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Challenges and Triumphs: Public Elementary Teachers' Experiences in Providing Inclusive Education in Baguio City

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the experiences of public elementary school teachers in Baguio City as they navigate the challenges of implementing inclusive education. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study concentrates on three primary aspects: inclusive classroom practices, implementation challenges, and strategies employed to address these challenges. Data were collected through structured interviews with teachers, yielding valuable insights into their daily experiences. This study explored inclusive classroom practices, challenges, and successes among public elementary teachers in Baguio City. The findings indicate that teachers actively utilize inclusive practices such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), the use of assistive technologies, and collaborative teaching approaches. Teachers actively applied inclusive practices like differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), despite facing significant obstacles such as overcrowding, limited resources, and insufficient support. Teachers demonstrated commitment and adaptability, employing diverse instructional strategies, building partnerships with families and specialists, and fostering inclusive environments. However, systemic challenges persisted, highlighting the need for meaningful structural reforms to sustain and enhance inclusive education. The study emphasizes the importance of enabling policies, sustained training, and adequate resources to support teachers in creating truly inclusive classrooms where every learner belongs and succeeds. School leaders should strengthen teacher training programs, establish multidisciplinary teams, and provide regular workshops and mentoring from special education experts. Nevertheless, they encounter significant challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, limited access to professional development, and minimal support from key stakeholders. These systemic obstacles impede the full realization of inclusive education. Despite these difficulties, the study emphasizes the resilience and commitment of teachers. They engage in ongoing learning, establish strong partnerships with families and specialists, and cultivate inclusive classroom environments where all learners are appreciated and supported. Their dedication reflects a profound understanding of inclusion principles and a strong desire to address the diverse needs of their students. This research highlights both the potential and the persistent challenges of inclusive education within the Philippine public school system. It advocates for targeted, long-term support from the government and educational institutions to enhance teacher capacity, improve resources, and strengthen stakeholder engagement. By tackling these systemic issues, the promise of inclusive education can be more fully realized in public schools throughout the nation. The study emphasizes both the potential and the ongoing challenges of inclusive education in the Philippine public-school context and calls for strategic, systemic support to sustain and expand inclusive practices.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Classroom Practices, Challenges, Teacher Resilience, Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

INTRODUCTION

The global education landscape has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, embracing inclusive education as a fundamental approach. This approach prioritizes equal access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, socio-economic backgrounds, or other differences. Grounded in principles of equity, diversity, and participation, inclusive education seeks to eliminate barriers to learning and foster supportive environments catering to diverse learner needs.(UNESCO, 2020) This international initiative to support inclusivity in school was backed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The state must guarantee a fully inclusive education system at all levels, ensuring lifelong learning without discrimination or exclusion based on disability. Also, the state should exercise reasonable accommodations, individualized support, and the availability of communication tools to foster academic and social growth. Moreover, UNICEF defines inclusiveness as educating all children together, covering those with disabilities and minority language speakers. Its approach is dynamic and adaptive depending on the needs and situations of the countries it caters. Support to different countries was extended through the transformation of systems via policy, planning, and data. Empowering educators and families through training and awareness. Improvement of infrastructure and tools to remove barriers. Lastly, building a region-wide cooperation on sharing best practices for benchmarking. Through Beyond Education-linked efforts, UNICEF supports inclusive education across numerous countries, wherein the Philippines is one of its recipients on policy review, teachers' training on the use of modules and screening toolkits, and giving classroom design guidelines. (UNESCO, 2024)

In the Philippines, national education policies and programs reflect this shift. The country has enacted landmark legislation, such as the Inclusive Education Act of 2022, which underscores its commitment to providing quality education for all learners, particularly those with disabilities (Republic of the Philippines, 2022) The Inclusive Education Act of 2022 establishes inclusive learning resource centers and sets standards for supporting learners with disabilities, demonstrating the government's efforts to create a more inclusive education system.. This law establishes inclusive learning resource centers and sets standards for supporting learners with disabilities. Furthermore, the Department of Education has implemented policies and programs promoting inclusivity in schools, including the Inclusive Education Program and curriculum contextualization (Deped, 2020).

The Philippines' efforts align with international frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), which advocate for inclusive and equitable quality education. While progress has been made, challenges persist, such as inadequate accessibility, social stigma, and resource limitations. Addressing these gaps requires sustained commitment and collective efforts to promote inclusivity and equality in education.

According to a study by Forber-Pratt et al. (2022), teachers play a crucial role in implementing inclusive education, and their experiences and challenges can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of inclusive practices. In the context of Baguio City, public elementary teachers face unique challenges in providing inclusive education, including limited resources, diverse learner needs, and cultural sensitivities (Dacanay, 2022). Despite these challenges, many schools in the city have made significant strides in promoting inclusive education, demonstrating the commitment of teachers and administrators to creating a more inclusive learning environment (Pedroche & De Guzman, 2022).

According to Dacanay (2022), the implementation of inclusive education in public elementary schools in urban centers like Baguio City poses unique challenges due to cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic factors. Teachers play a vital role in translating inclusive policies into classroom practices, requiring ongoing support and training to address the diverse needs of learners." Their experiences, both the challenges they face and the successes they achieve, offer vital insights into the lived realities of inclusive education at ground level. However, while inclusive education has been legislated and promoted, its implementation in diverse local contexts such as Baguio City remains complex and often underexplored. Teachers must navigate limited resources, large class sizes, insufficient training, and sometimes unclear policy directives (Pedroche et al., 2023). Yet, within these constraints, many educators continue to demonstrate innovation, empathy, and resilience in fostering inclusive environments (Pedroche et al., 2023). Capturing their narratives is essential not only for identifying systemic gaps but also for recognizing effective practices that may be scaled or adapted elsewhere.

In the public elementary school setting, inclusivity extends beyond integrating learners with disabilities; it encompasses accommodating learners with varied learning needs, cultural backgrounds (especially among indigenous populations), and language proficiencies. Teachers must navigate limited resources, large class sizes, insufficient training, and sometimes unclear policy directives. Yet, within these constraints, many educators continue to demonstrate innovation, empathy, and resilience in fostering inclusive environments. (Pedroche et al., 2023). Capturing their narratives is essential not only for identifying systemic gaps but also for recognizing effective practices that may be scaled or adapted elsewhere.

Inclusive education has become a cornerstone of modern educational systems worldwide, aiming to provide equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or needs. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has been actively promoting inclusive education through various initiatives and policies, recognizing the importance of creating a learning environment that values diversity and supports the unique needs of every student (DepEd, 2020). Baguio City, known for its commitment to education and community development, has been at the forefront of implementing inclusive practices in its public schools, aligning with the national agenda to ensure that all learners have access to quality education (Pedroche & De Guzman, 2022).

Moreover, Baguio City, known for its diverse population and rich cultural heritage, presents a unique context for studying inclusive education. Elementary school teachers in Baguio City face various challenges in providing inclusive education, including limited resources, diverse learner needs, and cultural sensitivities. Despite these challenges, many schools in the city have made significant strides in promoting inclusive education.

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, teachers often face significant challenges in implementing these practices effectively. From managing diverse classroom needs to overcoming resource constraints and societal biases, the journey towards inclusive education is complex and multifaceted. Public elementary teachers, being at the frontline of this educational shift, play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of students with diverse needs (Forber-Pratt et al., 2022). Their experiences, challenges, and triumphs in providing inclusive education are vital to understanding how best to support both teachers and students in this endeavor.

The experiences of public elementary teachers in Baguio City can provide valuable insights into the challenges and triumphs of implementing inclusive education (Forber-Pratt et al., 2022). This study aims to explore the experiences of these teachers, highlighting the challenges they face and the strategies they

use to promote inclusive education. By doing so, the study hopes to contribute to the growing discourse on inclusive education in the Philippines and to provide evidence-based recommendations that inform policy, teacher training, and school-level support systems.

This research, therefore, delved into the experiences of public elementary teachers in Baguio City as they implement inclusive education. It aims to illuminate both the challenges they face be it logistical, institutional, or attitudinal and the triumphs they experience through strategies, adaptations, and personal commitment. By doing so, the study hoped to contribute to the growing discourse on inclusive education in the Philippines and to provide evidence-based recommendations that inform policy, teacher training, and school-level support systems.

Literature Review

The meaning of the term 'inclusion' is often taken for granted and seldom defined. Empirical research on inclusive education is often normative since it is based on terms such as 'justice' and 'democracy'. Such terms are challenging to be translated into real practice because their meanings depend on a subjective evaluation related to the time and place where inclusion is supposed to happen. Inclusive education, therefore, is challenging to explore in research and to achieve in educational situations (Rapp et al., 2021). Globally, inclusive education has gained significant attention in recent years, with many countries recognizing its importance in promoting student learning and well-being. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of inclusive education in promoting student learning and well-being (Loreman, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive education is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners, and teachers play a crucial role in promoting inclusive practices (Loreman, 2020). However, teachers often face challenges in implementing inclusive education, including limited resources, inadequate training, and societal biases (Sharma & Sokal, 2020). Despite these challenges, teachers who successfully implement inclusive practices report improved student outcomes and increased teacher satisfaction (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2020). In the Philippine Context, inclusive education has gained momentum through various policies and frameworks. The Department of Education (DepEd) has issued guidelines emphasizing the inclusion of learners with disabilities in the K to 12 basic education program. These policies aim to create an educational environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, can learn together. However, the implementation of these policies faces challenges such as inadequate resources, lack of trained personnel, and societal attitudes towards disability. A study by Patina and Bolongaita (2024) highlighted that elementary school teachers in the Philippines encounter difficulties in assessing children, modifying the learning environment, and involving parents in the educational process. These challenges are influenced by demographic factors such as age and years of service, with younger teachers and those with less experience reporting more difficulties. The study calls for comprehensive training programs to equip teachers with the necessary skills to implement inclusive education effectively. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Education Teachers often face multifaceted challenges when implementing inclusive education. These include limited resources, lack of professional development, and insufficient support from parents and the community.

A study by Madarang and Martin (2024) found that teachers in Diffun District, Quirino, Philippines, reported challenges such as bullying, inadequate facilities, and lack of parental support. The study emphasizes the need for training programs to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in inclusive education. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges. Toquero (2020) reported that special education teachers in the Philippines faced difficulties in adapting lessons for students

with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) during the pandemic. The study found that teachers experienced educational apprehensions, intermittent virtual socialization, and psychological crises. Despite these challenges, teachers assisted parents in supervising their children with disabilities through online communication, homeschooling, and parental engagement. Strategies and Triumphs in Overcoming Barriers Despite the challenges, teachers have developed strategies to promote inclusive education.

Another study by Ensao et al. (2024) explored the experiences of special and inclusive education teachers in distance learning. The study found that teachers utilized various strategies, such as differentiated instruction, to cater to the diverse needs of students. Teachers also employed technology and educational applications to enhance learning experiences for students with special needs. Furthermore, a study by Bagay (2025) examined the experiences of multigrade teachers in the Upper Calanasan District, Apayao. The study found that teachers employed adaptive strategies such as peer tutoring, differentiated instruction, and project-based learning to address the diverse learning needs of students. The study highlights the importance of professional development and support networks in enhancing teacher effectiveness in inclusive education.

Inclusive education has become a cornerstone of modern educational systems, aiming to provide equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or needs. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has been actively promoting inclusive education through various initiatives and policies. Baguio City, known for its commitment to education and community development, has been at the forefront of implementing inclusive practices in its public schools. However, despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, teachers often face significant challenges in implementing these practices effectively.This study is significant as it explores the real-life experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in Baguio City, providing valuable insights into the challenges and successes they face. Ultimately, the study aims to promote educational equity and inclusivity, contributing to a more just and effective public education system.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979), which posits that an individual's development is influenced by various environmental systems. In the context of inclusive education, these systems include the microsystem (e.g., classroom environment, teacher-student interactions), mesosystem (e.g., interactions between school and family), exosystem (e.g., community resources), and macrosystem (e.g., national policies and cultural attitudes). This framework suggests that the experiences of public elementary teachers in Baguio City are shaped by multiple interconnected factors. Understanding these factors can provide insights into the challenges and triumphs teachers encounter in implementing inclusive education.

The study is anchored in Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interactions and cultural tools in learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a socially mediated process, and teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding students' learning experiences. In inclusive education, this theory underscores the importance of collaborative learning environments where teachers and students co-construct knowledge. Additionally, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) highlights the role of self-efficacy in influencing behavior and motivation. Teachers' beliefs in their ability to implement inclusive practices can impact their teaching strategies and interactions with students. Enhancing teachers' self-efficacy can lead to more effective implementation of inclusive education.

Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable importance as it explores the real-life experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in Baguio City. Inclusive education aims to ensure that all learners, regardless of ability or disability, are given equal opportunities to participate and succeed in the general education setting. Understanding the challenges and successes that teachers face in this context is crucial for improving educational practices and policies. It provides a platform for educators to share their lived experiences, including the obstacles they encounter and the strategies they develop to overcome them. Their insights can serve as a valuable resource for fellow educators who are navigating similar circumstances and can foster a sense of solidarity and shared learning among teachers. The findings can inform decision-makers about the support systems teachers need, such as professional development, classroom resources, and institutional policies that facilitate inclusive practices. This can guide the formulation of more responsive and sustainable programs that uphold the principles of equity and inclusivity. Also, understanding the realities of inclusive education in public schools can help teacher training programs align their curricula with the practical needs of future educators, particularly in preparing them to teach in diverse and inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, this study adds to the growing body of literature on inclusive education in the Philippine context, especially in regional areas like Baguio City. It opens up avenues for further research into specific areas such as resource allocation, student outcomes, or the role of community involvement in inclusive education. By highlighting both the struggles and successes of teachers, the study underscores the collective effort required to make inclusive education effective. It fosters a better understanding among parents and communities of the essential role teachers play in promoting inclusivity and the challenges they overcome to support every learner.

Objectives of the Study

This qualitative study explored the experiences of public elementary school teachers in Baguio City in implementing inclusive education. Guided by semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the study specifically aims to:

1. Identify and describe the inclusive classroom practices currently being implemented by public elementary school teachers in Baguio City.
2. Explore the challenges that teachers encounter in providing inclusive education.
3. Examine the strategies and successes of teachers in creating inclusive learning environments and overcoming barriers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive exploratory approach, to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in Baguio City. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to explore the perspectives, emotions, and lived realities of participants in a natural and open-ended manner. The design is grounded in the belief that teachers' voices are central to understanding the realities of inclusive education. Also, the design provides rich, contextualized insights that can inform policy, training, and support systems for inclusive education in the local setting of Baguio City.

Locale and Population of the Study

The participants of this study consist of 10 public elementary school teachers in Baguio City who are currently involved in implementing inclusive education. These are teachers who have 3 years or more experience handling learners with diverse needs, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties, or other exceptionalities, within mainstream classroom settings. Also participants will be drawn from various public elementary schools under the Department of Education, Baguio City Division, ensuring representation from different school sizes, locations and grade levels. The study will primarily focus on teachers who have had direct classroom experience with inclusive education practices, have taught learners with special educational needs (LSENs) within general education settings, and are willing to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The number of participants will follow the principle of data saturation common in qualitative research. An estimated 10–15 teachers may be selected for individual interviews. This purposive sampling ensures that the participants are well-positioned to provide deep, relevant, and diverse insights into the challenges and triumphs of implementing inclusive education in the context of public elementary schools in Baguio City.

Data Gathering Instrument

To effectively explore the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in Baguio City, this study utilized qualitative data gathering tools . The semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate one-on-one interviews with selected participants. This guide contained a series of open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives and questions. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into relevant topics as they arise during the conversation. The topics covered include current inclusive practices in the classroom, challenges encountered in implementing inclusive education support systems and resources available, strategies used to overcome barriers, and reflections on personal successes and triumphs. Moreover, all interviews were audio-recorded (with prior informed consent) to ensure accuracy in data transcription and analysis. The researcher took detailed field notes to document observations, context, and notable non-verbal expressions that enriched the interpretation of the data.

Data Gathering Procedures

Before data collection, the researchers secured permission from the Department of Education – Baguio City Division. After approval, coordination with school administrators followed to identify qualified participants, specifically, teachers with experience handling inclusive classrooms. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and informed consent was obtained. Semi-structured interviews, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, were conducted to explore teachers' practices, challenges, and strategies in inclusive education. These interviews were audio-recorded with permission and supplemented by field notes. All data were transcribed verbatim and anonymized using pseudonyms. These procedures aim to provide a comprehensive, ethical, and trustworthy account of teachers' lived experiences in implementing inclusive education.

Treatment of Data

The data gathered from semi-structured interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data. After transcription, the researcher read through the data multiple times to become familiar with the content. Key

phrases, recurring ideas, and significant experiences were highlighted and coded. These initial codes were then organized into broader categories to form themes that reflect the participants' experiences with inclusive education, particularly their classroom practices, challenges, strategies, and successes. To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher applied member checking, allowing selected participants to review summaries or interpretations of their responses. Peer consultation and feedback from the research adviser was used to minimize bias and improve accuracy. Through this process, the study aimed to provide meaningful insights into the realities faced by public elementary teachers in Baguio City as they implement inclusive education in their classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adheres to ethical standards in the conduct of qualitative research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, the researcher will obtain formal approval from the Department of Education – Baguio City Division, as well as ethical clearance from the relevant institutional review board or ethics committee, if required by the academic institution.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. Participants will be provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, their right to withdraw at any time, and how their data will be used. They will be asked to sign a consent form indicating their voluntary participation. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms or coded labels will be used in all transcripts and research outputs. Audio recordings, consent forms, and digital files will be stored securely in password-protected folders, accessible only to the researcher and research adviser. All identifying information will be removed from final reports to ensure anonymity. Moreover, the researcher will ensure that the participants feel safe and respected during all interactions. Sensitive topics will be handled with care, and participants will not be pressured to answer any questions that make them uncomfortable.

This research includes content or analysis generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as chatGPT and paraphrase quillbot. These tools were used solely to support the research process (e.g., summarization, data organization, or language enhancement) and not to make ethical judgments or decisions. All ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and participant welfare were guided by human judgment and in accordance with recognized ethical standards. The researcher remains fully responsible for all interpretations, conclusions, and ethical integrity of the work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Inclusive Classroom Practices Currently Being Implemented by Public Elementary School Teachers

Inclusive classrooms strive to create dynamic learning environments where every student, regardless of ability, background, or learning style, is welcomed and supported through thoughtful, responsive teaching strategies. In Baguio City's public elementary schools, teachers report a variety of effective practices that embody these principles.

Differentiated Instruction and Content Modification

The central theme is differentiated instruction. Educators adapt their teaching methods varying pacing, complexity, and task types to align with individual student needs. This can mean offering both simplified and enriched tasks, ensuring each learner is appropriately challenged. Teachers consistently modified lesson content and tasks to suit students' readiness, learning styles, and ability levels providing simpler or more advanced work accordingly.

"Differentiated instruction is employed to accommodate learners with special needs."
"Providing different level of activities…learners work on simplified activities while others work on more challenging activities."
"My lesson …depend on the learners' needs…I differentiate activities from easy to difficult."
The repeated mention of differentiated instruction and content modification confirms its central role in their inclusive practice. In the study of Pozas (2020), it analyzed teacher reports and confirmed that DI involves tiered tasks and flexible grouping to address student diversity. However, teachers often feel overwhelmed, as they are not fully trained to implement all dimensions of DI.

Flexible & Learner-Centered Teaching

Complementing this are learner-centered strategies. Teachers adopted varied instructional strategies visual aids, hands-on activities, songs, technology to accommodate diverse learners and foster a collaborative classroom environment.
"I use a lot of visual aids, songs and hands-on activities and simple language so that all learners can follow."
"Flexible teaching methods: …setting norms that encourage students to listen to and learn from each other."
"Learner-centered approach. Ensuring teaching and learning to be fun and enjoyable."
These responses show a strong commitment to flexibility, engagement, and creating inclusive, student-centered spaces. Also, these statements align with findings from recent research. A systematic review in African mainstream classrooms by Genovesi, et al. (2024) described strategies such as concrete teaching aids, simple communication, and interactive activities like music and group tasks all noted for enhancing student engagement and comprehension . Similarly, universal design principles by Ecker, (2023) support the use of multimedia, interactive content, and flexibility to address diverse learning needs. Further, educator resources emphasize providing multiple engagement channels (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and student choice in participation methods, which fosters autonomy and inclusivity.

Collaborative & Active Learning Engagement

A strong emphasis was placed on engaging students through group work, peer collaboration, hands-on activities, and interactive strategies tailored to their preferences and learning profiles.
"Group work or peer grouping…the purpose is to help learners who are academically challenged."
"Encourage student participation through recitation, group activities, games and any enjoyable strategies."
"The learners are given differentiated activities…Peer and grouped work are also used as strategies."
All responses underline a consistent use of social interaction and collaboration to increase student engagement and support. A 2021 meta-analysis by Bouton, (2021) highlights how group activities facilitate co-construction of knowledge, with peers supporting each other's learning, increasing motivation and belonging—especially effective for at-risk and low-performing learners. Another study in science education by Gillies (2023) highlights practices such as guided teacher facilitation and group dialogues (e.g., accountable talk), which boost understanding and include students in meaningful classroom talk.

Use of Tools, Manipulatives & Assistive Resources

Educators integrated manipulatives, technology, visual/audio tools, and hands-on materials to reinforce concepts and support varying learning preferences.
"In Math class I give learners manipulatives to solve problems."
"Use videos, audio, and visual aids for key concepts."

"I let learners choose how they would report what they've understood…poster, skit, poem writing…and Science experiments."

The frequent inclusion of tangible and multimedia resources highlights a proactive approach to multisensory learning and accessibility. This corroborates with the study of Park et al, (2021) that virtual manipulatives like interactive fraction bars and algebra tiles offer students with physical or cognitive disabilities a concrete way to explore mathematical concepts and promote inclusive participation. Another study by Lien, et al. (2023)states that instruments such as dynamic geometry software, calculators with audio features, and educational apps help break down complex concepts and support personalized pacing and comprehension.

Individualized & Group Teaching Structures

Teachers employed customized schedules and grouping strategies—individual pacing for some, combined group activities for others—to balance individual support with social learning.

"My approach is individualized and grouped teaching method…scheduled individually for pacing learning…A grouped schedule method is also incorporated for socialization and grouped activity."

"Grouping learners based on interest, readiness and learning profile. Varying content, process, products, and environment."

These structured approaches show how teachers intentionally designed learning formats to support both individual progress and communal learning. A Study by Bouck, et al (2022) show teachers "use flexible grouping based on abilities, interest, and/or readiness" most of the time, evidencing its effectiveness in promoting differentiated instruction and collaboration in subjects like mathematics. Furthermore, Vanderbilt's Peabody (2025) toolkit supports the use of peer-pairs, small groups, and whole-class instruction, with flexibility tied to instructional goals, suggesting structured use of various grouping methods to meet diverse learner needs.

Positive Learner Outcomes & Classroom Climate

Teachers reported achieving inclusive environments where students feel welcomed, respected, confident, and engaged—leading to both academic and social growth.

"Every learner feel valued and respected to reach their potential."

"With a lot of encouragement and support…a learner who barely spoke… gradually opened up."

"I overheard learners saying 'ang saya' and parents talk to me that their children are having fun in my class."

Positive comments and real-life examples illustrate the success of inclusive strategies in both emotional and academic domains. A secondary school study by Hoffmann (2021) found that social inclusion positively correlated with students' ability to concentrate, feel physically and psychologically safe, and reduced disruptive behavior all key to academic and emotional development. Another research from Malawi and Uganda (2023) showed that students feeling "loved," emotionally safe, and taught well led to increased self-expression, trust, and motivation to learn—evidence of strong prosocial outcomes.A Frontiers study by Freeman, et al. (2020) found that inclusive classroom management and teacher support promoted peer acceptance, especially benefiting students with special educational needs—enhancing social inclusion and reduced peer rejection.

These six themes Flexible Teaching, Differentiated Instruction, Collaborative Engagement, Use of Tools, Individualized Structures, and Positive Outcomes interlock to form a cohesive narrative of effective inclusive teaching. Each theme is richly evidenced by participant responses, demonstrating that combining

varied methods, tools, tailored pacing, and collaborative structures creates classrooms where all learners feel included, supported, and capable of growth. These findings align closely with Beltran et al. (2025), whose study in the Pili East District documented similar effective practices. Their research confirmed that differentiated instruction, collaborative policies, and supportive learning environments are essential for successfully integrating learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms. Collectively, these practices reflect a holistic, inclusive atmosphere, one that values learner diversity and fosters active engagement. They underscore the imperative for educators to deploy increasingly creative strategies to effectively meet the varied needs of their students.

Challenges that Teachers Encounter in Providing Inclusive Education

Inclusive education frequently encounters a range of interconnected challenges that can make its successful implementation in mainstream classrooms difficult. Educators around the world often struggle with various obstacles as they work to create inclusive learning environments. The following are participants' responses on the challenges encountered in implementing inclusive education.

Diverse Learner Needs Amid Limited Resources and Class Size

Teachers encounter a diverse range of student learning styles, ability levels, and behavioral needs, but they are frequently under-resourced to address these differences effectively. Additionally, large class sizes further restrict opportunities for individualized support.

"The common problem…students…wide range of learning styles, academic levels, and behavioral or emotional needs also with the limited resources."

"One major challenge is the large class size, it is hard to give attention to every learner "Large class size…hard to give attention."

Studies across the Philippines highlight similar issues: lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient infrastructure hinder inclusive education implementation. A study in Cagayan de Oro by Santos (2020) revealed that while teachers support inclusive education conceptually, many cite heavy workloads, insufficient training, and limited resources as ongoing barriers in implementation. Moreover, teachers must accommodate students with varied learning styles, academic abilities, and behavioral or emotional needs. However, with large class sizes often exceeding DepEd's ideal of 28:1, individual attention becomes a rarity, making differentiated instruction extremely difficult. Filipino classroom observations by Reddit user (2023) describe overcrowding—some with 50–80 learners per class leaving little room for differentiated attention and personalized learning. These findings collectively demonstrate that teachers, despite recognizing the need for individualized instruction, are severely constrained by classroom overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, and unequal distribution of resources. These systemic issues create significant barriers to realizing inclusive educational goals in the Philippine context.

Insufficient Training & Teacher Preparedness

Many teachers feel unprepared to instruct learners with special needs due to inadequate training.

"Time constraints and insufficient training."

"As a teacher not trained in inclusive education, we are struggling…"

"Teachers' resistance…not prepared particularly those with special needs."

"No knowledge on handling LSENs."

Philippine research repeatedly reports general educators' lack of SPED training and formal preparation as a key barrier .The findings confirms the study of Flores, (2025) revealing that the level of knowledge, skills, training, and practice of receiving teachers are in average. Then, the level of support they received

are in average also. In the result of interviewed, it was revealed that the challenges of teachers are frustrations in classroom, classroom management, effects in methods of teaching, classroom practices and lack of training. They also lack support from the administration and stakeholders. Moreover, time shortages and administrative responsibilities frequently emerge as significant barriers to delivering personalized instruction in inclusive classrooms. The burden of managing curriculum requirements, paperwork, and behavioral support often leaves teachers with insufficient time to address each student's unique learning needs effectively. This tension between inclusive goals and practical realities highlights the need for systemic support, such as reduced class sizes, collaborative planning time, and targeted professional development, to enable teachers to implement inclusive strategies successfully.

Overwhelming Workloads

Inclusive strategies demand more planning, individual attention, and follow-up, which is hard to sustain under heavy schedules.

"Strategies…entails more time…and teachers are overwhelmed."

"Catering to learners with diverse needs … cannot cater to them because of many works to do…time constraint."

Inclusive education strategies require considerable additional planning, individualized attention, and consistent follow-up to effectively support diverse learners. However, many teachers find it challenging to sustain these demands due to heavy workloads and limited time. Research shows that teachers often feel overwhelmed by the increased time commitment that inclusive practices entail. For example, as one study notes, "Strategies for inclusive teaching entail more time, and teachers are overwhelmed" (Flores, 2025). Similarly, educators report, "Catering to learners with diverse needs is difficult because of numerous tasks and time constraints."

Behavioral Challenges & Social Dynamics

Teachers also manage peer relationships, including bullying and stigmatization when special accommodations are perceived as favoritism.

"Bullying, enviousness because…learners are seen as favorites."

A study in Child & Youth Care Forum by Berchiatti (2021) confirmed that a strong student–teacher relationship can buffer bullying—yet students with special education needs (SEN) and learning difficulties are often socially marginalized and at high risk of peer victimization. The negative societal attitudes and teacher biases toward inclusion often create significant classroom challenges and may lead to the marginalization of students with disabilities. Educators frequently report encountering social and behavioral issues such as bullying, jealousy, and perceived favoritism toward learners with special needs. These dynamics not only disrupt classroom harmony but also hinder the effectiveness of inclusive education, reflecting broader issues of stigma within the community.

External Support: Families, Infrastructure & ICT

Barriers include lack of parental cooperation, poor internet, inadequate assistive tools, and insufficient facilities.

"Lack of parents/ family support… Dysfunctional family…"

"Unavailability of internet for technology strategies."

Effective inclusive education relies not only on classroom practices but also on strong external support from families, adequate infrastructure, and access to information and communication technology (ICT). However, persistent barriers limit these supports, impacting the success of inclusion efforts.

A major challenge in implementing inclusive education is the lack of parental or family engagement, often stemming from factors like socioeconomic strain, dysfunctional family dynamics, or limited awareness of special education needs. For instance, a qualitative study by Zuhri, et al. (2023) in Indonesia found that while both parents and teachers acknowledged the importance of collaboration, "limited parents' availability" and low awareness consistently hindered effective partnerships in inclusive settings .

Technological barriers continue to pose significant challenges in inclusive education. Many educators report issues such as "unavailability of internet for technology strategies," which limits their ability to employ digital tools that enhance learning for students with disabilities. A study by García Rivas (2024) indicates that educators value assistive technology but face challenges related to connectivity, access to devices, and teacher training. These limitations hinder the effective use of assistive technologies, such as screen readers, adapted keyboards, or speech-to-text software, which are essential for supporting students with disabilities.

In addition, inadequate school facilities and physical infrastructure hinder inclusive education. Accessible classrooms, resource rooms, and proper accommodations are essential for inclusion but are often lacking, particularly in under-resourced settings (UNESCO, 2020). Teachers consistently cite missing ICT infrastructure and low community awareness as critical obstacles, reflecting wider systemic issues.

The findings reinforce Arias et al. (2023), who applied Braun & Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis and identified eight key challenges: insufficient resources; inadequate training and professional development; conflicting inclusive education policies; weak government support; misaligned curricula and classroom organization; suboptimal assessment practices; low awareness of inclusive education; and insufficient stakeholder collaboration. These themes highlight the persistent nature of implementation challenges faced by teachers globally. Similarly, Deroncele-Acosta et al. (2024) echo these conclusions, noting that despite growing awareness of equitable and accessible education, many schools still lack the necessary materials, specialized personnel, and technological tools to support all learners effectively. Consequently, educators are limited in their ability to implement inclusive methods and guarantee quality education for every student.

Strategies and Successes of Teachers in Creating Inclusive Learning Environments and Overcoming Barriers

Despite systemic barriers such as rigid curricula, limited training in special education, insufficient resources, and entrenched attitudes, Baguio City's public elementary teachers report a range of successes and adaptive strategies in bringing inclusive education to life. They highlight methods such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), assistive technology, and collaborative teaching strategies deeply aligned with best practices endorsed by research. By prioritizing emotional support, fostering peer interaction, building strong partnerships with parents and specialists, and engaging in continuous professional learning, teachers are not only surmounting obstacles but also cultivating inclusive, affirming classrooms where all students can thrive.

This section explores how educators in Baguio City describe and interpret their achievements, what success means to them, the strategies they employ, and how they overcome barriers in inclusive education, one classroom at a time. Based on the interviews, the following shows the teachers' successes and the strategies they use to navigate and level obstacles to inclusion:

Differentiated Instruction & Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Teachers repeatedly emphasized using differentiated instruction customizing content, process, and output

to each learner's pace and level. This includes leveled activities, flexible grouping, and leveraging Assistive Technology to support diverse learners. Many also cited UDL, focusing on multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement:

"Differentiated activities, innovative strategies, at level activities for learners with special needs"

"UDL … differentiated instruction and using assistive technology."

Educators in Baguio City are increasingly aligning their teaching practices with evidence-based frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), co-teaching, and other innovative strategies. These approaches enable teachers to effectively respond to the diverse needs of learners and foster more inclusive classrooms. Research by Lebeco et al. (2023) highlights UDL and differentiation as key strategies for supporting inclusive education. This finding is supported by the study of Almeqdad et al. (2023), which indicates that UDL can significantly enhance student learning outcomes particularly when implemented through professional development programs or targeted classroom interventions.

Collaborative Teaching & Peer Learning

A recurrent success factor is collaborative pedagogies: co-teaching with specialists, peer support among students, and teacher planning teams:

"Differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching and planning."

"Encourage more student-to-student interactions through collaborative activities."

In this context, collaborative activities should be highly encouraged, as collaboration fosters collective ownership of inclusion. A study conducted by William, et al., (2025) indicates that peer learning enhances student engagement and improves academic outcomes.

Positive Classroom Culture & Student Empowerment

Creating a nurturing, respectful, and empowering environment emerged as a major theme:

"Creating a positive and supportive classroom culture."

"Empowering student voice through classroom constitution … involve them in creating rules."

According to Tu, (2021) teachers report that when students feel respected and emotionally and physically safe, they become more actively engaged, which in turn strengthens group cohesion and boosts their self-confidence.

Emotional Support, Empathy & Respect

Many teachers stressed the importance of emotional intelligence and openness:

"Acceptance is a must. Empathy and understanding, open communication, flexibility and adaptability."

"Approach every student as a unique individual … take time to hear students' thoughts … showing that their voice matters."

Drawing on whole-child and trauma-informed education principles, valuing each child as a complete person establishes the trust essential for learning and inclusion. A research by Jusni, et al., (2023) indicates that students thrive and feel secure to engage when they know they are respected and understood within a supportive school community.

Parental Involvement & External Referrals

Teachers described seeking partnerships with parents and specialists:

"Involvement of parents."

"In worse cases we refer learners to specialists for proper evaluation which will guide teachers on dealing with the learners' needs."

"Consulting or referring to a focal person on inclusive education in the school."

In this discourse, *t*eachers report that when students feel respected and emotionally and physically safe, they become more actively engaged, which in turn strengthens group cohesion and boosts their self-confidence (Zulkifli, 2025).

Professional Learning & Peer Support

Continuous growth through training and collaboration emerged strongly:

"Supporting one another as teachers, sharing strategies … and adjusting for learners."

"Deploy SpEd teachers to regular schools as focal (…) guide teachers."

"More training in handling learners with special needs … Inclusive education will be successful … if proper training are given to teachers."

A systematic review by Wray, et al., (2022) also highlighted teacher training (both in-service and pre-service) as a key predictor of higher self-efficacy for inclusive practice alongside teaching experience, legislative knowledge, and hands-on contact with students with special needs. In sum, studies confirm that well-designed professional development markedly increases teacher confidence and competence in inclusive strategies, reinforcing the importance of sustained, practical training in shaping inclusive educational environments and outcomes.

Use of Technology & Instructional Innovation

Educators also leveraged creative methods:

"Maybe use some computer applications and infusion of games in my lesson."

"Differentiated instruction and use of technology."

Technologies that contribute to inclusive education are digital tools and specialized devices that facilitate equitable access to learning for students with diverse abilities. Understanding these technologies allows for the personalization of teaching methods, the removal of barriers that limit participation for students with differences, and the promotion of a more accessible and equitable educational environment for all. "According to David, (2024) technology and playful learning can boost motivation and accommodate diverse learning needs effectively." Also, the findings of study by Bonilla et al, (2025) indicate that educational technologies transform the learning environment into a more inclusive and accessible one by adapting to the diverse needs of students. Tools such as mobile devices, interactive applications, and augmented reality help to remove barriers for students with disabilities or in various contexts, facilitating personalized and equitable learning. Additionally, these technologies promote the development of critical skills and encourage collaboration among students, enriching both their academic training and social integration. Thus, technological inclusion becomes a key factor in maximizing the potential of each student within a diverse educational system.

Conclusions

In inclusive classroom practices, public elementary teachers in Baguio City employ diverse instructional strategies, foster collaborative learning environments, utilize assistive technologies, and actively engage with families to support learners with varied needs. Despite their dedication, systemic challenges such as under-resourced SPED centers, limited access to specialized training, and language barriers continue to impede the full implementation of inclusive practices. While teachers demonstrate exceptional commitment and adaptability, meaningful structural reforms are necessary to sustain and enhance the impact of their efforts.

Public elementary school teachers in Baguio City are deeply committed to inclusive education, despite facing many challenges. These include a lack of proper training, limited resources, and social issues such

as stigma and misunderstanding. Similar problems are seen in other parts of the country and around the world, especially in preparing teachers, providing enough support, and changing attitudes toward inclusion. Without strong support and changes in the system, the goal of creating truly inclusive classrooms may not be fully achieved.

Baguio City public elementary teachers interpret success in inclusive education as emotional fulfillment, student growth, and shared effort. Their strategies design together differentiation, collaboration, emotional support, parental partnership, and innovation. To magnify these triumphs, enabling policies, sustained training, and adequate resources are essential. When supported, teachers can transform challenges into inclusive opportunities building classrooms where every learner belongs and succeeds.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach to strengthen inclusive education. School leaders and mentors should enhance both pre-service and in-service training on inclusive education, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, and assistive technologies, with regular workshops and mentoring from SPED experts, backed by school-based multidisciplinary teams including SPED coordinators, guidance counselors, and community volunteers. DepEd officials must tackle overcrowding and resource shortages by hiring additional teachers to reduce class sizes, allocating sufficient funding for assistive tools, ICT equipment, and inclusive materials, and aligning policies with consistent monitoring to support implementation. Curriculum developers are urged to create lessons grounded in UDL—offering multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression—with differentiated activities, flexible assessments, culturally responsive content, and embedded assistive technology use. Teachers should cultivate inclusive classrooms by promoting empathy, respect, open communication, student voice, and peer collaboration, while engaging in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to share strategies and improve practice. Parents are encouraged to actively partner with schools through regular communication, participation in school events, openness to feedback, advocacy, and nurturing inclusive values like empathy and acceptance at home. Lastly, future researchers should expand studies across diverse settings (urban/rural, public/private), using comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method designs—including voices of students, parents, and support staff—to assess interventions like teacher training and technology, and collaborate with schools to develop evidence-based solutions.

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