

The Unified Front: Strategies for Teacher Collaboration in Inclusive Classrooms

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Abstract

Teacher collaboration plays a significant role in strengthening inclusive classroom practices and supporting diverse learners. However, while previous studies emphasize the importance of collaboration in inclusive education, limited research explains how collaborative practices can be consistently sustained and unified in everyday classroom settings. This study examined the collaborative strategies commonly used by teachers in inclusive classrooms, their perceived effects on student learning and participation, the challenges teachers encounter in maintaining collaboration, and the importance of a unified approach to inclusive education. Using a descriptive research design, data were collected from 23 primary school teachers from private schools in Biñan City, Laguna, through a validated structured questionnaire. Findings revealed that sharing instructional materials (82.6%), team meetings or planning (78.3%), peer observation (47.8%), and co-teaching (43.5%) were the commonly reported collaborative practices, with co-teaching being the least frequently implemented. Teachers generally perceived collaboration as having a positive effect on student learning and participation. However, differences in teaching styles (65.2%), lack of training (39.1%), lack of time (34.8%), communication issues (30.4%), and limited administrative support (21.7%) were identified as major barriers to effective collaboration. Open-ended responses further highlighted the importance of open communication and sharing, professional development, teamwork, flexibility, support, and regular collaboration time. The study contributes to the discussion on inclusive education by highlighting the need for structured support systems, professional development, and stronger institutional frameworks that enable teachers to collaborate consistently. Beyond the local setting, the findings suggest that sustainable teacher collaboration is essential to developing more equitable, responsive, and inclusive learning environments across diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: Inclusive Classrooms, Teacher Collaboration, Inclusive Education, Co-teaching, Collaborative Practices

Introduction

In today's education system, creating inclusive classrooms has become a major priority for educators and policymakers. Inclusive classrooms are learning environments where all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or learning styles, are provided equal opportunities to participate and succeed. However, achieving inclusion requires more than simply placing diverse learners in the same classroom. It demands strong collaboration among teachers to ensure that instruction, classroom management, and student support are responsive to different learning needs. When teachers collaborate effectively, they are able to combine their expertise, share responsibilities, and develop strategies that improve both teaching practices and student outcomes.

Research consistently highlights the importance of teacher collaboration in inclusive education, although scholars differ in their emphasis on how collaboration contributes to successful inclusion. Phillips (2025) focuses on responsive teaching, arguing that inclusion depends on educators' ability to adapt instruction according to how students learn and process information. In contrast, Udvari-Solner and Kluth (2017) emphasize cooperative learning and shared instructional practices, suggesting that active participation and co-teaching create supportive classroom environments. Meanwhile, Jan, Nabi, and Maqbool (2023) view collaboration as a means of improving classroom management and instructional effectiveness, whereas Miller and Burden (2007) stress its role in fostering professional growth and shared accountability among teachers. Although these studies collectively support the value of collaboration, they approach the concept from different perspectives—some focusing on student outcomes, others on teacher development, and others on instructional practices. This indicates that teacher collaboration is a multidimensional process that influences inclusive education in various interconnected ways.

Despite the growing body of research, there remains limited understanding of how collaborative practices can be consistently sustained in real classroom settings. Many studies discuss the benefits of collaboration but provide less attention to the specific strategies, school structures, and support systems necessary to maintain long-term collaborative relationships among teachers. In addition, previous research often examines collaboration from isolated viewpoints rather than presenting a unified understanding of how communication, co-teaching, shared planning, and collective problem-solving work together to strengthen inclusion. As a result, there is still a need to explore how schools can develop a more systematic and sustainable collaborative culture in inclusive classrooms.

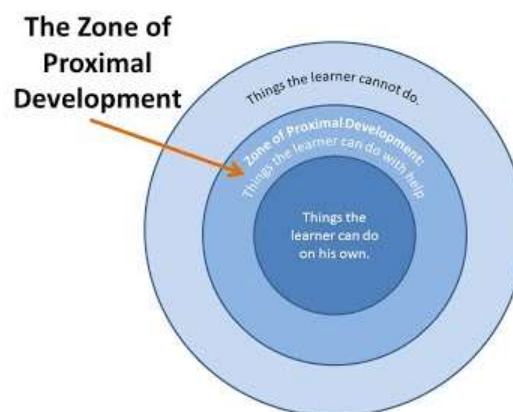


Fig 1. Collaborative learning theory

Guided by Collaborative Learning Theory and Inclusive Education Theory, the conceptual framework of the study views teacher collaboration as the independent variable, represented through communication, co-planning, co-teaching, and shared decision-making. These collaborative practices are expected to influence the dependent variable, which is the effectiveness of inclusive classroom implementation, including improved student participation, learning support, and classroom inclusivity. Through this framework, the study aims to examine how collaborative strategies among teachers can create a more unified and sustainable approach to inclusive education.

Problem Statement

In today's inclusive education system, collaboration among teachers plays an important role in addressing the diverse needs of learners. Inclusive classrooms require educators to work together through shared planning, teaching strategies, communication, and decision-making to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, receive effective support and equal learning opportunities. Strong teacher collaboration can enhance student learning, participation, and classroom engagement. However, maintaining consistent and effective collaboration among teachers remains a challenge in many schools. Although the importance of collaboration in inclusive education has been widely recognized, there is still a need to better understand the specific collaborative strategies used by teachers, the impact of these practices on student learning and participation, and the challenges educators encounter in sustaining collaboration. Furthermore, limited studies focus on how a unified approach among teachers can strengthen inclusive education practices in everyday classroom settings. Thus, this study aims to explore the strategies for teacher collaboration in inclusive classrooms and determine how collaborative practices contribute to more effective inclusion.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What collaborative strategies are commonly used by teachers in inclusive classrooms?
- How does teacher collaboration impact student learning and participation?
- What challenges do teachers face in maintaining effective collaboration?
- How can a unified approach among teachers improve inclusive education practices?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Collaborative Learning Theory developed from Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and supported by Inclusive Education Theory. These theories provide the foundation for understanding how teacher collaboration contributes to effective inclusive classroom practices.

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable	Process	Dependent Variable
Teacher Collaboration • Communication • Co-planning • Co-teaching • Shared decision-making	Collaborative practices among teachers in inclusive classrooms	Effective Inclusive Education • Improved student learning • Increased student participation • Better classroom engagement • Stronger inclusive practices

Collaborative Learning Theory emphasizes that learning takes place through social interaction, cooperation, and shared experiences. According to Vygotsky, individuals learn more effectively when they engage with others through communication, problem-solving, and guided support. In the context of education, collaborative learning encourages teachers to work together in planning lessons, sharing instructional strategies, solving classroom concerns, and supporting diverse learners. The theory highlights that collaboration promotes critical thinking, professional growth, and more responsive teaching practices. Applied to this study, the theory explains that when teachers collaborate effectively, they are better able to address the academic and social needs of students in inclusive classrooms.

The study is also based on **Inclusive Education Theory**, which states that all students, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or backgrounds, should receive equal access to quality education in regular classrooms. This theory emphasizes participation, fairness, and support for diverse learners through teamwork and shared responsibility among teachers. It highlights that effective inclusive education cannot be achieved by one teacher alone, but through cooperation and collaboration among educators and other school stakeholders.

These theories are relevant to the study because they explain the importance of collaboration in improving inclusive education. Collaborative Learning Theory emphasizes interaction, teamwork, and shared learning among teachers, while Inclusive Education Theory focuses on collective responsibility in supporting diverse learners. Together, these theories support the study in examining collaborative strategies, their effects on student learning and participation, the challenges teachers face, and the importance of a unified approach in inclusive classrooms.

Methods

Research Design

The study utilized a *descriptive research design* to examine teacher collaboration in inclusive classrooms. This design was appropriate because the study primarily aimed to describe the collaborative strategies used by teachers, their perceptions of the effects of collaboration, the challenges they encountered, and their views regarding a unified approach to inclusive education. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the responses of the participants.

Because the study did not directly measure student achievement or conduct an inferential test of relationships between variables, the findings are interpreted as teachers' perceptions and reported practices rather than objective measures of student outcomes.

Participants of the study and Settings

The study involved 23 primary school teachers from private schools in Biñan City, Laguna. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling. This technique ensures "information-rich" cases. As noted by Dayso et al. (2025), targeting teachers directly involved in handling inclusive education is essential for targeting the practical realities of implementation within the private school sector.

The Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire served as the main data-gathering instrument. It was aligned with the objectives of the study, which focused on identifying common teacher collaboration strategies, their effects on student learning, and the challenges teachers face. The instrument consisted of the following sections;

Structure of the Research Questionnaire

Section	Description	Type of Data Collected
1	Demographic Profile of Respondents	Age, Gender
2	Collaborative Strategies Used in Inclusive Classrooms	Co-teaching, co-planning, peer collaboration, etc.
3	Perceived Effects of Teacher Collaboration	Impact on student learning and participation
4	Challenges in Teacher Collaboration	Time, communication, workload, support, etc.
5	Level of Agreement on Unified Approach	Importance of collaboration in inclusive education (Likert scale)
6	Open-Ended Item	Suggestions for improving teacher collaboration

This table presents the sections of the questionnaire used in the study, including the type of data collected for each part.

Section 1: Demographic Profile: Collected information on age and gender to contextualize the findings.

Section 2: Collaborative Strategies: Grounded in Saks et al. (2025), this section identifies common practices like sharing instructional materials and team planning, distinguishing between basic coordination and deep professional collaboration.

Section 3: Perceived Effects: Grounded in a study by Van Herpen et al. (2024), these items examine how collaboration influences student outcomes, reflecting recent longitudinal evidence that collaborative teaching networks directly correlate with higher student achievement.

Section 4: Challenges in Collaboration: Based on Yap (2026), this section identified contemporary barriers such as "time poverty," pedagogical misalignment, and limited administrative support.

Section 5: Unified Approach: Reflecting the "Unified Front" framework, a Likert scale was used to measure teachers' agreement on the importance of a coordinated strategy in inclusive settings.

Section 6: Open-Ended Item: Included to capture teacher-led suggestions for improvement, a practice emphasized by Basister et al. (2025) as a primary driver for innovation in inclusive schools.

Validity

To ensure the quality of the data gathered, the instrument underwent the following processes:

To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to an expert validation process. A panel of specialists in education and research reviewed the items for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives. Their feedback was incorporated to refine the questionnaire before full administration.

The reliability of the Likert-scale items (Section 4 and 5) will be established using Cronbach's Alpha.

Procedure

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the raw data, the following statistical tools will be employed. For section 1 (Demographic profile of the Respondents), the researcher will use Frequency and Percentage as well as in section 2 (Collaborative Strategies Used in Inclusive Classrooms). For section 3 (Perceived Effect of Teacher Collaboration) weighted mean will be identified to allow determination of tendency of respondents perception. In Section 4 (Challenges in Teacher Collaboration) percentage will be used to summarize the results. For Section 5 (Level of Agreement on Unified Approach) weighted mean will be computed to determine how cohesive collaborative effort can strengthen classroom outcomes. And for Section 6 (Open-Ended Item), Thematic Analysis will be used to categorize and interpret the open-ended suggestions provided by the respondents for improving teacher collaboration.

Ethics

Ethical standards were strictly followed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent, and all responses were kept strictly confidential and anonymous in accordance with data privacy guidelines. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Results

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
23 – 25 years old	9	39.13%
26 – 30 years old	6	26.09%
31 – 35 years old	4	17.39%
36 – 40 years old	0	0.00%
41 – 46 years old	4	17.39%
Total	23	100%

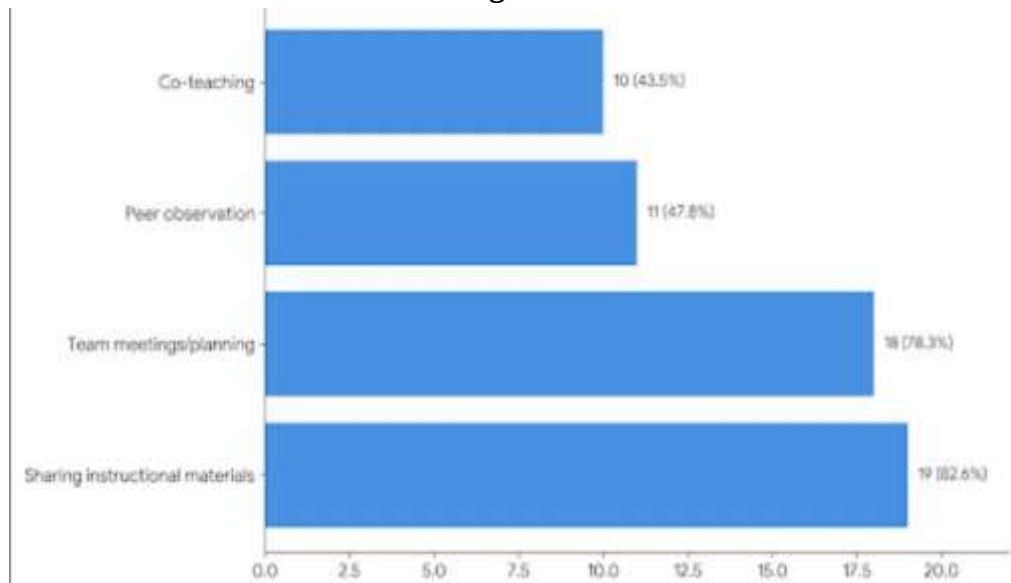
As presented in Table 1, the majority of the teacher respondents belong to the 23–25 age group, representing 39.13% (9) of the sample, followed by those aged 26–30 years at 26.09% (6). The remaining participants are distributed across the 31–35 and 41–46 age groups, each accounting for 17.39% of the sample, while no respondents were recorded within the 36–40 age range.

Table 1.1

Gender Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Female	19	82.61%
Male	3	13.04%
Prefer not to say	1	4.35%
Total	23	100%

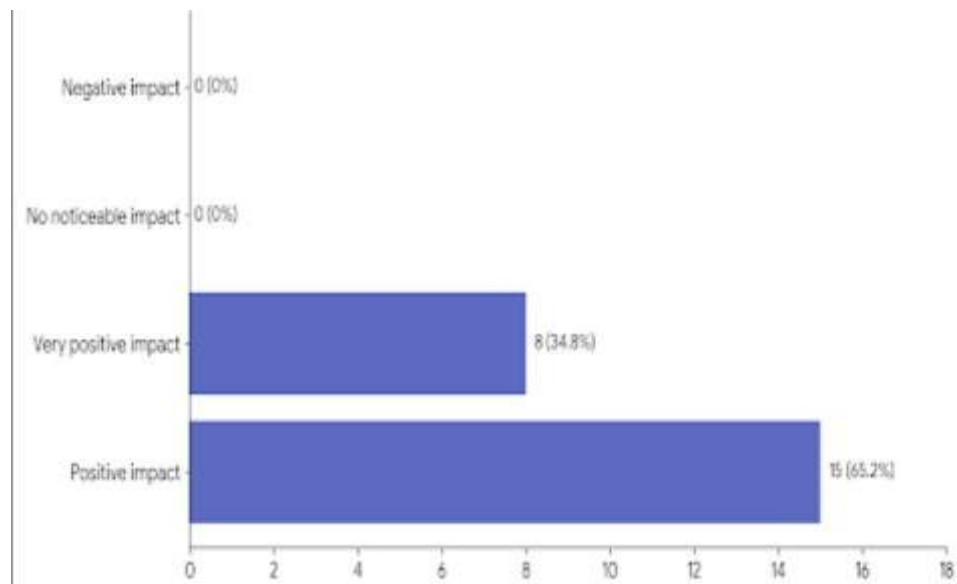
As shown in Table 1.1, the majority of the respondents are female (19) 82.61%, followed by male participants (3) 13.04%, while one respondent (4.35%) preferred not to disclose gender.

Table 2. Collaborative Strategies Used in Inclusive Classrooms



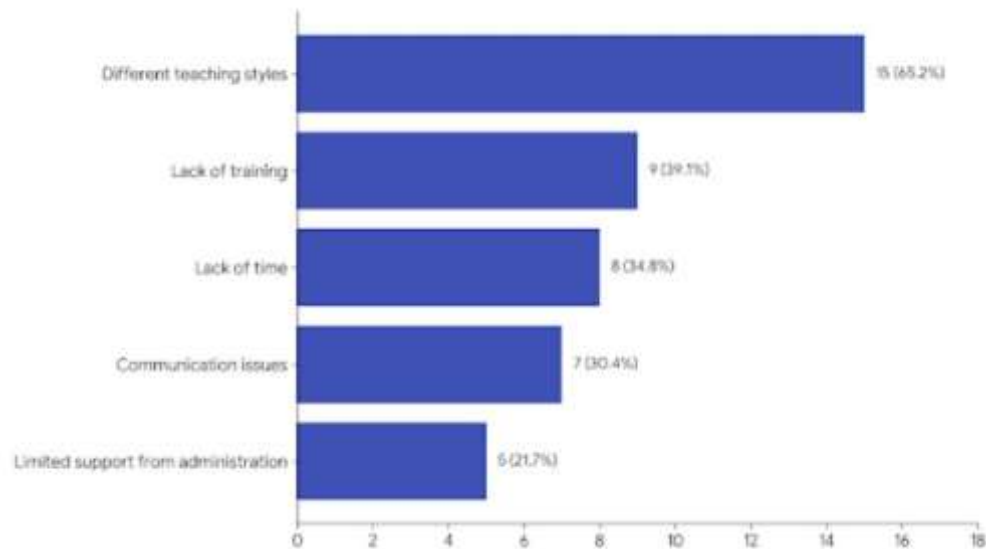
The data indicate that Sharing Instructional Materials is the most commonly employed collaborative strategy, reported by 82.6% (n = 19) of the respondents. This is closely followed by Team Meetings or planning, which are utilized by 78.3% (n = 18) of the teachers. In comparison, more direct and classroom-based forms of collaboration are less frequently practiced. Peer observation is reported by 47.8% (n = 11) of participants, while Co-teaching is the least utilized at 43.5% (n = 10).

Table 3. Perceived Effects of Teacher Collaboration



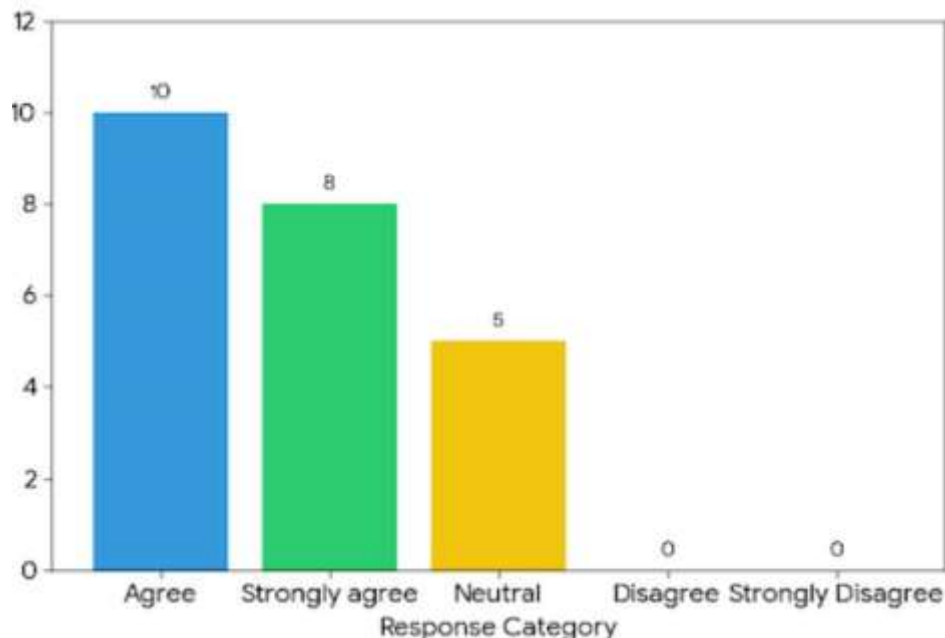
The survey results show a unanimous consensus among respondents regarding the benefits of teacher collaboration on student outcomes. A majority of the teachers, 65.2% (n=15), reported that collaboration has a "Positive impact" on student learning and participation, while the remaining 34.8% (n=8) described the effect as a "Very positive impact. This unanimous result suggests that when teachers operate as a "Unified Front," students in inclusive settings are more likely to stay engaged and achieve academic progress.

Table 4. Challenges in Teacher Collaboration



The data reveals that the primary obstacle to effective collaboration among teachers is different teaching styles, cited by 65.2% (n=15) of the respondents. Other significant challenges include a Lack of training (39.1%) and a Lack of time (34.8%), which suggest that educators feel under-prepared or over-extended to maintain consistent collaborative efforts. Additionally, Communication issues (30.4%) and Limited support from administration (21.7%) were identified as further hurdles.

Table 5. Level of Agreement on Unified Approach



The survey results indicate a generally positive perception of how a unified approach among teachers influences inclusive classroom practices. A combined 78.3% of respondents expressed agreement with the statement, with 43.5% (n=10) selecting "Agree" and 34.8% (n=8) selecting "Strongly agree."

The remaining 21.7% (n=5) of participants maintained a "Neutral" stance, while no respondents (0%) disagreed with the statement. This majority consensus suggests that teachers recognize a unified,

consistent strategy across the staff as a significant factor in improving the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education. These findings align with the study's objective to determine how a more cohesive collaborative effort can strengthen classroom outcomes.

Table 6. Open-Ended Item

	Theme	Total Number of Statements
1	Regular collaboration time	5
2	More training and seminars	9
3	Open communication and sharing	13
4	Teamwork, flexibility, and support	6

As shown in Table 6, the respondents emphasized open communication and sharing as the most important strategies for improving teacher collaboration in inclusive classrooms. Open communication allows teachers to exchange ideas, address difficult situations collaboratively, and support colleagues who are experiencing challenges in handling diverse learners. Through this collaborative exchange, teachers can minimize difficulties and maximize opportunities to deliver quality education for all learners. The respondents also highlighted the need for additional training and seminars to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in addressing students' individual differences. Moreover, teamwork, flexibility, support, and the allocation of regular collaboration time were identified as essential practices, as these provide teachers with opportunities to share daily experiences, reflect on classroom practices, and strengthen professional relationships. Collectively, these strategies contribute to more effective collaboration and improved instructional practices in inclusive classroom settings.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that although teacher collaboration is widely recognized as beneficial, its actual implementation remains fragmented and largely confined outside the instructional space. With 65.22% of respondents aged 30 or younger, the sample reflects a cohort of early-career educators who have been professionally socialized to value teamwork and inclusive practices. This orientation is evident in the 100% consensus among participants regarding the positive impact of collaboration on student learning, with 34.8% rating its impact as very positive. These results align with Jan, Nabi, and Maqbool's (2023) assertion that collaboration is a key driver of instructional effectiveness. Despite this strong endorsement, the data reveal a pronounced "co-teaching gap." While sharing instructional materials (82.6%) and team planning (78.3%) were the most frequently used strategies, co-teaching was practiced by only 43.5% of respondents. This pattern indicates that collaboration is predominantly prep-heavy, focused on planning rather than shared instructional delivery. Although teachers actively pool resources to support the responsive teaching advocated by Phillips (2025), they have yet to fully embrace the shared instructional responsibility emphasized by Udvari-Solner and Kluth (2017). As a result, the classroom remains a symbolic boundary limiting deeper forms of collaborative practice essential for inclusive education.

The disparity between the high value placed on collaboration and its limited enactment during instruction is further explained by the challenges identified by participants. The most significant barrier was the misalignment of teaching styles (65.2%), followed by lack of training (39.1%) and insufficient time (34.8%). This paradox where all teachers support collaboration, yet many struggle to align pedagogical approaches highlights the multidimensional complexity of collaborative work. These findings support Miller and Burden's (2007) view that collaboration requires more than shared intentions; it demands sustained professional growth and shared accountability to navigate interpersonal and instructional differences effectively.

Furthermore, these challenges directly reflect the research gap identified in the study the absence of school structures that support long-term collaborative relationships. When respondents cite limited administrative support (21.7%) and time constraints, they reinforce the notion that collaboration cannot depend solely on individual initiative. Instead, sustainable collaboration requires systematic, institution-level support. The findings suggest that schools must move beyond informal resource sharing toward structured collaboration through targeted training, aligned planning systems, and protected time for co-teaching. Addressing the prevailing barrier of differing teaching styles through professional development and institutional support may bridge the gap between the theoretical promise of inclusive education and its practical classroom implementation. Ultimately, the results indicate that achieving a truly unified approach to inclusion requires not only shared beliefs, but also aligned instructional practices and supportive organizational structures.

Conclusion

This study underscores the critical role of teacher collaboration in fostering effective inclusive classroom practices. Through a descriptive-correlational research design involving 23 teachers from private schools in Biñan City, Laguna, the findings reveal that collaborative strategies such as sharing instructional materials, team planning, and peer observation significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. The unanimous perception among teachers regarding the positive impact of collaboration highlights its importance in creating equitable learning environments for diverse learners.

However, the research also identifies substantial barriers to effective collaboration, including differing teaching styles, lack of training, and time constraints. These challenges indicate that while teachers recognize the value of collaboration, its implementation often falls short, particularly in the context of co-teaching, which remains underutilized. The study emphasizes the necessity for structured support systems and professional development initiatives to facilitate sustained collaborative practices.

Ultimately, the findings advocate for a unified approach among educators, suggesting that collaboration should not only be encouraged but systematically integrated into the educational framework. By addressing the identified challenges and fostering a culture of collaboration, schools can enhance their inclusive education practices, thereby ensuring that all students receive the support they need to thrive academically and socially. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education, highlighting the need for cohesive strategies that promote collaboration as a fundamental component of effective teaching in diverse classrooms.

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