International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Inclusive Education and Intertwined Locus of Teachers in Senior High School

Reylee M. Bermejo

1 Ajo Unified School District Ajo, Az
2 Graduate School, University of Perpetual Help System DALTA, Las Piñas City, Philippines
reyleebermejo10@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explored the real and pressing challenges senior high school teachers faced in implementing inclusive education within general classrooms that continue to grow more diverse. Despite policies mandating inclusive practices, many teachers remained untrained, unequipped, and unsupported, often thrown into classrooms without the necessary tools to meet the complex needs of learners with physical, emotional, or cognitive differences. Using a phenomenological research design, eight general education teachers from senior high schools in Tanay, Rizal shared powerful narratives that revealed a common story of trial, adaptation, and resilience. Without formal preparation, they resorted to self-study, peer support, and creative teaching approaches while navigating behavioral challenges, communication barriers, and limited instructional resources. Emotional exhaustion, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy surfaced as teachers struggled to balance academic expectations with inclusive practices. They also contended with rigid curricula, insufficient systemic support, and deeply rooted social issues like peer discrimination and parental denial, which further complicated the classroom experience. These findings emphasized the disconnect between inclusive education policies and classroom realities, highlighting the need for grounded, practical support. In response, the study introduced INCLUSION EMPOWERED: A Holistic Capacity-Building Program for Inclusive Education, a comprehensive initiative that prioritizes teacher training, resource access, emotional resilience, and cross-sector collaboration. The study strongly recommended long-term professional development and institutional reform while calling for future research to include the voices of students with special needs—making space for their perspectives in shaping inclusive learning environments that work for all.

Keywords: *inclusive education, instructional adjustments, teacher challenges*

1. Context and Rationale

In view of the mandates of inclusive education, Senior High Schools (SHS) both private and public schools should promote inclusion in general education classrooms. Even if there is awareness of inclusive education, creating an inclusive classroom with deaf and mute students has been difficult as a Senior High School teacher who experienced dealing with those students. Evaluating and reflecting on how to effectively accommodate, modify, and deliver differentiated instructions to support the teaching-learning process is important. In addition, the ways to assess students' learning must be reasonably and carefully done. It is essential to be innovative and imaginative when delivering the same lesson to a varied student body, employing various ways to accommodate the requirements of both General Education and SNED learners.

Furthermore, numerous educators articulated their concerns and frustrations about managing inclusive classes. Some of the teachers have no experience managing Special Needs Education learners at all. They were clueless about the strategies and how to make teaching work without compromising the learning of General Education students. Some teachers shared their sentiments of avoiding inclusive classrooms if they had an option because they felt they were not equipped knowing that they were unaware of inclusive education practices.

With those reasons enumerated, this study served as an avenue to recognize and analyze the difficulties Senior High School teachers encountered in exploring and implementing inclusive education.

Inclusion in education was defined as a methodology that accommodates individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities, as well as embracing human variety in terms of ability, language, age, culture, gender, and other variations (Abrol, 2023). It aims to promote equitable education in which diverse learners regardless of their condition can access opportunities suitable for them to make learning and engagement possible and feasible.

Additionally, according to the World Declaration on Education, every individual has an absolute right to an education that is safeguarded by both domestic and international law. The Global Education for All program makes it clear that every child has the right to an education, regardless of their circumstances or condition (Salcedo & Chua, 2022).

The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy, and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action stated that educational systems ought to be planned and executed with the vast array of unique needs and characteristics of students in mind. Therefore, ordinary schools must provide special education needs kids with access and accommodations ("World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Salamanca, Spain, 1994 [16]," n.d.).

The Republic Act (RA) 11650, which declared that no learner should be denied admission, was signed into law by former President Duterte in response to international requirements on special and inclusive education. It required all schools countrywide to ensure inclusive education. All early childhood education institutions, both public and private, were thus required to implement the inclusion policy (Gita-Carlos, 2022). Additionally, DepEd order no. 44 s. 2021 aimed to make schools inclusive and firmly believed that a better environment is necessary for all students to collaborate, regardless of their problems or differences. Therefore, it has been imperative to make sure that general education or mainstream classrooms include children with special needs despite some resistance to inclusive education throughout the world (Pitchai et.al, 2023).

This study aimed to present the challenges and issues commonly encountered by Senior High School teachers whose only option was to teach students with special needs in a regular classroom. Even if it was mandated that education should be accessible to all, and students should not be denied of the right to attend formal schooling, it was a big challenge for teachers who don't have the educational background or sufficient training to manage students with exceptional needs.

The concept of inclusive education has been a new idea in many parts of the country. Many schools were still clueless on how to execute inclusion knowing that many teachers are still hesitant to make it possible in classrooms. Inclusive education is being seen as an additional burden for general education teachers due to the demand of modifying work and finding the right accommodation for students. However, the increasing number of students with special needs is inevitable, and these students can't be deprived of their rights to equal access to quality education.

The principles of inclusive education may be applied differently in different nations due to differences in interpretations, circumstances, and methods of application. Research on the kind of environment that Filipino children with special needs are placed in is not widely available in the Philippines (Raguindin et al., 2021). In terms of exposure, knowledge, and legal bases on inclusive education, contextualization in the Philippines is still challenging due to limited resources. In order to effectively serve both general and special learners in an inclusive classroom, teacher preparation programs must reinstate the use of 21st-century skills in pedagogy construction, instruction delivery, and competent assessment management (Macabenta et al., 2023).

Compared to other nations, the Philippines was thought to be emerging in the fields of inclusive and special education. Regulations about inclusive education have been established in the Department of Education (DepEd) Division of Rizal; however, the best configuration for an inclusive classroom remained a mystery to many institutions despite initiatives to promote inclusive education.

Since inclusion has been a challenge to many educators due to lack of knowledge and support in terms of implementation, this study examined how selected Senior High School teachers in Tanay, Rizal addressed diversity in the classroom particularly struggling and Special Needs Education (SNED) learners. The main emphasis of this study is how general education teachers managed the demands and difficulties of inclusive education.

A model of a six-dimension framework of inclusive education by Kay and Middleton was a way to encourage teachers implementing inclusion to move forward by seeing the advantages inclusive education can offer. Understanding the theory of inclusive education provided a strong foundation that general education teachers can practice. This framework focused on the following components: Learning and Difference, Social Justice and Human Rights, Empowerment, Creativity, Humanism, and Praxis.

The purpose of this study was to identify the gaps in the implementation of an efficient inclusive classroom and to ascertain the problems and obstacles that teachers have when implementing inclusive education, particularly in Tanay, Rizal's Senior High Schools.

1.1 Research Questions

This phenomenological study aimed to determine and evaluate the difficulties Senior High School teachers encountered in adopting inclusive education practices specifically the challenges and issues that they commonly faced. Further, this research had the purpose of identifying how teachers made adjustments to meet the demands of inclusive education in a general classroom setup. The following questions were aligned with the objectives and assumptions of this study. Explicitly, this study sought to answer the following areas regarding the challenges that teachers experienced as a result of implementing inclusive education in Senior High Schools:

- What are the lived experiences of the general education teachers in managing struggling learners both identified and unidentified students with special needs in a general education classroom?

- What are the challenges and issues encountered by the co-participants in adopting inclusive education practices?

- What are the themes and insights that can be derived from the statements of the participants?

- What output can be recommended in supporting teachers in an inclusive classroom?

2. Research Methodology

The phenomenological research approach was specifically employed in this study to conduct qualitative research. According to Creswell & Creswell (2022), the phenomenological research method is a qualitative technique that seeks to investigate and comprehend people's lived experiences of a certain topic. This method involved in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of participants' descriptions to uncover the essence of their experiences.

One key reference in phenomenological research was Creswell's discussion of the principles and procedures of conducting phenomenological research. Creswell emphasized the importance of bracketing one's assumptions and preconceptions to fully engage with participants' experiences.

A thorough examination of individuals' subjective feelings and perceptions can be accomplished through phenomenological research. By focusing on the essence of individuals' experiences, researchers can uncover rich and detailed insights that may not be captured through other research methods.

Overall, the phenomenological method of research was the most substantial approach that can be used in dissecting the information and digging deeper into the details needed to address the research problem. Moreover, it offered a unique and valuable approach for exploring the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals. Its strengths lie in its in-depth exploration, emphasis on meaning-making, participant-centered approach, flexibility, and contribution to theory development.

2.1 Participants and/or other Sources of Data and Information

There were 8 sample participants in this study to represent the Senior High Schools (SHS's) in Tanay town proper. The participants were the ones who have been experiencing inclusion classes in their respective schools. Moreover, the 8 participants were selected to show diverse students depending on the classifications of students with special needs. These teachers have been managing struggling learners who were diagnosed and undiagnosed. Some limitations that should be considered were the truthfulness of the participants' answers and their knowledge and exposure to inclusive classroom practices since special and inclusive education practices have rarely been observed in SHS.

The data-gathering procedure was expected to be conducted on the first week of August to have sufficient time for the teachers to examine and reflect on the data about the students and for the researcher to apply thematic analysis to the data gathered.

Lastly, the questionnaire for the semi-structured interview emphasized the experiences of educators with students designated as having special needs as well as those who frequently underperformed in the General Education classroom.Data Gathering Methods

2.3 Data Analysis

The Six-Step Thematic Data Analysis (2021) developed by Clarke and Braun is a technique used in qualitative research to find, examine, and summarize themes (or patterns) in data. This procedure consists of six steps: becoming acquainted with the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, evaluating themes, defining and labeling themes, and creating the final report.

Thematic analysis is considered a valuable procedure in analyzing data in qualitative research for several reasons. One key advantage is its flexibility and adaptability, allowing researchers to apply it to a wide range of research questions and data types. Thematic analysis also provides a systematic and rigorous approach to identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data, helping researchers to organize and make sense of complex information.

3. Discussion of Results

The insights from the study were summarized by the seven (3) themes generated from the interview with the participants. These are the following: *Teacher Preparedness and Instructional Challenges, Classroom Management and Emotional Well-being, and Environmental, Social, and Systemic Constraints*.

To support teachers in inclusive classrooms, the proposed program, INCLUSION EMPOWERED: A Holistic Capacity-Building Program for Inclusive Education, is designed to equip senior high school teachers with the skills, strategies, and resources necessary to implement inclusive education effectively. Having the goal of addressing teacher preparedness, classroom management, and systemic barriers, the program aims to foster teacher resilience, enhance student engagement, and promote a culture of inclusivity within schools. By focusing on targeted training, resource development, and collaboration among stakeholders, this initiative has the vision of creating sustainable improvements in inclusive education practices and ensuring equitable opportunities for all learners.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms reveal a shared journey of adaptation and self-directed learning, where a lack of formal training compels creativity and resilience in addressing diverse student needs, emphasizing the transformative role of inclusivity in fostering confidence and belonging for both students and educators.

Teachers encounter significant challenges in implementing inclusive education, including inadequate training, difficulty in adjusting teaching methods, communication barriers, behavioral complexities, emotional strain, resource limitations, societal prejudices, and systemic rigidity, highlighting the critical need for systemic support and targeted teacher development.

The findings reflect interconnected themes that underscore gaps in teacher preparedness, the dual challenges of classroom management and emotional well-being, and systemic barriers, calling for comprehensive training programs, emotional resilience support, and structural reforms to foster an inclusive educational environment.

The proposed program, INCLUSION EMPOWERED: A Holistic Capacity-Building Program for Inclusive Education, provides a comprehensive approach to inclusive education through targeted training, resource development, and stakeholder collaboration, to prepare teachers with the skills and support needed to overcome systemic barriers, manage diverse classrooms, and foster a culture of inclusivity and equity.

4.2 Recommendations

- Provide continuous professional development programs focused on inclusive education strategies to equip teachers with formal training and skills.

- Establish comprehensive support systems, including resources, teacher aides, and psychological services, to address the multifaceted challenges faced by educators in inclusive classrooms.

- Implement structural reforms that integrate teacher preparedness, classroom management strategies, and systemic support to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education.

- Adopt and institutionalize the *INCLUSION EMPOWERED: A Holistic Capacity-Building Program for Inclusive Education* program to ensure sustainable improvements in teacher training, resource allocation, and collaboration among stakeholders for inclusive education.

- For future research, examine the experiences of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms to provide a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of inclusive practices.

References

Abrol, M. (2023). Role of teacher in promoting inclusive education. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i02.1626

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide (1st ed.). Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2022). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Gita-Carlos, R. (2022). *PRRD OKs inclusive education for learners with disabilities*. Philippine News Agency. https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1169807

Hasson, L., Keville, S., Gallagher, J., Onagbesan, D., & Ludlow, A. K. (2022). Inclusivity in education for autism spectrum disorders: Experiences of support from the perspective of parent/carers, school teaching staff and young people on the autism spectrum. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, *70*(2), 201-   212. https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2022.2070418

Hornby, G., & Kauffman, J. M. (2021). Special and inclusive education: Perspectives, challenges and prospects. *Education Sciences*, *11*(7),   362. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070362

World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Salamanca, Spain, 1994 [16].