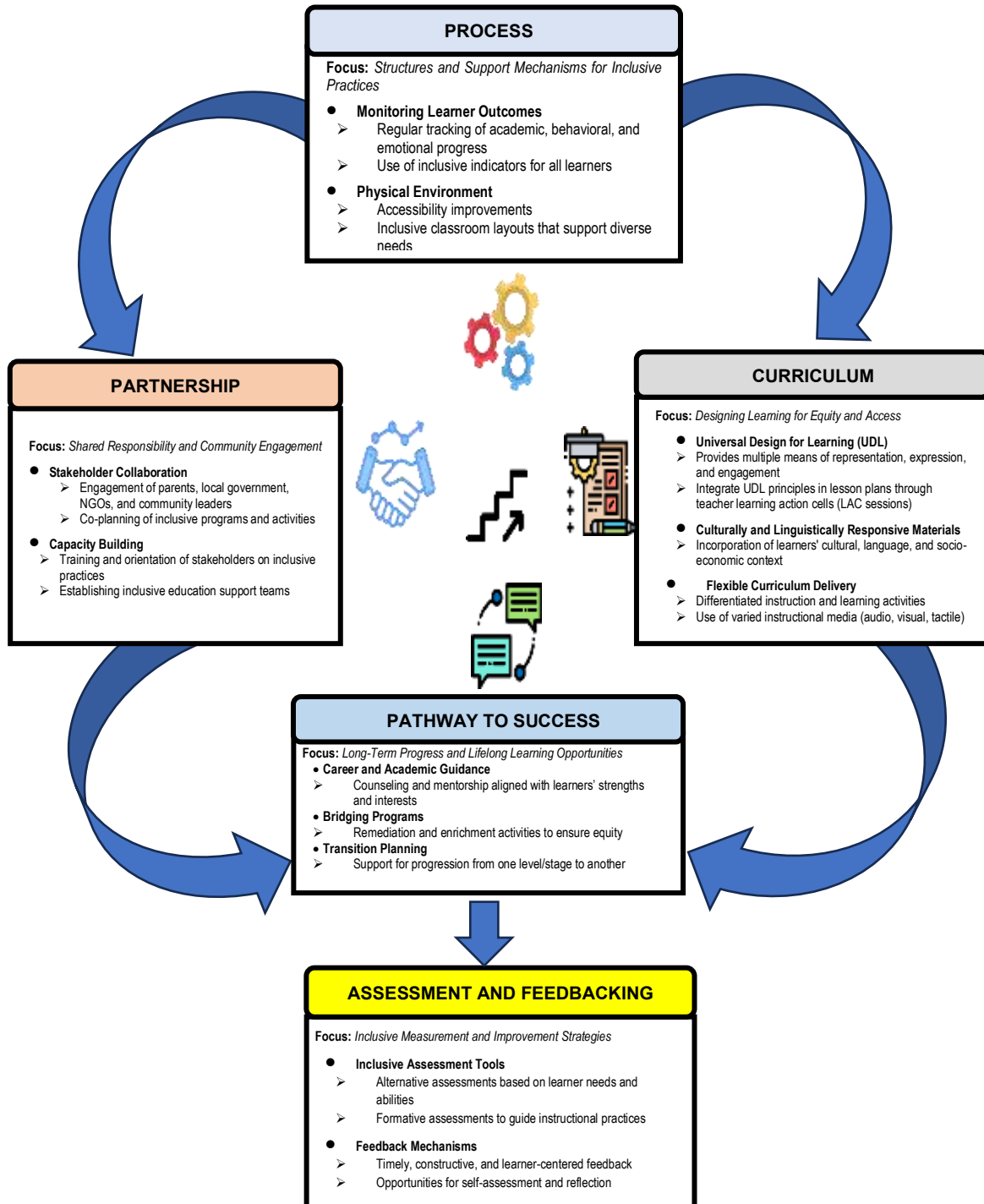
Theme 3: Economic and Material Constraints

Economic hardship significantly limited learners' participation in classroom activities, as many lacked basic school supplies and were often compelled to borrow materials from peers (KI21, KI22). This ongoing shortage of essential resources not only hindered academic engagement but also produced feelings of embarrassment, inferiority, and dependence, weakening their confidence and sense of belonging in the classroom. The absence of fundamental tools such as notebooks and writing materials created daily barriers that reinforced inequality and placed marginalized students at a sustained disadvantage. Beyond academic consequences, these material constraints contributed to emotional distress and social exclusion, further reducing motivation and classroom involvement. Consistent with Dela Cruz, Inosanto, Manalo, Mendoza, Tuazon, and Dominado (2025), who found that even among Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries, financial support does not fully erase negative psychosocial effects self-esteem and life orientation remain fragile in the face of poverty. Addressing these challenges requires inclusive support mechanisms such as resource provision, school-based assistance programs, and community partnerships to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities.

Proposed Intervention Program

The development of the proposed intervention program for inclusive education stemmed from an analysis of both the challenges and successful practices observed in implementing inclusive strategies for marginalized learners. Grounded in existing laws such as Republic Act No. 10533 and aligned with global directives, the program was designed to address key gaps in teacher preparedness, learner engagement, school support, and program evaluation. It was conceptualized as a dynamic and responsive framework with a central focus on enhancing inclusive education, surrounded by four interrelated components: teacher training, learner involvement, support systems, and monitoring mechanisms. The model not only integrated best practices but also offered a structured yet adaptable guide for schools.

The Inclusive Model Promoting Access, Collaboration, and Transformation (IMPACT) is a strategic and holistic model crafted to guide schools in developing inclusive environments that accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, particularly those who are marginalized. Grounded in inclusive education principles and aligned with both national mandates and global frameworks, this model emphasizes equity, accessibility, and learner-centered approaches.



Inclusive Model Promoting Access, Collaboration, and Transformation (IMPACT)

The Inclusive Model Promoting Access, Collaboration, and Transformation (IMPACT) is a strategic and holistic framework designed to support schools in creating inclusive environments that address the diverse needs of all learners, especially those from marginalized groups. Rooted in the core principles of inclusive education and aligned with national policies and international frameworks, IMPACT prioritizes equity, accessibility, and learner-centered practices. The model is built around five interconnected domains: Process, Curriculum, Assessment and Feedback, Partnership, and Pathways to Success which function as essential levers for transforming conventional education systems into inclusive, dynamic, and supportive learning spaces that promote participation, achievement, and well-being for every learner.

The PROCESS domain establishes the foundational structures and mechanisms necessary for inclusive practices to thrive. It emphasizes the importance of systematically monitoring learner outcomes academic, behavioral, and emotional through inclusive indicators that reflect the progress of all learners. This monitoring must use inclusive indicators that reflect the realities and challenges of all learners, particularly those who may face additional barriers. By closely tracking outcomes, teachers can identify at-risk learners early and tailor interventions that meet their individual needs. Additionally, it focuses on enhancing the physical learning environment by ensuring accessibility through infrastructure adjustments such as ramps, signage, and inclusive classroom layouts. Inside the classroom, layouts should be flexible and inclusively arranged in ways that allow students with varying physical, sensory, or cognitive needs to participate fully and feel comfortable. This component reinforces the idea that inclusivity must be built into the very structure of the school, allowing every learner to engage meaningfully and safely within the educational setting.

Within the CURRICULUM domain, the focus is on designing learning experiences that promote equity and respond to learner diversity. Central to this is the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework that ensures that educational content is accessible to all by providing multiple ways for students to access information, express their understanding, and engage in learning. UDL shifts the focus from a one-size-fits-all approach to one that recognizes learner variability as the norm. The use of cultural and linguistically responsive materials ensures that it reflects students lived experiences, cultures, languages, and socio-economic contexts, which in turn strengthens engagement and motivation. Moreover, curriculum flexibility through differentiated instruction and the use of diverse instructional media provides learners with multiple pathways to access content and demonstrate understanding. This domain underscores the necessity of curriculum reform as a key driver of inclusivity.

The third domain, the PARTNERSHIP domain reflects the shared endeavor that involves not only teachers and students but also parents, community leaders, local government units, and NGOs. Stakeholder collaboration ensures that the planning and execution of inclusive programs are grounded in the actual needs and contexts of the community. Through joint decision-making and co-implementation, schools can develop more sustainable and contextually relevant inclusive practices. Capacity building is also essential in this process. Training teachers, parents, and community members on inclusive education principles helps build a shared understanding and competence. Creating inclusive education support teams, such as guidance counselors, special education coordinators, and learning support aids, ensures that the school has the resources and personnel necessary to address diverse learner needs effectively.

The PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS domain ensure that inclusive education translates into long-term learner success and lifelong opportunities. Through targeted academic and career guidance, it helps learners identify their interests, strengths, and goals while aligning them with future opportunities. This is particularly crucial for marginalized learners who may not have access to mentoring or career exposure.

Bridging programs offer remediation and enrichment activities to close achievement gaps, while transition planning assists learners in moving seamlessly between educational levels. This domain emphasizes the importance of inclusive education not only in the present but also in preparing learners for a meaningful and productive future.

Finally, ASSESSMENT and Feedback highlights component ensures that the ways students are evaluated and supported are inclusive and reflective of their unique abilities and needs. Traditional assessments may not capture the full potential of every learner. Thus, inclusive assessment tools such as performance-based tasks, oral exams, and portfolios are used to provide alternative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding. These are often accompanied by formative assessments, which help teachers adjust their instruction in real-time based on ongoing learner performance. Equally important are feedback mechanisms that are timely, constructive, and centered around the learner's growth. Feedback should not be limited to grades but should provide meaningful insights that students can act on. Opportunities for self-assessment and reflection also empower learners to take ownership of their learning, build confidence, and develop critical thinking skills.

In summary, the IMPACT offers schools a clear, adaptable, and actionable roadmap for achieving genuine inclusion. Each domain interconnects to form a comprehensive system that promotes equity, supports learner diversity, and ensures long-term success. When implemented with fidelity and collaboration, this framework holds the potential to transform educational practices and create environments where all learners regardless of background, identity, or ability are valued, included, and empowered to thrive.

4. CONCLUSION

While inclusive education has the power to transform the learning experiences, its success ultimately depends on the shared responsibility of the entire educational ecosystem not just the dedication of individual teachers. The proactive and compassionate efforts of teachers clearly make a difference, but without support to remove persistent barriers such as poverty, resource scarcity, and weak family engagement, full inclusion remains constrained. Thus, inclusive education must be understood not merely as a classroom-level initiative but as a broader social commitment that requires institutional alignment, policy reinforcement, and community involvement. Cultivating truly inclusive schools demands intentional investment in teacher development, collaborative school cultures, and learner-centered practices that address both academic and emotional needs. Only through such comprehensive and sustained efforts can education become genuinely inclusive, empowering all learners to thrive regardless of their backgrounds.

Implementation of inclusive education remains fundamentally constrained by deficiencies that overburden teachers and marginalize learners. Despite their commitment, teachers are compelled to compensate for school's shortcomings such as inadequate materials and a lack of contextualized assessment tools often at personal cost. This unsustainable reliance on individual effort reflects deeper structural issues that cannot be addressed through isolated interventions. Moreover, the compounded academic, emotional, social, and economic challenges faced by learners underscore the inadequacy of current support mechanisms in meeting diverse needs. True inclusivity demands more than policy declarations; it requires a coordinated, well-resourced, and multi-dimensional approach that empowers teachers, uplifts learners, and transforms school environments into equitable spaces for all. Without such systemic reform, inclusive education will remain an ideal in principle, but elusive in practice.

5. RECOMMENDATION

Educational authorities are encouraged to increase resource allocation and provide continuous professional development for teachers focused on inclusive and culturally responsive practices. Schools might foster collaborative environments that actively involve teachers, administrators, parents, and communities to build shared commitment and support for marginalized learners. Clear policies could be established to guide inclusive instruction and protect students from discrimination, while schools implement holistic support systems addressing both academic and emotional needs through peer mentoring and counseling. Additionally, cultivating a culture of respect and enforcing anti-bullying measures are essential to create safe, welcoming spaces where all learners can thrive.

Educational stakeholders, particularly at school leadership levels, might prioritize systemic reforms that go beyond surface-level inclusion efforts. This includes the provision of context-appropriate, differentiated instructional and assessment materials; sustained funding for inclusive infrastructure and learning technologies; and comprehensive, ongoing professional development that equips teachers with practical strategies for inclusive pedagogy. Schools may also establish multi-tiered support systems that address learners' academic, emotional, social, and material needs through strengthened partnerships with parents, communities, and local agencies. Policy implementation might be monitored not only for compliance but for actual impact on teaching conditions and student outcomes. Only through integrated, well-funded, and responsive mechanisms can inclusive education move from being a burden on individual educators to a shared, institutional responsibility that ensures all learners thrive.

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