

From Policy to Practice: Inclusive Education Implementation in Rural Mainstream Elementary Schools for Learners with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the implementation of inclusive education practices in 14 mainstream public elementary schools in the San Agustin District, Division of Surigao del Sur, during School Year 2024–2025. Specifically, it examined the demographic profiles of teachers and schools, the level of implementation of inclusive education practices among teachers and school heads, school performance indicators, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms employed, best practices observed, and the enhanced inclusive education framework developed from the findings. The study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were gathered from 145 teacher-respondents through survey questionnaires and documentary analysis of school performance indicators, while qualitative data were obtained through focus group discussions and key informant interviews with selected teachers and school heads. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis.

Findings revealed that inclusive education practices among teachers and school heads were generally rated as Mostly Implemented. Teachers demonstrated strengths in collaborative professional development, while school heads exhibited strong personal and professional attributes and interpersonal effectiveness. Despite these positive practices, schools continued to face challenges related to limited resources, insufficient training opportunities, inadequate facilities, lack of specialist support services, heavy teacher workload, and weak parental involvement. To address these concerns, teachers and schools employed differentiated instruction, individualized learner support, peer collaboration, continuous learner monitoring, stakeholder partnerships, and adaptive classroom strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The study further revealed no significant relationship between the level of inclusive education implementation and school performance indicators. Based on the findings, the INCLUDE Framework was developed to strengthen teacher capacity, inclusive leadership, learner support systems, parent-community collaboration, resource provision, and learner progress monitoring. The study implies that strengthening institutional support, expanding professional development opportunities, and fostering collaborative partnerships among schools, families, and communities are essential for sustaining effective inclusive education practices, particularly in rural elementary schools implementing inclusive education programs.

Keywords: Inclusive education; learners with disabilities; mainstream elementary schools; rural education; differentiated instruction

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a global priority in ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities and other special educational needs. Anchored on the principle that every learner has the right to participate meaningfully in regular educational settings, inclusive education promotes social participation, academic achievement, and equal opportunities regardless of individual

differences. International frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities advocate inclusive and equitable quality education. In the Philippines, the implementation of inclusive education is reinforced through Department of Education policies and programs that seek to ensure that learners with special needs are accommodated within mainstream schools and provided with appropriate support services. Consequently, schools are expected to adopt inclusive practices that foster participation, learning, and development for all learners.

Despite these policy commitments, the implementation of inclusive education remains challenging, particularly in rural and resource-limited schools. Research consistently highlights teacher preparedness, leadership support, and institutional resources as critical factors influencing successful inclusion. Teachers who receive adequate professional development and demonstrate high self-efficacy are more capable of addressing diverse learner needs and implementing inclusive instructional practices effectively (Sharma & Sokal, 2020; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2022). However, inadequate special education training, limited instructional materials, insufficient facilities, heavy workloads, and lack of specialist support continue to hinder effective implementation, especially in public schools serving disadvantaged communities (Mngo & Mngo, 2021). Moreover, studies emphasize that strong school leadership, parental engagement, and community collaboration are essential in creating supportive and sustainable inclusive learning environments (Ainscow, 2020). While these factors have been widely examined, much of the existing literature focuses on national trends and urban contexts, leaving limited evidence on how inclusive education is implemented in small rural school districts.

This gap is evident in the San Agustin District, Division of Surigao del Sur, where district-level data reveal persistent challenges affecting inclusive education implementation. During School Year 2023–2024, the district recorded 18 identified learners with special needs; however, only 3% of teachers had received SPED-related training, while 97% reportedly expressed reluctance to participate in such training due to perceived difficulties in handling learners with special needs (San Agustin District Office, 2024). The district likewise reported insufficient learning materials, limited facilities, and a dropout rate of 5.7%. These conditions suggest a mismatch between inclusive education policy expectations and the realities faced by schools, teachers, and learners in rural settings. Despite these concerns, no comprehensive local study has examined how inclusive education practices are implemented across mainstream elementary schools in the district, the challenges encountered, the coping mechanisms employed, and their relationship to school performance indicators.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the implementation of inclusive education practices in mainstream elementary schools in San Agustin District during School Year 2024–2025. Specifically, it examines the implementation of inclusive practices among teachers and school heads, school performance indicators, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms employed, and best practices observed in supporting learners with special needs. The study contributes to the growing body of localized evidence on inclusive education in rural contexts and provides practical insights for teachers, school heads, and education officials. Furthermore, the findings serve as the basis for developing an enhanced inclusive education framework that may guide future interventions, capacity-building initiatives, resource allocation, and policy implementation aimed at strengthening inclusive education practices in mainstream elementary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Inclusive education is widely recognized as a rights-based approach that seeks to ensure the participation, learning, and achievement of all learners, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, within mainstream educational settings. International and national policies emphasize that inclusion extends beyond physical placement and requires schools to remove barriers to learning, provide appropriate support services, and create environments where diversity is valued and accommodated. Recent literature consistently demonstrates that the effectiveness of inclusive education depends on the interaction of teacher competence, school leadership, institutional resources, family engagement, and learner support systems. Rather than functioning as isolated factors, these elements operate collectively to influence the quality and sustainability of inclusive education practices.

The present study is anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which views learner development as influenced by multiple interconnected systems. In the context of inclusive education, learners with special needs are affected not only by classroom instruction but also by relationships within the school, family involvement, community support, district-level services, and broader educational policies. This perspective highlights the need to examine inclusive education as a systems-based process rather than a purely classroom concern. The theory provides a useful lens for understanding how teacher practices, school leadership, parental participation, resource availability, and policy implementation interact to shape educational experiences and outcomes for learners with special needs.

A second theoretical anchor is Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasizes flexible instructional approaches that accommodate learner variability. UDL advocates multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to ensure equitable learning opportunities for diverse learners. Contemporary studies indicate that differentiated instruction, instructional adaptations, individualized support, and accessible learning materials are among the most effective practices for promoting learner participation and achievement in inclusive classrooms. This perspective supports the study's focus on teacher-related inclusive practices, particularly in examining how teachers adapt instruction and provide support for learners with special needs within mainstream elementary schools.

The study is further informed by Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory, which explains how teachers' beliefs in their capabilities influence their willingness and ability to implement inclusive practices. Research consistently shows that teachers who receive adequate training and professional development demonstrate greater confidence, stronger commitment to inclusion, and more effective use of inclusive instructional strategies. Conversely, limited preparation and insufficient support often contribute to uncertainty, resistance, or reduced effectiveness in addressing learner diversity. This theoretical perspective underscores the importance of teacher training, professional development, and confidence-building as critical components of successful inclusive education implementation.

Finally, Inclusive School Leadership Theory provides the framework for understanding the role of school heads in fostering inclusive school cultures. Effective school leaders influence inclusion through resource allocation, instructional supervision, teacher support, professional development opportunities, stakeholder collaboration, and parent-community engagement. Studies suggest that inclusive education is more likely to succeed when school leaders establish supportive policies, encourage collaborative problem-solving, and create environments where all learners are valued and supported. Leadership therefore serves as a critical link between policy intentions and classroom implementation.

Synthesizing the literature and theoretical perspectives, a central argument emerges: inclusive education succeeds when teacher capacity, leadership systems, resources, family engagement, and learner monitoring mechanisms work together as an integrated system. Teacher competence alone cannot sustain inclusion without supportive leadership and adequate resources; similarly, resources and policies are insufficient without trained teachers and active stakeholder participation. This integrated perspective provides the conceptual foundation for the present study, which examines the implementation of inclusive education practices in mainstream elementary schools in San Agustin District and serves as the basis for developing the proposed INCLUDE Framework. The framework recognizes that meaningful inclusion requires coordinated action across classroom, school, family, community, and policy levels to support the participation, progress, and success of learners with special needs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed first through survey questionnaires and documentary analysis of school performance indicators. The qualitative phase followed to explain and enrich the quantitative findings through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with selected teachers and school heads. The integration of

quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of inclusive education practices in mainstream elementary schools and served as the basis for developing an enhanced inclusive education framework.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the fourteen (14) public mainstream elementary schools of San Agustin District, Surigao del Sur Division, Philippines. The participating schools were Buhisan Elementary School, Britania Elementary School, Campanubay Elementary School, Gata Integrated School, Hamburger Elementary School, Hornasan Elementary School, Janipaan Elementary School, Lamela Elementary School, Maurillo Avila Integrated School, Pongtod Elementary School, Salvacion Elementary School, San Agustin Central Elementary School, Sto. Niño Elementary School, and Teodoro R. Alvizo IP Community Elementary School.

A complete enumeration approach was employed, wherein all eligible schools in the district were included. The locale provided a suitable context for examining inclusive education practices across schools with varying enrollment sizes, resources, facilities, and community settings.

Research Respondents

The quantitative phase involved 131 teachers and 14 school heads from the fourteen participating schools, for a total of 145 respondents. Complete enumeration was employed to ensure comprehensive representation of teachers and school heads involved in the implementation and management of inclusive education programs.

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant experience in inclusive education implementation. A total of twenty-eight (28) teachers and four (4) school heads participated in the qualitative inquiry. The teacher participants represented varying levels of experience in handling learners with special needs and participated in four focus group discussions (FGDs), with seven participants in each group. Each FGD lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Four school heads participated in key informant interviews (KIIs), each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. Participants were selected based on their involvement in inclusive education programs and the quantitative survey results to ensure diverse perspectives regarding challenges, coping mechanisms, and best practices.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using an adapted survey questionnaire based on the instrument developed by Manos (2024). Formal permission to adapt and use the instrument was obtained from the original author. The questionnaire gathered information on teacher and school profiles, teacher-related and school head-related inclusive education practices, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, best practices, and recommendations for enhancing inclusive education implementation.

The instrument consisted of eight parts: (1) teacher profile, (2) school profile, (3) teacher-related inclusive education practices, (4) school head-related inclusive education practices, (5) challenges encountered, (6) coping mechanisms, (7) best practices, and (8) open-ended recommendations. A documentary analysis checklist was used to collect school performance indicators, including participation, survival, retention, repetition, transition, promotion, completion, failure, dropout, and graduation rates, when available. An FGD/KII guide containing open-ended questions was utilized during the qualitative phase.

Content validation was conducted by three experts in educational management, inclusive education, and research methodology. The instrument obtained Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) values ranging from 0.80 to 1.00 and a Scale-Level Content Validity Index (S-CVI) of 0.96, indicating excellent content validity. Revisions were made based on the validators' recommendations prior to pilot testing.

Pilot testing was conducted among teachers and school heads from a comparable district who were not included in the actual study. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha demonstrated strong internal consistency across the instrument. The Teacher-Related Inclusive Education Practices Scale obtained $\alpha =$

0.9455. Subscales likewise demonstrated high reliability, including Advocacy and Inclusive Education ($\alpha = 0.9339$), Collaborative Professional Development ($\alpha = 0.9170$), Confidence in Teaching Diversity ($\alpha = 0.8900$), and Inclusion in School Activities ($\alpha = 0.9404$). The School Head-Related Inclusive Education Practices Scale obtained $\alpha = 0.9075$. Additional sections yielded reliability coefficients ranging from $\alpha = 0.7300$ to $\alpha = 0.9448$, indicating acceptable to excellent reliability for final administration.

Data Gathering Procedure

After securing ethical clearance and the necessary approvals from the Department of Education (DepEd), the Schools Division Office of Surigao del Sur, the San Agustin District Office, and the participating school heads, the researcher administered the survey questionnaire to the 131 teachers and 14 school heads included in the quantitative phase. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage.

School performance indicators were collected through documentary analysis of official DepEd records, including the Learner Information System (LIS), Enhanced Basic Education Information System (EBEIS), School Forms, and School Report Cards.

Following the analysis of the quantitative data, purposively selected teachers and school heads participated in focus group discussions and key informant interviews to provide deeper explanations of the quantitative findings. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The qualitative data were coded and analyzed thematically. Quantitative findings, documentary data, and qualitative themes were subsequently integrated to develop the enhanced inclusive education framework.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Department of Education (DepEd) – Schools Division Office of Surigao del Sur, and administrative permission was secured from the San Agustin District Office and the participating school heads. Permission to access official school records and performance indicators was likewise obtained from the appropriate authorities.

Written informed consent was secured from all participants before their involvement in the survey, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, their right to decline participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, codes were used in place of participants' names, and no personally identifiable information was included in the reports or publications arising from the study. Because the study involved school performance records and the context of learners with special needs, special care was taken to ensure that no learner-identifiable information was collected, accessed, or disclosed. All data were used solely for research purposes.

The study complied with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Survey forms, interview recordings, transcripts, and documentary records were securely stored in password-protected electronic files and locked storage accessible only to the researcher. Audio recordings were made only with participants' consent and were deleted after transcription and verification. These measures were implemented to protect participants' rights, privacy, and welfare throughout the conduct of the study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis. Audio-recorded FGDs and interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and organized into themes. The analysis followed six

phases: familiarization with the data, code generation, theme development, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing.

Trustworthiness was established through careful documentation of coding procedures, maintenance of an audit trail, and verification of themes against participant responses. The resulting themes were integrated with the quantitative findings to provide a deeper understanding of inclusive education implementation in mainstream elementary schools.

Statistical Treatment

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency and percentage were used to summarize categorical profile variables, while mean and standard deviation were employed to describe continuous variables and determine the level of implementation of inclusive education practices.

School performance indicators, including participation, survival, retention, repetition, transition, promotion, completion, failure, dropout, and graduation rates, were analyzed using descriptive statistics and rate computations based on official school records.

Independent samples t-test and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to determine significant differences in the level of implementation of inclusive education practices when respondents were grouped according to selected profile variables. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the level of implementation of inclusive education practices and school performance indicators. All statistical analyses were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND STATISTICAL REPORTING

Profile of Teachers and Schools

The results indicate that the most represented age group falls within the 31–40 years range, while the least represented group consists of those aged 61 years and above. Beyond simple distribution, this pattern suggests that the teaching workforce is largely composed of mid-career educators who are expected to manage increasing instructional demands while simultaneously adapting to evolving expectations such as inclusive education. Although this stage is often associated with openness to innovation, such readiness does not automatically translate into competence in handling diverse learner needs, particularly in the absence of targeted preparation.

The limited presence of highly experienced teachers may also reflect a gap in mentorship and the transfer of experiential knowledge, which are essential in guiding less experienced teachers in addressing complex classroom situations. Without structured mentoring systems, teachers may depend on individual strategies rather than collective, evidence-based practices, resulting in inconsistent implementation of inclusive education across classrooms. More importantly, the findings suggest that age is not a reliable indicator of inclusive teaching competence, as effectiveness is largely influenced by access to professional development, institutional support, and collaborative learning opportunities. This implies that even teachers in their most productive years may experience difficulty implementing inclusive practices if the necessary support structures are not in place.

The dominance of female teachers reflects a common trend in elementary education but has limited relevance to inclusive teaching effectiveness. More critical is teachers' level of preparation and support, as inclusive education requires instructional adaptation, learner-centered strategies, and equitable practices. The distribution of educational attainment highlights a gap, with most teachers remaining at the bachelor's level and very few pursuing graduate studies. This suggests limited engagement in professional learning, which may restrict exposure to inclusive pedagogies, differentiated instruction, and intervention strategies. As emphasized by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2022), inclusive teaching requires continuous development to effectively address diverse learner needs.

**Table 2.1. Demographic Profile of Teacher-Respondents**

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21–30 years old	15	11.5%
	31–40 years old	49	37.4%
	41–50 years old	47	35.9%
	51–60 years old	16	12.2%
	61 years old and above	4	3.1%
Gender	Total	131	100.0%
	Male	13	9.9%
	Female	118	90.1%
	Total	131	100.0%
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	71	54.2%
	Master's Degree	3	2.3%
	Others	57	43.5%
	Total	131	100.0%
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	14	10.7%
	6–10 years	46	35.1%
	11–15 years	28	21.4%
	16–20 years	22	16.8%
	21 years and above	21	16.0%
	Total	131	100.0%
Specialized Trainings on Inclusive Education	None	24	18.3%
	1–2 trainings	72	55.0%
	3–4 trainings	22	16.8%
	5 or more trainings	13	9.9%
	Total	131	100.0%
Position/ Designation	Teacher I	40	30.5%
	Teacher II	25	19.1%

	Others	66	50.4%
	Total	131	100.0%
Teaching Load	1–2 loads	12	9.2%
	3–4 loads	7	5.3%
	5–6 loads	49	37.4%
	7 or more loads	63	48.1%
	Total	131	100.0%

Similarly, the pattern in teaching experience, where the highest concentration falls within moderate years of service, indicates that teachers possess general classroom familiarity but may not necessarily demonstrate proficiency in inclusive practice. Experience alone does not ensure the ability to address learner diversity, particularly when such experience is grounded in traditional teaching approaches rather than inclusive pedagogy. UNESCO (2020) emphasized that inclusion requires active removal of barriers to learning, which demands not only experience but also appropriate training and systemic support. This reinforces the idea that competence in inclusive education is not automatically acquired over time but must be intentionally developed.

The most critical concern emerges from the distribution of specialized training, where minimal exposure is more dominant than extensive training. This suggests that many teachers may have only basic awareness of inclusive education principles without sufficient depth to implement them effectively. Short-term or occasional training may introduce concepts of inclusion, but it does not necessarily equip teachers with the practical skills required for differentiated instruction, individualized support, and assessment modification. This gap is further intensified by the presence of heavy teaching loads, where the majority of teachers handle extensive instructional responsibilities compared to those with lighter loads. Such conditions may significantly limit teachers' capacity to design inclusive learning activities, monitor learner progress, and provide individualized support. As emphasized by the OECD (2023), excessive workload can constrain instructional quality and reduce opportunities for meaningful learner engagement, particularly in inclusive settings where additional time and effort are required.

Moreover, the variation in position or designation, particularly the large proportion classified under unspecified roles, suggests possible inconsistencies in responsibilities and expectations related to inclusive education. Without clear role definitions and structured support systems, the implementation of inclusive practices may vary across classrooms, leading to uneven learning experiences for learners with special needs. This further highlights the importance of establishing clear institutional frameworks that define teacher responsibilities and provide guidance in inclusive education implementation.

Taken together, the findings reflect a critical gap between teacher capacity and the demands of inclusive education. While the workforce demonstrates strengths in terms of active professional engagement and moderate experience, these are offset by limitations in specialized training, advanced preparation, and manageable workload conditions. This imbalance suggests that inclusive education is being implemented within constrained environments, where teacher readiness is challenged by systemic limitations rather than individual shortcomings.

The demographic profile indicates that while teachers are actively engaged and moderately experienced, their capacity to effectively implement inclusive education is constrained by limited specialized training, insufficient advanced preparation, and heavy teaching workloads. These findings emphasize the need for sustained professional development, structured mentoring, and institutional support systems to strengthen inclusive education practices.

Table 2.2 presents the profile of the participating schools in terms of school size, teacher-to-student ratio, location, facilities and resources for inclusion, budget and funding, support staff availability, and community and parental involvement.

The results show that most schools fall within a moderate size category, while few operate with smaller populations. Although this suggests enrollment may not be large, this should not be interpreted as an advantage for inclusive education. School size does not determine capacity for inclusion; rather, interaction between learner population and resources shapes implementation quality. Ainscow (2020) emphasized that inclusive education depends more on schools' ability to respond to learner diversity than structural characteristics such as size. Thus, moderately sized schools may struggle to support learners with special needs when conditions are limited. Similarly, the dominance of moderate teacher-to-student ratios compared to very low ratios indicates that class sizes, though not extreme, may still restrict individualization. Inclusive education requires close monitoring, scaffolding, and differentiated instruction, which become difficult when teachers handle multiple learners simultaneously (UNESCO, 2020).

Table 2.2. Profile of Schools Based on Reported School Conditions

School Profile Variable	Category	Teachers f	Teachers %	School Heads f	School Heads %
School Size	Less than 100 learners	9	6.9%	0	0.0%
	100–300 learners	64	48.9%	11	78.6%
	301–500 learners	14	10.7%	1	7.1%
	More than 500 learners	44	33.6%	2	14.3%
	Total	131	100.0%	14	100.0%
Teacher-to-Student Ratio	1:10	1	0.8%	0	0.0%
	1:11–20	16	12.2%	3	21.4%
	1:21–30	73	55.7%	7	50.0%
	1:31–40	38	29.0%	4	28.6%
	More than 40	3	2.3%	0	0.0%
	Total	131	100.0%	14	100.0%
Location	Urban	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Rural	131	100.0%	14	100.0%
	Total	131	100.0%	14	100.0%
Facilities and Resources for Inclusion	Adequate	40	30.5%	1	7.1%
	Inadequate	62	47.3%	9	64.3%
	No facilities/resources available	29	22.1%	4	28.6%

	Total	131	100.0%	14	100.0%
Budget and Funding	Adequate	14	10.7%	1	7.1%
	Limited	89	67.9%	8	57.1%
	None	28	21.4%	5	35.7%
	Total	131	100.0%	14	100.0%
Support Staff Availability	None	67	51.1%	8	57.1%
	1–2 support staff	54	41.2%	4	28.6%
	3 or more support staff	10	7.6%	2	14.3%
	Total	131	100.0%	14	100.0%
Community and Parental Involvement	High	2	1.5%	0	0.0%
	Moderate	89	67.9%	8	57.1%
	Low	36	27.5%	5	35.7%
	None	4	3.1%	1	7.1%
	Total	131	100.0%	14	100.0%

A more critical dimension emerges from the uniform rural location of the schools, which underscores a systemic context of disadvantage. Rural schools often experience limited access to specialized services, assistive resources, and professional development opportunities, which directly affects their ability to implement inclusive education effectively. UNESCO (2020) highlighted that geographic location is a significant barrier to inclusion, particularly when it intersects with resource limitations and socio-economic constraints. This finding suggests that the challenges observed are not isolated but reflect broader structural conditions affecting the entire district. In this context, inclusive education becomes more complex, as schools must address not only learner diversity but also environmental and institutional limitations.

The most significant concerns are evident in the dominance of inadequate facilities and limited resources compared to very few cases of adequacy. This indicates that schools lack the physical environment, instructional materials, and assistive devices necessary to support learners with special needs. According to OECD (2023), resource availability is a fundamental requirement for equitable education, as it enables schools to provide appropriate accommodations, modify learning environments, and implement inclusive strategies effectively. Without these, inclusive education risks becoming symbolic rather than functional. The same pattern is observed in budget allocation, where limited funding prevails over adequacy. This suggests that schools may struggle to sustain inclusive programs, invest in teacher training, or improve accessibility. Financial constraints therefore act as a major barrier, restricting both immediate classroom support and long-term capacity-building initiatives.

Another critical issue is the lack of support staff, where the absence of personnel is more common than sufficient staffing. This implies that classroom teachers are expected to implement inclusive education without the assistance of SPED teachers, aides, or specialists. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2022) emphasized that inclusive education should be supported by a collaborative system involving multiple professionals, rather than relying solely on individual teachers. The absence of such support structures increases teacher workload and may lead to inconsistent or limited implementation of inclusive practices. This

also aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which highlights that effective learner support requires interaction across multiple systems, including school, family, and institutional structures.

Furthermore, while community and parental involvement is moderately present, the minimal occurrence of strong engagement indicates that collaboration remains underdeveloped. Inclusive education requires consistent support from both school and home, as learners with special needs benefit from coordinated interventions across environments. Hyassat et al. (2024) emphasized that parental involvement plays a crucial role in reinforcing learning and supporting learner development beyond the classroom. The limited level of strong engagement observed in this study suggests that schools may not be fully utilizing community partnerships, which weakens the overall support system for inclusion.

The school profile reveals that while structural conditions such as size and class ratio appear manageable, deeper institutional constraints—particularly in resources, funding, support staff, and stakeholder engagement—significantly limit the effective implementation of inclusive education. These findings highlight that inclusive education is not constrained by enrollment or organization alone but by the availability of systemic support, reinforcing the need for strengthened institutional capacity and coordinated support systems.

4.2 Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices among Teachers and School Heads

Table 3.1 and 3.2 present the level of implementation of inclusive education practices as assessed by teachers and school heads. The teachers assessed implementation in terms of Inclusive Special Education Support, Advocacy and Inclusive Education, Collaborative Professional Development, Confidence in Teaching Diversity, and Inclusion in School Activities. School heads assessed implementation in terms of School Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Creating a Child-Friendly Learning Environment, Human Resource Management and Development, Parent Involvement and Community Partnerships, School Management and Operations, and Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness.

Table 3.1. Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices among Teachers

Area of Inclusive Education Practice	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Inclusive Special Education Support	3.903	Mostly Implemented
Advocacy and Inclusive Education	3.797	Mostly Implemented
Collaborative Professional Development	4.116	Mostly Implemented
Confidence in Teaching Diversity	3.964	Mostly Implemented
Inclusion in School Activities	3.815	Mostly Implemented
Overall Mean	3.919	Mostly Implemented

The findings show that Collaborative Professional Development obtained the highest rating, while Advocacy of Inclusive Education registered the lowest. The strong result in collaborative professional development suggests that teachers are able to engage in collective learning and peer interaction; however, this may reflect compliance with existing school structures such as Learning Action Cells rather than deep transformation of inclusive teaching practices. In contrast, the lower result in advocacy indicates a gap in promoting inclusive culture beyond the classroom, suggesting that inclusion remains largely operational rather than fully internalized within school communities. This implies that while teachers may collaborate professionally, their ability to influence attitudes, reduce stigma, and promote acceptance of learners with special needs remains limited. The contrast between these results reveals that collaboration does not automatically lead to advocacy, and that inclusive education is not only a technical practice but also a cultural and value-driven process.

From an analytical perspective, this finding reflects a disparity between procedural implementation and deeper inclusive commitment. Ainscow (2020) emphasized that inclusive education requires systemic change that goes beyond teacher collaboration to include shifts in school culture and shared values. Similarly, UNESCO (2020) highlighted that inclusion involves removing barriers to participation, which includes social and attitudinal barriers, not only instructional ones. The relatively lower advocacy rating may therefore indicate that while teachers are equipped to work together, they may lack sufficient support in leading school-wide inclusion efforts or influencing stakeholder perspectives. This also aligns with Woodcock et al. (2024), who stressed that teacher beliefs and understanding of inclusion significantly shape classroom practice and school culture.

Moreover, the overall rating of “Mostly Implemented” should not be interpreted as a strong level of success. Instead, it suggests partial implementation where practices are present but not consistently or fully applied. This relatively positive result contrasts with earlier findings on limited training, heavy workloads, and inadequate resources, indicating that implementation may be constrained by systemic limitations. Kivirand et al. (2022) emphasized that ongoing professional development and structured support systems are necessary to move from partial to sustained implementation of inclusive education. Thus, the findings suggest that teachers are functioning within available systems, but these systems are not sufficiently developed to support full inclusion.

While teachers demonstrate strengths in collaborative engagement, the lower emphasis on advocacy highlights a critical gap in building an inclusive culture. Inclusive education among teachers remains operational but not fully internalized, indicating the need to strengthen both professional capacity and school-wide advocacy for inclusion.

Table 3.2. Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices among School Heads

Area of Inclusive Education Practice	Mean	Adjectival Rating
School Leadership	3.871	Mostly Implemented
Instructional Leadership	3.789	Mostly Implemented
Creating a Child-Friendly Learning Environment	3.586	Mostly Implemented
Human Resource Management and Development	4.014	Mostly Implemented
Parent Involvement and Community Partnerships	3.771	Mostly Implemented
School Management and Operations	3.557	Mostly Implemented
Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness	4.257	Fully Implemented
Overall Mean	3.835	Mostly Implemented

The results reveal that Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness obtained the highest rating, while School Management and Operations registered the lowest. The strong result in personal attributes suggests that school heads perceive themselves as supportive, approachable, and professionally committed to inclusive education; however, this strength appears to be more individual than systemic. In contrast, the lowest rating in school management and operations indicates gaps in translating leadership intentions into structured and sustainable practices, such as planning, resource allocation, monitoring, and

implementation systems. This implies that while school heads may demonstrate positive attitudes toward inclusion, these are not fully supported by institutional mechanisms necessary to sustain inclusive practices. The contrast between strong personal attributes and weaker operational systems suggests that inclusion is driven more by leadership disposition than by formalized school processes.

From an analytical standpoint, this finding highlights the difference between leadership intention and organizational capacity. OECD (2023) emphasized that inclusive education requires not only leadership commitment but also governance structures, resource management, and monitoring systems to ensure sustainability. Similarly, Ainscow (2020) argued that leadership for inclusion must be expressed through systematic school-wide practices rather than individual efforts alone. The lower rating in management and operations may therefore indicate weak institutionalization of inclusive education, where policies and procedures are not sufficiently aligned with inclusive goals. This is further supported by UNESCO (2020), which stressed that inclusive education requires coordinated action across multiple levels, including leadership, systems, and support structures.

Furthermore, the overall rating of “Mostly Implemented” again reflects partial rather than full implementation. Despite strong personal leadership qualities, the lack of operational support suggests that inclusive practices may be inconsistently applied across schools. This aligns with findings in the teacher profile, where limited resources, insufficient training, and lack of support staff were identified as major constraints. The U.S. Department of Education (2025) also emphasized that effective school leadership must go beyond interpersonal qualities and involve strategic planning, data use, and stakeholder engagement to achieve meaningful inclusion.

While school heads demonstrate strong personal commitment to inclusive education, weaknesses in management and operational systems limit full implementation. This indicates that inclusive leadership must move beyond personal attributes toward structured, system-based practices to ensure sustainable and consistent inclusion.

Level of School Performance of the Elementary Schools in San Agustin District, Surigao del Sur Division

Table 4 presents the level of school performance of the elementary schools in San Agustin District, Surigao del Sur Division using selected school performance indicators. These indicators include participation rate, survival rate, retention rate, repetition rate, transition rate, graduation rate, promotion rate, completion rate, failure rate, and dropout rate.

Table 4. Level of School Performance of the Elementary Schools in San Agustin District, Surigao del Sur Division

School Performance Indicator	Percentage	Adjectival Interpretation
Participation Rate	96.73%	Very High
Survival Rate	94.85%	Very High
Retention Rate	94.49%	High
Repetition Rate	2.30%	Very Low
Transition Rate	95.24%	Very High

Graduation Rate*	98.76%	Very High
Promotion Rate	97.52%	Very High
Completion Rate	94.96%	Very High
Failure Rate	2.77%	Very Low
Dropout Rate	5.70%	Moderately High

The graduation rate emerged as the highest school performance indicator, with a very high descriptive interpretation. This finding suggests that most learners were able to complete the elementary education cycle and reach the terminal grade level. The result may indicate that schools in the district have established mechanisms that support learner persistence, progression, and completion. It also implies that teachers, school heads, parents, and community stakeholders collectively contribute to sustaining learner participation until graduation. From an inclusive education perspective, a high graduation rate reflects the capacity of schools to keep learners engaged in the educational system despite the challenges associated with diverse learning needs.

The finding is consistent with UNESCO (2020), which emphasized that inclusive education should promote learner access, participation, progression, and achievement. The high graduation rate may be attributed to the implementation of learner-centered practices, school leadership support, community involvement, and interventions designed to reduce educational barriers. Ainscow (2020) argued that schools that successfully identify and address barriers to participation are more likely to improve learner outcomes and educational completion. Likewise, the DepEd Basic Education Development Plan 2030 highlights the importance of creating equitable learning environments that enable learners to remain in school and successfully complete their education. However, while the result is favorable, it should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence that all learners, particularly learners with special needs, received adequate and appropriate support. UNESCO (2020) stressed that inclusion extends beyond completion and requires meaningful participation, quality learning experiences, and equitable opportunities for all learners. Therefore, a high graduation rate may indicate successful learner retention and progression, but it does not automatically confirm the quality or inclusiveness of the educational experiences provided.

The very high graduation rate indicates that schools in the district have been effective in supporting learners toward educational completion. The finding supports the principles of inclusive education that emphasize participation and progression. Nevertheless, graduation alone should not be viewed as the sole indicator of successful inclusion because quality, equity, and meaningful learning outcomes remain equally important considerations.

The failure rate registered as the lowest school performance indicator and was described as very low. This finding suggests that only a minimal number of learners were unable to meet the academic requirements necessary for promotion. Such a result may indicate that schools are implementing interventions, remediation programs, and learner support mechanisms that help students achieve the minimum learning standards. It may also reflect the commitment of teachers and school leaders to ensuring that learners are provided with opportunities to succeed academically rather than being left behind.

The very low failure rate may be interpreted as evidence of positive school support systems and inclusive educational practices that promote learner success. UNESCO (2020) emphasized that inclusive education seeks to remove barriers that hinder participation and achievement, thereby reducing the likelihood of academic failure among vulnerable learners. Similarly, Ainscow (2020) maintained that schools committed to inclusion actively develop strategies that enable learners with diverse needs to participate and progress successfully. However, the finding should be interpreted cautiously. The literature reviewed in this study emphasizes that school performance indicators should not be treated as direct measures of learning quality. As noted by UNESCO (2020), learner achievement must be examined alongside participation, engagement, and meaningful

learning experiences. Furthermore, the descriptive-correlational framework of the study recognizes that favorable outcomes may also be influenced by school policies, assessment practices, remediation efforts, and promotion mechanisms rather than solely by instructional effectiveness. Thus, while the low failure rate is encouraging, it should not automatically be regarded as proof that all learners have mastered the expected competencies at the desired level.

The very low failure rate reflects a generally positive educational environment where most learners can satisfy academic requirements and continue their schooling. The result aligns with inclusive education principles that seek to reduce barriers to learner success. Nevertheless, low failure rates should be interpreted alongside other indicators of educational quality to ensure that learner progression is accompanied by meaningful learning and competency development.

The findings are supported by recent literature emphasizing that inclusive education must go beyond access. UNESCO (2020) argues that inclusion requires removing barriers to participation and learning, particularly for learners who are marginalized by disability, poverty, location, language, or other forms of disadvantage. DepEd (2022), through BEDP 2030, likewise highlights the need to improve quality, equity, resilience, and learner support in basic education. The Congressional Commission on Education or EDCOM II (2024) also underscores continuing problems in Philippine education, particularly in governance, quality, and learner outcomes. UNICEF Philippines (2024) similarly warns that access to schooling does not always translate into meaningful learning.

Overall, the school performance of elementary schools in San Agustin District may be described as generally favorable, especially in terms of participation, promotion, retention, transition, graduation, and completion. However, the dropout rate remains a serious concern and should not be treated as a minor statistic. The results suggest that the district has been able to keep most learners in the school system, but inclusive education still needs stronger support mechanisms to ensure that learners with special needs and other vulnerable learners are not only enrolled and promoted, but are also meaningfully supported, retained, and helped to succeed.

Significant Differences in the Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices When Grouped According to Profile

Prior to conducting the inferential analyses, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were examined. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test and visual inspection of histograms and Q-Q plots, while homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's Test. Results indicated that the assumptions were adequately satisfied, supporting the use of parametric statistical procedures. Independent Samples t-test was used for sex, while One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed for age, educational attainment, teaching experience, specialized training in inclusive education, position/designation, and teaching load. All statistical decisions were based on an alpha level of .05. The analyses were conducted using data from 131 teacher-respondents (N = 131).

Table 5. Significant Differences in the Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices According to Teacher Profile Variables

Profile Variable	Statistical Test Used	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Age	One-Way ANOVA	F = 2.670	.035	Reject Ho	Significant Difference
Sex	Independent Samples t-test	t = 2.440	.121	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Educational Attainment	One-Way ANOVA	F = 3.620	.030	Reject Ho	Significant

					Difference
Teaching Experience	One-Way ANOVA	F = 1.970	.103	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Specialized Training in Inclusive Education	One-Way ANOVA	F = 11.330	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant Difference
Position/Designation	One-Way ANOVA	F = 1.700	.187	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Teaching Load	One-Way ANOVA	F = 1.440	.234	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant

The findings revealed that specialized training in inclusive education consistently produced significant differences across all domains of inclusive education implementation. Teachers who had participated in a greater number of specialized trainings generally reported higher levels of implementation than those with limited or no training. Among the profile variables examined, specialized training demonstrated the strongest influence on inclusive education implementation, highlighting the importance of professional development in enhancing teachers' knowledge, confidence, and competence in addressing learner diversity.

The findings support UNESCO (2020), which emphasized that teachers require specialized competencies to effectively implement inclusive practices and respond to the needs of diverse learners. Similarly, Yada et al. (2022) reported that teachers who received formal preparation and professional development opportunities demonstrated stronger self-efficacy and more positive attitudes toward inclusive education. Woodcock et al. (2022) likewise emphasized that teacher competence in inclusive settings is strongly associated with ongoing professional learning and capacity-building initiatives.

Educational attainment also yielded significant differences, particularly in the domains of Inclusive Special Education Support and Advocacy of Inclusive Education. Teachers with higher educational qualifications generally demonstrated stronger implementation in these areas. Advanced academic preparation may provide broader exposure to learner diversity, differentiated instruction, assessment adaptations, and inclusive pedagogical approaches. However, educational attainment did not significantly influence all domains of implementation, suggesting that academic qualifications alone are insufficient without corresponding practical experience and professional development.

Age was found to significantly influence the domain of Confidence in Teaching Diversity. This result suggests that confidence in handling learners with diverse needs may vary across age groups due to differences in professional exposure, teaching experiences, and familiarity with contemporary inclusive education approaches. Nevertheless, age did not significantly affect the remaining domains, indicating that it is not a consistent predictor of inclusive education implementation.

Conversely, sex, teaching experience, position/designation, and teaching load did not demonstrate statistically significant differences. These findings indicate that teachers generally exhibited comparable levels of implementation regardless of gender, years of service, professional rank, or workload assignment. The results imply that demographic and employment-related characteristics are less influential than professional preparation and specialized training in shaping inclusive education practices.

The findings are consistent with Florian and Black-Hawkins (2021), who argued that effective inclusive practice is influenced more by teacher beliefs, competencies, and professional learning than by demographic characteristics. UNESCO (2020) likewise emphasized that successful inclusion depends on teacher capacity, institutional support, and access to resources rather than personal characteristics alone.

Although statistical significance was observed for age, educational attainment, and specialized training, future studies should report effect size measures such as eta squared (η^2) and corresponding confidence intervals to determine the magnitude and practical significance of these differences. Statistical significance indicates the presence of group differences, whereas effect sizes provide information regarding the extent and educational importance of those differences.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that specialized training is the most influential teacher characteristic associated with inclusive education implementation, followed by educational attainment and age in selected domains. These findings highlight the importance of sustained professional development, advanced teacher preparation, and institutional support systems in strengthening inclusive education practices.

Significant Relationship Between the Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices and the Level of School Performance

To ensure consistency in the unit of analysis, teacher implementation scores were aggregated at the school level prior to correlation analysis. This procedure was necessary because school performance indicators represent school-level measures. The correlation analysis was conducted using data from the fourteen (14) participating elementary schools. Assumptions of linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity were examined and found acceptable for correlation analysis. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was utilized to determine the relationship between inclusive education implementation and school performance indicators.

Table 6 presents the results of the correlation analysis.

Table 6. Significant Relationship Between the Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices and the Level of School Performance

Variable Tested with School Performance	Pearson r	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Inclusive Special Education Support	0.017	.953	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Advocacy of Inclusive Education	0.020	.947	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Collaborative Professional Development	0.001	.996	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Confidence in Teaching Diversity	0.130	.658	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Inclusion in School Activities	0.101	.732	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
School Leadership	0.342	.232	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Instructional Leadership	0.230	.429	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Creating a Child-Friendly Environment	0.079	.788	Failed to Reject H_0	Not Significant

Human Resource Management and Development	0.287	.320	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Parental Involvement	0.310	.280	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
School Management and Operations	0.328	.253	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Personal and Professional Attributes	0.307	.285	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant

The findings revealed that none of the domains of inclusive education implementation demonstrated statistically significant relationships with school performance indicators. The computed Pearson correlation coefficients ranged from negligible to weak positive relationships, and all associated p-values exceeded the .05 level of significance.

The absence of statistically significant relationships should not be interpreted as evidence that inclusive education has no impact on educational outcomes. Rather, the findings suggest that the school performance indicators used in the study may be too broad to capture the specific outcomes associated with inclusive education. Indicators such as participation rate, promotion rate, completion rate, graduation rate, and dropout rate primarily measure overall school performance and learner progression. While these indicators provide important information regarding educational outcomes, they may not adequately reflect inclusion-specific dimensions such as learner engagement, accessibility, individualized support, social participation, differentiated instruction, and the educational experiences of learners with special needs.

UNESCO (2020) emphasized that inclusive education focuses on equitable access, meaningful participation, learner engagement, and the removal of barriers to learning. Consequently, broad school performance indicators may not be sufficiently sensitive to detect improvements resulting from inclusive practices. A school may demonstrate favorable participation and completion rates while still facing challenges in accessibility, individualized support, and meaningful inclusion of learners with special educational needs.

The nonsignificant findings may also reflect the indirect nature of inclusive education outcomes. Inclusive practices often influence educational outcomes through intermediate variables such as teacher competence, school climate, resource availability, leadership support, stakeholder collaboration, and parental involvement. OECD (2023) emphasized that educational equity and inclusion are long-term goals requiring sustained interventions and coordinated support systems before measurable improvements in broader educational indicators become evident.

Furthermore, the relatively small number of schools included in the correlation analysis ($N = 14$) may have limited the statistical power of the tests and reduced the likelihood of detecting significant relationships. Future studies may benefit from larger samples and the inclusion of more inclusion-sensitive indicators, such as learner engagement, attendance patterns, academic progress of learners with special needs, accessibility measures, individualized education plan implementation, and parent satisfaction indicators.

For statistical completeness, future investigations should report confidence intervals and effect size estimates for correlation coefficients. Such measures would provide additional information regarding the precision and practical significance of the observed relationships.

Overall, the findings indicate that no statistically significant relationship exists between the implementation of inclusive education practices and the selected school performance indicators. However, this should not be interpreted as evidence that inclusive education is ineffective. Rather, the findings suggest that broad school performance measures may be insufficiently sensitive to capture the specific educational outcomes associated

with inclusive education. Future evaluations should therefore incorporate inclusion-focused indicators that more directly reflect the participation, engagement, achievement, and well-being of learners with special educational needs.

Qualitative Findings and Mixed-Methods Integration

To complement the quantitative findings, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with teachers and semi-structured interviews with school heads were conducted. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Five major themes emerged regarding the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream elementary schools.

Table 7. Emergent Themes from Qualitative Data

Qualitative Theme	Core Meaning	Sample Participant Statement	Interpretation
Resource-Driven Improvisation	Teachers continually adapt available resources to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs despite limited facilities and instructional materials.	“We often create our own learning materials because the school does not have enough specialized resources for learners with special needs.” (Teacher Participant 4)	Inclusive education implementation relies heavily on teacher creativity and improvisation in resource-constrained settings.
Training Gap and Confidence Strain	Many teachers feel inadequately prepared to address diverse learner needs due to limited specialized training.	“We try our best, but sometimes we are unsure if the strategies we use are appropriate because we have not received extensive training in special education.” (Teacher Participant 7)	Continuous professional development is necessary to strengthen teachers’ competence and confidence in inclusive practices.
Leadership Support but Weak Systems	School leaders generally support inclusion but face institutional limitations such as inadequate funding and lack of support personnel.	“We encourage teachers to accommodate all learners, but our school lacks specialized staff and sufficient resources to fully support inclusion.” (School Head Participant 2)	Positive leadership attitudes must be reinforced by systemic and policy-level support mechanisms.
Parent Engagement as Uneven Support	Parent involvement varies considerably across schools and families.	“Some parents actively cooperate with teachers, while others rarely attend meetings or participate in intervention activities.” (Teacher Participant 9)	Structured parent engagement programs are needed to ensure consistent support for learners.
Differentiated Instruction as a Survival Strategy	Teachers employ flexible instructional approaches to ensure learner participation and achievement.	“I modify activities and assessments so that all learners can participate according to their abilities.” (Teacher Participant 3)	Differentiated instruction serves as a practical strategy for sustaining inclusive classroom participation but requires stronger institutional support.

The quantitative findings indicated that inclusive education practices were generally implemented across mainstream elementary schools despite various constraints. Teachers reported moderate to high levels of implementation in learner support, instructional adaptation, classroom management, and stakeholder collaboration.

The qualitative findings provided deeper insights into how these practices were carried out. While quantitative results suggested successful implementation, participant narratives revealed that implementation was frequently sustained through teacher initiative, creativity, and personal commitment rather than through fully established institutional systems. The theme of Resource-Driven Improvisation supports the quantitative finding that schools continue implementing inclusive education despite inadequate facilities and instructional materials.

Similarly, the quantitative data identified limited training opportunities among teachers. This finding was reinforced by the theme Training Gap and Confidence Strain, where participants expressed uncertainty regarding specialized instructional approaches for learners with special educational needs. This suggests that implementation may be occurring, but not always with sufficient professional preparation.

The theme Leadership Support but Weak Systems further explained why school administrators were perceived as supportive while implementation challenges remained significant. School heads demonstrated commitment to inclusive education; however, financial constraints, insufficient support personnel, and limited institutional resources hindered the full realization of inclusive practices.

Moreover, quantitative results showing moderate levels of stakeholder participation were clarified through the theme Parent Engagement as Uneven Support, which revealed inconsistencies in parental involvement across schools. Finally, the theme Differentiated Instruction as a Survival Strategy demonstrated how teachers actively adapt instruction to accommodate learner diversity, supporting the quantitative evidence of classroom-level implementation.

Overall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that inclusive education is being implemented in mainstream elementary schools, but its sustainability largely depends on teacher adaptability, leadership commitment, and localized problem-solving. Strengthening teacher training, resource allocation, support services, and parent engagement mechanisms would enhance the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of inclusive education practices.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The findings suggest that inclusive education in mainstream elementary schools within the San Agustin District is present but unevenly institutionalized. While quantitative results indicate that inclusive education practices are generally “mostly implemented,” qualitative evidence suggests that this implementation is not fully standardized or consistently supported across schools. Instead, inclusive practices appear to be sustained through the efforts, commitment, and adaptability of teachers and school heads. This may reflect a situation where inclusion is practiced in daily school life but remains dependent on individual initiative rather than fully established institutional systems.

The results further indicate that teacher and school capacity are constrained by several interrelated factors, including limited specialized training, inadequate instructional resources, insufficient support personnel, heavy teaching workloads, and budgetary limitations. These constraints were consistently reflected in both quantitative and qualitative findings. Teacher demographic characteristics such as sex, length of service, and position do not appear to sufficiently explain variations in inclusive education implementation. Instead, the findings suggest that sustained and practice-oriented professional development, along with improved institutional support systems, may be more closely associated with stronger implementation of inclusive practices. However, these relationships should not be interpreted as causal given the descriptive-correlational nature of the study.

In addition, the findings suggest that traditional school performance indicators such as enrollment, promotion, retention, and completion rates are insufficient measures of inclusive education outcomes. Although these indicators show generally favorable results, they do not fully capture learner participation, engagement, accessibility, individualized support, and social inclusion. Learners with special educational needs may still experience barriers that are not reflected in conventional performance data. This suggests the need for inclusion-sensitive indicators that better reflect the multidimensional nature of inclusive education.

Finally, the absence of a statistically significant relationship between inclusive education implementation and general school performance indicators suggests that conventional metrics may not be sensitive enough to reflect the broader outcomes of inclusive education. Rather than indicating a lack of effect, this may reflect the limitation of traditional performance measures in capturing non-academic dimensions of inclusion, such as learner participation, behavioral support, and classroom engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that inclusive education in the San Agustin District is progressing but remains uneven in implementation, constrained by contextual and institutional factors, and inadequately captured by traditional performance indicators. Strengthening teacher preparation, improving resource allocation, and developing more comprehensive evaluation tools may help better support and assess inclusive education practices in mainstream elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that inclusive education in mainstream elementary schools of San Agustin District is already evident but remains moderately implemented, uneven, and highly dependent on the initiative of teachers and school heads. Although educators generally demonstrate positive attitudes and collaborative practices toward inclusion, the implementation is constrained by limited specialized training, inadequate facilities, insufficient funding, lack of support personnel, and weak institutional systems. These conditions suggest that inclusive education is being practiced in schools, but not yet fully institutionalized or consistently supported across contexts.

The study further concludes that specialized preparation and sustained professional development are important factors associated with strengthened inclusive education practices. Teacher demographic characteristics such as sex, length of service, and position alone do not appear to ensure effective inclusive instruction. Instead, the findings suggest that practice-oriented training and continuous capacity-building opportunities may be more closely associated with improved competence in differentiated instruction, learner accommodation, assessment modification, referral procedures, and inclusive classroom management.

The results also indicate that while school performance indicators such as enrollment, promotion, retention, and completion remain generally favorable, these measures do not fully reflect the quality of inclusive education implementation. Learners with special educational needs may continue to experience barriers related to participation, engagement, accessibility, and individualized support that are not captured by traditional performance metrics. This suggests the need for more responsive, inclusion-sensitive indicators to better reflect learner experiences and educational progress.

Moreover, the absence of a statistically significant relationship between inclusive education implementation and general school performance indicators suggests that conventional school performance measures may not be sufficiently sensitive to capture the multidimensional outcomes of inclusive education. This may reflect the limitation of relying solely on academic and administrative indicators to evaluate inclusive practices, which also involve social, behavioral, and participatory dimensions.

Finally, the study concludes that the proposed INCLUDE Framework is a context-responsive intervention that aligns with the identified challenges, coping strategies, and best practices in the participating schools. It may support a more structured and sustainable approach to inclusive education by strengthening collaboration, institutional support systems, teacher capacity, and learner monitoring practices.

DECLARATIONS

The author hereby declare that this study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional and/or education division authorities prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants after they were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality, anonymity, and the protection of participants' rights, dignity, and well-being were strictly observed throughout the research process.

The author further declare that the datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy considerations but may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to appropriate institutional and ethical approvals. There are no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct, analysis, or interpretation of the study. In addition, this research did not receive any external funding and was undertaken as part of academic requirements supported by the authors' own resources.

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