

Inclusive Classroom Practices and Challenges from the Lens of the Teachers in a Rural School

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Abstract

This study examined the inclusive classroom practices employed by teachers, the challenges they encountered, and the measures proposed to strengthen inclusive education at San Vicente Elementary School, a rural public elementary school in Uson South District, Division of Masbate. The study was anchored in a conceptual framework linking teachers' inclusive practices, implementation challenges, and recommendations for improvement. It employed a qualitative phenomenological design involving all seven Kindergarten to Grade 6 teachers selected through complete enumeration sampling. Data were gathered using a validated semi-structured interview guide and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings showed that teachers implemented differentiated and learner-centered instruction, individualized support, flexible grouping, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, varied instructional materials, positive behavior management, and supportive classroom routines to address diverse learner needs. However, they encountered difficulties in managing learners with varying academic, behavioral, emotional, and social needs, particularly in large classes. Other challenges included insufficient instructional materials and assistive technologies, inadequate facilities, limited access to specialized personnel and support services, and insufficient professional training in inclusive education. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrated patience, adaptability, resourcefulness, and commitment to promoting learner participation and inclusion. The study concluded that effective inclusive education in rural schools requires sustained teacher development, adequate learning resources, specialized assistance, improved facilities, and coordinated support from school administrators, families, communities, and educational authorities. It recommends continuous professional development, stronger institutional and stakeholder collaboration, improved resource allocation, and expanded learner-support mechanisms. The study supports SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 5 on Gender Equality, and SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities by promoting equitable participation and access to learning. It contributes to educational, institutional, community, and policy sustainability by providing localized evidence for strengthening inclusive education in resource-constrained rural schools.

Keywords: Classroom Management, Differentiated Instruction, Inclusive Classroom Practices, Inclusive Education, Rural School, Teacher Experiences, Teacher Preparedness

1. Introduction

Inclusive education promotes equitable access, meaningful participation, and quality learning opportunities for all learners regardless of ability, disability, gender, culture, socio-economic condition, or other individual differences. Although international commitments and Philippine laws have established a strong policy foundation for inclusion, implementation remains difficult in rural public schools where teachers often work with limited facilities, instructional materials, professional training, specialized personnel, and institutional support. These conditions require teachers to adapt instruction, classroom management, assessment, and learner-support practices while addressing diverse academic, behavioral, emotional, and social needs. This study examines inclusive classroom practices and challenges from the perspectives of teachers at San Vicente Elementary School, a rural public elementary school in Uson South District, Division of Masbate. It focuses on the practices teachers employ, the barriers they encounter, and the recommendations that may strengthen inclusive education in resource-constrained schools. By exploring teachers' lived experiences, the study seeks to generate localized evidence that may support teacher development, school-based interventions, resource allocation, stakeholder collaboration, and improved implementation of inclusive education policies.

Education is a fundamental human right and an important instrument for social transformation, equality, and sustainable development. Inclusive education advances this right by ensuring that learners are accepted, supported, and provided equitable opportunities to participate and succeed in mainstream classrooms. It recognizes learner diversity and seeks to reduce exclusion arising from disability, gender, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic disadvantage, learning differences, and other circumstances. At the global level, UNESCO (2020) described inclusive education as strengthening the capacity of educational systems to reach all learners by removing barriers to learning and participation. UNICEF (2021) similarly

emphasized that inclusion provides equal access to quality learning opportunities and contributes to reducing educational inequalities and promoting social participation. Inclusion therefore extends beyond merely placing learners with disabilities in regular classrooms. Slee (2018) argued that genuine inclusion requires meaningful participation, equitable learning opportunities, and changes in school cultures and systems that may otherwise marginalize learners. In the Philippines, inclusive education is supported by DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, entitled *Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children*. This policy recognizes that children should be accepted and accommodated in regular classrooms regardless of ability, disability, race, culture, or socio-economic condition. Republic Act No. 11650, or the *Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act*, further institutionalizes equal access to appropriate educational programs, services, and support mechanisms for learners with disabilities. DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021, entitled *Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program*, requires accessible, responsive, and learner-friendly educational services. DepEd Order No. 023, s. 2022, or the *Child Find Policy for Learners with Disabilities Towards Inclusive Education*, strengthens the identification, referral, and inclusion of learners who may otherwise remain excluded from the basic education system. These policies demonstrate the government's commitment to an education system founded on diversity, equity, participation, and inclusion.

Despite this policy environment, rural schools continue to experience implementation barriers. Teachers may be expected to manage learners with different academic abilities, behavioral patterns, emotional conditions, and social backgrounds without sufficient preparation or specialized assistance. Common challenges include limited instructional materials, inadequate facilities, insufficient professional development, shortage of special education personnel, large classes, multiple teacher responsibilities, and weak access to support services. These conditions create continuing differences between inclusive education policies and classroom realities. San Vicente Elementary School provides a relevant setting for examining these issues. Located in Barangay San Vicente, Municipality of Uson, Province of Masbate, the school serves a rural community in which many families depend on farming, coconut cultivation, and animal husbandry. Learners may experience socio-economic limitations affecting their access to educational resources and learning opportunities. The school is also surrounded by rivers, making attendance difficult and unsafe during storms and periods of heavy rainfall. The school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) 2023–2028 identifies infrastructure and resource concerns, including the absence of a stable electricity supply, insufficient toilet facilities, classrooms requiring rehabilitation, and shortages in sports equipment and other educational resources. Nevertheless, the school works with the Barangay Local Government Unit, Parent-Teacher Association, Alumni Association, and other community sectors to address literacy, numeracy, learner development, and facility-related concerns. These circumstances illustrate the demands placed on teachers who implement inclusive classroom practices within a geographically and materially constrained environment.

A major theme in the literature is that inclusive education is grounded in equity, participation, and social justice. Waitoller and Artiles (2022) emphasized that inclusive education must address learners' cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity while removing institutional barriers to participation and achievement. Teachers are central to this process. Ainscow (2020) and Mel Ainscow (2020) found that responsive teaching, flexible instruction, collaboration, respect for individual differences, and equal participation strengthen inclusive learning environments. Differentiated and learner-centered instruction also enables teachers to modify activities, materials, teaching methods, and assessments according to learners' readiness, abilities, interests, and learning profiles (Loreman, 2021; Loreman Tim, 2021; Gheysens et al., 2021). Cooperative learning, peer tutoring, individualized instruction, classroom accommodations, positive behavior support, and collaborative learning further improve participation, particularly among learners with special educational needs (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). Teacher preparedness, classroom management, assessment, and institutional support are equally important. Sharma and Sokal (2016) found that formally prepared teachers demonstrated greater confidence and were more likely to use inclusive approaches, while inadequate training may hinder instructional adaptation. Inclusive classrooms require safe, respectful, and supportive environments, together with flexible assessment practices that recognize individual differences. However, teachers often struggle with large classes, behavioral concerns, heavy workloads, limited materials, insufficient support services, and competing curriculum demands (Forlin, 2021; Ainscow, 2020; Boyle et al., 2023).

Challenges are often more severe in rural schools, where teachers face shortages of qualified personnel, instructional resources, specialized services, and professional development opportunities while managing multigrade, overcrowded, or highly diverse classrooms (Guo et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2021). Effective inclusion therefore requires adequate resources, leadership commitment, family involvement, specialized support, and collaboration among teachers, parents, specialists, communities, and educational agencies (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2023; Epstein & Sheldon, 2023). Philippine studies similarly show that teachers employ differentiated instruction, learner-centered activities, individualized support, peer collaboration, and classroom accommodations despite inadequate materials, facilities, training, specialized personnel, and institutional support (Beltran et al., 2025; Martin, 2026; Pasmala et al., 2024; Miña, 2024; Galgao et al., 2025; Ramos & Fernandez, 2025). Rural and special education teachers also experience heavy workloads, time constraints, behavioral and assessment concerns, and complex learner needs, yet demonstrate resilience, patience, flexibility, creativity, and collaboration

(Magallanes et al., 2025; Montales, 2026; Lancian & Cancio, 2025). Kyamko et al. (2024) further emphasized that cooperation among teachers, administrators, parents, and stakeholders strengthens teacher confidence and inclusive classroom implementation. Overall, sustainable inclusion depends on teacher commitment supported by systematic training, responsive leadership, appropriate resources, community participation, and access to professional services.

Globally, inclusive education requires educational systems to remove barriers and ensure participation for all learners. UNESCO (2020), UNICEF (2021), Slee (2018), and Waitoller and Artiles (2022) describe inclusion as an educational, social, and institutional responsibility that addresses marginalization associated with disability, poverty, language, culture, ethnicity, gender, and other circumstances. Schools must therefore adapt their systems to learner diversity rather than require learners to conform to a single educational model. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 10533, the Philippine Inclusive Education Framework, DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, and the MATATAG Agenda promote learner-centered, accessible, and inclusive education. DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 protects learners from discrimination, violence, abuse, and bullying, while DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015 supports flexible and learner-centered assessment. Republic Act No. 9155 further emphasizes shared responsibility among schools, communities, local government units, and stakeholders, while the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 prioritizes equitable access and support for disadvantaged learners. Within this policy context, San Vicente Elementary School provides a relevant rural setting for examining how limited infrastructure, resources, socio-economic conditions, and specialized support affect the implementation of inclusive education.

The study is anchored in a clear conceptual framework that highlights three interconnected elements of inclusive classroom implementation: the practices employed by teachers, the challenges encountered, and the recommendations or interventions that may further strengthen inclusion. The framework recognizes teachers' use of differentiated instruction, learner-centered teaching, classroom accommodations, positive classroom management, individualized support, collaborative activities, and flexible assessment to address learner diversity and promote participation, equity, acceptance, and meaningful engagement. It also considers contextual conditions such as available instructional materials, facilities, training, class size, access to specialized services, workload, and the complexity of learners' academic and behavioral needs. Examining these conditions provides a constructive basis for enhancing professional development, resource provision, school-based support, stakeholder collaboration, and policy implementation. Conceptually, the study follows an input-process-output orientation. The input includes teachers' inclusive practices, implementation challenges, and recommendations; the process involves gathering and interpreting teachers' accounts; and the output consists of emergent themes and proposed measures for strengthening inclusive education in rural schools. Feedback from the findings may guide the continuous improvement of classroom practices and institutional support. The emphasis on teachers' meanings and perceptions is consistent with phenomenological research, which seeks to understand lived experiences as perceived and described by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Although inclusive education has been widely examined, several gaps remain. First, many studies have concentrated on policy implementation, teacher competence, attitudes, preparedness, or general classroom challenges using quantitative, descriptive, or mixed-method approaches. Fewer studies have explored teachers' experiences through qualitative phenomenology, which can provide deeper understanding of how teachers interpret and respond to inclusion in everyday practice. Second, much of the existing research has been conducted in urban schools, large institutions, secondary schools, technical-vocational settings, or areas with broader access to resources. Rural public elementary schools have received comparatively limited attention, even though they may experience distinct conditions involving geographical isolation, infrastructure limitations, shortages of specialized personnel, fewer training opportunities, and restricted access to instructional support. Third, existing studies often examine instructional practices, classroom management, assessment, preparedness, or support systems separately. Limited research has considered these interconnected dimensions within one rural school context. Understanding their interaction is important because teachers' practices may be directly influenced by available resources, professional knowledge, leadership support, family involvement, and local conditions. Fourth, phenomenological research on inclusive education remains limited within the Division of Masbate and Uson South District. The experiences of teachers at San Vicente Elementary School have not been sufficiently documented, despite the school's distinctive socio-economic, geographical, infrastructural, and educational circumstances. The study addresses these gaps by examining how teachers implement inclusive instructional strategies, classroom-management approaches, assessment practices, and learner-support mechanisms; what challenges they encounter; and what recommendations may improve implementation. Localized findings may provide a more realistic basis for teacher-capacity programs, school interventions, resource allocation, community partnerships, and contextualized policy implementation.

The study primarily aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education because it examines how a rural public school can provide inclusive, equitable, learner-centered, and responsive educational opportunities. By identifying classroom practices and barriers affecting diverse learners, the research may contribute to improving access, participation, teaching quality, assessment, and learner support. It also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Gender Equality because inclusive education requires equal educational participation and freedom from discrimination based on gender.

Although the study is not exclusively focused on gender, its emphasis on classrooms that respect learner diversity supports equal opportunities for girls and boys. The study further supports Sustainable Development Goal 10 – Reduced Inequalities by addressing educational exclusion associated with disability, socio-economic disadvantage, learning differences, geographical isolation, and limited access to resources and specialized services. Its focus on rural learners and teachers highlights the need to reduce disparities between well-resourced schools and underserved educational communities.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by identifying practices and support mechanisms that may help teachers continue providing equitable learning opportunities despite limited resources. Strengthened teacher preparation, differentiated instruction, inclusive assessment, and responsive classroom management may improve the long-term capacity of rural schools to serve diverse learners. It supports institutional sustainability by providing evidence that school administrators and the Department of Education may use in designing professional development, allocating instructional resources, improving facilities, establishing support systems, and monitoring inclusive education implementation. Sustainable inclusion requires structures that do not depend solely on individual teacher commitment. The research also contributes to policy and governance sustainability by examining how national policies are translated into classroom practice. Local evidence may reveal implementation gaps and assist decision-makers in developing more context-responsive programs, guidelines, and interventions for rural schools. In terms of socio-economic sustainability, inclusive education can reduce the educational disadvantages experienced by learners from low-income and geographically isolated communities. Providing equitable opportunities may strengthen learner participation and development and help prevent existing social and economic inequalities from being reproduced through the education system. The study advances community sustainability by emphasizing collaboration among schools, parents, local government units, associations, and other stakeholders. Shared responsibility can improve resource mobilization, learner assistance, facility development, attendance interventions, and community ownership of inclusive education. Finally, the study has a multidisciplinary contribution because inclusive education involves pedagogy, psychology, school leadership, public policy, community development, social equity, and resource management. Understanding teachers' lived experiences may therefore support coordinated interventions that address not only classroom instruction but also institutional conditions, family participation, community support, and educational governance.

This study aimed to examine inclusive classroom practices and challenges from the perspectives of teachers at San Vicente Elementary School. Specifically, it sought to determine the inclusive classroom practices employed by teachers, identify the challenges they encountered in achieving inclusive classroom practices, and propose recommendations for strengthening inclusive education. The inquiry focused on instructional strategies, classroom management, assessment practices, teacher preparedness, coping mechanisms, and support systems. Its participants consisted of seven teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 6 who were directly involved in handling learners with diverse educational needs. All qualified teachers were included through complete enumeration sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), while their experiences were elicited through semi-structured interviews that permitted clarification and elaboration of responses (Kallio et al., 2016). The study was limited to San Vicente Elementary School and did not include administrators, parents, learners, secondary schools, or other schools within Uson South District. Its findings are therefore intended to provide contextual and experiential understanding rather than statistical generalization.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine teachers' inclusive classroom practices and challenges in a rural school. Qualitative research was appropriate because it provided detailed accounts of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings within their natural setting. Creswell and Poth (2018), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and Patton (2015) emphasized that qualitative inquiry explores how individuals interpret social experiences and realities through in-depth, participant-based data. The phenomenological approach focused on the shared lived experiences of teachers in implementing inclusive education. Creswell and Poth (2018), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (2016) explained that phenomenology seeks to describe and interpret the essence and meaning of experiences as perceived by participants. This design enabled the identification of common themes related to inclusive practices, implementation challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations for strengthening inclusive education in rural schools.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at San Vicente Elementary School in Barangay San Vicente, Uson, Masbate, under the Uson South District. Established in 1974, the school is located about 14 kilometers from the district office and serves a rural community largely dependent on farming, coconut cultivation, and animal husbandry. Learners face socio-economic and geographical challenges, including limited educational resources and unsafe travel during heavy rainfall due to surrounding rivers. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) 2023–2028 also identified concerns involving electricity, toilet facilities, classroom rehabilitation, and shortages of educational resources. Despite these limitations, the school collaborates with the

Barangay Local Government Unit, Parent-Teacher Association, Alumni Association, and other stakeholders. The locale was selected because it reflects the conditions of rural schools implementing inclusive education with limited facilities, materials, and specialized support services.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The participants consisted of seven teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 6 who were currently teaching at San Vicente Elementary School. They were selected because of their direct involvement and experience in implementing inclusive classroom practices and handling learners with diverse educational needs in a rural public elementary school. The study focused exclusively on the teachers' experiences and perspectives. It did not include school administrators, parents, learners, teachers from other schools, or participants from secondary and tertiary educational institutions. Consequently, the findings represented the subjective experiences of the participating teachers within the specific context of San Vicente Elementary School and were not intended for statistical generalization.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used complete enumeration sampling, through which all seven qualified teachers at San Vicente Elementary School were included. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), complete enumeration sampling involves including all members of an identified population who satisfy the established inclusion criteria. This procedure is appropriate when the target population is relatively small and all qualified individuals can participate in the research. Complete enumeration was considered suitable because the number of teachers was manageable and all qualified participants had direct experience in implementing inclusive classroom practices. Including the entire eligible population enabled the study to represent the range of perspectives and experiences available within the school.

2.5 Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide served as the primary research instrument. It contained open-ended questions intended to gather detailed accounts of the inclusive classroom practices employed by teachers, the challenges they encountered, their coping mechanisms, and their recommendations for strengthening inclusive education. The semi-structured format allowed participants to describe and reflect freely on their experiences while enabling the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification and deeper exploration. Before data collection, the interview guide was reviewed and validated by research experts and professionals knowledgeable in qualitative research and inclusive education to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and appropriate to the objectives of the study.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher prepared the thesis outline, incorporated the adviser's and panel members' recommendations, and secured approval from the Schools Division Office of Masbate Province and the principal of San Vicente Elementary School. The participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures, after which informed consent was obtained. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at convenient times and locations, with follow-up questions used to clarify responses regarding inclusive practices, challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, reviewed, coded, categorized, and analyzed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and subthemes.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, analyze, organize, and report patterns or themes within a dataset. It involves familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of potential themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and preparation of the final report. The researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts to develop familiarity with the participants' accounts. Significant statements related to inclusive classroom practices, implementation challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations were identified and coded. Similar codes were grouped into categories, which were subsequently examined to determine emerging themes and subthemes. These themes were interpreted according to the meanings and experiences described by the participants within the rural school context.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Before data gathering, approval was obtained from the Assistant Schools Division Superintendent Officer-in-Charge of the Schools Division Office of Masbate Province and the school head of San Vicente Elementary School. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, potential use of the data, and voluntary nature before providing informed consent. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. Their identities were protected through codes or pseudonyms, and their responses were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. In compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, all personal information and research data were securely handled and protected from unauthorized access, disclosure, or misuse. The study also followed the ethical standards stated in DepEd Memorandum No. 15, s. 2019, entitled Guidelines on Research

Management. Voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, beneficence, respect for persons, honesty, fairness, transparency, and objectivity were maintained throughout the research process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Inclusive Classroom Practices Employed by Teachers

3.1.1 Differentiated and Learner-Centered Instruction

The findings revealed that teachers used differentiated and learner-centered instruction to accommodate learners with varying abilities, readiness levels, learning preferences, and educational needs. They adjusted lessons, activities, instructional materials, and assessment tasks and provided individualized education program-based interventions when necessary. Other practices included flexible and mixed-ability grouping, pair and small-group work, scaffolding, peer tutoring, remediation, enrichment, visual aids, hands-on activities, and individualized support. These approaches enabled learners to participate in activities appropriate to their abilities and learning pace. The findings show that differentiated instruction is a fundamental inclusive practice because it allows teachers to respond to learner diversity rather than use a uniform approach for the entire class. Flexible and individualized strategies increase accessibility, participation, and engagement, particularly in rural classrooms where learners with different needs are taught together. These findings support Beltran et al. (2025), who found that teachers commonly utilized differentiated instruction, learner-centered activities, and individualized support to promote participation and inclusion among learners with special educational needs. Similarly, Loreman (2021) emphasized that differentiated instruction enables teachers to modify classroom activities, learning materials, teaching methods, and assessments according to learners' varying abilities and learning styles. The findings are also consistent with Gheyssens et al. (2021), who reported that differentiated instruction allows teachers to respond effectively to learner diversity and create more supportive and inclusive learning environments.

3.1.2 Use of Varied Instructional Strategies and Learning Materials

The teachers employed varied strategies and materials to make lessons accessible, engaging, and responsive to diverse learners. They modified lesson content, learning processes, classroom tasks, activities, and assessments according to individual needs. The strategies included games, songs, storytelling, oral recitation, visual aids, auditory cues, kinesthetic and hands-on activities, group work, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, interactive discussions, technology integration, formative assessment, and visual and contextualized materials. Rotating group roles were also used to ensure that each learner had an opportunity to contribute. These findings indicate that instructional flexibility provides multiple ways for learners to engage with lessons and demonstrate their understanding. The use of interactive, collaborative, contextualized, and multisensory activities helps teachers address differences in ability, learning style, interest, and educational background while sustaining motivation and participation. These findings support Mitchell and Sutherland (2020), who identified cooperative learning, peer tutoring, individualized instruction, and positive behavior support as effective inclusive classroom practices that improve learner participation and classroom inclusion. Similarly, Ainscow (2020) emphasized that flexible instructional strategies and responsive teaching practices enable teachers to address learner diversity and promote meaningful participation in classroom activities. The findings are also consistent with Galgao et al. (2025), who reported that teachers frequently utilize learner-centered teaching approaches, differentiated instruction, and classroom accommodations to support diverse learners in inclusive educational settings.

3.1.3 Promotion of a Supportive and Inclusive Classroom Environment

The findings further showed that teachers created supportive classroom environments by promoting respect, equality, kindness, empathy, cooperation, teamwork, positive behavior, and acceptance of individual differences. They used respectful communication, positive reinforcement, cooperative learning, teamwork activities, positive behavior modeling, behavioral interventions, and consistent classroom routines. Teachers also sought to establish physically and emotionally safe classrooms where learners felt seen, respected, valued, understood, and encouraged to participate. A supportive classroom culture strengthens learners' confidence, participation, social interaction, and sense of belonging. When teachers model respectful behavior and provide opportunities for collaboration, learners become more willing to participate, work with peers, and develop positive relationships. These findings support Martin (2026), who found that teachers demonstrate positive attitudes toward inclusion and actively adapt classroom practices to promote learner participation and equal learning opportunities. Similarly, Boyle et al. (2023) reported that inclusive classroom practices contribute to improved learner participation, social interaction, acceptance, and engagement among students. Furthermore, Ainscow (2020) emphasized that collaborative classroom environments, respect for individual differences, and equal opportunities for participation are essential elements of successful inclusive education implementation.

3.2 Challenges Encountered in Implementing Inclusive Classroom Practices

3.2.1 Challenges in Managing Diverse Learners

The teachers experienced difficulties in managing learners with different academic abilities, behavioral concerns, reading difficulties, limited attention, interaction problems, and significant learning needs. One participant reported managing a class of 40 learners, while others described handling pupils who required intensive reading intervention, continuous

monitoring, repeated guidance, and considerable patience. These conditions made it difficult to balance whole-class instruction, behavior management, and individualized learner support. The findings demonstrate that managing learner diversity is a major challenge because teachers must provide additional interventions without neglecting the needs of the entire class. Large classes, complex learning needs, and limited specialized assistance may affect learner engagement, academic progress, classroom interaction, and the teachers' ability to provide individualized instruction. These findings support Forlin (2021), who reported that teachers commonly experience challenges related to classroom management, learner behavior, and diverse educational needs due to limited preparation and support. Similarly, Ainscow (2020) emphasized that teachers play a critical role in addressing learner diversity through responsive instructional approaches and inclusive classroom practices. The findings are likewise supported by Magallanes et al. (2025), who found that teachers in rural schools experienced difficulties in handling learners with varying behavioral, academic, and emotional needs. Similarly, Montales (2026) reported that teachers encountered challenges in managing learners with special educational needs because of limited preparedness and insufficient institutional support.

3.2.2 Limited Instructional Resources and Support Services

The participants consistently reported shortages of accessible and differentiated instructional materials, printed modules, visual aids, assistive technologies, learning tools, facilities, and specialized support services. Some materials were unavailable, inadequate, delayed, or unsuitable for learners with diverse needs. Consequently, teachers had to spend additional time and effort creating, modifying, and adapting materials for instruction and assessment. Insufficient resources restrict teachers' capacity to prepare lessons, provide appropriate accommodations, assess learning fairly, and support meaningful classroom participation. The absence of assistive technologies, specialized personnel, and appropriate materials further increases teachers' workload and reduces the accessibility of learning experiences. These findings support Mitchell and Sutherland (2020), who emphasized that effective inclusive education requires adequate instructional resources, appropriate interventions, and continuous support systems. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) highlighted that inclusive education becomes more successful when schools are provided with sufficient educational resources and support services that address barriers to learning and participation. The findings are further supported by Beltran et al. (2025), who identified insufficient instructional materials, inadequate facilities, and limited specialized personnel as major challenges in implementing inclusive education. Likewise, Galgao et al. (2025) reported that limited instructional resources and institutional support affect teachers' ability to effectively implement inclusive classroom practices.

3.2.3 Insufficient Training and Professional Preparedness

The teachers identified limited specialized training, insufficient skills, inadequate preparation, lack of continuous professional development, and limited access to SPED specialists as significant professional challenges. They expressed the need for more advanced knowledge of inclusive instructional strategies, assessment practices, behavior management, and interventions for learners with severe learning or behavioral difficulties. These limitations increased their workload and affected their confidence and effectiveness in managing inclusive classrooms. Teacher preparedness directly influences the quality and sustainability of inclusive education. Teachers with specialized knowledge and skills are better positioned to adapt instruction, manage learner diversity, conduct responsive assessment, and provide appropriate interventions. These findings support Sharma and Sokal (2016), who found that teachers who received professional preparation in inclusive education demonstrated higher levels of confidence and self-efficacy in accommodating diverse learners. Likewise, UNESCO emphasized that teacher training programs should focus on inclusive pedagogy, learner diversity, and classroom adaptation strategies to improve inclusive education implementation. The findings are consistent with Martin (2026), who identified teacher preparedness, lack of training, and insufficient instructional support as major concerns in implementing inclusive education. Similarly, the study conducted among non-SPED teachers revealed that limited specialized preparation affected teachers' confidence in handling inclusive classrooms.

3.3 Recommendations for Strengthening Inclusive Classroom Practices

3.3.1 Strengthening Teacher Training and Professional Development

The participants recommended continuous professional development and specialized training to improve teachers' knowledge, skills, confidence, and readiness to handle diverse learners. They specifically emphasized advanced preparation in differentiated instruction, inclusive strategies, behavior management, assessment, individualized interventions, and the management of learners with significant learning and behavioral difficulties. Continuous professional development can strengthen teachers' competence in adapting lessons, managing classrooms, identifying learner needs, and providing appropriate interventions. Better-prepared teachers are more capable of promoting learner participation, inclusion, and improved educational outcomes. These findings support Sharma and Sokal (2016), who found that teachers who received professional preparation in inclusive education demonstrated higher levels of confidence and self-efficacy in accommodating diverse learners. Similarly, UNESCO emphasized that continuous professional development enables teachers to develop inclusive pedagogical skills and effectively respond to learner diversity. The findings are likewise supported by Martin (2026), who identified teacher preparedness and professional development as critical factors in successful inclusive education implementation. Similarly, Montales (2026) recommended strengthening teacher training programs to improve teachers' competence in managing learners with special educational needs.

3.3.2 Improvement of Instructional Resources and Support Services

The teachers recommended providing adequate, accessible, and differentiated instructional materials, printed modules, visual aids, assistive technologies, contextualized learning resources, and tools appropriate for learners with diverse needs. They also proposed improving school facilities, ensuring the timely availability of materials, and providing additional specialized personnel, including SPED teachers, to assist with learner intervention and classroom support. Improved resources and support services can strengthen lesson preparation, instructional delivery, learner accommodation, assessment, and participation. Appropriate materials and assistive technologies reduce barriers to learning and enable teachers to provide more equitable and meaningful educational experiences. These findings support Mitchell and Sutherland (2020), who emphasized that inclusive education requires adequate resources, individualized support, and effective educational interventions to address learner diversity. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) highlighted that access to learning resources and support services is essential in reducing barriers to participation and improving educational outcomes for all learners. The findings are supported by Beltran et al. (2025), who identified insufficient instructional materials, limited facilities, and lack of specialized personnel as major challenges affecting inclusive education implementation. Likewise, Galgao et al. (2025) recommended increased institutional support and improved educational resources to strengthen inclusive classroom practices.

3.3.3 Strengthening Institutional and Collaborative Support Systems

The participants recommended stronger support from school administrators, the Department of Education, parents, communities, and other educational stakeholders. They emphasized adequate funding, improved infrastructure, specialized teacher assistance, continuous interventions for learners, effective monitoring, parental involvement, and stronger coordination among those responsible for inclusive education. The findings indicate that teachers cannot implement inclusive education effectively without coordinated institutional and community support. Collaboration among schools, families, communities, and educational authorities can provide more comprehensive learner assistance, reduce teachers' implementation burdens, and strengthen educational participation and success. These findings support Epstein and Sheldon (2023), who emphasized that collaboration among schools, families, and communities contributes significantly to learner success and educational improvement. Similarly, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2023) highlighted that strong support networks and collaborative partnerships are essential in sustaining inclusive educational environments. The findings are likewise supported by Kyamko et al. (2024), who found that collaboration among teachers, administrators, parents, and stakeholders strengthens inclusive education implementation and improves teacher confidence. Similarly, Martin (2026) concluded that successful inclusive education implementation requires stronger collaboration among teachers, school leaders, parents, and educational institutions.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Teachers at San Vicente Elementary School demonstrated commitment to inclusive education by employing differentiated and learner-centered instruction, varied teaching strategies and materials, individualized support, and supportive classroom environments that promoted participation, engagement, inclusion, and equitable learning opportunities. However, their implementation was constrained by difficulties in managing diverse learners, large classes, insufficient instructional resources and assistive technologies, inadequate facilities and support services, and limited professional training. Despite these challenges, teachers remained patient, resourceful, flexible, and committed, indicating that effective inclusive education in rural schools requires adequate resources, sustained professional development, specialized assistance, and coordinated support from schools, families, communities, and educational authorities.

Teachers should continue strengthening differentiated instruction, learner-centered teaching, cooperative learning, individualized support, and positive classroom management, while school administrators should provide regular training, seminars, and workshops on inclusive education, differentiated instruction, classroom management, and special needs education. The Department of Education should strengthen assistance to rural schools through adequate funding, instructional materials, assistive technologies, appropriate facilities, and the deployment of SPED teachers and specialists. San Vicente Elementary School should also reinforce learner-support mechanisms, inclusive school culture, and collaboration among teachers, administrators, parents, communities, and other stakeholders. Future studies should involve larger participant groups, other school settings, and additional stakeholders, including administrators, parents, and learners.

The study was limited to the lived experiences and perspectives of seven Kindergarten to Grade 6 teachers at San Vicente Elementary School and did not include teachers from other rural schools, school administrators, parents, learners, or participants from secondary and tertiary institutions. Because it employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, the findings depended on the participants' honesty, openness, personal experiences, and the researcher's interpretation of their accounts. Consequently, the results are specific to the school's context and are not intended for statistical generalization to other schools in Uson South District, the Division of Masbate, or other educational settings.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study complied with institutional and DepEd research ethics, with permission secured from the Schools Division Office of Masbate and San Vicente Elementary School. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants' identities and information were protected through pseudonyms, confidentiality measures, and compliance with Republic Act No. 10173. The authors accept full responsibility for the study's integrity and originality, appropriately acknowledge all contributions, retain copyright ownership subject to applicable publication policies, and declare no conflict of interest.

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