



LIVED EXPERIENCES AND MEANING-MAKING AMONG NON-SPED TEACHERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has become increasingly implemented in mainstream schools, requiring non-SPED teachers to address the diverse academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of learners despite limited formal training in Special Education. However, the lived experiences of non-SPED teachers in inclusive classrooms remain insufficiently explored, particularly in understanding how they navigate instructional demands and professional challenges. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of non-SPED elementary teachers handling learners with diverse learning needs in inclusive classroom settings, focusing on their instructional realities, emotional challenges, coping mechanisms, and professional transformations. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed involving five non-SPED elementary teachers from selected private schools in Cagayan de Oro City who were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews conducted in three interview sessions per participant from January 2026 to March 2026 during School Year 2025–2026. The study was completed in May 2026. The collected narratives were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis, while trustworthiness was ensured through confirmability procedures and expert validation. The findings generated five major themes: (1) Experiencing Evolving Instructional Perspectives, (2) Navigating Instructional Strains, (3) Transforming Professional Mindset, (4) Developing Emotional Resilience, and (5) Redefining Success in Inclusive Education. The results revealed that teachers continuously adjusted instructional approaches, experienced emotional and physical exhaustion, developed adaptive coping mechanisms, and gradually reconstructed their professional beliefs and teaching perspectives through inclusive classroom experiences. The study concluded that inclusive education not only challenges non-SPED teachers instructionally and

emotionally but also contributes to their professional growth, resilience, and transformation. Therefore, strengthened institutional support, continuous professional development, and sustained inclusive education training are necessary to better equip non-SPED teachers in addressing the diverse needs of learners effectively.

Keywords: *inclusive education, non-SPED teachers, phenomenology, lived experiences, diverse learning needs, inclusive classrooms*

INTRODUCTION

The true essence of inclusive education lies not only in equal access to learning, but in the willingness of teachers to continuously adapt for the success of every learner.

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) stated that it is necessary to develop instructional practices in a worldwide system that enable every child to emerge in a regular classroom setting. DepEd Order No. 72, series of 2009, mandates the school administration to provide a learning space where every learner, regardless of diversity, may participate in a way that makes them feel safe. Nevertheless, if they say they provide appropriate outlines, such as clear guidelines, support structures, and instructional frameworks. However, in reality, it is a contrast.

Despite strong policy mandates promoting inclusive education, many schools continue to experience a shortage of Special Education (SPED) teachers, limited instructional resources, and large class sizes, which significantly affect the quality of instruction delivered to learners with diverse needs.

Recent studies have shown that overcrowded classrooms and insufficient access to SPED-trained personnel make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized support and differentiated instruction in inclusive settings (UNESCO, 2020; Gaitas et al., 2024). Philippine-based research further indicates that general education teachers are often required to accommodate learners with disabilities without adequate training or material support, intensifying instructional challenges and emotional strain (Macapaz et al., 2024; Vergara et al., 2025).

On the other hand, non-SPED teachers have largely become responsible for supporting learners with developmental, behavioral, or other learning issues — often without sufficient training or preparation to do so. These teachers have to adjust their pedagogy, classroom management, and assessment practices to meet students' diverse needs. Combined with these instructional pressures, the challenges of teacher burnout, increased workload expectations, and pandemic-associated remote and blended learning have further challenged non-SPED teachers.

Despite these pressures, many develop creative coping strategies, partner with peers, and create classroom habits that continue to promote inclusive practices. Unfortunately, most existing research on inclusive education primarily concentrates on

learner outcomes—such as academic achievement, behavioral adjustment, and social participation of students with diverse needs (Hehir et al., 2016; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009; Lindsay, 2007)—or on policy implementation and institutional compliance (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; UNESCO, 1994), leaving the lived experiences and coping strategies of non-SPED teachers largely underexplored.

Most existing studies focus primarily on learner outcomes or policy implementation, while the lived experiences of non-SPED teachers remain underexplored. Filling this gap is important for informing and improving support systems and the development of teacher training and support, and for strengthening policy implementation.

The primary objective of this study is to fill this information gap and draw out the experiences of non-SPED teachers with students with diverse needs in inclusive contexts. The study aimed to capture their thoughts and perspectives to inform professional development initiatives and school leadership through guidance and policy development that support responsive, contextually grounded practices of inclusive education in the Philippines.

Research Questions

While inclusive education policies in the Philippines are clearly established, implementation remains inconsistent, as non-SPED teachers with limited training and support are often assigned to learners with diverse needs (Department of Education, 2009; Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). The complexity of teachers' roles in inclusive classrooms required them to address behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and developmental challenges despite limited training and institutional support (UNESCO, 2020; Gonzaga et al., 2024). While these policies pushed inclusion across all schools, the realities remain: a significant gap persists between systemic prospects and classroom realities (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Martin, 2026). The focus of most researchers was on learners' outcomes after implementing an inclusive classroom environment or the general program's effectiveness, without considering the effects that non-SPED teachers encounter, which remain unexplored.

These real-world situations illustrated the instructional and emotional demands placed on teachers who are often unprepared for targeted inclusive work. Although previous studies have largely emphasized teacher attitudes, stress, and emotional competence in inclusive classrooms (e.g., Macapaz et al., 2024; systematic reviews of emotional competence in inclusion, 2025) and have identified institutional factors such as class size, support systems, and professional preparation as major determinants of inclusion implementation (e.g., studies on teacher attitudes toward inclusion, 2025; Vergara et al., 2025), there remains a limited focus on the lived experiences, personal challenges, and coping strategies of non-SPED teachers managing these complex classroom contexts. The teachers' point of view was critical because they are the primary implementers of inclusive education; however, policymakers and researchers often ignore it.

This study explored the challenges, experiences, coping strategies, support, and meanings of the non-SPED teachers' inclusive teaching roles.

This study explored the following research questions:

1. How do the non-SPED teachers describe their experience in teaching learners with diverse needs in an inclusive classroom?
2. How do they address the challenges they encounter in handling children with diverse learning needs?
3. How do non-SPED teachers make meaning in their lived experiences in implementing inclusive education?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study as described by Moustakas (1994) was Transcendental Phenomenology which was used in the investigation of the lived experiences of non-SPED teachers in the context of working with children who have diverse learning needs. This is an appropriate approach that uncovers participants' human experience, describes it realistically, and is free from the researcher's expectations. It intentionally emphasizes Transcendental Phenomenology (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

The epoche is at the heart of Moustakas' approach and involves "tacitly bracketing" the previous knowledge and one's own beliefs regarding inclusive education in the field. This was done during all of the data collection and analysis, through upright reactions, reflexive journaling, and reviewing the journal prior to coding. To be aware of possible bias and to ensure that the voices and meaning of the participants comes through as authentic (Qutoshi, 2018; Roulston & deMarrais, 2020).

Following epoche, this study moved on to parallel clustering of meaning units, creation of textural and structural descriptions and identification of key statements that reflect teachers' experiences and how they experience inclusive teaching in their context. The analysis procedures which focused on transparency, systematic coding, and meaning reconstruction (Sundler et al., 2021; Vagle, 2022) explain the steps of analysis which were in line with the current phenomenological practices. This rigorous process made it possible to deeply interpret teachers' problems and strategies in handling these problems, and thus the essence of the lived experiences of non-SPED teachers were synthesized.

From a phenomenological perspective, it shows the meaning-making processes of non-SPED teachers when dealing with their inclusive teaching realities based on Husserl's (1982) bracketing of biases and Heidegger's (1962) focus on being-in-the-world. This way of working suggests that their teaching and emotional and professional experiences are unique and share a common essence through description, meaning-making and the structures of teachers' lived experiences.

The study was done in select private schools in the city of Cagayan de Oro (urban area) which had been practicing inclusive education but had limited number of SPED teachers and a limited structured support system. Schools of this kind include children with developmental delays, behavioral problems, learning disabilities, emotional problems and mild exceptionalities in a regular classroom, with professional experts diagnosing some of these children. The setting seems to be typical Philippines inclusive context where non-SPED Teachers manage diverse classrooms daily, but are said to be mainstream classrooms with limited resources and training.

The study was a phenomenological approach, conducted with five (5) non-SPED teachers who were working or have worked with children with diverse learning needs in inclusive classrooms. The selected samples were a group of people who had rich and relevant experiences with the objectives of the research, using a purposive sampling technique. The following were the inclusion criteria: 1) The participants were practicing elementary teachers, specifically Grade 1 or 2 in Cagayan de Oro City private schools; 2) They handled at least 2-3 learners with diverse needs in the last two years; 3) They do not have formal SPED specialization or licensure; and 4) They were willing to share detailed lived experiences.

To ensure ethical research of the data and protection of the participants' information, the researcher will formalize the approval by school administrators and will obtain informed consent from the participants before collecting the data.

In-depth one-on-one interviews (60-90 minutes) were used as the main method of collecting data for the purpose of a phenomenological approach with 5 non-SPED teachers. An interview guide was employed with open-ended questions to elicit the teachers' lived experiences of challenges, coping strategies, and meaning making. Interviews were audio recorded (with consent) and supported by fieldnotes of nonverbal gestures and 'feelings' and reflexive journalizing on the part of the interview researcher.

The interviews were held in the school of the participants or in a designated space agreed upon by the participants to allow for comfort, confidentiality, and minimal disruption to their work. Depending on the comfort and availability of the participants, interviews can also be done online (e.g., Zoom or Google Meet) if the participants prefer or require this.

The researcher gained the consent of the school administrators and the participants' informed consent to carry out a one-to-one interview. The choice of the preferred schedule and preferred confidential locations was given to the participants. Afterwards, the researcher asked open-ended, conversational questions, describing the purpose of the study, and the freedom of choice to withdraw at any time. All one-on-one interview sessions were transcribed verbatim after each session.

In an in-depth interview, the data collected were processed by using the Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen method which is one of the systematic phenomenological data analysis

methods in qualitative research. The method aims to describe the essence of the lived experience of the participants by analysing and interpreting their stories.

The researcher first started with bracketing, meaning that she set aside her own beliefs, assumptions and experiences of inclusive education, so that the analysis was based upon the participants' accounts. This approach ensured objectivity in the process and gave ample voice to the participants.

Secondly, all the transcripts from the interview were read multiple times to familiarize oneself with the data. Important statements that directly connected to the experience of the non-SPED teachers in dealing with learners with diverse needs were identified and extracted from the transcripts. All statements were given equal consideration in the preliminary analysis.

Thirdly, the significant statements that were extracted were given meanings, which involved interpreting what the statement meant in regard to the participants' experiences. Participants' descriptions were then clustered into themes of similar meanings; the themes were then checked for accuracy in capturing participants' descriptions.

Fourth, all the identified themes were merged into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. The common experiences, challenges, coping strategies and insights shared by the participants were captured in this description.

Finally, the basic framework or nature of the experience was identified, providing a summary of the meaning of the experience of being a non-SPED teacher with learners with diverse needs in inclusive classrooms.

Member checking, peer debriefing and reflexive journaling were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Data was analyzed using manual coding and the researcher was able to be closely attuned to the data throughout the process of analysis.

In order to ensure quality and credibility, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness of the study were adhered to:

Credibility was achieved by long-term contact with the participants via several in-depth interviews. Multiple sources of data – interview transcripts, field notes and reflexive journal – were used to triangulate the data in order to enhance the accuracy of interpretations. Member checking was performed by providing the participant with copies of their interview transcript and the themes generated to ensure that their experiences were being captured appropriately. Peer de-briefing was also applied by consulting with other qualitative research experts on the interview questions and discussing data interpretation.

Thick and rich descriptions of the participants and their contexts were provided to ensure **transferability**, such as years of teaching experience, type of school, class size, and the types of learner diversity they have dealt with.

Dependability was ensured by the use of a detailed audit trail, which included recordings of the audio material, transcriptions of the interviews, field notes, coding procedures, and theme development processes.

Reflexive journaling was used to assure **confirmability**. It allowed the researcher to suspend his own assumptions and biases and to be informed by the participants' accounts only. As a whole, these strategies will enable a faithful and credible description of the lived experiences of non-SPED teachers in inclusive classroom settings, supported by evidence.

Thematic analysis was used to systematically identify, organise and interpret patterns of meaning from the lived experiences of the participants in the data collected in this study. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for qualitative phenomenological research whose purpose is to gain insight and explore in-depth the participants' perspectives.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim, after the interview, for the purposes of accuracy and maintaining the authenticity of participants. The researcher read and reread the transcripts several times to familiarize himself with the data and understand the participants' narration.

It was analyzed in a step-by-step manner. Initial coding was done by the researcher, by highlighting the important statements, phrases, and replies concerning the participants' experiences in inclusive education. The codes were directly extracted from the data and included ideas of challenges, emotional reactions, teaching methods, and personal insights.

Second, codes were organized into groups which represent larger patterns seen in the responses of participants. These categories facilitated the clustering of data by the common experiences and ideas.

Thirdly, the categories were further analyzed and synthesized for emerging themes. These themes reflect the essence of the lived experiences of the participants, and are used to guide the findings of the study. Themes reflect key elements of the non-SPED teacher experience of inclusive education in the classroom.

Member checking, or confirmability, was performed after every interview, for credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis. Participants could view and verify their answers and make sure that what they mean from the data matched their experiences.

The researcher also kept reflexive journal during the analysis process to record insights, observations, and possible biases. This practice improved the transparency of the data and reduced the effect of assumptions by the interpreter on the data.

Finally, the researcher also enhanced the analysis by expert research feedback. The coding process, category formation, and development of themes were examined by

an experienced research adviser/expert. This process minimized bias and allowed the findings to be based on participants' responses. The study yielded reliable and meaningful findings through systematic coding and thematic analysis, which were validated by experts.

The final themes were presented in the form of a story and supplemented with direct quotes from the participants in order to preserve their voices. These themes were then analyzed and interpreted in conjunction with the research objectives and literature to gain a better understanding of the experiences of non-SPED teachers in inclusive education.

RESULTS

The study results were obtained from a phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of the participants. The interview transcripts were analysed in detail to identify some themes that illustrate the non-SPED teachers' experiences of inclusive education in their classrooms. These themes highlight the reality, coping mechanisms, challenges and professional development experiences of the participants in the context of instruction.

The presentation of findings is through direct quotations from participants as evidence and respective categories and themes. These demonstrate the various aspects of the participants' experiences and give a more in-depth understanding of their views on working with diverse learners.

Themes Book

| Significant Statements | Codes | Categories | Theme |
|--|----------------------------------|--|---|
| "Instead nga i-pressure nako siya, murag naghinay-hinay ko." (P2, T1, L103) <i>(Instead of pressuring the learner, I gradually took things slowly.)</i> | Instructional Pacing Adjustments | Using Differentiated Teaching Approaches | Theme 1: Experiencing Evolving Instructional Perspectives |
| "Dili nako dayon i-correct harshly ang students." (P2, T2, L116) <i>(I no longer correct students harshly right away.)</i> | Gentle Correction | | |
| "Instead nga i-correct dayon, ginatanaw nako as an opportunity to guide them." (P2, T3, L110) <i>(Instead of correcting them immediately, I see it as an opportunity to guide them.)</i> | Using Connection as Guidance | Encouraging Persistence | |

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| <p>“After some time, ni-try na siya ug answer like even if gamay lang.” (P4, T2, L264) <i>(After some time, the learner started trying to answer, even if only a little.)</i></p> | Supportive Encouragement | | |
| <p>“Pinaka-challenging gyud kay kanang repetitive behavior nga kana bitawng dili dayon nimo ma-control.” (P3, T2, L159) <i>(The most challenging part really is repetitive behavior—the kind that you cannot immediately control.)</i></p> | Managing Repetitive Behavior | Addressing Behavioral Challenges | Theme 2: Navigating Instructional Strains |
| <p>“Kay kung naay tantrum, dili lang siya naka-affect sa isa ka learner, but sa whole class gyud.” (P1, T2, L17) <i>(Because when there is a tantrum, it does not only affect one learner, but the whole class.)</i></p> | Handling Tantrums | | |
| <p>“...ma-feel nako nga dili nako na-control ang situation.” (P4, T2, L229) <i>(...I felt like I could no longer control the situation.)</i></p> | Loss of Instructional Control | | |
| <p>“It is about trying to reach learners bisan limited ang resources.” (P5, T3, L281) <i>(It’s about trying to reach learners even when resources are limited.)</i></p> | Resource Constraints | | |
| <p>“...kinahanglan gyud i-adjust per learner and mas kinahanglan ka mo-think ug deeper.” (P5, T1, L 258) <i>(...you really need to adjust for each learner, and you need to think more deeply.)</i></p> | Need for Learner Adjustment | | |
| <p>“Kay gusto nako siya tabangan, pero at the same time, kinahanglan pud nako i-continue ang lesson for the rest.” (P2, T2, L 99) <i>(Because I wanted to help the learner, but at the same time, I also needed to continue the lesson for the rest of the class.)</i></p> | Feeling of Guilt | Experiencing Emotional Constraints | |
| <p>“Murag na-doubt pud nako akong sarili...” (P1, T1, L35) <i>(“I even doubted myself...”)</i></p> | Feeling Doubtful | | |

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|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| <p>“Kay dili pa gyud ko kabalo unsa ang pinaka-effective nga strategy.” (P4, T2, L232) <i>(Because I still do not know what the most effective strategy is.)</i></p> | Internal Struggle | | |
| <p>“...kanang bitawng kalit lang ka natulala kay nagbalik-balik sa akong mind ang iyang giingon.” (P3, T2, L187) <i>(...there were moments when I would suddenly stare blankly because what the learner said kept replaying in my mind.)</i></p> | Emotionally Drained | | |
| <p>“Nah! maka-drain gyud siya over time.” (P2, T2, L124) <i>(It really becomes draining over time.)</i></p> | Work-related Fatigue | Dealing with Physical Exhaustion | |
| <p>“Kay dili siya mawala after class kay madala dala man nimo siya sa balay.” (P1, T2, L71) <i>(Because it does not end after class—you carry it home with you.)</i></p> | Post Work Exhaustion | | |
| <p>“Kay naa koy expectation nga kinahanglan ma-control nako ang situation.” (P3, T2, L170) <i>(Because I had the expectation that I should be able to control the situation.)</i></p> | Chronic Work Pressure | | |
| <p>“It is necessary gyud ka mag-adjust pirmi ang mga teachers dili kay ang mga students ang mag adjust sa mga teachers.” (P5, T2, L289) <i>(It is really necessary for teachers to keep adjusting, not for students to adjust to the teachers.)</i></p> | Adjusting Teaching Beliefs | Cognitive Reframing | Theme 3: Transforming Professional Mindset |
| <p>“Katong naka-realize ko nga dili gyud nako ma-achieve ang ideal sa tanan time, didto ko nag-adjust sa akong mindset.” (P5, T3, L278) <i>(When I realized that I could not achieve the ideal all the time, that was when I adjusted my mindset.)</i></p> | Cognitive Shifts | | |
| <p>“...na-realize gyud nako nga dili pwede nga mao gihapon akong mindset.” (P1, T2, L5) <i>(...I truly realized that I could not keep the same mindset anymore.)</i></p> | Shift of Instructional Mindset | | |

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| <p>“Karon, murag mo-stop ko gamay and then mo-think before mo-react.” (P3, T2, L212) <i>(Now, I pause for a moment and think before reacting.)</i></p> | <p>Reduced Self-judgement</p> | <p>Reconstructing Teaching Perspectives</p> | |
| <p>“...as much as possible we will not show to our students kung unsa gyud atong gibati at that moment.” (P5, T2, L298) <i>(...as much as possible, we should not show our students what we are really feeling at that moment.)</i></p> | <p>Professional Masking</p> | | |
| <p>“Para sa ako, nakatabang gyud ang acceptance or humility.” (P5, T2, L313) <i>(For me, acceptance or humility really helped.)</i></p> | <p>Acceptance of Imperfections</p> | <p>Emotional Regulation</p> | <p>Theme 4: Developing Emotional Resilience</p> |
| <p>“Mas patient gyud ko karon not just sa students, but even outside the classroom.” (P1, T3, L17) <i>(I am much more patient now—not only with students, but even outside the classroom.)</i></p> | <p>Becoming more Patient</p> | | |
| <p>“Be patient with your students and with yourself.” (P1, T3, L61)</p> | <p>Patience with Self and Students</p> | <p>Self-awareness</p> | |
| <p>“I will not base lang sa ideal teaching but sa reality gyud sa classroom scenarios.” (P5, T3, L 266) <i>(I will no longer base my teaching only on ideals, but on the actual realities of classroom scenarios.)</i></p> | <p>Adjusting to Actual Classroom Realities</p> | | |
| <p>“Yes po... nakig-ask ko sa akong co-teachers.” (P4, T2, L251) <i>(Yes... I asked help from my co-teachers.)</i></p> | <p>Collaborative Learning</p> | <p>Professional Communication</p> | |
| <p>“Also, kanang nakig-storya ko sa akong co-teachers.” (P3, T2, L202) <i>(Also, I talked with my co-teachers.)</i></p> | <p>Conversation With Colleagues</p> | | <p>Theme 5: Redefining Success in Inclusive Education</p> |
| <p>“Also, practical advice like strategies nga gi-try pud nila.” (P2, T2, L142) <i>(Also, practical advice like strategies that they themselves have tried.)</i></p> | <p>Collecting Ideas</p> | <p>Sharing of Ideas</p> | |

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| <p>“... naka-realize ko nga okay ra gyud kaayo magkamali, as long as willing ka mo-learn and i-correct ang mga sayop nga nabuhat before...” (P2, T3, L122) (<i>...I realized that it is really okay to make mistakes, as long as you are willing to learn and correct the mistakes you made before.</i>)</p> | <p>Continuous Learning</p> | | |
| <p>“Pero karon, murag open na ko nga naa gihapon ko’y kulang ug kinahanglan matun-an.” (P3, T3, L147) (<i>But now, I am more open to the fact that I still have shortcomings and things I need to learn.</i>)</p> | <p>Redefined Teaching Identity</p> | <p>Maturation in Teaching Perspective</p> | |
| <p>“Kanang teacher nga dili lang mo-teach, but mo-understand gyud.” (P1, T3, L55) (<i>A teacher who does not only teach, but truly understands.</i>)</p> | <p>Becoming More Understanding</p> | | |
| <p>“...this experience is teaching me how to be more patient and more understanding.” (P4, T3, L195) (<i>...this experience is teaching me how to be more patient and more understanding.</i>)</p> | <p>Greater Instructional Flexibility</p> | | |

DISCUSSION

The results of this study can be interpreted within the framework of the inclusive education principles, which focus on the responsiveness to learner diversity and flexible teaching practices. Current literature indicates that inclusive classrooms involve more than just regular teaching and learning, and instead teachers need to learn to accommodate individual learner differences (Florian, 2021; UNESCO, 2023). This is corroborated by the experiences of the participants, that the traditional models of teaching are being transformed to more adaptive and learner centred models.

Theme 1 Experiencing Evolving Instructional Perspective

Inclusive education was stated as a learning experience that changed over time the way the participants viewed teaching and delivery of instruction. The experiences of working with students with a variety of needs led them to break away from rigid sequences and to be flexible in responding to different student abilities, behaviors and speeds. They were introduced to the concept of adapting the instruction to the learners' needs and responses in the classroom, and not just to traditional teaching methods.

The participants shared that their instructional approaches evolved through continuous classroom exposure and daily interaction with learners. They began to recognize that effective inclusive teaching requires patience, individualized support, and sensitivity to different learning capacities. Through these experiences, teachers developed more adaptive teaching practices such as modifying pacing, using supportive correction, and encouraging learner participation without creating pressure or fear.

In terms of teachers' perspectives on instruction, the results show that the classroom context of inclusion can help teachers change their perspectives on instruction gradually. Their experiences demonstrate an evolution from a more homogenous way of teaching to a more learner responsive approach, which focuses on flexibility, encouragement and understanding. This is consistent with the literature which highlights that inclusive education takes into account the constant adaptation of teaching techniques to meet the needs of all learners and foster their active engagement in the classroom (Moriña, 2021; Leiva & Napa Valencia, 2025).

Category 1 Using Differentiated Teaching Approaches

The participants mentioned the need to adapt their teaching methods to the pace of the learner, his/her behavior, and emotional readiness due to the diversity of the learner's needs. Their experiences showed that inclusive teaching was flexible and not a teaching delivery model. Teachers adjusted the pace and the way they responded, so that learning was more manageable and less intimidating to learners over time.

One participant shared, "Instead nga i-pressure nako siya, murag naghinay-hinay ko." (P2, T1, L103) (*Instead of pressuring the learner, I gradually took things slowly.*) This reflects teachers intentionally slowing down instruction to accommodate learner readiness and participation. Another participant explained, "Dili nako dayon i-correct harshly ang students." (P2, T2, L116) (*I no longer correct students harshly right away.*) This showed how teachers became more careful and supportive in addressing learner mistakes.

The results show that teachers over time transitioned to using differentiated teaching practices in inclusive classrooms. They shifted their attention from just academic achievement to being more sensitive to the learners' emotional and developmental needs. This is in line with the findings of previous studies that have stated that including the method of differentiated instruction and adaptive teaching is important in inclusive education because it can be used by a teacher to accommodate learners in diverse educational needs with different pacing, supportive feedback, and learner-centred instruction (Leiva & Napa Valencia, 2025; Ici & Priyadi, 2025).

Category 2 Encouraging Persistence

Learners' persistence was described by the participants as a gradual and supportive process which helped the learners to stay confident in spite of their difficulties. Instead of concentrating on errors, teachers deliberately used errors as a source of input

for instruction, and let learners continue without the threat of being corrected or embarrassed. This is a more patient teaching style – learning at the pace of the learner. Teachers sought to maintain involvement and minimise withdrawal of learners from inclusive classrooms through ongoing encouragement.

The participants further explained that persistence often emerged slowly but meaningfully when learners were continuously supported. One participant shared, “Instead nga i-correct dayon, ginatan-aw nako as an opportunity to guide them.” (P2, T3, L110) (*Instead of correcting them immediately, I see it as an opportunity to guide them.*) This highlights a deliberate instructional mindset where feedback is used to build confidence rather than discourage participation. Another participant noted, “After some time, ni-try na siya ug answer like even if gamay lang.” (P4, T2, L264) (*After some time, the learner started trying to answer, even if only a little.*) This indicates that even minimal, consistent encouragement can gradually lead to increased learner engagement and effort.

In summary, the results indicate that promoting persistence is not just a teaching tactic but ongoing relational work that is performed between teacher and student. It requires patience, continuous encouragement and making errors learning development. This is in line with the literature on inclusive education, which highlights that having supportive scaffolding by teachers and acknowledging that small steps count as positive progress toward participation and confidence-building enhances and improves learner engagement (Leiva & Napa Valencia, 2025; Moriña, 2021).

Theme 2 Navigating Instructional Strains

This theme reflects the multifaceted and complex nature of inclusive education in real classroom situations and the demands placed upon teachers. It mirrors the constant challenges to instructional delivery, including behavior, limited resources, emotional stress and physical exhaustion. In contrast to a straightforward teaching process, teaching becomes a continuous negotiation between implementing the diverse needs of students and maintaining classroom order and educational objectives. The experiences demonstrate the need for ongoing adaptations and emotional stamina when teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Instructional strains were found to be not independent of each other but rather as pressures building upon one another in everyday practice in the participants' stories. Problems with behaviour can interfere with teaching and learning and need to be managed as they happen, and time and resources can also be a constraint in effective teaching and learning and the adjustments of the learner. Such instructional requirements are exacerbated by emotional conflict and physical exhaustion resulting in periods of uncertainty, guilt and fatigue. This indicates that instructional strain is both structure and emotional in nature, and influences teacher performance and persistence. Lancian and Cancio (2025) reported the same with an emphasis that inclusive teachers often struggle with emotional exhaustion and instructional challenges, as they must manage the classroom while differentiating instruction for students with disabilities. Furthermore,

Gonzaga et al. (2024) pointed out that a lack of preparedness and inadequate training are key factors that make it challenging for teachers to work with diverse learners in inclusive environments.

The participants also suggested that such conditions for instruction are continuously demanding mental strength and resilience. The hidden work of inclusive teaching is often evident in teachers continuing to teach even when they are exhausted or unsure. This is a reality that considers how well a teacher can cope with stress and make adjustments on the fly to enhance instructional effectiveness. In this sense, Aguilon and Eludo (2025) also found that teachers resort to adaptive classroom strategies due to the necessity of doing so, especially in contexts where teacher support is inadequate and learners' needs are very varied.

Generally, the results indicate that working with instructional tension is one of the characteristics of inclusive teaching practice as teachers constantly try to balance the demands for instruction with their emotional and physical constraints. These experiences are consistent with the literature, which highlights that inclusive education puts significant pressure on teachers because of the complexity of the classroom, lack of resources and emotional demands of having different learners in one classroom (Martin, 2026; Montales, 2026; UNESCO, 2020).

Category 1 Addressing Behavioral Challenges

Participants reported that one of the most challenging parts of inclusive classroom management was dealing with problem behaviors. During the school day, these challenges often can cause a loss of continuity and demand attention, making it hard to continue planned lessons. Frequent instances that require constant monitoring, quick decisions, and emotional control, on the part of the teacher were repetitions of behaviors and sudden outbursts of emotion. This is aligned with literature in inclusive education, which sees classroom management as going beyond instruction and highly dependent on regulation and responsiveness to behavior and emotion (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025; Macabenta et al., 2023).

The participants emphasized that certain behaviors, particularly repetitive actions, are difficult to manage and require sustained patience and continuous adjustment. One participant shared, “Pinaka-challenging gyud kay kanang repetitive behavior nga kana bitawng dili dayon nimo ma-control.” (P3, T2, L159) (*The most challenging part really is repetitive behavior—the kind that you cannot immediately control.*) This highlights the unpredictable and ongoing nature of behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms. Another participant noted, “Kay kung naay tantrum, dili lang siya naka-affect sa isa ka learner, but sa whole class gyud.” (P1, T2, L17) (*Because when there is a tantrum, it does not only affect one learner, but the whole class.*) This illustrates the ripple effect of behavioral disruptions, where one learner's actions influence the overall learning environment and instructional stability.

The results indicate that behavioral problems can't be handled only by punishment, a certain degree of patience and sensitivity to the learner's emotional stages, different teaching approaches in the classroom, and adaptation to the various needs of the learner are required. Classroom management becomes an integral and ongoing part of inclusive education practice as teachers constantly negotiate the instructional and behavioural "needs" of a classroom. This is consistent with the literature, which highlights that inclusive teachers frequently employ adaptive classroom management practices to support learning in diverse and complex behavioral contexts (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025; Macabenta et al., 2023).

Category 2 Negotiating Classroom Complexities

The participants referred the process of negotiating classroom complexities as an ongoing process of working with the constraints of resources and the high diversity of learners' needs to deliver instruction. Lesson delivery in inclusive classrooms is a dynamic process, with no standard approach to teaching, and teachers are constantly faced with varying levels of learner readiness, classroom environments, and instructional supports. This reflects the literature, which highlights that inclusive education demands flexible pedagogical approaches and decisions based on each learner's needs and classroom environment (Leiva & Napa Valencia, 2025; Moriña, 2021).

Moreover, the participants emphasized that resource limitations significantly shape instructional practice, often requiring improvisation and modifications to teaching strategies to ensure equitable access to learning. One participant explained, "It is about trying to reach learners, even when resources are limited." (P5, T3, L281) (*It's about trying to reach learners even when resources are limited.*) This highlights the persistent effort to sustain inclusive instruction despite material constraints. In addition, participants stressed the need for individualized adaptation, as reflected in the statement, "...kinahanglan gyud i-adjust per learner and mas kinahanglan ka mo-think ug deeper." (P5, T1, L258) (*...you really need to adjust for each learner, and you need to think more deeply.*) This demonstrates the cognitive demand of planning and delivering instruction that accommodates multiple learning needs simultaneously.

The results indicate that a certain adaptive thinking, pedagogical flexibility, and creativity in teaching and learning are necessary to negotiate the classroom complexities. Despite system constraints, teachers must tweak the strategies in real time to make learning inclusive. This is in line with research that emphasizes the importance of differentiated instruction, flexible grouping and responsive pedagogy for effective inclusive teaching, but its implementation is often constrained by resource and contextual issues (Ici & Priyadi, 2025; Catama, 2025).

Category 3 Experiencing Emotional Constraints

The participants explained that the emotional constraints are an internal struggle that is felt when teachers are trying to balance what they need to teach and the emotional aspect of inclusive education. Such pressures are heightened when teachers have to

cater for the needs of a learner while also maintaining the momentum of the class. This is consistent with the literature on inclusive teaching stressing that such teaching practice is emotionally challenging because decision making and emotional regulation is required in real-time in complex classroom settings (Wang et al., 2023; Calandri et al., 2025).

In addition, the participants expressed feelings of guilt, self-doubt, uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion as they navigated classroom realities. One participant shared, “Kay gusto nako siya tabangan, pero at the same time, kinahanglan pud nako i-continue ang lesson for the rest.” (P2, T2, L99) (*Because I wanted to help the learner, but at the same time, I also needed to continue the lesson for the rest of the class.*) This reflects the emotional conflict that arises when teachers prioritize between competing classroom needs. Another stated, “Murag na-doubt pud nako akong sarili...” (P1, T1, L35) (*I even doubted myself...*), highlighting how instructional difficulties can affect professional confidence. Similarly, “Kay dili pa gyud ko kabalo unsa ang pinaka-effective nga strategy.” (P4, T2, L323) (*Because I still do not know what the most effective strategy is.*), shows uncertainty in instructional decision-making, while “...kanang bitawng kalit lang ka natulala kay nagbalik-balik sa akong mind ang iyang giingon.” (P2, T2, L124) (*...there were moments when I would suddenly stare blankly because what the learner said kept replaying in my mind.*) reflects emotional overload and cognitive fatigue.

The results indicated that emotional restrictions are strongly embedded in the conflict between the requirement of teaching and the emotional responsibility of the teacher towards the students. These experiences suggest that emotional burden in inclusive education is ongoing and accumulative, resulting from ongoing responsibility and uncertainty, and the need to make quick decisions about instruction. This resonates with the research which suggests that emotional regulation and emotional competence are crucial for maintaining effective teaching in inclusive classrooms, where the emotional demand is increased due to the diversity and complexity of the classroom (Aldrup et al., 2024).

Category 4 Dealing with Physical Exhaustion

The participants felt that physical exhaustion was a lasting consequence of the relentlessness and challenge of inclusive teaching. Fatigue is not solely a classroom issue, it's an issue for teachers even after they leave work. This is in line with recent research highlighting the need for constant efforts in physical, emotional, and cognitive energy when applying inclusive teaching, given the need to address multiple challenges, including teaching, behavior management, and learner differentiation (Donath et al., 2023; Vantieghem et al., 2023).

In this study, participants emphasized that exhaustion develops gradually over time as a result of repeated instructional adjustments and continuous classroom management demands. One participant shared, “Nah! maka-drain gyud siya over time.” (P2, T2, L124), highlighting the cumulative nature of fatigue. Another stated, “Kay dili siya mawala after class kay madala dala man nimo siya sa balay.” (P1, T2, L71), illustrating how professional demands often extend beyond the classroom and into personal life,

resulting in sustained post-work exhaustion. These experiences align with literature on teacher emotional labor, which suggests that educators in inclusive settings often experience ongoing emotional and cognitive strain due to continuous reflection on classroom interactions and instructional demands (Aldrup et al., 2024; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Additionally, the statement, “Kay naa koy expectation nga kinahanglan ma-control nako ang situation.” (P3, T2, L170) (Because I had the expectation that I should be able to control the situation.), reflects the internal pressure and self-imposed standards that contribute to chronic work strain. This supports findings that teacher self-efficacy expectations, when unmet in complex inclusive classrooms, can intensify feelings of exhaustion and stress, especially when teachers constantly regulate both instructional and behavioral demands (Wang et al., 2023).

The results indicated that physical fatigue could not be attributed to workload in inclusive education but was the outcome of constant emotional regulation, cognitive decision making and adaptive teaching. This is evidenced by recent literature, which shows that inclusive teachers frequently suffer from a fatigue that stems from the multifaceted nature of inclusive teaching, the emotional work involved, and the responsibility for teaching diverse learners, thereby resulting in a state of exhaustion rather than a one-time occurrence (Calandri et al., 2025; Donath et al., 2023).

Theme 3 Transforming Professional Mindset

This theme highlights the teachers' incremental changes in thinking about teaching in the context of inclusive classrooms. It reflects a transition from a more one-size-fits-all approach to more flexible, adaptive and learner responsive perspectives. The literature in recent years reflects this as a desired outcome of the inclusive education experience, where teacher thinking and beliefs change due to the sustained exposure to classroom diversity, emotional demands, and learning complexities (Dignath et al., 2022; Aas et al., 2023). Teachers no longer simply respond to problems but are starting to see problems as features of the learning curve of becoming more effective practitioners.

In all the participants' stories, it was linked to concrete lived experiences in classrooms where their ideas about what it means to be a good teacher and to be in control were impacted. Teachers' expectations were for steady teaching success and complete classroom control. But years of experiences with a variety of learner needs and erratic behavior caused them to rethink these assumptions. This is consistent with the research that revealed teacher beliefs regarding inclusion are very much contingent upon what they see happening in their classrooms and their sense of self-efficacy, which either validates or changes over time (Woodcock et al., 2023).

The participants also pointed out that this change happens slowly and gradually as a result of reflection and critical realization, not by sudden change. They needed to make changes to their previous thinking and become more flexible and realistic in response to challenging teaching situations. This aligns with the research findings that

professional belief transformation relates to reflective practice and professional learning experiences in which teachers continuously adapt and experience-sharing (Aas et al., 2023; Vantieghem et al., 2023). It is through this reflective engagement that teachers can shift from a narrow conception of 'ideal teaching' to thinking contextually about teaching.

The overall results indicate that 'mindset change' is a developmental process in inclusive education. Helps teachers shift from self-judgment and frustration to acceptance, flexibility and adaptive thinking. The transformation is consistent with the literature that highlights that the competence of inclusive teachers is not static but evolves through the interaction of beliefs, experiences, and professional learning that ultimately leads to more sustainable and responsive teaching practices (Dignath et al., 2022; Vantieghem et al., 2023).

Category 1 Cognitive Reframing

The participants spoke of the cognitive reframing as a process of their interpretation of their role as a teacher and the challenges they encounter in the classroom in relation to inclusive education. They no longer saw challenges as signs of failure, but as ingrained and normal parts of a wide range of classroom realities. This shift is part of a wider trend in inclusive education literature, in which cognitive reframing has been identified as one of the key adaptive processes that teachers can engage in to regulate their stress and maintain their engagement in the teaching process by reframing their appraisal of the challenging situation (Lazarus & Folkman, as discussed by Wang et al., 2023 and Calandri et al., 2025). In this way, challenges turn into learning points in the class and not personal shortcomings.

From the participants' point of view, they emphasized that effective teaching requires continuous adjustment of beliefs and expectations. One participant stated, "It is necessary gyud ka mag-adjust pirmi ang mga teachers dili kay ang mga students ang mag adjust sa mga teachers." (P5, T2, L289) (*It is really necessary for teachers to keep adjusting, not for students to adjust to the teachers.*), highlighting a redefined sense of instructional responsibility. Another reflected, "Katong naka-realize ko nga dili gyud nako ma-achieve ang ideal sa tanan time, didto ko nag-adjust sa akong mindset." (P5, T3, L278) (*When I realized that I could not achieve the ideal all the time, that was when I adjusted my mindset.*), showing a shift toward more realistic professional expectations. Similarly, "...na-realize gyud nako nga dili pwede nga mao gihapon akong mindset." (P1, T2, L5) (*...I truly realized that I could not keep the same mindset anymore.*) demonstrates how lived classroom experiences trigger cognitive restructuring of teaching beliefs. These reflections align with studies showing that teachers' beliefs evolve when they encounter persistent classroom demands that require adaptive thinking and instructional flexibility (Woodcock et al., 2023; Aas et al., 2023).

The results show how cognitive reframing facilitates teachers to change their rigid perspectives on teaching to more flexible, context-specific beliefs. This is consistent with studies that have shown that emotion regulation strategies that focus on antecedents, like cognitive reappraisal, promote the well-being and effectiveness of teachers by altering

how stressors are understood (Wang et al., 2023). Teachers can keep students engaged, minimize stress, and stay committed to learning when they view difficulties as an integral part of learning and teaching.

In general, the cognitive reframing does appear as a basic adaptive process in inclusive education. It enables teachers to reconcile their expectations and reality in class, fight the tendency to blame themselves and build a more sustainable mindset. This aligns with the wider literature that emphasizes the importance of cognitive flexibility in the competence of inclusive teachers and in their sustainability as professionals (Calandri et al., 2025; Vantieghem et al., 2023).

Category 2 Reconstructing Teaching Perspectives

The participants explained that reconstructing their teaching perspectives is a learning process of refining their responding to classroom situations and professional presence in inclusive settings. This means to learn more deliberate reactions; to manage emotional reactions and rework their presence with learners. This is supported by recent literature as part of the emotional competence, as the skills of effective inclusive teachers are not only related to their instruction but also involve other aspects such as emotional regulation and sensitivity to the situation, which is built as a result of the experience (Aldrup et al., 2024; Calandri et al., 2025). Teachers move from reactive to more considered and reflective professional behaviour over time.

The participants highlighted two key dimensions of this reconstruction: reduced self-judgment and professional masking. One participant shared, “Karon, murag mo-stop ko gamay and then mo-think before mo-react.” (P3, T2, L212) (*Now, I pause for a moment and think before reacting.*), showing a developing capacity for self-regulation and reflective response. Another explained, “...as much as possible we will not show to our students kung unsa gyud atong gibati at that moment.” (P5, T2, L298) (*...as much as possible, we should not show to our students what we are really feeling at that moment.*), reflecting emotional management strategies used to maintain classroom stability. These experiences align with findings that teachers in inclusive settings gradually develop emotion regulation strategies that allow them to manage instructional demands while maintaining positive classroom interactions (Wang et al., 2023; Alarcón-Espinoza et al., 2024).

The findings indicate that reconstruction of teaching perspectives lies in refinement of both cognitive and emotional aspects in classroom practice. Teachers start to develop a more deliberate and purposeful way of teaching in which sensitivity to emotion and professional restraint are part of everyday teaching practice. This is consistent with evidence of strong relationships between teacher effectiveness in inclusive education and emotion regulation skills which are related to instructional clarity, classroom management, and teacher–student relationships (Aldrup et al., 2024).

In general, the reconstruction of teaching perspectives is a process of maturation of professional identity, based on the lived experience of classrooms. Teachers' exposure

to inclusive classroom demands leads to a more calm, thoughtful, and emotionally regulated teacher posture, fostering their capacity to effectively manage complex learning environments (Calandri et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023).

Theme 4 Developing Emotional Resilience

This theme captures the gradual evolution of emotional capacity and stability of teachers as they work in inclusive classrooms. It reflects the journey towards learning to be more patient, self-aware, and emotionally stable in the face of constant reminders of instructional pressures, behavioral issues, and classroom chaos. Emotional resilience is not something we are born with, it is something we learn and it develops and changes over time, depending on the teaching encounters we face each day.

From the stories of the participants, it suggest that resilience is a process that can only be nurtured by ongoing challenges to behaviour and teaching that test emotional control and perseverance. Teachers develop the ability to stay calm, cool and patient when facing recurring behaviour and classroom disruptions that impact not only individual students, but the whole class as well. This is consistent with research showing that inclusive classrooms are characterized by teachers needing to constantly regulate their emotions as a result of the behavioural complexity of the classroom and the unpredictable responses of the students (Wang et al., 2023; Calandri et al., 2025). In this context, resilience is very similar to the capacity to deal with emotional stress and maintain effectiveness in the classroom.

Participants also said that emotional resilience is enhanced by self-awareness and accepting limitations. They are more accepting of their own flaws and other's flaws over time thus reducing frustration and emotional exhaustion. This aligns with research that demonstrates the need for emotional competence in teachers for maintaining positive teacher–student relationships and continuing inclusive practices while facing continuous demands in the classroom (Aldrup et al., 2024; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Gu & Day, 2013).

Overall, the results indicate that experience, emotional regulation, and reflective adaptation make the process of developing emotional resilience a dynamic one. It helps teachers to stay calm in difficult classrooms, and sustain engagement in inclusive education. In line with recent literature, emotional resilience is an essential professional skill that helps teachers to handle behavioral complexity and keep their teaching stable and emotionally balanced (Wang et al., 2023; Calandri et al., 2025).

Category 1 Emotional Regulation

The participants referred to emotional regulation as an evolving ability to respond to emotions and meet the challenges of inclusive teaching. This means living with limitations, being humble and slowly improving patience at work and home. Emotional regulation is now seen as a key element of teacher emotional competence, arguing that it is essential for teachers to sustain instructional effectiveness and positive relationships

in the classroom in the face of emotional pressures and challenging learner needs (Calandri et al., 2025; Aldrup et al., 2024). It is not a set characteristic, but instead a constantly developing skill through ongoing classroom experience and reflection.

The participants emphasized acceptance and patience as key elements of their emotional regulation process. One participant shared, “Para sa ako, nakatabang gyud ang acceptance or humility.” (P5, T2, L313) (*For me, acceptance or humility really helped*), highlighting how embracing imperfections allows teachers to manage stress and reduce emotional pressure. Another stated, “Mas patient gyud ko karon not just sa students, but even outside the classroom.” (P1, T3, L17) (*I am much more patient now—not only with students, but even outside the classroom.*), showing how emotional regulation extends beyond instructional settings and influences overall personal behavior.

The results indicate that emotional regulation in inclusive education is closely related to acceptance, patience and emotional awareness. Gradually, teachers learn to manage their frustration and become more calm in response to classroom issues. This is in line with literature that shows how antecedent-based approaches like cognitive reappraisal and acceptance are more adaptive in reducing emotional exhaustion and enhancing instructional engagement (Wang et al., 2023).

In general, emotional regulation for inclusive teaching is an essential factor of protection and development. Helps teachers to stay calm in challenging emotional situations and practice patience, understanding, and resilience. In line with recent research, emotional regulation plays a major role in teacher effectiveness and ongoing involvement in inclusive education environments (Calandri et al., 2025; Aldrup et al., 2024).

Category 2 Self-awareness

Participants referred to self-awareness as an evolving process of critically reflecting on their own classroom behaviours, emotional reactions and expectations in inclusive classrooms. This requires an awareness of one's own limitations, modifications in instructional assumptions, and a greater awareness of the realities of both the teacher and the learner and how these affect classroom experiences. Self-awareness plays a fundamental role in teacher competence in inclusive education, as it helps teachers to examine and make purposeful adaptations to their practice that will increase their responsiveness to diverse learners (Raguindin & Li, 2025; Vantieghem et al., 2023).

The participants emphasized the importance of being mindful not only of students but also of themselves in the teaching process. One participant shared, “Be patient with your students and with yourself.” (P1, T3, L61), showing an emerging recognition that teacher well-being is essential in sustaining inclusive practice. Another stated, “I will not base lang sa ideal teaching but sa reality gyud sa classroom scenarios.” (P5, T3, L266) (*I will no longer base my teaching only on ideals, but on the actual realities of classroom scenarios.*), reflecting a shift toward grounding instructional decisions in lived classroom conditions rather than abstract expectations. These experiences align with studies

showing that teachers develop stronger inclusive competence when they critically reflect on their assumptions and align their practice with actual learner needs and classroom contexts (Woodcock et al., 2023; Aas et al., 2023).

The results indicate that self-awareness can help teachers connect the theory of "ideal teacher" and the actual situation in the classroom. In doing so, teachers become more realistic, flexible and responsive in making instructional decisions. This is consistent with studies that have shown that adaptive teaching requires self-awareness and reflective thinking and that this helps with ongoing professional learning and enhancing effectiveness in inclusive classrooms (Raguindin & Li, 2025; Kaloudis et al., 2025).

In conclusion, self-awareness plays a pivotal role in emotional well-being and career development. It allows teachers to recognise their own and contextual boundaries and stay committed to inclusive practice. In line with recent literature, self-awareness helps to enhance teacher adaptability and to develop more sustainable and context-aware teaching approaches in different learning contexts (Vantieghem et al., 2023; Woodcock et al., 2023).

Theme 5 Redefining Success in Inclusive Education

This theme reflects the process teachers use to build up their perception of what is successful teaching in inclusive classrooms. Teachers start to see success as being growth, participation, or meaningful learning experiences for diverse learners, rather than a perfect lesson, high compliance or uniform learner outcomes. This change is reflected in recent literature, which indicates that inclusive education must have a more flexible understanding of achievement, which takes into account learner progress alongside engagement and accessibility (Moriña, 2021; Leiva & Napa Valencia, 2025). This is an indication of the shift from product-oriented teaching to process-oriented educational thinking.

In all of the stories, success is no longer defined as complete classroom control or uniformity in learning. Rather, it is associated with small, but important, learner gains, a greater degree of engagement and an understanding of emotions in the classroom. Teachers realize that success in inclusive settings is not uniform, it is a process and it is personal. This is in line with the results of the study which show that inclusive education focuses on differences among learners and teachers' expectations must be adjusted based on individual learning pathways, flexible assessment, and differentiated instruction (Ici & Priyadi, 2025; Catama, 2024).

The participants also indicated that this redefinition is influenced by continuing exposure to classroom realities that question traditional performance-based norms. By the time teachers have had experience with different students' abilities and an unforeseen classroom environment, they eventually come to a conclusion about what constitutes successful learning. This developmental change is supported in the literature, which highlights that inclusive teaching approaches like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) instigate a rethinking of how educators value and measure success in practice as it

extends to include multiple means of engagement and expression (Craig et al., 2022; Catama, 2024).

In sum, a shift in professional attitude is seen in redefining success in inclusive education. Teachers shift from a prescriptive perspective of achievement towards a more human, flexible, and student-centred view of achievement. In line with recent research, this transition is indicative of a more equitable learning space that sees success as progression, participation, and ongoing development instead of uniform outcomes (Leiva & Napa Valencia, 2025; Moriña, 2021).

Category 1 Professional Communication

Professional communication was identified as a crucial support tool and mechanism that helps the participants to manage the requirements of inclusive teaching. This includes engaging with colleagues, consulting with others, and sharing ideas and knowledge to enhance instructional decisions and classroom management. Recent literature has focused on the importance of professional communication in the inclusive education practice, highlighting how it fosters collaboration, enhances teacher competence, and supports more responsive teaching practices in diverse classrooms (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Wakat et al., 2023). Teachers can use communication to diminish isolation and create common ground in relation to dealing with learner diversity.

The participants highlighted collaboration and collegial dialogue as central to their teaching practice. One participant shared, “Yes po... nakig-ask ko sa akong co-teachers.” (P4, T2, L251) (*Yes... I asked help from my co-teachers.*), showing reliance on collaborative learning to address instructional challenges. Another stated, “Also, kanang nakig-storya ko sa akong co-teachers.” (P3, T2, L202) (*Also, I talked with my co-teachers.*), reflecting the importance of continuous professional conversation in refining teaching strategies. These experiences align with findings that teacher collaboration and professional dialogue are critical in strengthening inclusive practices and improving classroom effectiveness (Donath et al., 2023; Strogilos, 2024).

The results indicate that professional communication is a practical and relational resource for teachers to facilitate informed decisions about their teaching. Collaborating with coworkers frequently provides teachers with experiences, strategies, and emotional support, which increases their ability to manage inclusive classrooms. This is consistent with the findings of research, which shows that cooperative communication supports reflection and enhances flexibility in teaching students with diverse needs in inclusive education (Ko et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Professional communication is a core aspect, overall, that needs to be maintained in the ongoing process of inclusive teaching. It helps teachers to co-construct knowledge, hone strategies, and gain professional confidence in the face of classroom challenges. As noted in the literature, collaboration and communication play an important role in teacher development and the successful implementation of inclusive education (Wakat et al., 2023; Donath et al., 2023).

Category 2 Sharing of Ideas

The sharing of ideas was seen as an ongoing collaborative process where teachers shared practical suggestions, classroom experiences and reflections, to enhance inclusive teaching practice. This includes implementation of colleagues' ideas, as well as, actively incorporating strategies into classroom instruction that are shared by colleagues. In recent literature, the sharing of pedagogical concepts has been emphasized as a valuable aspect of professional development for inclusive education, fostering flexibility in teaching and learning and enabling ongoing enhancement of materials and methods in inclusive education (Donath et al., 2023; Ko et al., 2023). Shared information helps teachers in flexible and informed ways to meet the needs of learners.

The participants emphasized collecting practical strategies from peers as a valuable part of their professional growth. One participant shared, "Also, practical advice like strategies nga gi-try pud nila." (P2, T2, L142) (*Also, practical advice like strategies that they themselves have tried.*), showing how experiential knowledge from colleagues contributes to instructional decision-making. Another reflected, "... naka-realize ko nga okay ra gyud kaayo magkamali, as long as willing ka mo-learn and i-correct ang mga sayop nga nabuhat before..." (P2, T3, L122) (*...I realized that it is really okay to make mistakes, as long as you are willing to learn and correct the mistakes you made before.*), highlighting the importance of openness to learning and continuous professional development. These experiences align with findings that collaborative professional learning encourages reflective thinking and supports teachers in refining their instructional approaches over time (Brennan & Gorman, 2023; Sánchez-García, 2023).

The results have indicated that through the exchange of ideas, teachers in inclusive education can be seen to have a culture of continuous learning. Teachers gain confidence to try out new techniques and strategies, and find creative solutions to problems in the classroom through a process of open sharing and reflective discussion. This is consistent with the literature which shows that professional learning communities stimulate teacher growth through collaborative reflection, innovation and ongoing pedagogical development (Donath et al., 2023; Ko et al., 2023).

In general, idea sharing is found to be a vital part of professional learning and instructional improvement. It will allow teachers to share their lessons learnt and make room for error as a learning process, as well as continuously improve their teaching skills. As several recent studies have confirmed, collaborative knowledge-sharing has a strong positive impact on inclusive education practices and sustains lifelong professional learning (Brennan & Gorman, 2023; Donath et al., 2023).

Category 3 Maturation in Teaching Perspective

The participants said that maturation in teaching perspective was the deepening of professional identity that developed through constant encountering of realities in inclusive classrooms. This means increasing self-awareness about personal limitations,

enhancing openness to learning, and changing the understanding of effective teaching. This shift in development is reflected in current literature, highlighting that teachers' competences in inclusive education are not static but are constantly developing; the development of competence is a process of reflection, experience and change in beliefs about teaching and learning (Vantieghem et al., 2023; Raguindin & Li, 2025). Teachers' professional development is a process whereby they progress towards more adaptable, learner-motivated and reflective teaching identities.

The participants highlighted a growing acceptance of imperfection and continuous learning as part of their professional growth. One participant shared, "Pero karon, murag open na ko nga naa gihapon ko'y kulang ug kinahanglan matun-an." (P3, T3, L147) (*But now, I am more open to the fact that I still have shortcomings and things I need to learn.*), reflecting a redefined teaching identity grounded in humility and openness. Another stated, "Kanang teacher nga dili lang mo-teach, but mo-understand gyud." (P1, T3, L55) (*A teacher who does not only teach, but truly understands.*), showing a shift toward a more empathetic and learner-centered conception of teaching. Similarly, "...this experience is teaching me how to be more patient and more understanding." (P4, T3, L195) highlights how lived classroom experiences contribute to professional growth and increased instructional flexibility. These findings align with studies showing that inclusive teaching development is strongly influenced by reflective practice and evolving teacher beliefs about learner diversity (Aas et al., 2023; Woodcock et al., 2023).

The results indicate that this maturation process of teaching perspective is a gradual shift from a performance identity toward a more reflective, adaptive and understanding identity. Teachers start to understand that being effective is not about being in control or perfect, it's about being responsive, understanding, and continually improving. This is in line with the literature, which shows that professional growth in inclusive education consists of growing self-efficacy, openness to change, and adaptation of instruction to the needs of the learner (Donath et al., 2023; Vantieghem et al., 2023).

On the whole, the maturation of teaching perspective is the comprehensive development of teachers' personality under the influence of practice, reflection and communication with students of different types. It emphasizes the concept that inclusive teaching competence is built up in an ongoing process of learning and emotional/ mental adjustments. This maturation process aligns with recent research, which indicates that such approaches result in better, more sustainable, empathetic and responsive teaching practices in inclusive education settings (Raguindin & Li, 2025; Woodcock et al., 2023).

Conclusions

The participants reported experiences of changing perspectives of instruction and instructional strains when describing their experiences in teaching learners with diverse needs in inclusive classrooms. Teachers' instructional pacing, instructional methods, and classroom reactions were always flexible to meet the needs of students with different abilities, behaviours, and capacities to learn. Their experiences underlined the need for flexibility, gentle correction, and supportive encouragement when working with the learner

to maintain his or her participation and engagement. Meanwhile, they faced behavioral issues, classroom complexities, emotional limitations, and physical fatigue. The management of repetitive behaviours, limited resources, emotional pressure and long hours of fatigue and stress mirrored the challenging and dynamic nature of inclusive teaching practice, in which teachers were constantly juggling teaching tasks and emotional and behavioural management. Teachers gradually started to be more flexible, patient and responsive in tackling classroom issues.

The participants have shown adaptive responses in dealing with the challenges they have faced in handling learners with diverse learning needs by changing the mindset of professionals and building emotional resilience. The teachers slowly moved away from a fixed frame of mind to become more flexible, reflective and learner-centred. They developed strategies to help them deal with challenges in the classroom by learning to regulate their emotions, be patient, and think about their circumstances in reflective ways. They discovered that handling the problems of the inclusive classroom took not only adaptation of classroom instruction, but maturity and emotional acceptance of imperfection, and a modification of expectations to fit the reality of the classroom. In the end, teachers came up with a new definition of success in inclusive education: "Understanding the learner, being patient, and preparing for ongoing professional development while continuing to have problems in the classroom."

In the process of interpreting their lived experiences in inclusive education, the participants discovered experiences of redefined success in inclusive education. Teachers were able to see success beyond just academic achievement and class control through understanding the learner, being flexible with the teaching and learning, engaging in professional communication, working collaboratively with other teachers, and being open to ongoing learning. Their experiences resulted in the experiencing of them being more professionally mature, emotionally resilient, and committed to inclusive education. Overall, inclusive teaching was given meaning when teachers had more adaptive attitudes and views, when they affirmed their own professional identity and when they understood that they were learning through persevering, co-working, and ongoing reflection.

Recommendations

1. For Non-SPED Teachers, that they may:

1.1 strengthen knowledge and skills in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and inclusive assessment strategies to better respond to diverse learner needs;

1.2 practice emotional regulation strategies such as cognitive reframing and mindfulness to manage stress and maintain classroom effectiveness; and

1.3 enhance communication skills for inclusive settings, particularly in explaining lessons clearly and collaborating with learners, parents, and support staff.

2. For School Administrators and Institutions, that they may:

- 2.1 provide sustained and structured training programs focused on inclusive education practices, classroom strategies, and learner diversity management;
- 2.2 reduce teacher workload by addressing large class sizes and ensuring manageable teacher–student ratios where possible;
- 2.3 strengthen school-based support systems such as mentoring programs, peer collaboration, and access to SPED specialists;
- 2.4 ensure availability of instructional materials, assistive resources, and flexible learning tools that support inclusive instruction; and
- 2.5 promote a supportive school culture that values teacher well-being, collaboration, and shared responsibility in inclusive education.

3. For Policymakers and Educational Authorities, that they may:

- 3.1 bridge the gap between inclusive education policies and classroom implementation through clearer, practice-based guidelines;
- 3.2 allocate sufficient funding for teacher training, instructional resources, and inclusive education support systems;
- 3.3 strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation in schools;
- 3.4 institutionalize continuous professional development programs that focus on inclusion, emotional competence, and adaptive teaching strategies; and
- 3.5 support policy initiatives that promote equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of learning needs.

4. For Teacher Education Institutions, that they may:

- 4.1 Integrate inclusive education as a core subject in pre-service teacher education programs;
- 4.2 Provide practicum experiences that expose student teachers to real inclusive classroom environments;
- 4.3 Develop training modules that strengthen communication skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive teaching strategies;
- 4.4 Encourage mentorship programs that connect pre-service teachers with experienced inclusive educators; and
- 4.5 Emphasize reflective practice as a fundamental teaching competence in all teacher preparation programs.

5. For Future Researchers, that they may:

- 5.1 conduct further studies involving larger samples and multiple school contexts to deepen understanding of inclusive education experiences;
- 5.2 explore the long-term effects of inclusive teaching practices on both teacher well-being and learner outcomes;
- 5.3 investigate the effectiveness of specific interventions such as professional development programs and mentoring systems; and
- 5.4 examine how emotional regulation, beliefs, and communication practices interact in shaping inclusive classroom success.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors confirm that this study was conducted in accordance with established ethical research standards. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were fully informed about the purpose of the study, procedures, and their rights as participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants, and all personal identifiers were removed from the data. All collected information was securely stored and accessed only for academic and research purposes, in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). The well-being, dignity, and rights of the participants were safeguarded at all stages of the study, and interview procedures were designed to minimize discomfort and ensure respectful engagement.

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exists in the conduct of this research. Plagiarism was strictly avoided through proper citation, careful paraphrasing, and adherence to academic writing standards. The interpretation of findings was conducted objectively and without bias, ensuring that results accurately reflect the participants' lived experiences. The results of this study were used solely for academic and research purposes. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used only as an assistive aid for language refinement, grammar correction, and structural editing. All intellectual content, including research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions, remained entirely the responsibility of the authors. The manuscript was carefully reviewed and checked for originality prior to submission to ensure academic integrity.

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