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PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON STRATEGIES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS FOR STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting inclusivity in teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds, with particular attention to the challenges they encountered, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the insights they developed from their experiences. The study was conducted among English teachers handling culturally diverse learners in selected private schools in Tagum City. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion and were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns across the participants' experiences. The findings revealed that promoting inclusivity in English instruction involves navigating interconnected cultural, linguistic, pedagogical, and social challenges. Teachers experienced difficulties in addressing cultural and contextual differences in classroom interactions and instruction, particularly when learners had varying linguistic backgrounds, levels of familiarity with local languages, and cultural experiences. These differences were accompanied by increased instructional demands, limited culturally inclusive teaching resources, and instances in which culturally diverse learners experienced social exclusion or disconnection from their peers and classroom environment. Despite these challenges, teachers responded by continuously developing their professional competence, strengthening cultural awareness, and adapting their language, instructional approaches, and classroom practices to accommodate diverse learner needs. They also emphasized building supportive teacher–student and peer relationships while sustaining inclusive practices through patience, reflection, and professional collaboration. The teachers' experiences further led them to recognize the need for responsive and inclusive pedagogical practices that place learners' diverse

backgrounds and needs at the center of instruction. This study was completed in August 2026.

Keywords: *Culturally Diverse Students, Inclusive Education, English Teachers, Language Teaching, Qualitative-Phenomenological Approach, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

In modern times, increasing global interconnectedness has contributed to greater cultural diversity in academic institutions, with learners bringing varied languages, dialects, identities, perspectives, and experiences. This diversity presents challenges for English teachers who must address learners' linguistic and cultural needs while fostering inclusive learning environments. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds may encounter linguistic, cultural, and personal barriers to language acquisition, while teachers may struggle to adapt instruction because of limited preparation in culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies. Without learning environments that recognize and value diversity, students may experience reduced self-esteem, belonging, and academic engagement.

Internationally, multicultural classrooms continue to face challenges related to cultural awareness, culturally relevant learning materials, and dominant cultural perspectives. In Malaysia, Hashim and Aris (2023) identified gaps in cultural awareness, unrelatable English learning content, and complications associated with dominant cultural perspectives. In Japan, biracial students, or "hafu," experience language-based discrimination and insufficient inclusive pedagogies, contributing to feelings of isolation and the privileging of monocultural and monolingual identities (Kimura, 2021). Similarly, in South Korea, students with one non-Korean parent encounter difficulties in English learning and feelings of alienation amid societal preferences for linguistic homogeneity (Kim, 2020). In the Philippines, culturally diverse students in Calamba, Laguna experience cultural mismatches, linguistic barriers, alienation, and discrimination, which may affect their classroom participation, peer relationships, and confidence (Camu, 2023).

In Tagum City, similar concerns are evident in private-school English classrooms, where teachers encounter difficulties addressing students' diverse cultural and linguistic needs. Predominantly Filipino-oriented learning materials and pedagogical practices may leave culturally diverse learners underrepresented, while limited teacher training in multicultural and inclusive approaches may constrain teachers' ability to develop culturally responsive lessons. These conditions can contribute to classroom disconnection and reduced student engagement.

Although studies have examined inclusive pedagogies (Kaur, 2024) and culturally responsive teaching (Mills, 2022), limited research has focused on the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting inclusivity among culturally diverse learners in language classrooms. This study addresses this gap through a phenomenological inquiry into the

strategies English teachers employ to foster inclusive, culturally responsive, and supportive learning environments.

The study is socially relevant because it may provide insights into addressing cultural and linguistic barriers, strengthening students' sense of belonging, and supporting teachers in developing practices that recognize diverse learner identities. It also contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, particularly Targets 4.5 and 4.7, by supporting equitable access to education and promoting inclusion, cultural diversity, global citizenship, and appreciation of differences.

To maximize its contribution, the findings were disseminated through submission of the completed thesis to the institution's graduate school library and presentation to school administrators, English teachers, and other language educators.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of English teachers in promoting inclusivity in language teaching for students with diverse cultural backgrounds?
2. How do English teachers cope with the challenges of promoting inclusivity in teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds?
3. What are the insights of English teachers in promoting inclusivity in teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds that can be shared with others?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and strategies of English teachers in promoting inclusivity among students with diverse cultural backgrounds. The study was conducted across three private schools in Tagum City. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the following criteria: (1) at least five years of English teaching experience, (2) firsthand experience teaching culturally diverse learners, including biracial and ethnic students, and (3) current employment as an English teacher in a private institution in Tagum City. A total of 14 English teachers participated, comprising seven participants in individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) and seven participants in focus group discussions (FGDs).

Data were gathered through semi-structured IDIs and FGDs using an open-ended interview guide designed to elicit participants' experiences, challenges, and strategies in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners. The researcher served as interviewer, FGD moderator, recorder, transcriber, translator, and primary data analyst. Interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded with participants' consent, supplemented by notes on relevant non-verbal observations, and transcribed verbatim. Local dialects and non-standard English expressions were translated into standard English while preserving their intended meaning.

Data collection followed ethical procedures, beginning with ethics clearance, institutional endorsements, and authorization from participating school heads. Participants received an Information and Consent Form and a Data Privacy Notice and were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, confidentiality, and right to withdraw. Data were securely stored, anonymized through participant codes, and retained for three years in accordance with institutional regulations.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) cited in Morin et al. (2021). The process involved familiarization with the transcripts, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Coding and clustering were used to organize participants' experiences, challenges, strategies, and insights into themes grounded in the research data.

The scope of the study was limited to English teachers from private schools in Tagum City who had at least five years of teaching experience and firsthand experience with culturally diverse learners. Teachers with five years or less experience in culturally diverse settings, non-English teachers, and teachers outside private institutions in Tagum City were excluded. Thus, the findings are situated within the experiences of qualified English teachers in the selected private-school context and are not intended to represent teachers in other educational settings or locations.

RESULTS

Table 1
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Lived Experiences of English Teachers in Promoting Inclusivity in Teaching Students with Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Confronting Cultural and Contextual Differences in English Instruction	● recognizing diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds among learners ● encountering difficulties in relating Philippine-centered examples to biracial students' experiences ● experiencing students' feelings of being different or out of place ● addressing cultural misunderstandings arising from differing norms and perspectives ● avoiding unintended disrespect and tension caused by limited cultural awareness
	● encountering language barriers among students with diverse linguistic backgrounds

Encountering Linguistic Challenges in Culturally Diverse English Classrooms	• struggling to select appropriate languages for classroom instruction • experiencing difficulties in understanding lessons, instructions, and examples • confronting meaning loss and contextual differences during translation • facing communication gaps between linguistically diverse learners and their peers
Experiencing Increased Demands in Inclusive English Teaching	• adjusting teaching approaches to accommodate diverse cultural and linguistic needs • struggling to develop appropriate strategies for individual learners • increasing preparation and modification of instructional materials • managing additional time and energy demands in inclusive teaching • experiencing heightened workload and personal strain
Facing Limitations in Culturally Inclusive Instructional Resources	• encountering shortages of culturally diverse instructional materials • confronting Philippine-centered content that limits cultural representation • struggling to locate appropriate resources for culturally diverse learners • expending additional effort to develop and source inclusive materials • managing increased instructional demands caused by resource limitations
Experiencing Social Exclusion and Disconnection among Culturally Diverse Learners	• encountering discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and cultural differences • experiencing feelings of inferiority and non-belonging • withdrawing from classroom participation and social interaction • facing judgment and hesitation in expressing ideas • encountering isolation and communication divides among classmates

Table 2
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanisms of English Teachers in Promoting Inclusivity in Teaching Students with Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Strengthening Teaching Competence through Continuous Professional Growth	● engaging in continuous learning to enhance inclusive pedagogical skills and teaching competence ● acquiring new knowledge and instructional strategies through training, seminars, and workshops ● applying professional learning and reflective practice to improve inclusive teaching effectiveness ● demonstrating openness to feedback, adaptive strategies, and continuous improvement ● preparing holistically by understanding learners, managing workload, and sustaining teaching readiness
Promoting Cultural Awareness and Responsive Inclusive Practices	● demonstrating cultural sensitivity and mindfulness in language use and classroom interactions ● acquiring and integrating cultural knowledge to support inclusive and responsive teaching ● understanding students' cultural backgrounds to reduce barriers and promote inclusion ● demonstrating empathy, open-mindedness, and respect for diverse perspectives and identities ● connecting lessons to students' cultural experiences to enhance participation and comprehension
Applying Linguistic and Instructional Adaptations for Inclusive Learning	● implementing linguistic accommodation strategies, including code-switching, to support comprehension ● using English as the primary medium while strategically integrating students' first language ● adapting teaching strategies and using differentiated instruction to address diverse learning needs

	● implementing student-centered approaches to enhance engagement and participation ● integrating technology and interactive strategies to support inclusive and engaging learning environments
Building Supportive and Inclusive Learning Relationships	● encouraging participation, self-expression, and valuing diverse student voices ● establishing trust and positive rapport to enhance engagement and motivation ● creating a safe and non-discriminatory classroom environment through mutual respect ● maintaining open communication with parents and colleagues to support student inclusion ● promoting collaborative learning to enhance peer support and shared learning experiences
Sustaining Inclusive Teaching through Patience, Reflection, and Professional Collaboration	● engaging in reflective and adaptive teaching practices to address diverse classroom challenges ● exercising patience and valuing students' gradual progress in learning ● recognizing student progress as a source of motivation and professional fulfillment ● collaborating with colleagues and seeking institutional support to improve inclusive practices

Table 3
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of English Teachers in Promoting Inclusivity in Teaching Students with Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Major Themes	Core Ideas
	● adapt instruction based on diverse learner needs ● implement inclusive, multimodal, and student-centered teaching strategies

Implement Responsive and Inclusive Pedagogical Practices	● utilize flexible and inclusive language practices to support understanding ● design differentiated and responsive assessment and learning opportunities ● integrate technology and strategic preparation to enhance inclusive instruction
Establish a Learner-Centered Classroom Environment	● establish a safe, respectful, and inclusive classroom environment ● value and embrace cultural and learner diversity ● promote student voice, participation, and self-expression ● build meaningful relationships and classroom connections ● prioritize meaningful communication over grammatical perfection
Integrate Culturally-Responsive Strategies	● develop cultural awareness to enhance teaching and communication ● acquire and apply cultural and linguistic knowledge in instruction ● understand learners' backgrounds to inform responsive pedagogy ● integrate culturally responsive and inclusive practices in teaching ● engage in continuous learning to strengthen cultural competence
Cultivate Reflective Teacher Mindset	● adopt an inclusive, reflective, and growth-oriented mindset ● demonstrate commitment, intentionality, and responsibility in inclusive teaching ● cultivate a positive disposition toward diversity and inclusion ● reconceptualize language teaching as communication, connection, and identity-building ● recognize the complexity of inclusive teaching and respond to holistic learner needs
	● collaborate with colleagues to enhance inclusive teaching practices ● seek and share professional knowledge, resources, and strategies

Promote Professional Collaboration and Support	● engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative problem-solving ● utilize collaboration to support workload, well-being, and professional growth ● advocate for institutional support through training, resources, policies, and leadership support

DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of English Teachers in Promoting Inclusivity in Teaching Students with Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Confronting Cultural and Contextual Differences in English Instruction

The findings reveal that culturally diverse English classrooms present challenges arising from differences in learners' cultural, religious, ethnic, and experiential backgrounds. Philippine-centered content, examples, humor, and classroom practices may be difficult for biracial and culturally diverse learners to relate to, potentially affecting their engagement and sense of belonging (Caingcoy, 2023; Pervaiz & Tatlah, 2025). Cultural misunderstandings may also occur when teachers and learners interpret behaviors, words, and interactions according to different cultural norms, highlighting the need for teachers to develop greater cultural awareness (Karami, 2021). Thus, culturally responsive English instruction requires more than incorporating diverse content; it involves recognizing learners' cultural and linguistic realities, anticipating possible misunderstandings, and creating opportunities for mutual understanding (Rusu, 2022; Putera & Akid, 2022). Without adequate cultural awareness and representation, some learners may remain academically present while feeling socially and culturally disconnected.

Encountering Linguistic Challenges in Culturally Diverse English Classrooms

The findings reveal that linguistic diversity presents a significant challenge to inclusive English instruction because differences in learners' proficiency and familiarity with English, Filipino, and Bisaya affect how teachers communicate lessons, instructions, examples, and classroom interactions. Teachers experienced the need to continuously negotiate language choices because using local languages may support the majority of learners while limiting access for those unfamiliar with them, whereas relying solely on English may disadvantage learners with limited English proficiency (Thapa & Upadhayaya, 2026). These linguistic differences also contribute to misunderstanding because learners interpret classroom language through their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge (Rossiter, 2022), highlighting the need for responsive language practices in linguistically diverse classrooms (Heikkola et al., 2022). Moreover, teachers observed that translating local expressions, idioms, jokes, and culturally embedded

meanings into English may result in meaning loss because communication is shaped not only by words but also by cultural context (Shukhratovna & Kizi, 2025). Such difficulties may further create communication gaps and restrict classroom participation and peer interaction, particularly among learners who are less familiar with the languages used by their classmates (Thohri, 2024).

Experiencing Increased Demands in Inclusive English Teaching

The findings reveal that inclusive English teaching places additional demands on teachers as they continuously adjust instructional approaches, develop learner-responsive strategies, modify materials, and devote additional time and energy to addressing diverse cultural and linguistic needs. Participants emphasized that standardized approaches are often insufficient, requiring teachers to closely observe learners and make ongoing pedagogical decisions based on their individual circumstances, consistent with the adaptive nature of inclusive teaching described by Devaki (2025) and the importance of teacher responsiveness highlighted by Saulon and Espiritu (2025). These demands also extend to revising instructional resources and preparing supplementary activities when existing materials do not adequately represent or accommodate culturally diverse learners, adding to teachers' existing curricular, assessment, and administrative responsibilities. As noted by Adu-Boateng and Goodnough (2021), teachers may experience tension between responsive instruction, curriculum requirements, and limited time, while sustained professional demands may contribute to fatigue and affect the continuity of instructional practices (Strutyńska, 2022).

Facing Limitations in Culturally Inclusive Instructional Resources

The findings reveal that the availability, cultural representation, and appropriateness of instructional resources remain important constraints in implementing culturally inclusive English instruction. Participants reported a scarcity of materials representing diverse cultural experiences, with many existing books, modules, presentations, and examples predominantly centered on the Philippine context. While Philippine contextualization supports local relevance, limited representation of other cultures may make it difficult for culturally diverse learners to connect meaningfully with classroom content, highlighting the need for resources that recognize varied learner experiences (Basnet, 2024; Emeklioğlu & Balkır, 2025). Teachers consequently had to search for, evaluate, modify, and supplement existing materials, often using online sources, which transferred part of the responsibility for developing culturally responsive resources to individual teachers and increased their preparation demands. This reflects the need for institutional structures and resources that support teachers in addressing learner diversity rather than placing the responsibility solely on individual educators (Abellán & Abellán, 2026). Moreover, resource limitations extend beyond instructional content to classroom activities and assessment tasks, as teachers must examine whether these provide equitable opportunities for learners from different cultural backgrounds. Overall, the findings indicate that culturally inclusive instruction requires broader and more representative learning resources that balance Philippine contextualization with diverse cultural perspectives while supporting equitable teaching and assessment practices.

Experiencing Social Exclusion and Disconnection among Culturally Diverse Learners

The findings reveal that cultural and linguistic diversity may create social barriers that affect learners' sense of belonging, participation, and peer interaction, particularly when differences in race, ethnicity, language, and cultural background become associated with discrimination, judgment, inferiority, hesitation, isolation, and communication divides. Participants' experiences suggest that inclusion extends beyond physical presence and academic access, as culturally diverse learners may remain socially disconnected when they feel different or lack opportunities to build meaningful relationships with classmates. Discrimination and perceived difference can weaken students' sense of belonging (Taff & Clifton, 2022; Doan & Russel, 2022), while fear of negative judgment may cause learners to hesitate in speaking, participating in discussions, or interacting with peers (Anichamalar & Dhureshavar, 2025). Language can also function as a social marker that shapes students' confidence, peer relationships, and willingness to participate (Syafitri et al., 2025), particularly when learners struggle to understand local jokes, expressions, or informal conversations that facilitate peer connections (Moore & Ferrario, 2022). Overall, the findings indicate that culturally inclusive education must address both instructional and interpersonal dimensions by fostering classroom environments where diverse learners feel accepted, respected, and able to participate meaningfully despite differences in language and cultural background (Aswad & Wirentake, 2023; Kanwar & Adhikari, 2023).

Coping Mechanisms of English Teachers in Promoting Inclusivity in Teaching Students with Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Strengthening Teaching Competence Through Continuous Professional Growth

The findings reveal that English teachers cope with the demands of inclusive teaching by strengthening their professional competence through continuous learning, reflective practice, feedback, and holistic preparation. Participants viewed professional development through trainings, seminars, workshops, and further studies as essential for acquiring updated knowledge and context-responsive strategies that enable them to move beyond standardized approaches and address diverse learner needs (Vilvar, 2026). Reflection further allows teachers to evaluate their classroom experiences, identify effective and ineffective practices, and make informed instructional adjustments, reinforcing the view that professional competence develops through continuous engagement with actual teaching experiences (Ferencová et al., 2024). Feedback and collaboration with colleagues, mentors, and supervisors likewise provide opportunities to reassess practices, exchange practical solutions, and strengthen the consistent implementation of inclusive strategies (Li, 2025). The findings also emphasize that sustaining inclusive teaching requires holistic preparation, including cognitive, physical, emotional, and mental readiness, as well as resilience and self-regulation in managing workload and diverse learner needs (Zhang & Tian, 2024; Baatz & Wirzberger, 2025).

Promoting Cultural Awareness and Responsive Inclusive Practices

The findings reveal that English teachers cope with the demands of inclusive teaching by strengthening cultural awareness and integrating culturally responsive practices into instruction. Increased attentiveness to learners' cultural backgrounds enables teachers to communicate more deliberately, recognize differences in how expressions and examples may be interpreted, and minimize misunderstandings and exclusion (Calandri et al., 2025). Teachers also make continuous efforts to understand learners' experiences, values, and perspectives so they can contextualize lessons and incorporate diverse cultural references that make learning more relevant and meaningful (Barrett, 2025). Beyond instructional adjustments, empathy, open-mindedness, and respect for diversity help teachers respond thoughtfully to differences and foster positive teacher–student relationships (McAllister & Irvine, 2023). The findings further indicate that connecting lessons to students' cultural backgrounds and presenting multiple perspectives can improve comprehension while validating learners' identities and strengthening their sense of belonging (Caingcoy, 2023).

Applying Linguistic and Instructional Adaptations for Inclusive Learning

The findings reveal that English teachers cope with linguistic and instructional challenges by deliberately adapting their teaching practices to accommodate differences in learners' language proficiency, abilities, and learning needs. Strategic code-switching serves as a linguistic accommodation that allows teachers to maintain English as the primary medium while selectively using learners' first languages to clarify meaning, reduce comprehension barriers, and support participation (Bhatti et al., 2025; Al-musthofa & D'Angelo, 2024). Differentiated instruction likewise enables teachers to modify activities, tasks, and approaches according to learners' varied abilities and engagement levels, providing multiple pathways for accessing and participating in learning (Moallemi, 2023). Student-centered strategies further encourage learners to communicate, express ideas, and interact with peers, while continuous monitoring allows teachers to adjust instruction according to students' immediate responses and comprehension (Khair & Satriawan, 2025; Treve, 2024). The use of technology and interactive activities also provides alternative ways of presenting information and engaging learners with different learning preferences (Cohen & McIntyre, 2024).

Building Supportive and Inclusive Learning Relationships

The findings reveal that English teachers cope with the demands of inclusive teaching by intentionally building supportive and inclusive relationships through trust, respect, open communication, and collaboration within the classroom and wider school community. Establishing a safe and nonjudgmental classroom environment encourages culturally and linguistically diverse learners to express ideas, take communicative risks, and participate more confidently (Wagh, 2023), while promoting equitable participation and respect helps establish classroom norms that value diversity (Siegel-Stechler, 2023). Teachers also encourage perspective-taking and dialogue to address cultural differences and transform potential misunderstandings into opportunities for mutual learning and respect

(Hernández & Darling-Hammond, 2022). These relational practices extend beyond the classroom through communication with parents and collaboration with colleagues, enabling teachers to coordinate support and share strategies for responding to diverse learner needs (Guberina, 2023; Tampubolon et al., 2023). Likewise, collaborative learning activities strengthen peer relationships by providing opportunities for students to recognize one another's strengths, build connections, and participate collectively in learning (Kebede et al., 2024).

Sustaining Inclusive Teaching Through Patience, Reflection, And Professional Collaboration

The findings reveal that English teachers sustain inclusive teaching through patience, reflection, flexibility, resilience, ethical responsibility, and professional collaboration, which function as interconnected long-term coping strategies in diverse classroom contexts. Reflection enables teachers to critically examine classroom experiences, identify areas for improvement, and adjust instructional strategies according to learners' needs, supporting a more adaptive and accountable approach to teaching (Cole et al., 2022; Kantawala, 2023). Patience allows teachers to recognize gradual progress in learners' confidence and participation, helping sustain motivation when immediate outcomes are not evident (Cañoso, 2025). Teachers likewise demonstrate resilience and ethical commitment by maintaining fairness, respect, and professionalism while managing instructional difficulties, workload pressures, and diverse learner needs (Macabenta et al., 2023; Cloma et al., 2025). Professional collaboration further strengthens these practices by providing opportunities to share experiences, seek guidance, exchange strategies, and receive constructive feedback from colleagues and administrators (Zorde & Lapidot-Lefler, 2025; Toews & Zagona, 2022).

Insights of English Teachers in Promoting Inclusivity in Teaching Students with Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Implement Responsive and Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

The findings reveal that English teachers view responsive and inclusive pedagogical practices as essential to addressing learner diversity by grounding instructional decisions in students' backgrounds, needs, learning behaviors, and levels of participation. Rather than relying on rigid methods, teachers adjust their strategies based on their understanding of learners and their shared learning goals, promoting a more cohesive and learner-centered classroom (Lapidot-Lefler, 2025; Tjernberg & Forsling, 2023). The use of multisensory and multimodal approaches, together with flexible language practices such as code-switching, vocabulary scaffolding, and contextual translation, provides multiple pathways for accessing content and communicating meaning (Vishwakarma & Kapil, 2026; Parra & Proctor, 2022; Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2022). The findings further emphasize that inclusive teaching requires prioritizing equity rather than uniformity by providing differentiated resources and support according to learners' specific needs (Subba & Gotamey, 2022). Technology and innovative instructional approaches also

expand opportunities for engagement and accessibility by offering varied ways of presenting content and facilitating participation (Mayasari et al., 2025; Zou et al., 2025).

Establish a Learner-Centered Classroom Environment

The findings reveal that English teachers view an inclusive and equitable learning environment as a foundation for effective language teaching, recognizing that students' sense of safety, respect, belonging, and trust shapes their willingness to participate and communicate. Teachers therefore strive to create emotionally safe classrooms where learners can express ideas without fear of judgment, particularly those who may feel hesitant because of linguistic or cultural differences (Al-Barakat et al., 2025). They also promote acceptance of diverse cultural and linguistic identities, moving beyond mere tolerance toward practices that affirm and value differences while reducing marginalization (Ashrafova, 2024). Valuing student voice further enables teachers to understand learners' experiences and use their perspectives to inform responsive instructional decisions (Scarparolo & MacKinnon, 2022), while empathy, approachability, and consistent support strengthen teacher–student trust and sustained participation (Liu et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022). The findings also indicate that emphasizing meaning-making over immediate grammatical correction provides learners with greater freedom to communicate, experiment with language, and develop communicative competence without fear of criticism (Marmouta et al., 2025; Tran, 2025).

Integrate Culturally-Responsive Strategies

The findings reveal that English teachers view cultural competence and responsive understanding as foundational to inclusive language teaching, shaping how they interpret learners' identities, design instruction, and respond to diverse classroom needs. Rather than being limited to knowledge about different cultures, cultural competence is understood as an evolving capacity developed through continuous learning, reflection, and engagement with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Understanding learners' identities, beliefs, and lived experiences enables teachers to align instructional content with students' realities, making lessons more relevant, accessible, and engaging (Gulzar et al., 2024; Mehta, 2024). Teachers further develop this competence by researching students' backgrounds, engaging with diverse perspectives, and incorporating culturally relevant texts, allowing them to move beyond assumptions toward a more informed understanding of cultural diversity (Eden et al., 2024). This knowledge is then translated into deliberate pedagogical decisions, including careful language use, culturally appropriate material selection, differentiated instruction, and the creation of safe and respectful learning environments (Haniko et al., 2024; Wang, 2024; Ituma, 2025). Through these practices, cultural awareness becomes an active component of instructional decision-making that promotes meaningful participation and equitable learning opportunities.

Cultivate Reflective Teacher Mindset

The findings reveal that English teachers view a reflective and inclusive teacher mindset as a foundational dimension of effective inclusive language teaching, shaping not only their instructional practices but also their beliefs, dispositions, and relationships with learners. This mindset is characterized by openness, adaptability, continuous learning, and a commitment to equity, enabling teachers to view classroom challenges and instructional shortcomings as opportunities for professional growth rather than as failures (Page et al., 2025; Laine & Tirri, 2023). Teachers also recognize learners as individuals with distinct needs, experiences, and learning trajectories, leading them to move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and develop more responsive and meaningful learning experiences (Yoshida et al., 2023; Salvante & Estera, 2026). Reflection further strengthens this orientation by allowing teachers to reassess instructional decisions, evaluate classroom outcomes, and continuously refine their practices in response to changing learner needs (Faerm & Quinn, 2023; Ferreira, 2022). Beyond pedagogical adjustment, the findings emphasize the emotional and relational dimensions of this mindset, as empathy, genuine care, and recognition of students' identities help teachers establish relationships in which learners feel acknowledged, respected, and valued (Calandri et al., 2025). Consequently, language teaching is understood not merely as the transmission of linguistic knowledge but as a communicative and relational process that fosters connection, belonging, and meaningful interaction (Atkinson et al., 2025).

Promote Professional Collaboration and Support

The findings reveal that English teachers view professional collaboration and institutional support as essential foundations for sustaining inclusive teaching, emphasizing that addressing learner diversity is not an individual responsibility but a collective undertaking involving teachers, school leaders, and the broader educational community. Collaboration among teachers provides opportunities to exchange strategies, reflect on classroom experiences, receive feedback, and co-construct practical knowledge for responding to diverse learner needs (Cojorn & Sonsupap, 2024; Aslan et al., 2022). Such collegial support also helps teachers share responsibilities, manage instructional demands, and reduce professional stress, strengthening their capacity to sustain inclusive practices over time (Zorde & Lapidot-Lefler, 2025). At the institutional level, professional development opportunities such as trainings and seminars equip teachers with knowledge and skills for addressing learner diversity, while adequate resources and inclusive policies provide the structures and direction necessary for translating these principles into classroom practice (Tuerah, 2025; Pinki, 2025). Leadership support further contributes to an enabling school environment in which inclusive practices are prioritized and sustained, while sufficient preparation time allows teachers to thoughtfully adapt instruction to learners' varied needs (Wang & Dapat, 2024; Chow et al., 2024).

Conclusions

The study concludes that promoting inclusivity in English language teaching for students with diverse cultural backgrounds is a complex, continuous, and context-responsive

process shaped by teachers' experiences, adaptive practices, and professional understandings. Teachers encountered challenges arising from cultural and contextual differences, linguistic diversity, increased instructional demands, limitations in culturally inclusive resources, and social exclusion or disconnection among learners. These experiences demonstrate that cultural diversity extends beyond differences in students' backgrounds, as it also shapes how learners understand instructional content, communicate, participate in classroom activities, and develop a sense of belonging. At the same time, these challenges provided teachers with opportunities to reconsider their practices and develop greater responsiveness to the varied needs and experiences of their learners.

In navigating these challenges, teachers demonstrated that inclusive teaching requires continuous professional growth, cultural awareness, linguistic and instructional adaptation, supportive relationships, and sustained reflection, patience, and resilience. They strengthened their competence through professional development, collaboration, feedback, and reflective practice while making deliberate efforts to understand learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers also adapted their language use, instructional strategies, learning materials, activities, and forms of support to make learning more accessible and meaningful to diverse learners. Building respectful and supportive relationships further enabled teachers to establish classroom environments where students could participate, communicate, and interact without fear of judgment or exclusion. These practices illustrate that inclusive teaching is not dependent on a fixed set of strategies but requires teachers to continually assess classroom realities and adjust their practices according to learners' needs.

The findings further establish that inclusive English teaching is grounded in responsive pedagogy, equitable learning environments, cultural competence, reflective teacher dispositions, and professional collaboration. Teachers recognize that meaningful inclusion requires more than acknowledging cultural differences; it involves understanding students' identities and lived experiences, valuing their voices, creating emotionally safe spaces, and ensuring equitable opportunities to participate and learn. Cultural competence is therefore understood as an ongoing process through which teachers expand their understanding of diverse learners, reflect on their assumptions, and translate cultural knowledge into appropriate instructional decisions. Similarly, a reflective teacher mindset enables educators to view challenges as opportunities for learning and refinement, while empathy and genuine care strengthen the relational dimension of language teaching.

The findings also emphasize that inclusive education cannot be sustained through individual teacher effort alone. Professional collaboration and institutional support provide important conditions for teachers to sustain responsive practices by enabling the exchange of knowledge and strategies, access to professional development, adequate instructional resources, supportive policies, leadership, and sufficient preparation time. Inclusive teaching consequently emerges as a shared responsibility in which teachers, colleagues, school leaders, and educational institutions contribute to creating conditions that support diverse learners.

Recommendations

This study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of English teachers as they deal with the challenges of promoting inclusivity among students with diverse cultural backgrounds. The findings highlight the strategies, challenges, reflections, and professional experiences that shape teachers' efforts to create responsive and inclusive learning environments. Nevertheless, the study also reveals areas that warrant further investigation to deepen understanding of inclusive language teaching and address aspects that extend beyond the scope of the present inquiry. These areas provide opportunities for future research to examine inclusive teaching practices from broader perspectives and across varied educational contexts.

First, future researchers may consider conducting quantitative or mixed-methods studies to complement the qualitative findings of this research. Such approaches can measure the extent, effectiveness, and impact of inclusive practices on student outcomes, thereby providing a broader empirical basis for educational decision-making.

Second, similar studies may be conducted in different educational contexts, such as public schools, rural settings, or international institutions, to examine how contextual variables influence inclusive teaching practices. Comparative studies may also provide deeper insights into how inclusivity is enacted across varying socio-cultural and institutional environments.

Third, future research may focus on students' perspectives on inclusive teaching practices. Understanding how learners perceive inclusivity, cultural representation, and classroom support can provide a more holistic view of the teaching-learning process and validate the effectiveness of teachers' strategies.

Fourth, researchers may explore specific dimensions of inclusive pedagogy in greater depth, such as translanguaging practices, culturally responsive teaching, or the role of technology in inclusive education. Narrowing the scope to a single variable or phenomenon may yield more detailed and nuanced findings.

Fifth, longitudinal studies may be conducted to examine the long-term development of teachers' inclusive practices and professional growth. This would provide insight into how teachers sustain inclusivity over time and how their beliefs and practices evolve through experience.

Sixth, future researchers may investigate the role of institutional leadership and policy implementation in supporting inclusive education. This includes examining how school policies, administrative support, and organizational culture influence teachers' capacity to implement inclusive practices effectively.

Lastly, further studies may explore teacher well-being and resilience in inclusive education, particularly in relation to workload, emotional demands, and professional

sustainability. Understanding these factors is crucial in ensuring that inclusive teaching practices are not only effective but also sustainable over time.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researchers declare that the study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles and research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement, and they were fully informed of their rights, including their freedom to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were strictly maintained, and appropriate measures were observed to protect their personal information in compliance with applicable data privacy principles. The researchers also ensured that the well-being, dignity, and rights of all participants were safeguarded throughout the research process. No conflict of interest existed in the conduct of the study, and the researchers maintained integrity and objectivity in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings, with no intentional bias introduced into the research process. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct were strictly avoided, and all sources and ideas derived from other works were properly acknowledged. The findings were reported truthfully and were used solely for academic and research purposes. Furthermore, artificial intelligence tools were used, where applicable, only as research and writing support, and such use is fully disclosed in accordance with institutional requirements and principles of research transparency and integrity.

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