INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

ISSN(print): 2643-9840, ISSN(online): 2643-9875

Volume 09 Issue 10 October 2026

DOI: 10.47191/ijmra/v9-i10-42, Impact Factor: 8.685

Page No. 7022-7034

Bridging Diversity in Learning: Lived Experiences of Teachers Handling Students with Special Needs in Mainstream Classrooms

Rosemarie T. Mallari[1], Dr. Samboy G. Nabor[2]

[1,2]University of Perpetual Help System Dalta – Las Piñas

ABSTRACT: This study examined the lived experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms at Holy Cross Colleges, Inc. Pampanga during the 2026–2027 school year. Anchored in Husserlian descriptive phenomenology and informed by Social Cognitive Theory and Social Constructivist Theory, the study described how nine purposively selected teachers experienced, responded to, and made meaning of teaching learners with special needs without specialized preparation. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and field notes and analyzed using Colaizzi's method, involving the extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and clustering of themes into a synthesized essential structure. Four themes emerged: Thrown Into Inclusion: Teaching Without a Map, describing participants' unplanned, unsupported entry into inclusive teaching; Reading the Signs: Identifying and Managing Crisis in the Classroom, capturing their reliance on sustained observation and the hidden emotional labor of crisis response; Crafting a Classroom That Fits: Individualized and Relational Pedagogy, describing instructional strategies built through trial and adjustment; and It Takes a School: Collaboration, Gaps, and Shared Responsibility, documenting the collaborative networks and institutional gaps participants navigated. Together, these themes revealed that teaching a student with special needs in a mainstream classroom was experienced as a largely unassisted process of improvisation, sustainable only when a supportive relational and institutional network was present or actively built by the teacher. These findings informed the Teacher Inclusive Practice and Support Framework, proposed as the study's practical output, with implications for classroom practice, institutional policy, and future research on inclusive education.

KEYWORDS: descriptive phenomenology, inclusive education, mainstream classrooms, teachers' lived experiences, Teacher Inclusive Practice and Support Framework

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has increasingly become an important principle in contemporary education, emphasizing that learners, regardless of ability, disability, or learning needs, should have equitable opportunities to participate and learn in educational settings. Globally, inclusive education has shifted the focus of schooling from simply placing learners with disabilities in regular classrooms toward creating learning environments that recognize learner diversity, remove barriers to participation, and provide appropriate support. UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that inclusion cannot be realized without teachers who are prepared to teach all learners and who possess the values, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to respond to learner diversity. This shift places teachers in a central position because the success of inclusion depends substantially on how teachers understand learner diversity and respond to the different academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs present in their classrooms.

Within mainstream classrooms, teachers are expected to provide meaningful learning opportunities for learners with diverse abilities while simultaneously addressing the needs of the class as a whole. This responsibility may require teachers to modify instructional strategies, differentiate learning activities, adjust classroom routines, respond to behavioral concerns, and establish supportive relationships with learners. Republic Act No. 11650 (2022) defines inclusive education as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of learners through accommodation, modification, adaptation, and individualization in content, approaches, structures, and strategies. The law further recognizes the importance of empowering teachers through training and equipping them with capabilities related to the identification, referral, and provision of appropriate interventions for learners with disabilities. Thus, inclusive education requires not only the placement of learners in mainstream classrooms but also appropriate classroom practices and support systems.

Although inclusive education can promote participation, belonging, interaction, and equitable educational opportunities, its implementation may also create challenges for teachers, particularly when appropriate training, instructional resources, preparation time, and professional support are limited. UNESCO (2020) reported that teachers may demonstrate commitment to inclusion while simultaneously expressing concerns about their preparedness and the capacity of education systems to support them. The report further emphasizes that teacher preparation for inclusive education should be treated as a core component of teacher education and professional development rather than as a specialized concern limited to particular teachers.

The experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms have therefore become an important area of educational inquiry. Teachers may experience uncertainty when initially handling learners with special needs, particularly when their previous preparation has focused primarily on general education. At the same time, repeated classroom experiences may contribute to the development of adaptability, patience, confidence, empathy, and new ways of understanding learner diversity. Recent phenomenological research involving teachers in inclusive settings has documented both challenges and positive professional experiences, including instructional adaptation, collaboration, emotional demands, empathy, flexibility, and professional growth (Fajardo et al., 2025; Francia & Siy, 2024; Miña, 2024; Pancito, 2024). These experiences are not limited to instructional practices; they may also influence teachers' professional identities, relationships with learners, perceptions of inclusion, and understanding of their responsibilities as educators.

In the Philippine context, inclusive education is supported by national policies that promote the provision of appropriate educational opportunities and support for learners with disabilities. Republic Act No. 11650, or the Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act, strengthened the country's policy direction by establishing a comprehensive framework for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in the general education system. The law applies the policy of inclusion to both public and private schools and provides for reasonable accommodations, support and related services, individualized education plans, Inclusive Learning Resource Centers, and training for teachers and other school personnel (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). These provisions demonstrate that inclusive education is not solely a classroom responsibility but a shared responsibility requiring coordinated support from schools, families, government agencies, and other stakeholders.

However, the presence of policies does not automatically guarantee uniform implementation at the classroom level. Recent national evidence demonstrates continuing gaps in the delivery of support for learners with disabilities. The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II, 2025) reported that approximately 75% of enrolled learners with disabilities were mainstreamed into general education classes, while 60% lacked access to any special needs education resource at their school, such as a special needs education program, SPED center, Inclusive Learning Resource Center, or special needs education teacher. The report further noted that only 32% of enrolled learners with disabilities had a special needs education teacher assigned to their school. These findings indicate that many learners with disabilities are being educated in general education classrooms where regular teachers may have to respond to specialized learning needs with limited access to specialized personnel and resources.

The situation highlights the importance of understanding the experiences of mainstream classroom teachers. When specialized support is limited, teachers may need to negotiate competing demands, modify their instructional approaches, manage classroom behavior, collaborate with colleagues and families, and respond to individual learning differences. EDCOM II (2025) emphasized the need for increased training, resources, and funding to address implementation gaps in inclusive education. Similarly, Republic Act No. 11650 (2022) recognizes the importance of providing training and continuing education for teachers, including teachers in private schools, to strengthen their capacity to serve learners with disabilities.

The current phenomenon in mainstream classrooms therefore involves more than the formal inclusion of students with special needs. It also involves the everyday experiences of teachers who translate inclusive education policies and principles into actual classroom practices. Teachers may encounter instructional challenges, behavioral concerns, workload pressures, communication difficulties, and emotional demands while simultaneously attempting to create a supportive learning environment for all students. At the same time, their experiences may be shaped by relationships with learners, colleagues, school administrators, parents, and other professionals. Understanding these experiences requires attention not only to what teachers do but also to how they experience, perceive, interpret, and make sense of their everyday encounters with learners with special needs.

Existing literature has documented several challenges associated with inclusive education, including inadequate professional preparation, limited resources, classroom management concerns, workload, and difficulties in differentiated instruction. Other studies have highlighted teacher resilience, professional growth, collaboration, and the development of adaptive teaching practices (Fajardo et al., 2025; Francia & Siy, 2024; Miña, 2024; Pancito, 2024). However, much of the broader literature has examined inclusion through measures of teacher attitudes, preparedness, competencies, or implementation. Such

approaches provide useful information about particular aspects of inclusive education but may not fully capture the personal meanings, emotions, reflections, relationships, and everyday realities of teachers who directly experience inclusive classroom practice.

A particular gap remains in understanding the lived experiences of mainstream classroom teachers in private basic education institutions in Pampanga. While teachers in inclusive settings may encounter challenges similar to those reported in other educational contexts, the institutional environment, available support, learner characteristics, school culture, and professional expectations may shape how those experiences are understood and managed. Existing phenomenological studies in the Philippines have provided valuable insights into the experiences of teachers involved in inclusive education; however, the experiences of mainstream classroom teachers within a private basic education context in Pampanga remain insufficiently explored. There is therefore a need for a context-specific phenomenological inquiry that allows teachers to describe their experiences in their own words and enables the researcher to identify the essential structure and meaning of the phenomenon.

The present study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms at Holy Cross Colleges, Inc. Pampanga. Rather than measuring teachers' competency or preparedness, the study seeks to understand how teachers experience inclusion, what challenges they encounter, how they respond to those challenges, what forms of support and relationships they experience, and what meanings they derive from their experiences. Through descriptive phenomenology, the study will preserve the participants' descriptions and seek to understand the essence of the phenomenon as consciously experienced by the teachers.

The study is also relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The study is likewise consistent with the broader national aspirations expressed in AmBisyon Natin 2040, which envisions a Philippines in which Filipinos experience a strongly rooted, comfortable, and secure life and in which development planning promotes improvements in quality of life (National Economic and Development Authority, 2016). Inclusive and equitable access to quality education contributes to these broader aspirations by supporting the participation and development of learners with diverse needs.

The study is further relevant to current Philippine education reforms. The implementation of Republic Act No. 11650 requires sustained attention to teacher preparation, support services, instructional resources, individualized educational planning, and collaboration among education stakeholders. The findings of EDCOM II (2025) further demonstrate that policy implementation requires attention to the actual conditions experienced within schools and classrooms. Examining teachers' firsthand experiences can therefore contribute to a better understanding of the practical realities surrounding inclusive education and the forms of support that teachers may need.

The practical value of the study lies in generating a context-sensitive basis for a proposed Teacher Inclusive Practice and Support Framework. The proposed output is intended to translate the participants' lived experiences into practical areas for teacher support, professional development, classroom adaptation, collaboration, and institutional assistance. It is not intended to prescribe a universal intervention but to provide a contextual framework grounded in the experiences and meanings expressed by teachers participating in the study.

Thus, the study seeks to give voice to teachers whose experiences are central to the implementation of inclusive education. By understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it directly, the research may contribute to more responsive classroom practices, stronger institutional support, improved teacher preparation, and more meaningful implementation of inclusive education. More importantly, it recognizes that inclusive education is not achieved solely through policy mandates or the placement of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms; it is experienced and enacted daily through the interactions, decisions, adaptations, relationships, and reflections of teachers and the broader school community.

Research Question

This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study seeks to explore and describe the lived experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. Guided by Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, the study aims to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives and identify the essential meanings and structure of their experiences.

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms?

   Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

2. How do teachers describe their experiences of handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms?

3. What challenges do teachers experience while addressing the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students with special needs?
4. How do teachers describe the ways they respond to and manage the challenges they encounter in inclusive classrooms?
5. What experiences do teachers describe regarding the support, resources, and collaboration available to them in handling students with special needs?
6. What meanings do teachers attribute to their experiences of teaching students with special needs in mainstream classrooms?
7. How do teachers describe the ways these experiences influence their understanding of themselves and their roles as educators?
8. What essential structure or essence of the phenomenon can be derived from the shared experiences of the participants?

II. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the lived experiences of basic education teachers who have direct experience handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms at Holy Cross Colleges, Inc. Pampanga. It will employ a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design to explore teachers' experiences, challenges, responses, support systems, meanings, and reflections concerning inclusive classroom practice.

Approximately nine teachers will be purposively selected based on established inclusion criteria. The number may be adjusted depending on data saturation. Participants must be currently employed as basic education teachers in the institution, have direct experience teaching students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, and be willing to participate in an in-depth interview. The study will focus exclusively on teachers' experiences. Students with special needs, parents, school administrators, and special education professionals will not serve as participants. Their perspectives are acknowledged as relevant to inclusive education but are beyond the delimitations of the present phenomenological inquiry.

Data will primarily be generated through semi-structured in-depth interviews supplemented by researcher field notes and observations where appropriate. The study will not measure teacher competency, preparedness, attitudes, effectiveness, or relationships among variables through statistical procedures. It will likewise not establish causal relationships or statistically generalize the findings to other institutions. Data collection is proposed to take place during September to October 2026, subject to institutional approval and participant availability, within School Year 2026–2027. The findings will therefore represent the experiences shared by participants during the specified period.

As a phenomenological study, the purpose is depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. The resulting insights and proposed framework will be contextually grounded in the participants' experiences and may serve as a reference for similar educational settings.

FRAMEWORK

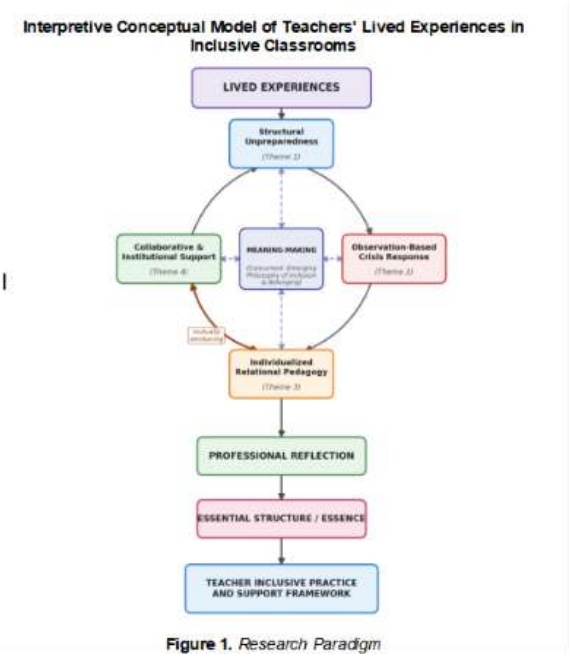


Figure 1. *Research Paradigm*

The research paradigm began with the lived experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. These experiences included direct classroom encounters, challenges, relationships, and forms of support.

Teachers were expected to respond to these experiences along four interrelated dimensions: an initial condition of unpreparedness for the demands of inclusive teaching, an observation-based process of identifying and responding to a learner's needs and behavioral or safety crises, an individualized and relational approach to instruction, and a collaborative and institutional network that a teacher had to locate or help construct. Consistent with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, in which personal factors, behavior, and environmental conditions were understood to interact reciprocally rather than in a single causal direction, and with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, in which learning and adaptation were mediated through ongoing social interaction, these four dimensions were not framed as independent or parallel categories of response. They were instead depicted as sequentially and reciprocally related, forming a cycle in which each dimension shaped, and was reshaped by, the others, with individualized instructional adaptation and collaborative support expected to function as particularly mutually reinforcing responses to the initial condition of unpreparedness rather than as separate ones.

At the center of this cycle, and consistent with the phenomenological premise that meaning was constituted within lived experience itself rather than only through a later, separate act of reflection, teachers' meaning-making, their evolving philosophy of inclusion and belonging, was framed as developing concurrently with, and continuously feeding back into, each of the four dimensions rather than as a stage reached only after all four had been addressed. Through this continuous process, the phenomenological analysis then sought to identify the essential structure or essence of the phenomenon shared across participants.

The essential structure served as the experiential basis for the proposed Teacher Inclusive Practice and Support Framework. The framework was not predetermined before data analysis. Rather, it was developed from the findings and reflected the practical needs and insights that emerged from the participants' lived experiences.

Research Design

This study will employ a qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design grounded in Edmund Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology is concerned with describing individuals' conscious experiences of a particular phenomenon and identifying the essential meaning or structure of those experiences. It is appropriate when researchers seek to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals who have directly experienced it.

The phenomenon investigated in this study is the experience of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. The study does not seek to measure teachers' competency, preparedness, attitudes, or effectiveness. Instead, it seeks to understand how teachers experience inclusive classroom practice, the challenges they encounter, how they respond to those experiences, and the meanings they attribute to them.

A phenomenological design is more appropriate than a case study because the primary focus is not the bounded institutional case of Holy Cross Colleges, Inc. Pampanga but the common experience of teachers who have directly encountered the phenomenon. It is also distinct from ethnography because the study does not aim to examine the culture of a particular group over an extended period. The focus is the essence and meaning of the teachers' lived experiences.

The study will follow Husserl's principle of bracketing or epoché, in which the researcher consciously identifies and sets aside preconceived assumptions regarding inclusive education to remain attentive to the participants' descriptions. The study will use Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method to systematically analyze the participants' narratives and develop a description of the essential structure of the phenomenon.

The research questions are aligned with the phenomenological design by asking participants to describe their experiences, challenges, responses, support systems, meanings, and reflections. Thus, the design, research questions, data generation, and analysis are directly connected to the purpose of understanding the lived experience of teachers in mainstream inclusive classrooms.

Role of The Researcher and Reflexivity

In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data generation, interpretation, and analysis. The researcher will establish rapport with participants, conduct the semi-structured interviews, document observations and field notes, transcribe and organize the data, identify significant statements, and analyze the participants' descriptions using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Method.

Because the researcher is directly involved in the interpretation of participants' experiences, reflexivity will be maintained throughout the research process. The researcher will acknowledge personal assumptions, prior knowledge, beliefs, and expectations concerning inclusive education and teachers handling students with special needs.

Consistent with Husserlian descriptive phenomenology, the researcher will practice bracketing or epoché by consciously identifying preconceived assumptions before and during data generation and analysis. A reflexive journal will be maintained to document the researcher's thoughts, assumptions, methodological decisions, and possible influences on the interpretation of data.

The researcher will also maintain an audit trail documenting major methodological decisions, interview procedures, coding activities, revisions, and analytical processes. These procedures are intended to ensure that the findings remain grounded primarily in the participants' descriptions rather than in the researcher's personal assumptions.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data will be analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method, which provides a systematic procedure for describing the meaning and essential structure of participants' lived experiences.

Step 1: Familiarization with the Data. The researcher will read and reread the interview transcripts to become deeply familiar with the participants' descriptions. Audio recordings will be reviewed alongside transcripts to ensure that the participants' narratives are accurately understood.

Step 2: Identifying Significant Statements. Statements directly related to the phenomenon of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms will be identified and extracted from the transcripts. These statements will serve as the primary experiential evidence for the analysis.

Step 3: Formulating Meanings. The researcher will examine each significant statement and formulate meanings that remain closely grounded in the participants' descriptions. The researcher will avoid imposing preconceived explanations on the statements.

Step 4: Organizing Formulated Meanings into Theme Clusters. Related formulated meanings will be grouped into clusters. These clusters will be compared across participants to identify similarities, differences, and recurring experiential patterns.

Step 5: Developing an Exhaustive Description. The researcher will integrate all relevant theme clusters into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. The exhaustive description will incorporate the different dimensions of teachers' lived experiences.

Step 6: Producing the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon. The exhaustive description will be condensed into a concise statement describing the fundamental structure or essence of the teachers' lived experience of handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms.

Step 7: Validation of the Findings with Participants. The synthesized findings may be returned to participants for validation or member checking. Participants will be invited to confirm whether the description accurately represents their experiences. Any relevant clarification or correction will be considered in refining the final description.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher will maintain a reflexive journal and audit trail to document analytical decisions. The final themes and essential structure will be grounded in the participants' firsthand accounts rather than predetermined categories derived from quantitative variables.

Statistical Treatment

The study will establish trustworthiness using the four criteria of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility will be strengthened through prolonged engagement with the data, repeated reading of transcripts, member checking, and peer or expert debriefing. The researcher will ensure that participants' descriptions are accurately represented and that interpretations remain grounded in the data.

Transferability. Transferability will be supported through thick description of the research context, participants' relevant characteristics, data-generation procedures, and the circumstances surrounding the phenomenon. Providing sufficient contextual information will allow readers to determine whether the findings may be relevant to comparable educational settings.

Dependability. Dependability will be established through an audit trail documenting the research design, participant selection, interview procedures, transcription, coding, theme development, and methodological decisions. Consistency in the implementation of the research procedures will also be maintained.

Confirmability. Confirmability will be supported through reflexive journaling, documentation of analytical decisions, preservation of original interview transcripts, and peer or expert review when appropriate. These procedures will help demonstrate that the findings emerge from the participants' narratives rather than from the researcher's personal preferences or assumptions.

Triangulation may also be employed by comparing interview accounts with researcher field notes and observations when appropriate. The purpose of triangulation will be to enrich contextual understanding rather than to statistically verify participants' responses.

Together, these strategies will strengthen the rigor and trustworthiness of the phenomenological inquiry.

III. RESULTS

This chapter presents data from semi-structured interviews with nine teachers on their experiences with students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. It begins with participants' background profiles, in both tabular and narrative forms, to contextualize the subsequent analysis. The study's qualitative analysis organized participants' verbatim responses into axial codes, which clustered into formulated meanings reflecting collective experiences and challenges. These meanings were further categorized into sub-themes and four major themes. The chapter discusses these themes with supporting excerpts, highlighting both commonalities and individual differences in how teachers perceive and manage teaching students with special needs.

Table 1.
Background Profile of the Teacher-Participants

Code	Educational Background	Grade Level	Length of Experience in Teaching
CHS	BSEd, Major in Science (not a graduate of BSNEd / Special Education)	JHS/SHS	Has handled SEN learners since her first year of teaching
JS	BSEd, Major in Math	Grade 7	~25 SEN learners
AC	BEEd (Bachelor of Elementary Education), generalist – not a major in Special Education	Grade 5	At least 1–2 years in her current post at the time of first becoming aware of learners with special needs
AC2	BEEd (Bachelor of Elementary Education)	Elementary	1–2 years
FT	BEEd (Bachelor of Elementary Education)	BEEd (Bachelor of Elementary Education),	3 years
AMC	BEEd (Bachelor of Elementary Education), Major in General Education	Elementary.	At least 2 years in a previous post, plus the current school year
KMC	BEEd (Bachelor of Elementary Education), Major in General Education	Elementary.	2 years in teaching (novice teacher)
EE	BSEd, Major in English major.	Grade 7 (advisory/English class)	4 years
RN	BSEd, Major in English major.	Grade 9	5 years

Analysis of the interview data, building on the axial coding and formulated-meaning clustering completed in the earlier stages of analysis, revealed four emergent themes describing how the nine teacher-participants experienced teaching learners with special needs within mainstream classrooms. These themes were derived from recurring patterns of meaning across the eighteen formulated-meaning clusters that were, in turn, distilled from the significant experiences and axial codes identified across all seven sections of the interview. Each theme contains sub-themes that capture more specific categories within the larger pattern.

Table 2.
Summary of Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme No.	Emergent Theme	Sub-Themes	Central Descriptive Meaning
Theme 1	**Thrown Into Inclusion: Teaching Without a Map**	• Unplanned entry and lack of formal preparation • Learning to teach through lived experience • An emerging philosophy of inclusion and belonging	Teachers take on the education of learners with special needs largely without formal special-education preparation. Lacking a map, they lean on personal conviction and accumulated experience to slowly build both the practical skill and the inclusive philosophy that formal training did not give them.
Theme 2	**Reading the Signs: Identifying and Managing Crisis in the Classroom**	• Observation as the primary tool for identifying special needs • Confronting intense behavioral and safety crises • The hidden emotional labor of teachers	Because they work without diagnostic tools or specialist backup, teachers become close observers of behavior who must recognize warning signs, respond to real behavioral and safety crises, and absorb the emotional toll of doing so.
Theme 3	**Crafting a Classroom That Fits: Individualized and Relational Pedagogy**	• Differentiating instruction through trial and observation • Small wins, big meaning: motivation and recognition • The constant balancing act between one and the many	At the instructional core of inclusion is a continuous, relational balancing act: adapting lessons to fit each learner, using recognition and small wins to sustain motivation, and weighing one learner's needs against the whole class's.
Theme 4	**It Takes a School: Collaboration, Gaps, and Shared Responsibility**	• Classmates as everyday partners in inclusion • Parents as allies and sources of friction • Institutional support networks and their limits • Calling for systemic change and shared ownership	Successful inclusion depends on a web of relationships with classmates, parents, guidance counselors, administrators, and colleagues, and teachers consistently point out that where this web is thin, in resources or shared responsibility, inclusion suffers and should be strengthened school-wide.

This theme describes the participants' entry into the practice of teaching learners with special needs, an entry that was, for nearly all of them, unplanned and unsupported by formal special-education preparation. Several participants described stepping into inclusive classrooms because of school policy, because a learner was simply assigned to their section, or because their own sense of professional responsibility would not let them turn a learner away. Regardless of the path, the starting point was largely the same: a teacher trained for a "regular" or "typical" classroom, suddenly required to serve a learner whose needs that training had not covered.

The sub-themes under this theme are unplanned entry and lack of formal preparation, learning to teach through lived experience, and an emerging philosophy of inclusion and belonging. Together, these sub-themes trace a single arc across the participants' narratives: teachers who began this work with fear, self-doubt, or simple unfamiliarity gradually built, through years of direct exposure rather than coursework, both a working competence and a personal conviction about what inclusion actually requires.

Integration of Participant Voices

Across the four themes, the nine participants collectively constructed inclusion as a process of entering unprepared, learning to observe and respond to crisis, individualizing instruction through continuous trial and adjustment, and depending on a wider network of classmates, parents, and colleagues to sustain the work. Their accounts converged on the idea that teaching learners with special needs in a mainstream classroom was not a specialized assignment layered neatly on top of ordinary teaching; it reshaped how they identified need, how they planned and delivered instruction, how they managed their own emotional composure, and how they related to the people around a given learner.

The participants showed strong convergence in several areas. First, nearly all described their entry into this work as unplanned and unsupported by specialized training, whether framed as a mismatch between their degree and their assignment, a school-wide inclusion policy, or simply the reality of an early teaching career. Second, in the absence of formal diagnostic tools, careful observation of behavior was consistently the mechanism by which a learner's needs were first identified, and consultation with the guidance counselor or the parent was the consistent next step. Third, participants agreed that instruction had to be individualized through ongoing observation and adjustment rather than a single accommodation decided once, and that recognition and small visible progress mattered enormously to a learner's motivation. Fourth, participants converged on collaboration with classmates, parents, and colleagues as necessary rather than optional, and several independently arrived at the same recommendation that this responsibility should be shared school-wide rather than carried by one teacher.

At the same time, participant voices showed clear variation in where their experience placed the greatest weight. CHS emphasized the tension between her lack of specialized training and her strong personal conviction toward inclusion, along with the risk of teacher burnout when support is not shared. JS placed particular weight on the sheer volume of cases she had handled by her own estimate around twenty-five students and on the discreet, ongoing balancing of individual and class-wide instruction that volume required. AC emphasized the gradual, multi-year development of her own awareness and the friction that could arise even from a well-intentioned parent relationship. AC2 centered her account almost entirely on one sustained, high-intensity case, from an initial act of self-restraint against pitying the learner through a modular-learning arrangement negotiated with his parents. FT, whose responses were comparatively brief, foregrounded her school's formal inclusion policy and its structured incident-response protocol following a safety incident. AMC emphasized the compounding difficulty of managing three learners with special needs at once without training, and the direct financial cost of self-funding learning materials. KMC, the least experienced participant, emphasized how quickly and how early in her career learner diversity confronted her, alongside a strong emerging belief that every learner's needs are individual. EE emphasized the most acute safety crises in the dataset, a self-harm incident and repeated elopement episodes and the classmates and administrators who helped her manage them. RN emphasized the deliberate, moment-to-moment techniques she used to include a learner without singling him out, and the specific resource gap of not having a speech or learning-support specialist available.

The integration of participant voices also reveals a pattern of movement. Participants first encountered a learner with special needs largely unprepared, then developed the observational skill and emotional composure needed to recognize and respond to crisis, then built, through trial and continuous adjustment, an individualized way of teaching that learner without neglecting the rest of the class, and finally located and, where it was lacking, called for the collaborative and institutional support needed to sustain that work over time. This integrated pattern shows that, for these nine teachers, inclusion was not a single skill acquired once. It was an ongoing, relational process shaped by observation, experience, collaboration, and a steadily deepening personal conviction about what genuine inclusion requires.

This chapter presents a synthesis of the study's findings, the conclusions drawn from the analysis and interpretation of the lived experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, and the recommendations that follow from them. It integrates insights from the preceding chapters, the central research question and seven corollary questions, the theoretical and conceptual framework, the four emergent theme, and the analytical and theoretical interpretation, to articulate the overall contribution of this study to theory, practice, and policy concerning inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. The chapter also presents the Teacher Inclusive Practice and Support Framework, the study's proposed practical output, and discusses its implications for professional practice, institutional policy, and future research.

The findings of this study, drawn from the four emergent themes presented in Chapter 4 and the essential structure interpreted in Chapter 5, are summarized below in relation to each of the seven corollary questions that guided this inquiry.

1. Unplanned, Unsupported Entry into Inclusive Teaching. In response to Corollary Question 1, concerning how teachers describe their experiences of handling students with special needs, the participants' accounts converged on an entry into this work that was largely unplanned and unsupported by formal special-education preparation, whether prompted by a school-wide inclusion policy, the incidental placement of a learner in their section, or their own sense of professional responsibility. As documented under Thrown Into Inclusion: Teaching Without a Map, this initial uncertainty gave way, over time and through sustained direct exposure rather than coursework, to a working competence and a settled personal conviction that inclusion means adapting one's teaching to the learner rather than expecting the learner to meet a fixed standard.
2. Observation-Based Identification and the Hidden Cost of Crisis Response. In response to Corollary Question 2, concerning the challenges teachers encounter in addressing the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students with special needs, the findings presented under Reading the Signs: Identifying and Managing Crisis in the Classroom show that, without diagnostic tools or an on-site specialist, participants had to rely on their own sustained observation to first suspect and then confirm a learner's needs, and were typically the first, and often only, adult available to respond when a learner's distress escalated into aggression, self-harm, or flight, at times, as several participants recounted, at real physical risk to themselves. This work exacted a largely invisible emotional cost, including fear, self-doubt, and the acknowledged risk of burnout, compounded, as shown under Crafting a Classroom That Fits, by the continuous, day-to-day difficulty of individualizing instruction for one learner without shortchanging the instructional needs of the rest of the class.
3. Reactive, Trial-and-Observation-Based Individualized Pedagogy. In response to Corollary Question 3, concerning how teachers respond to and manage these challenges, participants described developing individualized instructional strategies largely through their own trial and observation rather than through any predetermined model, using small, deliberate moments of recognition and praise to sustain a learner's motivation, and discreetly dividing their attention to protect both a specific learner's safety and the instructional pace of the whole class. These responses, documented under Theme 3, were rarely settled in advance; they were continuously revisited and adjusted as a specific learner's needs became clearer.
4. A Necessary but Uneven Network of Collaborative Support. In response to Corollary Question 4, concerning teachers' experiences of support, resources, and collaboration, the findings under It Takes a School: Collaboration, Gaps, and Shared Responsibility show that participants depended on a network of classmates, parents, guidance counselors, administrators, and colleagues to sustain their work, with classmates functioning, once deliberately oriented, as genuine everyday partners in inclusion and parents functioning, depending on the case, as either valued allies or a recurring source of friction. At the same time, participants consistently identified gaps in this network, schools structured primarily for learners without special needs, inconsistent access to specialized materials or personnel, and, in some accounts, personally financed learning materials, and closed by recommending that this responsibility be shared more systematically across the whole school community rather than left to the individual subject teacher or adviser.
5. An Emerging Philosophy of Inclusion and Belonging. In response to Corollary Question 5, concerning the meanings teachers attribute to their experiences, participants derived from this work an emerging philosophy of inclusion and belonging: a conviction that a learner with special needs deserves the same opportunity to participate and be valued as any other student, arrived at not through formal study but through the accumulated experience documented across all four themes. For most participants, this meaning-making coexisted with real difficulty rather than following only after it was resolved, consistent with the duality identified in Chapter 5.
6. Growth in Confidence and Expanded Professional Identity. In response to Corollary Question 6, concerning how these experiences influence teachers' understanding of themselves and their professional roles, participants described a shift

from initial fear and self-doubt toward increasing confidence and an expanded sense of professional responsibility that extended well beyond instruction, encompassing observation, crisis response, and the active cultivation of a support network. Several participants explicitly measured this growth against their own earlier selves, describing what once felt overwhelming as comparatively manageable after sustained practice.

7. An Essential Structure of Unassisted Improvisation Moving Toward Sustainability. Finally, in response to Corollary Question 7, concerning the essential structure of the phenomenon derived from the participants' shared experiences, Chapter 5 concluded that teaching a student with special needs in a mainstream classroom is experienced, for these nine participants, as a largely unassisted process of improvisation that becomes sustainable, rather than precarious, only to the extent that a supportive relational and institutional network is present or is actively built by the teacher herself. This essential structure is not the sum of four independent themes but the single underlying pattern that their directional, reinforcing, and hierarchical interrelationship, analyzed in Chapter 5, reveals, and it provides the experiential foundation for the conclusions, and for the practical output, presented in the remainder of this chapter.

Taken together, these seven sets of findings indicate that the central research question guiding this study, concerning the lived experiences of teachers handling students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, cannot be adequately answered by any single corollary question in isolation. Rather, the participants' descriptions of their experience, the challenges they encountered, their responses, the support available to them, and the meanings they derived are best understood as interconnected facets of the single essential structure summarized above, a structure that in turn grounds the conclusions and the practical output presented in the remainder of this chapter.

Based on the synthesis of findings presented above and their alignment with the literature reviewed, the study concludes the following:

1. Inclusive teaching in this setting is initiated by circumstance rather than by prior preparation. None of the nine participants entered the practice of teaching students with special needs through a deliberate choice grounded in specialized training; entry was instead prompted by institutional policy, incidental section assignment, or personal conviction. This pattern held across every participant regardless of subject area, grade level, or years in service, confirming that the absence of specialized preparation upon entry is not an isolated circumstance but a structural feature of how these nine teachers came to their present responsibilities, and that the gap between the number of learners with special needs enrolled in mainstream sections and the number of personnel formally trained or designated to support them is experienced directly, and repeatedly, at the level of the individual classroom.
2. In the absence of specialist support, classroom teachers function as de facto first responders to behavioral and safety crises. Participants' accounts of intervening in incidents ranging from aggression and self-harm to a learner running from the classroom demonstrate that identification and crisis management, ordinarily the responsibility of specialized personnel, defaulted to the classroom teacher. This responsibility was not formally assigned to participants by their institutions; it was assumed in the moment, out of necessity, by whichever teacher happened to be present, revealing a specific, embodied cost, including physical risk and sustained emotional labor, that this responsibility carries for teachers without formal preparation to bear it.
3. Individualized, relational pedagogy is developed reactively, through sustained trial and observation, rather than supplied through prior training or a predetermined model. The strategies participants described, breaking tasks into smaller steps, offering alternative means of communication, calibrating the difficulty of a question to a learner's demonstrated capability, were arrived at through iterative adjustment rather than applied from an existing framework. Participants also described such strategies as inherently learner-specific: what succeeded with one learner frequently failed with another, requiring the same trial-and-observation process to be repeated rather than applied once and reused, so that competence built with one learner did not straightforwardly transfer to the next.
4. Collaboration, more than training alone, determines whether inclusive teaching is experienced as sustainable or as precarious. Participants whose cases were supported by a functioning network of classmates, parents, and colleagues described their experience in markedly more manageable terms than participants whose collaborative relationships were thin or had stalled. This distinction indicates that closing the training gap identified throughout this study, while necessary, may not by itself be sufficient without a corresponding relational and institutional network, and it carries direct significance for the practical output presented later in this chapter, which treats collaboration as a distinct domain of support rather than as a byproduct of training.

5. Classmates constitute an active, and largely underrecognized, layer of inclusive support. Where discussions of inclusive education's support structures tend to focus on the teacher, the specialist, or the institution as the principal agents of support, the present findings show that peers, once deliberately oriented and prepared by the teacher, function as genuine partners in behavioral support, tutoring, and the everyday inclusion of a learner with special needs, a dimension of the phenomenon that this study's participant-level focus was able to surface. This conclusion suggests that any account of this school's inclusive support structures remains incomplete if it considers only adult stakeholders.
6. The coexistence of difficulty and professional fulfillment in participants' accounts reflects a single developmental process rather than two separate outcomes. Rather than describing inclusive teaching as either simply burdensome or simply rewarding, participants' accounts placed both qualities within the same underlying cycle of unpreparedness, accumulated competence, and collaborative support, with a participant's position within that cycle at the time of the interview shaping whether the experience read as fulfilling or strained. This finding indicates that inclusive classroom experience, at least as these nine participants lived it, resists a simple positive or negative classification and is better understood as a single trajectory observed at different points.
7. Policy commitments to inclusive education have not yet been matched by consistent classroom-level implementation, including within private basic education institutions. National policy explicitly recognizes the importance of teacher training and institutional support for learners with disabilities, yet the present findings, drawn from a private institution rather than the public-school settings most directly examined in existing national assessments, indicate that this gap in training, resources, and specialized personnel persists regardless of school type. This conclusion does not diminish the genuine commitment to inclusion that every participant in this study demonstrated; it indicates instead that translating policy intent into consistent classroom-level support remains an unfinished task even where individual teachers have already accepted the underlying responsibility. It further suggests that the private status of the institution studied here offered participants no practical advantage in the specific respects this study examined, training, referral access, and specialized personnel, and that policy attention premised on public-school need alone may be overlooking a comparable, and comparably unmet, need in the private sector.

Based on the findings and delimitations of this study, future research may consider the following directions:

1. Comparative Research Across Public and Private School Settings. Because this study was delimited to nine teachers at a single private basic education institution, future studies could examine whether the four emergent themes and the essential structure they compose recur similarly among teachers in public schools, where EDCOM II (2025) has documented related but not identical patterns of resource and personnel gaps, and among teachers in other private institutions with different resource levels, to determine which features of the essential structure identified here are context-specific and which appear to hold more generally.
2. Longitudinal Research on Teacher Self-Efficacy and Collaboration. A longitudinal design following teachers across multiple school years could clarify how the self-efficacy development suggested by Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) interacts over time with the specific collaborative conditions identified under It Takes a School, addressing a developmental question that this study's single data-collection period during School Year 2026–2027 could only describe retrospectively through participants' recollection rather than observe as it unfolded.
3. Triangulated, Mixed-Methods Investigation of Classroom Practice. Because this study relied primarily on semi-structured interviews supplemented by researcher field notes, future research could incorporate structured classroom observation or documentary analysis of institutional records, such as incident reports and individualized learning plans, alongside interviews, strengthening triangulation beyond the procedure and providing an additional vantage point on the individualized strategies and crisis-response practices participants described.
4. Evaluation of the Teacher Inclusive Practice and Support Framework. Building on the framework proposed in this chapter, subsequent studies could design and evaluate a pilot implementation of one or more of its four domains within a participating institution, assessing feasibility, teacher acceptance, and any observable change in the collaborative and institutional conditions the present study found to be lacking, using the detailed, operational version of the framework presented separately as an implementation reference.
5. Research on Pre-Service Teacher Education Curricula. Future inquiry could examine how teacher education programs, particularly the BSEd and BEEd tracks represented among this study's participants, might incorporate observation-based identification, trial-and-error individualized instructional adaptation, and collaborative case management into pre-service

coursework, extending this study's implication for teacher education institutions into an empirical curriculum-design question that could be tested through pilot coursework and graduate follow-up.

6. Research Involving Additional Stakeholder Perspectives. Because this study was delimited to teachers' own accounts, future research could incorporate the perspectives of guidance counselors, parents, and, where ethically appropriate, students themselves, to determine whether the collaborative gaps and sources of friction identified in this study, particularly under It Takes a School, are similarly perceived by the other parties to that same collaborative relationship.

REFERENCES

1) **Abu-Alghayth, K. M. (2025).** Understanding teachers' lived experiences of instructional collaboration in inclusive and mainstream settings: A transcendental phenomenological approach. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 72(2), 321–338. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2024.2317484
2) **Ainscow, M. (2021).** Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences. Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 6(1), 7–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587
3) **Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002).** Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17(2), 129–147. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250210129056
4) **Bandura, A. (1986).** Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Prentice-Hall.
5) **Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022).** Thematic analysis: A practical guide. SAGE Publications.
6) **Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023).** Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
7) **Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024).** Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
8) **Department of Education. (2009).** DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009: Inclusive education as strategy for increasing participation rate of children. Department of Education.
9) **Department of Education. (2017).** Policy guidelines on the provision of educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program. Department of Education, Philippines.
10) **Department of Education. (2021).** DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021: Policy guidelines on the provision of educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in the K to 12 basic education program. Department of Education.
11) **Fajardo, R. A., Goce, E. C., Balbutin, R. R., Matondo, F. L., Lozano, J. A., Sabunod, G. M. M., et al. (2025).** The realities of inclusive teaching: Insights from seasoned teachers. British Journal of Special Education, 52(4), 646–658. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.70060
12) **Florian, L. (2022).** What counts as evidence of inclusive education? European Journal of Special Needs Education, 29(3), 286–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.933551
13) **Forlin, C. (2021).** Teacher education reform for enhancing teachers' preparedness for inclusion. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14(7), 649–653. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603111003778353
14) **Francia, B. B., & Siy, B. C. (2024).** Lived experiences of special needs education teachers in the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream class. International Journal of Research Publication, 156(1), 86–93. https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1001561920247130
15) **Haug, P. (2022).** Understanding inclusive education: Ideals and reality. Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 19(3), 206–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/15017419.2016.1224778
16) **Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2021).** Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
17) Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
18) **Miña, A. (2024).** The lived experiences of special education teachers in teaching inclusive education. Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal, 21(10), 1072–1090. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12731335
19) **Mitchell, D. (2025).** Inclusive education is a multi-faceted concept. Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 5(1), 9–30.

20) **Nguyen, X. T., & Springer, C. (2021).** Teacher experiences and challenges in inclusive education: A systematic review. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25(10), 1125–1142.
21) **Pancito, M. M. (2024).** Lived experiences of non-SpED teachers in inclusive education. Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal, 28(7), 807–813. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14410102
22) Pantic, N., & Florian, L. (2025). Developing teachers as agents of inclusion and social justice. Education Inquiry, 6(3), 27311. https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v6.27311
23) **Republic Act No. 11650. (2022).** Instituting a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities in support of inclusive education. Republic of the Philippines.
24) **Republic of the Philippines. (2022).** Republic Act No. 11650: An act instituting a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities in support of inclusive education, establishing inclusive learning resource centers of learners with disabilities in all school districts, municipalities and cities, providing for standards, guidelines, and funding therefor, and for other purposes. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2022/06/30/republic-act-no-11650/
25) **Salguet, M. A. J. (2025).** Teachers' perspectives on the issues and challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. Research and Advances in Education, 4(7), 29–35. https://doi.org/10.63593/RAE.2788-7057.2025.09.004
26) **Slee, R. (2021).** Inclusive education isn't dead; it just smells funny. Routledge.
27) **UNESCO. (2020).** Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all. UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2020/inclusion
28) **UNESCO. (2022).** Inclusive teaching: Preparing all teachers to teach all students. Global Education Monitoring Report. https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/publication/inclusive-teaching-preparing-all-teachers-teach-all-students
29) **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021).** A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. UNESCO.
30) **United Nations. (20222).** Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. United Nations.
31) **Vygotsky, L. S. (1978).** Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press. https://books.google.com/books?id=RxjjUefze_oC
32) **Yin, R. K. (2023).** Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.