

Teachers' Experiences in Diverse Educational Settings in an Integrated School: Voices From The Classroom

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Abstract. This study explored the lived experiences of teachers working in diverse educational settings within an integrated school, aiming to understand both the rewarding and challenging aspects of their roles. Using a phenomenological approach, the study gathered data through in-depth interviews (5) teachers and focus group discussions (5) teachers who navigated varied student needs, cultural backgrounds, and learning abilities. Thematic analysis revealed two major categories of experiences: Positive Experiences and Challenges. On the positive side, teachers reported growth in inclusive teaching practices, enhanced cultural responsiveness, and increased collaboration with colleagues and learners. These experiences were deeply fulfilling and contributed to stronger teacher-student connections. However, challenges such as language barriers, disparities in learning readiness, and the tension between curriculum demands and individual student needs emerged as significant stressors. To address these challenges, teachers employed adaptive coping mechanisms including scaffolding and flexible grouping techniques, strategic use of multilingual and culturally relevant resources, and continuous professional learning paired with peer collaboration. These strategies not only helped manage classroom complexities but also fostered personal and professional resilience. Educational insights drawn from the findings emphasized the power of inclusive practices in fostering belonging, the role of cultural responsiveness in deepening learning, and the critical importance of collegial support systems in sustaining teacher motivation. Overall, the study underscores that teaching in diverse, integrated school settings requires empathy, adaptability, and sustained collaboration. The findings call for educational leaders and policymakers to invest in targeted support systems.

KEY WORDS

1. Diverse 2. Educational Setting 3. Integrated School

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1. Introduction

In today's ever-evolving global educational landscape, the importance of inclusive and diverse educational settings cannot be overstated. Integrated schools, where students of varying abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs come together, provide a rich environment for both academic and personal growth. Teachers in such settings play a pivotal role, adapting their strate-

gies to cater to the needs of all learners, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting equity in education. Their experiences, insights, and challenges offer valuable perspectives on the effectiveness of inclusive education and how it shapes the educational journey of students. Understanding these experiences is essential to enhancing teaching practices, ensuring that di-

verse classrooms are places where every child can thrive. In the UK, despite significant strides towards inclusive education, gaps still exist in the training and support provided to teachers working in diverse classrooms. Research has highlighted a lack of professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills to effectively manage diverse needs, particularly in terms of integrating students with special educational needs (SEN). Additionally, there is limited exploration of how teachers' experiences in these settings impact their job satisfaction and long-term professional growth. This gap underscores the need for further investigation into how teacher experiences shape the inclusivity of UK classrooms. (Chen, 2020) Singapore, renowned for its high-performing education system, has also encountered challenges related to diversity in the classroom. As the population becomes increasingly multicultural, there is a growing concern over how well teachers are equipped to manage cultural diversity and support students from various ethnic backgrounds. While there have been policy advancements in inclusive education, the gap lies in the insufficient research on teachers' lived experiences in these settings, especially regarding the integration of students from different socio-economic backgrounds and with special educational needs. The need for a deeper understanding of these experiences is pressing to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive teaching practices. (Craig, 2021) In the UAE, the rapid growth of a multicultural student body in its schools presents a unique set of challenges for educators. Despite the government's commitment to inclusivity, teachers often face difficulties in accommodating the wide range of learning needs and cultural differences in their classrooms. A significant gap exists in exploring how teachers navigate the complexities of these diverse classrooms, particularly in terms of emotional and psychological support for students. This gap suggests that further research into teachers' per-

spectives and experiences in managing diversity could lead to more targeted interventions and policies aimed at improving inclusivity in the UAE's educational settings. (Clark, 2021) In the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines, while inclusive education is a growing focus, there remains a lack of in-depth studies on teachers' day-to-day experiences in integrated classrooms. Teachers often work under significant pressure, managing a diverse group of students with varying needs, but the support systems in place are often inadequate. The gap in understanding how teachers cope with these challenges and the impact on their professional development requires more attention to inform future educational policies and practices. (Pizarro, 2021) Region 3, known for its rapidly expanding urban and rural mix, faces challenges in integrating diverse student populations in its educational system. While many schools have implemented inclusive education frameworks, there is limited research on how teachers in this region adapt their teaching methods to accommodate students with varying learning needs. This gap highlights the need for focused research on the experiences of teachers in Region 3, particularly in relation to professional development and the resources available to support inclusive teaching practices. (Gabine, 2020) In SOCSKSARGEN, a region that includes both rural and urban schools, teachers face unique challenges in creating inclusive classrooms due to disparities in resources and access to professional training. Many teachers in this region work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, yet there is little research on how these teachers manage the integration of these students within the classroom setting. The gap in understanding the teachers' experiences in this context calls for a study that can provide insights into how best to support teachers in promoting inclusive education in SOCSKSARGEN. (Mamangkas, 2020) The need to conduct this study at Kinamayan Integrated School, Sto.

Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division, becomes evident due to the growing diversity in educational settings, especially within the context of inclusive education. Kinamayan Integrated School, as part of a region that includes a mix of urban and rural populations, faces unique challenges in accommodating students with var-

ious learning needs, backgrounds, and abilities. Despite the increasing emphasis on inclusive education in the Philippines, there is a limited body of research documenting the real-world experiences of teachers in such environments, particularly in local settings like Sto. Tomas East District.

1.1. Purpose of the Study—The purpose of this study is to examine and gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of teachers working in diverse educational settings within an integrated school environment. By amplifying their voices, this research aims to identify the challenges they face, the opportunities they leverage, and the strategies they employ to navigate the complexities of varied classroom dynamics. The study aspires to provide meaningful insights that can inform the development of effective teaching practices, promote inclusivity, and enhance the overall educational experience for both educators and students in multicultural and multifaceted learning contexts.

1.2. Research Questions—The main purpose of this study was to discover the school heads' experiences with diversity management and their inclusion leadership methods is important because it offers important insights into the opportunities and challenges of creating inclusive learning environments. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following:

- (1) What are the experiences teachers face when working in diverse classrooms within an integrated school setting?
- (2) What are teachers' key challenges and coping mechanisms when working in diverse classrooms within an integrated school setting?
- (3) What insights can be drawn from this study?

1.3. Definition of Terms—To provide clarity and a shared understanding of key concepts used in this study, specific terms are defined as they are operationally applied within the research. These definitions aim to ensure consistency and precision in interpreting the findings and discussions throughout the study.

Diverse Educational Setting

In this study, "Diverse Educational Setting" refers to an integrated school environment where teachers work with students from various cultural, socio-economic, linguistic, and ability backgrounds. It encompasses classrooms with learners who exhibit a wide range of aca-

demic needs, learning styles, and personal experiences, requiring educators to adapt their teaching strategies to address the unique dynamics and inclusivity challenges within these settings.

Integrated School

In this study, "Integrated School" refers to an educational institution that accommodates students from different grade levels, typically combining elementary and secondary education under one administration. It also promotes inclusivity by integrating learners from diverse cultural, social, and academic backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, within a shared learning environment.

1.4. Significant of the Study—The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed

light on the unique experiences of teachers navigating diverse educational settings within an

integrated school environment. As classrooms become increasingly multicultural and inclusive, understanding how educators adapt to these changes is vital for promoting effective teaching practices and fostering a supportive learning atmosphere. Particularly, to the following:

Students

Increased awareness of diverse experiences can help students develop empathy and appreciation for differences. The study's findings can promote practices that create more inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students.

Teachers

Sharing experiences can enhance teachers' understanding of best practices and innovative strategies in diverse classrooms. The study may help in establishing networks for teachers to share challenges and solutions with their peers.

School Heads

The findings can provide school heads with strategies to foster a supportive environment for teachers and students.

Department of Education Officials

Insights from the study can inform policies and practices that support diverse learners and inclusive education.

Future Researchers

Findings may provide data that can be compared with other contexts or regions, enriching the broader educational research landscape. Finally, to fellow researchers who wanted to conduct a similar or comparative study. In research, providing a clear definition of key terms is essential to ensure a common understanding among readers. This section will define the core concepts used throughout the study, helping to clarify their meaning within the specific context of the research.

1.5. Theoretical Lens—The study is anchored to Social Constructivism, rooted in the work of theorists like Lev Vygotsky, 1934/1962 or in the early 20th century, which suggests that learning is a social process where knowledge is constructed through interactions with others. This theory emphasizes the role of cultural context in learning and highlights the importance of collaborative learning environments. In integrated schools, teachers can apply social constructivist principles by encouraging collaboration among students from different backgrounds, facilitating peer learning, Social Constructivism, largely attributed to the work of Lev Vygotsky, posits that knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student but is actively constructed through social interactions. Vygotsky's theories emphasize the importance of cultural and social contexts in the learning process, suggesting that learning occurs within a cultural framework and is influenced by the relationships students have with one another and

with their teachers. This perspective shifts the focus from individual learning to a more communal approach, where knowledge is shared and developed collaboratively. In integrated educational settings, where students from diverse backgrounds come together, these principles are particularly significant. In integrated schools, creating collaborative learning environments is crucial for fostering inclusive educational experiences. Social Constructivism highlights the importance of peer interactions in the learning process, as students engage with one another to construct understanding. Teachers can facilitate this by designing group activities and projects that require collaboration and dialogue among students. By working together, students can share their diverse perspectives, enriching the learning experience and promoting mutual respect and understanding. This collaborative approach not only enhances academic outcomes but also fosters social cohesion among students from different cultural backgrounds. In a so-

cial constructivist framework, the role of the teacher shifts from that of a traditional lecturer to a facilitator of learning. Teachers are encouraged to create an environment where students feel safe to express their ideas and collaborate with peers. This involves guiding discussions, posing thought-provoking questions, and encouraging students to reflect on their learning. In integrated schools, teachers can utilize their understanding of the cultural backgrounds of their students to facilitate meaningful interactions and discussions that resonate with students' lived experiences. This approach can help students feel valued and acknowledged, fostering a sense of belonging in the classroom. The cultural context plays a vital role in Social Constructivism. Vygotsky emphasized that learning is deeply influenced by the cultural tools and symbols that individuals encounter. In integrated schools, recognizing and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of students can enhance the learning experience. Teachers can incorporate culturally relevant materials and examples into their lessons, enabling students to connect new knowledge with their own experiences. This approach not only makes learning more meaningful but also promotes inclusivity by validating students' identities and experiences. When students see their cultures reflected in the curriculum, they are more likely to engage actively in their learning. Social Constructivism also encourages critical thinking and self-reflection among students. By engaging in collaborative discussions, students are prompted to consider different viewpoints, question assumptions, and articulate their thoughts. This critical engagement is essential in integrated classrooms, where students may have varied perspectives shaped by their cultural backgrounds. Teachers can create opportunities for reflection by encouraging students to discuss their learning processes and how their backgrounds influence their understanding of the content. Such reflective practices can help students develop a

deeper understanding of both the subject matter and their own identities. Implementing Social Constructivist principles in integrated schools has profound implications for educational practice. By fostering collaboration, cultural sensitivity, and critical reflection, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of their students. This approach not only enhances academic achievement but also prepares students to navigate a multicultural world. As educators embrace the tenets of Social Constructivism, they contribute to the development of a more equitable and inclusive education system that recognizes and values the diverse experiences of all students. Ultimately, by focusing on social interactions and cultural contexts, educators can empower students to become active participants in their learning journeys. Another theory that would anchor to this study is Multicultural Education Theory. Multicultural Education Theory, articulated by scholars such as James A. Banks, advocates for educational practices that reflect and honor the diverse cultural experiences of students. This theory emphasizes the need for an inclusive curriculum that addresses social justice and equity, enabling students to develop a critical consciousness about their own cultural identities and those of others. Teachers can use this framework to create lessons that are relevant to their student's lives and experiences, thus fostering a more inclusive classroom environment. Multicultural Education Theory, prominently articulated by scholars like James A. Banks, advocates for an educational framework that recognizes and values the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. This theory posits that education should not only reflect the various cultural experiences of students but also promote social justice and equity within the classroom. By integrating multicultural perspectives into the curriculum, educators can help students understand and appreciate the rich tapestry of cultural identities that shape their communities

and the world at large. This approach aims to cultivate an environment where all students feel valued and included, fostering a sense of belonging that enhances their educational experiences. At the heart of Multicultural Education Theory is the need for an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges and honors the diverse backgrounds of students. An inclusive curriculum goes beyond simply adding multicultural content; it involves critically examining and re-evaluating existing curricula to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented. This process helps students see themselves in the learning material, making education more relevant and engaging. For instance, incorporating literature, history, and contributions from various cultural groups allows students to connect their own experiences to the broader narrative, promoting empathy and understanding among peers from different backgrounds. A key goal of Multicultural Education is to develop students' critical consciousness, which involves fostering an awareness of social injustices and encouraging action toward equity. By exploring issues related to race, class, gender, and power dynamics, educators can help students understand the systemic inequalities that exist in society. This awareness empowers students to question societal norms and take informed action in their communities. Teachers can create discussions and projects that invite students to analyze contemporary issues through a multicultural lens, prompting them to consider how their own cultural identities intersect with broader social issues. Such critical engagement not only enriches students' educational experiences but

also equips them with the tools to become advocates for change. Implementing Multicultural Education Theory in the classroom requires intentional planning and reflection from educators. Teachers can utilize various strategies to create a more inclusive environment, such as integrating culturally relevant resources, encouraging student voice, and fostering collaborative learning experiences. By promoting group activities that celebrate diverse cultural backgrounds, educators can facilitate interactions that deepen students' understanding of one another. Additionally, ongoing professional development can equip teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of multicultural education. Ultimately, by embracing Multicultural Education Theory, teachers can cultivate an inclusive classroom atmosphere that respects and values the diverse identities of all students, paving the way for a more equitable and just educational landscape. Figure 1 below presents three interconnected aspects of teachers' experiences in diverse educational settings within an integrated school environment. The left circle highlights the range of experiences teachers encounter while working in classrooms characterized by diversity. These experiences likely involve navigating cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences among students. Teachers must adapt their teaching methods and communication styles to accommodate students' varying backgrounds, learning abilities, and needs. Understanding these experiences is crucial to identifying the complexities teachers face in such dynamic and inclusive environments.

2. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methods employed in conducting the study and gathering data. It details the research design, philosophical assumptions, research participants and sampling, data collection procedures, research instruments, trustworthiness measures, and ethical considerations. The study utilized three common qualitative methods: participant observation, in-depth interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions, each chosen to address specific research objectives effectively.

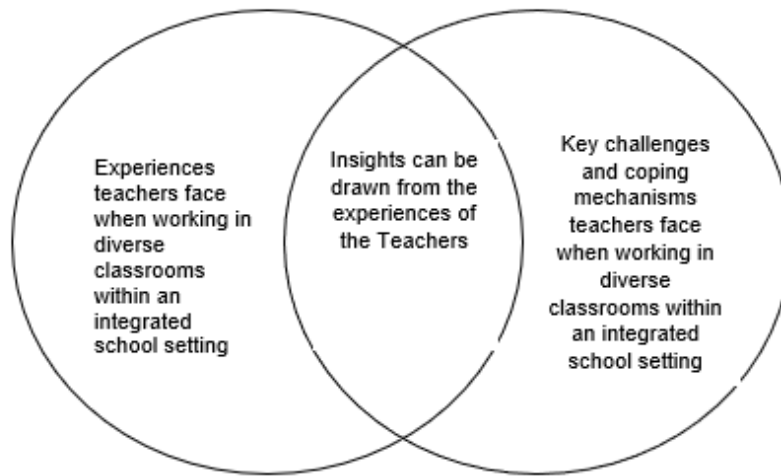


Fig. 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

Participant observation was used to gather data on naturally occurring behaviors in their real-world contexts. In-depth interviews provided insights into participants' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when addressing sensitive or complex topics. Focus groups were employed to explore cultural norms and generate a broad understanding of issues relevant to the group or subgroup represented. Phenomenology, as defined by Patton (2022), seeks to uncover the structure and essence of individuals' lived experiences. This research aligns with that aim by delving into the experiences of school heads navigating the challenges of the new normal, comparing its implementation then and now. Giorgi (2020) reminds researchers to approach phenomenological inquiry with an understanding that the data gathered often represents only the surface of a deeper, more complex reality. This perspective guided the study in uncovering the profound depth and breadth of participants' experiences.

2.1. Philosophical Assumptions—The philosophical assumption serves as the foundation for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data within a specific research context. It provides the background necessary to draw conclusions and make informed decisions throughout the study. In this research, the philosophical assumptions reflect the guiding principles behind the choice of topic, research problem, and paradigm, which shape the approach and methodology. A strong study begins with a thoughtful selection of the topic, research problem, or area of interest, coupled with the underlying paradigm. The concept of "paradigm," as traced by Stanage (2019), originates from the Greek term *paradeigma* and Latin paradigm, meaning pattern, model, or example. A paradigm functions as a guiding framework for thought and action, a model upon which decisions and designs are based. In other words, it represents the pattern in which a researcher views and interacts with the world. This view aligns with Denzin and Lincoln's (2020) definition of a research paradigm as a "basic set of beliefs that guide action," encompassing the researcher's worldview and philosophical stance. In the context of this study, the philosophical assumptions offer the lens through which the experiences of teachers and school heads in an integrated school setting, specifically Kinamayan Integrated School in Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte

Division, will be understood and analyzed.

Ontology

This section examines the nature of reality as it relates to the study. Creswell (2019) emphasizes that reality is subjective, shaped by individual experiences, which leads to multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon. For qualitative researchers, ontology addresses the ways in which individuals construct their own realities within the research context. In this study, the realities of different stakeholders—researchers, participants, and readers were acknowledged as distinct. The focus was on understanding the varied experiences of teachers in integrated school settings, specifically at Kinamayan Integrated School in Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division. The study investigated how teachers perceived and navigated the implementation of the curriculum, comparing the past and present contexts. The participants' reflections reveal the strategies they have developed to adapt to the evolving educational landscape. This diversity of perspectives serves as the foundation for exploring teachers' lived experiences in a multifaceted educational environment. In this research, the voices and interpretations of participants were central. Extensive quotes and thematic analysis are used to capture their perspectives, ensuring that different viewpoints are reflected. Participants' responses were coded and analyzed to identify both commonalities and discrepancies in their experiences. To maintain the study's reliability, the coding process was carried out meticulously. Throughout the research, I remained committed to preserving the authenticity of the participants' voices, avoiding any personal bias that could influence the findings.

Epistemology

This section addresses the epistemological assumption, which concerns how knowledge claims are justified in the research process. Guba and Lincoln (2019), as cited by Creswell (2019), emphasized the importance of

minimizing the distance between the researcher and the participants to gather firsthand, authentic information. This approach encourages the researcher to collaborate closely with participants, spending time in the field and becoming an "insider" within the study context. This process aligns with the goals of this study, which involved engaging deeply with the participants to understand their lived experiences. In this research, the 10 participants from Kinamayan Integrated School in Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division, were integral to providing insight into how they implemented the DepEd-required curriculum in the classroom. Using thematic analysis, I found that phenomenology was the most suitable methodology for understanding the participants' experiences and perceptions. By adopting this approach, I was able to explore how teachers perceive and respond to the challenges and changes they face in implementing the program. To ensure the richness and accuracy of the data, I maintained close and ongoing conversations with the participants, which allowed me to gather firsthand information about their experiences. This approach was essential for understanding their coping mechanisms and strategies in carrying out the program, offering a clearer picture of the realities they encounter in their professional roles.

Axiology

This section focused on the role of values in the research process. Creswell (2019) emphasized the significance of values in shaping the narrative of a study. Axiology suggests that researchers should openly acknowledge the values that influence their interpretations and explicitly connect their perspectives with those of the participants. In this study, I maintained a strong commitment to upholding the dignity and value of every piece of information provided by the participants. I recognized the personal and value-laden nature of the data shared by the teachers at Kinamayan Integrated School

in Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division. Understanding this, I approached the participants' responses with care, ensuring their answers were preserved with integrity. In interpreting the data, I worked to align my understanding with the participants' own interpretations, ensuring that the study accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. This approach helped maintain the authenticity and merit of their contributions throughout the research process.

Rhetoric

This philosophical assumption emphasizes that the researcher may adopt a literary, infor-

mal style while incorporating a personal voice and qualitative terms, with limited definitions. In the context of this study, I utilized the first person to convey the experiences of the teachers at Kinamayan Integrated School in Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division. This approach allows for a more intimate and nuanced portrayal of the participants' lived experiences in diverse educational settings, reflecting both the personal and subjective nature of qualitative research. By using a personal voice, the study emphasizes the depth and complexity of the teachers' stories and perspectives.

2.2. Qualitative Assumptions—The methodology adopted for this study involved a creative and responsive approach to explore key questions and subject matter, with the method referring to the specific procedures and knowledge used (Gerodias, 2019). In this research, the experiences of the teachers were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDIs), which enabled a detailed exploration of their coping strategies as revealed in their responses. The researcher's curiosity about these experiences led to the decision to conduct qualitative research, which Kalof and Dietz (2019), as cited by Gerodias (2019), describe as an effective means of uncovering the "meanings and motivations that underlie cultural symbols, personal experiences, and phenomena." Phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate method for this study, as it focuses on capturing teachers' stories, particularly those balancing dual roles in the classroom. David (2020) explains that phenomenological research highlights the themes, symbols, and meanings embedded in these lived experiences, providing a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives. Phenomenological research

is founded on two core premises. First, it recognizes that experience is a rich and legitimate source of knowledge. Becker (2019), as cited by Morrissey and Higgs (2020), asserts that experience shapes behavior and offers profound insights into human phenomena, positioning it as a reliable foundation for understanding rather than an uncertain one. The second premise emphasizes that the everyday world is a valuable source of knowledge. By examining events in the context of daily life, we can gain critical insights into ourselves and the nature of specific phenomena (Morrissey Higgs, 2020). In this study, the phenomenological approach allowed for a focused exploration of the "what" and "how" of teachers' experiences (Moustakas, 2019). Through this lens, the researcher sought to uncover the subjective perspectives of participants, shedding light on how the DepEd program was implemented both prior to the pandemic and during the ongoing educational shift. This methodology enabled a deeper understanding of how teachers in diverse educational settings navigated the evolving challenges of the curriculum, providing valuable insights into their adaptive strategies.

2.3. Design and Procedure—

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of teachers at Kinamayan Integrated School, Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division. By focusing on their unique perspectives, the study sought to uncover patterns and themes related to how these teachers navigated the challenges of implementing the curriculum in diverse educational settings. The phenomenological approach allowed participants to share their personal experiences, which were analyzed to derive insights into their coping mechanisms and strategies. Participants were invited to take part in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), conducted either virtually or face-to-face, depending on the circumstances. Using the methodology outlined by Jamon and Cabanes (2019), recurring themes and patterns were extracted from their responses to capture their lived realities. A total of 10 teachers participated in the study, offering valuable firsthand insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats they experienced in adapting to the educational shifts brought by evolving challenges. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the Colaizzi method was employed, a rigorous technique commonly used in phenomenological research. This method facilitated the identification of key themes, enabling the researcher to

synthesize the essence of the participants' experiences. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, with participants signing informed consent forms and retaining the right to withdraw from the study at any time. As Creswell (2023) describes, phenomenology emphasizes the shared experiences of a group to uncover the essence of a phenomenon. Guided by Moustakas' (2019) framework, the interviews sought to address two primary questions: What have you experienced in relation to the phenomenon? In what contexts or situations have your experiences occurred? Supplementary data, such as documents and observations, were also incorporated to enrich the findings. Through this meticulous process, the study revealed how teachers at Kinamayan Integrated School adapted to the demands of implementing the curriculum in integrated school settings. It highlighted their coping mechanisms and strategies for balancing their dual roles as educators and curriculum implementers in a challenging and ever-changing educational landscape. The insights gained from this study aim to provide valuable contributions to the understanding of teachers' lived experiences in integrated schools, paving the way for improved support and guidance for educators in similar contexts.

2.4. Research Participants—In the selection of the research participants, I used the purposive sampling design, as participants were chosen based on the criteria or purpose of the investigation. This design is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. The participants were carefully chosen to ensure that the findings were authentic and reliable (Marshall, 2019). It is a non-probability sampling method where elements selected for the sample are determined by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using

sound judgment, which results in saving time and resources (Black, 2020). In this study, suitable participants were chosen based on specific criteria. A total of ten (10) teachers, either male or female, from Kinamayan Integrated School, Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division, will be part of the in-depth interviews (IDIs). One of the primary criteria for selection is that participants must have at least five years of teaching experience to ensure a depth of understanding and firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, to protect the identity of the participants, coding

will be used. The codes IDI-FT1 to IDI-FT10 will represent the informants in the in-depth interviews.

2.5. Ethical Considerations—In this section, I outlined the ethical principles that guided my research, ensuring the protection and well-being of the participating teachers. These principles included my commitment to social value, informed consent, addressing the vulnerability of research respondents, upholding privacy and confidentiality, carefully considering risks, benefits, and safety, ensuring justice, maintaining transparency, acknowledging my qualifications as the researcher, addressing potential conflicts of interest, ensuring the adequacy of resources, and recognizing community relevance.

Social Value

I recognized the significant social value inherent in this research. By exploring the lived experiences of teachers in diverse educational settings at Kinamayan Integrated School, I aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes they encountered in an integrated school environment. The findings of this study provided valuable insights for the Department of Education, school leaders, and local policymakers, potentially informing improvements in support systems, teaching strategies, and policies that address the realities of diverse classrooms. Ultimately, this research positively impacted not only the teachers but also the learners and communities they served in Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte.

Informed Consent

I placed a strong emphasis on obtaining informed consent from each participating teacher. Before participation, I personally ensured that each teacher received a clear and comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, procedures (such as in-depth interviews), estimated time commitment, and their right to withdraw at any point without any consequences. A detailed consent form was provided, and I proceeded

only once I was confident that each participant fully understood and voluntarily agreed to be involved.

Vulnerability of Research Respondents

I acknowledged that teachers, despite their professional roles, might have had concerns about how their narratives would be perceived by their colleagues or superiors. Some hesitated to express their honest experiences and opinions. To address this vulnerability, I cultivated a research environment built on mutual trust, respect, and empathy. I assured participants that their involvement was voluntary and that their identities would remain strictly confidential. Their experiences were anonymized in all forms of reporting, empowering them to share openly and without fear of repercussions.

Privacy and Confidentiality

I prioritized protecting the privacy and confidentiality of all participating teachers. Each teacher was assigned a unique identifier or code to ensure anonymity. I securely stored all collected data, including interview transcripts and notes, and I was the only one with access to them. In all presentations and publications of my findings, I reported the data in a way that ensured no individual participant or specific classroom could be identified. It was my responsibility to create a safe and respectful space for participants to share their stories with confidence.

Risks, Benefits, and Safety

I ensured that all interactions were conducted respectfully and that participants felt comfortable and safe throughout the process. The potential risks to participants were minimal, involving their time commitment and the possibility of emotional responses when discussing challenging teaching experiences. Nonetheless, the benefits of the research were meaningful. Through their participation, teachers

contributed to a growing body of knowledge on educational diversity and integration, helping to inform professional development and policies that reflect their lived realities.

Justice

To ensure justice, I selected participants fairly from Kinamayan Integrated School without discrimination, giving each eligible teacher an equal opportunity to share their perspectives. The voices of teachers across different grade levels, subject areas, and experiences were valued. Furthermore, I shared the findings with the participating school community and relevant stakeholders in the Sto. Tomas East District to ensure that those who contributed to the research could benefit from its results.

Transparency

Transparency was a foundational principle of this study. I maintained open and honest communication with all participants throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential implications of the findings. I remained available to answer questions or address concerns at any stage, fostering a collaborative and respectful research relationship.

Qualification of the Researcher

As the researcher, I brought with me a strong foundation in both education and qualitative research. I had over a decade of teaching experience in the Philippine public school system, including in inclusive and integrated school settings, which equipped me with a deep understanding of the diverse needs of learners and educators. I was skilled in classroom management, differentiated instruction, and learner-centered approaches—practices that sharpened my ability to listen deeply and interpret experiences with empathy and accuracy. I had also undergone training in research methodology, data collection, and ethical research practices, ensuring that I conducted the study with rigor and integrity. My experiences strengthened my analytical thinking, attention to detail, and commit-

ment to upholding confidentiality and respect throughout the research process. These qualifications and values enabled me to conduct the study with the sensitivity and professionalism it required.

Conflict of Interest

I remained vigilant in identifying any potential conflicts of interest that might have arisen due to my professional involvement in the education sector. When actual or perceived conflicts emerged, I disclosed them transparently and took appropriate steps to uphold the objectivity and trustworthiness of my research.

Adequacy of Resources

I ensured that all in-depth interviews with the participating teachers were conducted efficiently, with minimal disruption to their teaching schedules. I accommodated their availability and provided any materials needed to support their participation. The research process was planned in a way that respected their time and professional responsibilities.

Community Involvement

I ensured that community involvement was evident throughout the research process by maintaining open communication with school leaders and participants, being present and respectful during interviews, and actively listening to the voices of teachers. This research held direct relevance for the educational community in Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte, especially for teachers working in integrated school settings. I approached every interaction with cultural sensitivity and genuine interest, recognizing the value of the participants' lived experiences. Furthermore, I shared the findings with the school and district in accessible formats—such as presentations or summary reports—to encourage local ownership of the insights. By amplifying the voices of teachers and highlighting their experiences, I contributed meaningfully to the improvement of school culture, instructional practices, and teacher support systems. Through this, the study sparked dialogue and reflection

on diversity and inclusivity not only within Kinamayan Integrated School but also across other integrated school contexts in the Philippines.

2.6. Role of the Researcher—I took on a variety of duties in this study in order to make it successful. Initially, I requested authorization to carry out the research from the superintendent of the Schools Division and subsequently from the study participants. In order to meet the requirements of this kind of research, I, as the researcher, have, if permission granted, videotaped the actual interview. The purpose of the interview is to learn more about the learn-

ers' experiences in the new normal of teaching and learning. How the Department of Education should enhance its programs would also be discussed during the interview. After the needed data has been gathered, everything has been transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. However, human instruments are more important to be studied in case the quality of this research has to deal with biases and assumptions in dealing with the persons involved in the research (Greenbank, 2023).

2.7. Data Collection—According to Creswell (2019), an important step in the process was to find people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they would provide good data. A closely interrelated step in the process involved determining a strategy for the purposeful sampling of individuals or sites. Once the inquirer selected the sites or people, decisions needed to be made about the most appropriate data collection approaches. To collect this information, the researcher developed protocols or written forms for recording the data such as interviews or observational protocols. Also, the researcher needed to anticipate issues of data collection, called "field issues," which could be a problem, such as having inadequate data, needing to prematurely leave the field or site, or contributing to lost information. Finally, a qualitative researcher had to decide how he or she would store data so that they could easily be found and protected from damage or loss. In this study, I employed the following data-gathering steps. I asked the Schools Division Superintendent for permission to conduct the study at Kinamayan Integrated School, Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte Division.

I secured the superintendent's permission. I sent the superintendent a letter explaining the study's objectives and the participants' identification, with an attached copy of Chapters 1 and 2 and the research instrument. I would only start after I received the Superintendent's approval.

I asked for permission from the school heads

After securing approval from the SDS, I sent letters to the principals or school heads of the identified schools explaining the study to be conducted in their schools. I obtained consent from the participants and considered the participants' consent as informants of the study a priority; thus, I ensured permission from them and their parents/guardians. The participants were adequately oriented about the whole study process and their part as participants.

I conducted the interview

I used the interview questionnaire to conduct an in-depth interview. I took participants' profiles, took notes, and recorded conversations using a sound recorder for easy transcription. Likewise, I carefully listened and actively responded during the interviews.

I was transcribing the interviewees' responses

The researcher would then precisely transcribe the interviewees' responses by recalling their answers from the sound recorder. Since the participants used their vernacular language, the researcher translated it into English.

Data Coding and Thematizing

Categorizing and coding the data would come after the transcription process. Themes were extracted, and participants' data were con-

trasted and compared. The researcher would then conduct a second round of interviews (FGD) to confirm data requiring more justification and participant feedback. The newly acquired material was carefully analyzed and added to the existing body of knowledge. Then, in order to identify patterns and trends, data were contrasted and compared between the individuals.

2.8. Data Analysis—In this study, I carefully examined and thoughtfully analyzed all the data collected. I began by describing my personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. This step was an attempt to set aside my own experiences so that the focus could be fully directed to the participants. I developed a list of significant statements by identifying how individuals were experiencing the topic. These significant statements were listed with equal worth, ensuring they were nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping. I then grouped the significant statements into larger units of information, referred

to as “meaning units” or themes. Afterward, I wrote a description of “what” the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. Next, I described “how” the experience happened, referred to as the “structural description.” In this step, I reflected on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. Finally, I wrote a composite description of the phenomenon that incorporated both the textual and structural descriptions. This composite description represented the “essence” of the experience and served as the culminating aspect of the phenomenological study.

2.9. Framework of Analysis—The analytical framework for this study was flexible enough to allow the researcher to either gather all of the data and then analyze it or evaluate it while it was being collected. The data collected was then sifted, charted, and categorized in line with key topics and themes during the analysis stage. The first step involves thoroughly reading and re-reading all the transcribed interviews. This step was crucial as it allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the data, ensuring they fully understood the content and context of the participant's responses. By repeatedly engaging with the transcriptions, the researcher began to identify recurring patterns, themes, and nuances that might not be immediately apparent. This process helps in building a comprehensive foundation for further analysis.

In the second step, I extracted significant statements from the transcribed interviews. These were specific phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon. The goal was to isolate the most relevant and impactful parts of the data that would contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject. By focusing on these key statements, I distilled the essence of the participants' experiences and insights. The third step involves giving meaning to the extracted significant statements. During this process, I categorized pertinent quotes into broader themes. This involves interpreting the statements to understand the underlying meanings and implications. By organizing the data into themes, I began to see how different aspects of the participants' experiences relate to each other and the overall phenomenon being stud-

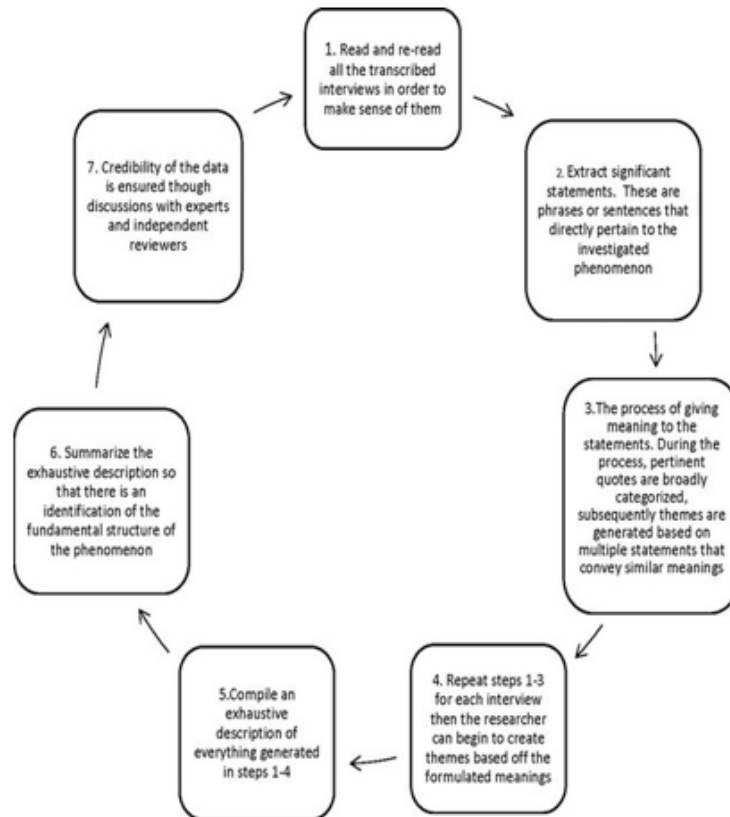


Fig. 2. Analytical Framework of the Study (Ritchie and Spencer 2019)

ied. In the fourth step, I repeated steps 1 to 3 for each interview. This iterative process ensures that all interviews are analyzed in the same thorough manner. By treating each interview individually and then comparing the themes across interviews.

2.10. Trustworthiness of the Study—Trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential for establishing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. In the context of this study on teachers' experiences in diverse educational settings, trustworthiness ensures that the findings accurately reflect the participants' realities and that the research process is transparent and rigorous. The value of a qualitative study lies in how it is conducted, as the integrity of the research directly affects its outcomes. Therefore, trustworthiness makes the research credible, shareable, and something the researcher can be proud of. As Harts (2019) notes, trustworthiness replaces the traditional

notions of **validity** and **reliability** in qualitative research, focusing instead on data authenticity and rigor. Credibility is established through prolonged engagement with the participants, ensuring that their experiences are accurately captured. In this study, I ensured credibility by interviewing as many teachers as possible until saturation was reached, allowing the data to reflect a comprehensive view of their experiences in diverse classrooms. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other settings. In qualitative research, findings are often specific to a particular context, in this case, the integrated school environment. However, by providing detailed descriptions of

the school setting and the challenges faced by the teachers, I aimed to offer enough contextual information for readers to determine whether the findings could be applicable in other educational contexts. Confirmability addresses the need to minimize researcher bias, ensuring that the findings stem from the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations. While absolute objectivity is difficult to achieve, steps were taken to ensure that the conclusions reflected the teachers' perspectives, not personal biases. The use of direct quotes and careful analysis of their narratives helped maintain this objectivity. Finally, dependability refers to the

consistency and reliability of the findings. In this study, dependability was achieved by ensuring that the interpretation of the data and the recommendations were firmly grounded in the teachers' responses. Confirmability, in this regard, ensures that other researchers can trace the study's processes and verify the findings based on the data provided. By focusing on these aspects of trustworthiness, the study aimed to present a reliable and insightful exploration of how teachers navigate diverse educational settings in an integrated school, capturing the complexity of their experiences in both the past and the present.

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter addresses the research questions and presents the emerging themes based on the participants' responses. The first research question aimed to explore the experiences teachers face when working in diverse classrooms within an integrated school setting.

3.1. Teachers' Experiences in Diverse Classrooms within an Integrated School Setting—Teachers in integrated school settings are constantly navigating the complexities of student diversity. Many described the experience as both challenging and transformative, requiring continuous professional reflection and flexibility. They encounter students from varied cultural backgrounds, different learning paces, and distinct personal circumstances—all of which shape the way they teach and interact with their classes. One of the most commonly shared experiences was the need to adapt teaching strategies to address the unique mix of learners. Teachers often referred to adjusting lesson content, modifying classroom language, or providing differentiated activities to make learning more accessible. They emphasized that traditional one-size-fits-all approaches were often ineffective in diverse environments. Additionally, teachers mentioned that building relationships with students became a crucial part of their role. Under-

standing their learners' backgrounds—whether linguistic, familial, or social—helped them foster a more inclusive and empathetic classroom culture. These insights are consistent with recent studies. According to Nguyen et al. (2021), diversity in classrooms requires teachers to develop cultural competence, responsive teaching approaches, and a deeper sensitivity to students' identities and lived experiences. Meanwhile, Kaur and Noman (2020) stress that navigating diversity requires both emotional intelligence and pedagogical adaptability, as teachers play multiple roles beyond instruction: mentors, counselors, and even cultural mediators. Despite the workload and the complexity of their tasks, most participants expressed a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment. The opportunity to shape a supportive, inclusive environment was viewed as a professional responsibility and a personal mission. From this general perspective of teaching in diverse settings, several emerging themes were identified.

3.1.1. Embracing Inclusive Teaching Practices —

In diverse classrooms, inclusive teaching becomes a core approach for meeting student needs. Participants in this study shared that they regularly adapt their strategies to include all students, regardless of background or learning level. This includes differentiated instruction, the use of multimodal learning tools, and creating culturally relevant content.

Ainscow (2020) describes inclusive education as a practice of restructuring teaching and learning to reduce barriers and promote participation for all learners. In line with this, teachers in the study emphasized the importance of creating a safe, respectful, and collaborative classroom culture. Teachers also recognized that inclusivity goes beyond content delivery. It includes how students are grouped, how feedback is given, and how classroom discussions are facilitated to ensure every learner's voice is heard. As Alasmari (2021) explains, effective inclusive practices increase student engagement, promote equitable access, and foster belongingness among diverse learners. The participants stated in this study consistently emphasized the necessity of adapting their instructional strategies to accommodate the diverse needs of their students. One of the core elements highlighted was the use of differentiated teaching methods, such as integrating visuals and real-world objects to aid understanding, particularly for students who struggle with language barriers. This approach underscores the importance of mak-

ing learning accessible, ensuring that students from various linguistic backgrounds are not left behind. Teachers also described how culturally relevant content—drawing connections between lesson topics and students' traditions or lived experiences—fostered a more inclusive and meaningful learning environment. This personalized approach helped students feel more connected to the material and validated their cultural identities, making them more likely to engage with the content. Moreover, a significant strategy employed by participants was collaborative learning, where students were encouraged to work together in small groups. This strategy not only facilitated peer support but also allowed stronger students to assist those who were struggling, further promoting inclusivity. Teachers also made conscious efforts to ensure that every student's voice was heard in class, even those who were more reserved. The use of gentle prompting and creating a safe space for participation were important aspects of their inclusive approach. While these practices were highly valued by teachers, they also noted the challenges that came with meeting every student's unique needs, especially in a resource-constrained environment. However, despite these difficulties, teachers expressed a deep commitment to continuously improving their practices to ensure that all students, regardless of ability or background, could succeed.

3.1.2. Strengthening Cultural Responsiveness and Collaboration —In an integrated school setting, cultural responsiveness and collaboration are essential components of effective teaching, especially in diverse classrooms. Teachers in this study highlighted how crucial it was to acknowledge and respect the cultural backgrounds of their students, as well as to foster a collaborative approach both within the classroom and across the school community. The integration of culturally responsive teaching

ensures that students feel recognized and valued, while collaboration enhances the collective responsibility of both teachers and students in creating an inclusive learning environment. One of the common threads among participants was the recognition that cultural diversity presents both challenges and opportunities in teaching. Teachers spoke of the need to understand the various cultural contexts in which their students live, as this understanding influences both academic performance and personal development.

Additionally, fostering a culture of collaboration—among teachers, students, and the wider school community—was seen as a crucial tool in creating a more inclusive and effective learning space. The participants’ responses underline the importance of fostering a culturally responsive environment where students feel valued and understood. One of the most striking aspects of their experiences was the effort to incorporate students’ cultural identities into daily lessons. Teachers acknowledged that by recognizing the diverse backgrounds of their students, they could make the curriculum more relevant and engaging. This was especially critical for students who may otherwise feel marginalized or disconnected from the subject matter. Cultural responsiveness, therefore, becomes a bridge that connects students’ personal experiences with academic content. Equally significant was the emphasis on collaboration among teachers. Participants revealed how teamwork and ongoing communication with colleagues created a robust support system that allowed them to address the varied needs of their students effectively. This collaborative approach not only enhanced teaching strategies but also

fostered a shared sense of responsibility within the school, ensuring that students received consistent and holistic support across different subjects and learning contexts. Moreover, teachers shared how collaboration extended beyond the staffroom, with increased efforts to engage families and communities in the learning process. They recognized that understanding a student’s home life and community context was just as important as understanding their academic needs. Several teachers reported collaborating with parents and local community leaders to ensure that the school environment was welcoming and reflective of the students’ broader social and cultural contexts. The integration of cultural responsiveness and collaboration in teaching practices ensures that diverse classrooms are not merely a challenge to be managed, but an opportunity to enrich the learning experience for all students. As highlighted by Gay (2020), culturally responsive teaching strengthens student achievement by valuing diversity, while collaborative efforts empower teachers to share strategies, solve challenges, and create a cohesive educational experience for their students.

3.1.3. Struggling with Language Barriers and Varied Learning Readiness —In diverse classroom settings, teachers often face the dual challenge of bridging language gaps and addressing students’ different levels of learning readiness. This theme captures the complex realities that educators encounter as they work to make learning accessible for all, regardless of their students’ linguistic backgrounds or prior academic experiences. Teachers shared how language barriers can slow down class discussions, limit student participation, and cause misunderstandings in both instruction and assessment. Similarly, learning readiness varies greatly among students—some come well-prepared and confident, while others struggle with foundational skills or motivation. Nav-

igating these disparities requires teachers to be flexible, patient, and innovative in their teaching strategies. The insights from participants clearly show that language barriers and varied levels of learning readiness are among the most pressing challenges teachers face in integrated school settings. For many, the language gap acts as a significant roadblock to comprehension, engagement, and assessment. Teachers reported spending extra time simplifying instructions, using multimodal tools (like pictures, gestures, or translations), and creating bilingual support materials. These extra steps, while effective, often add to the teacher’s already heavy workload. In addition, differences in learning readiness—ranging from content knowledge to study habits—require teachers to craft differ-

entiated lessons that can meet students at their respective levels. This requires constant assessment, scaffolding, and sometimes re-teaching of basic concepts before new material can be introduced. Teachers expressed concern over maintaining academic balance—ensuring advanced students aren't held back while struggling students aren't left behind. The strategies shared, such as peer tutoring, flexible grouping, and tiered activities, demonstrate teachers' resilience and adaptability. However, these also highlight the urgent need for professional development and institutional support, especially in the areas of inclusive education and second-language instruction. These findings are supported by current literature. For example, Deroo and Ponzio (2021) emphasize the need for culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy to support multilingual learners, while Yuliana and Sukyadi (2022) highlight how tailored scaffolding can help bridge readiness gaps in mixed-ability classrooms. Ultimately, this theme brings to light the reality that while diversity enriches the classroom, it also demands intentional and sustained support from both teachers and the wider school system.

3.1.4. Balancing Curriculum Demands with Individual Learner Needs—Teachers face pressure to meet curriculum standards while also tailoring instruction for students with diverse academic, cultural, and emotional backgrounds. The challenge lies in meeting deadlines, covering required competencies, and preparing students for assessments, all while differentiating instruction for learners with varying levels of support needs. This often results in instructional overload, where teachers feel stretched between fulfilling institutional expectations and delivering equitable, personalized learning experiences. One recurring challenge shared by teachers in integrated school settings is the tension between adhering to a standardized curriculum and responding to the unique needs of diverse learners. While the curriculum

outlines specific content, timelines, and assessment benchmarks, classrooms are filled with students who learn at different paces, bring various cultural backgrounds, and possess varying levels of academic readiness. Teachers often find themselves navigating this complex dynamic by making thoughtful adjustments to pacing, content delivery, and task design to accommodate all students—without compromising curriculum standards. This balancing act often requires teachers to prioritize core learning objectives while finding creative ways to integrate scaffolding and enrichment activities that meet students where they are. For some, this means using layered tasks or tiered assignments; for others, it's providing extra support outside class hours, especially for learners who are still developing language proficiency or foundational skills. Recent research by Hammond Jackson (2021) supports this tension, noting that while curriculum fidelity is important for equity, it must be paired with flexibility to respond to student variability. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) emphasize that inclusive education depends on a teacher's capacity to differentiate instruction without diluting rigor, ensuring all learners can access the content meaningfully. In the end, the experiences of the participants show that integrated classrooms require more than delivery of lessons—they demand attentive decision-making, adaptive instruction, and genuine care to balance high expectations with human realities. Figure 3 presents a thematic overview of the experiences of teachers working in diverse classrooms within an integrated school setting. These experiences are organized into two major categories: Positive Experiences and Challenges. Under the positive experiences, teachers shared how they embraced inclusive teaching practices, strengthened cultural responsiveness, and fostered collaboration among colleagues and learners. These aspects reflect the rewarding side of working in a diverse environment, where educators grow in their ability to

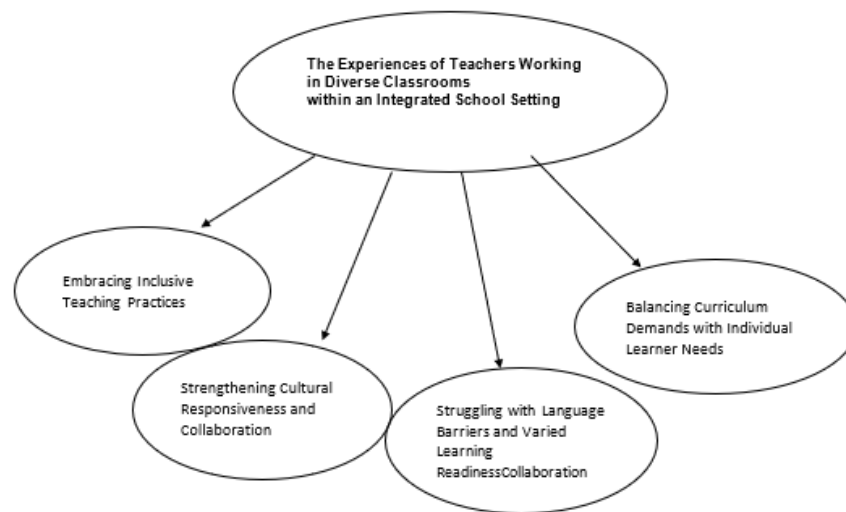


Fig. 3. The Experiences of Teachers Working in Diverse Classrooms within an Integrated School Setting

adapt and connect with students from various backgrounds. Conversely, the challenges include struggling with language barriers and varied learning readiness, as well as balancing curriculum demands with individual learner needs. These themes highlight the complex realities teachers face as they strive to meet academic ex-

pectations while addressing the unique needs of every learner. The figure offers a clear snapshot of the dynamic nature of teaching in integrated settings—where opportunities for growth are closely intertwined with the need for ongoing adaptation and support.

3.2. The Teachers' Coping Mechanisms When Working in Diverse Classrooms Within an Integrated school setting. —Teaching in diverse classrooms within an integrated school setting brings a unique set of challenges that test teachers' adaptability, patience, and creativity. Participants in this study shared a wide range of difficulties they encountered, ranging from communication barriers and mismatched learning readiness to limited instructional resources and heightened emotional demands. These challenges are often amplified by the need to bal-

ance inclusivity with academic standards, all while catering to students' varied cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds. Despite these hurdles, teachers actively develop and apply a range of coping mechanisms to sustain effective teaching. These include peer collaboration, differentiated instruction, continuous professional learning, and emotional resilience. Their responses reveal a dynamic process of reflection and adjustment, highlighting both the complexity of diverse classrooms and the strength of teachers committed to inclusion.

3.2.1. Scaffolding and Flexible Grouping Techniques —To address varied readiness and language proficiency, teachers use tiered instruction, visual aids, and peer-assisted learning. Flexible grouping allows advanced learn-

ers to support others, while also giving teachers room to rotate their focus among smaller groups. These strategies help make learning accessible without lowering expectations. To address the varying needs of learners in diverse classrooms,

many teachers rely on scaffolding strategies and flexible grouping techniques as essential coping mechanisms. These approaches allow them to adjust instruction based on students' readiness levels, learning styles, and language proficiency, while still promoting inclusivity and participation. Scaffolding involves breaking lessons into manageable steps, providing supports such as guided instruction, visual aids, and modeling before gradually encouraging independent work. Meanwhile, flexible grouping allows teachers to rotate students through different learning setups whether by ability, interest, or language level—to encourage peer support and collaborative learning. These responses reflect teachers' active effort to make instruction more accessible

and supportive for all students, without singling out those who need extra help. Research supports the effectiveness of these practices. According to Alston et al. (2020), scaffolding and flexible grouping are key strategies in inclusive education, as they promote engagement and reduce the risk of marginalization. Similarly, Zhang and Wang (2021) note that flexible grouping fosters collaborative learning environments where students of different backgrounds can thrive academically and socially. Ultimately, the use of these techniques highlights the proactive nature of teachers in diverse classrooms. By continuously adjusting their methods, they ensure that learning remains equitable, responsive, and inclusive for every student.

3.2.2. Strategic Use of Multilingual and Culturally Relevant Resources —In navigating the challenges of diverse classrooms, many teachers turn to multilingual and culturally relevant resources as vital tools for engagement and understanding. These resources—ranging from bilingual texts and translated materials to culturally familiar examples and localized content—help bridge the gap between students' home languages, cultures, and the school curriculum. Rather than viewing linguistic and cultural differences as barriers, teachers in this study embraced them as assets that could enrich the learning experience when used thoughtfully and strategically. These accounts highlight how intentional use of multilingual support and culturally responsive materials not only aids comprehension but also validates students' identities. This practice aligns with the work of Gay (2020), who underscores the importance of culturally responsive teaching in building bridges between diverse learners and academic content. Similarly, García and Kleyn (2020) advocate

for translanguage as a powerful approach to support multilingual learners, allowing them to draw on their full linguistic repertoire. These practices resonate with the findings of Alim and Paris (2021), who emphasize that culturally sustaining pedagogies promote not only access to learning but also affirm students' cultural identities. Moreover, Lucas and Villegas (2022) stress the significance of linguistic responsiveness in classrooms, noting that when students' home languages are acknowledged and used strategically, it supports both academic achievement and socioemotional development. Recent research by de Jong et al. (2023) also found that the use of multilingual resources in instruction leads to increased student engagement and improved comprehension, especially among emergent bilinguals. By weaving culture and language into instruction, teachers cultivate inclusive environments where students feel respected and seen. More importantly, these strategies empower learners to participate more fully, fostering both academic success and a deeper connection to the classroom community.

3.2.3. Continuous Professional Learning and Peer Collaboration —

For teachers working in diverse classrooms, the challenges of meeting varied students' needs often prompt a commitment to continuous professional learning and peer collaboration. These coping mechanisms help educators stay current with the latest teaching strategies, educational tools, and inclusive practices while fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility among colleagues. Professional learning can take many forms, including workshops, online courses, collaborative planning sessions, and peer observations. By continuously improving their practice, teachers enhance their ability to support diverse learners and address their unique needs. Peer collaboration, on the other hand, creates a supportive environment where teachers can share strategies, discuss challenges, and work together on problem-solving. These reflections underscore the importance of both ongoing professional development and collaborative practice. Recent research supports these findings. A study by Moolenaar et al. (2022) found that teachers who engage in regular professional learning opportunities are better equipped to handle classroom diversity and improve student outcomes. Similarly, the work of Hattie et al. (2021) emphasizes that collaborative professional learning communities enhance teaching practices, especially when teach-

ers have access to shared expertise and mutual support. Moreover, recent research by Lee and Lee (2023) highlights that peer collaboration fosters an environment of collective efficacy, where educators can continuously refine their approaches and, in turn, boost student engagement and learning outcomes. Ultimately, professional learning and peer collaboration serve as vital coping strategies for teachers working in diverse classrooms. They empower educators to continually adapt, share knowledge, and improve their teaching practices, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, can succeed. Figure 4 illustrates the various strategies teachers employ to cope with the challenges of working in diverse classrooms within an integrated school setting. It identifies three main approaches: Scaffolding and Flexible Grouping Techniques, Strategic Use of Multilingual and Culturally Relevant Resources, and Continuous Professional Learning and Peer Collaboration. These coping mechanisms highlight teachers' adaptive and proactive responses to student diversity. Scaffolding and flexible grouping allow teachers to adjust instruction based on students' needs and learning levels. The strategic use of multilingual and culturally relevant resources ensures that learning materials resonate with students' backgrounds and languages.

3.3. Educational Insights Drawn from the Findings of the Study—The voices of teachers in diverse, integrated school settings reveal more than isolated experiences—they surface broader

systemic dynamics, challenges, and transformative possibilities for inclusive education. From their shared reflections, three major insights crystallize:

3.3.1. Inclusive Practices Foster Belonging and Growth—The findings emphasize that inclusive education is not a static goal but an evolving commitment. Teachers consistently underscored the need to adjust, reflect, and grow in response to the shifting needs of their learners. They employed differentiated instruction,

multimodal learning approaches, and culturally responsive pedagogy—not as fixed strategies, but as flexible frameworks that are continually reworked. Teachers collectively emphasized that embracing inclusive practices not only improved classroom dynamics but also fostered a deeper sense of belonging among learners

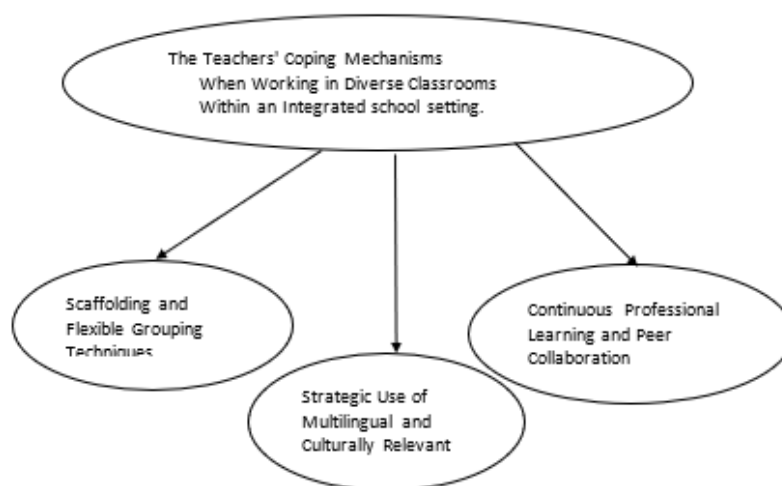


Fig. 4. How Teachers cope with the challenges

from varied backgrounds. They shared that by differentiating instruction, adapting lessons to suit individual needs, and creating safe spaces, students became more engaged and confident. These efforts were seen as essential in helping all learners thrive academically and socially, reinforcing the idea that inclusion benefits everyone in the classroom. These shared experiences highlight that inclusive teaching practices serve as the foundation for not just academic success, but also for fostering a sense of belonging and security for every student. Teachers in this study recognized that when students feel valued and respected for who they are, their social and academic engagement improves significantly. This

reflects a broader pedagogical shift highlighted in Florian and Spratt (2022), who argue that inclusive education must be understood as a principle guiding everyday decisions rather than a checklist of techniques. Likewise, Ainscow (2020) affirms that inclusion is an ongoing process of increasing participation and reducing exclusion—not only in access but in the curriculum, classroom relationships, and assessment. Furthermore, UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) underscores the global movement toward equity and flexibility in educational systems, reinforcing the idea that inclusive practice is a living, responsive journey shaped by context and collaboration.

3.3.2. Cultural Responsiveness Enhances Connection and Learning —Teachers in the study revealed a shift in mindset—from seeing linguistic and cultural diversity as obstacles to recognizing them as assets. They shared how multilingual strategies and culturally relevant examples not only improved comprehension but also deepened student engagement and belonging. Many teachers noted that being culturally responsive strengthened the bond between them and their students. By integrating students’ cultural references into lessons and recognizing

diverse traditions and values, teachers reported that learners became more enthusiastic and motivated. This cultural connection allowed for a more meaningful learning experience and enabled teachers to tailor instruction in ways that respected and celebrated diversity. This resonates with de Jong et al. (2023), who emphasize that linguistically responsive teaching reframes home languages as cognitive and emotional tools, not distractions. Similarly, Lucas and Villegas (2022) advocate for “culturally sustaining pedagogy” that affirms students’ iden-

ties and challenges deficit-oriented narratives. Their work aligns with Paris and Alim (2020), who argue for educational practices that nurture, rather than erase, cultural ways of knowing. By using language and culture as bridges,

the teachers in this study echo global findings that inclusion is not merely about access, but affirmation—ensuring that every learner sees themselves reflected in their learning environment.

3.3.3. Support Systems Matter: Collaboration and Growth Fuel Resilience—While the diversity of learners brings richness, it also introduces complexity. Teachers identified challenges such as language barriers, differentiated readiness, and increased emotional labor. However, what allowed them to thrive was not isolated effort, but systemic support—ongoing professional development, peer mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving environments. The shared narratives from both in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) highlight a common and powerful theme: peer support as a critical coping mechanism for teachers working in diverse classroom settings. The first quote from IDI 4 reveals a teacher’s sense of uncertainty when managing varied learner needs. This uncertainty is common among educators facing heterogeneous classrooms. However, what transforms this uncertainty into growth is the realization that they are not alone—dialogue and collaboration with colleagues become a source of clarity and confidence. The act of sharing experiences, reflecting together, and collectively problem-solving reduces the emotional burden and fosters a sense of belonging and professional solidarity. Meanwhile, the insights from FGD 4 and FGD 5 underscore the importance of ongoing professional development and emotional support systems. Regular learning sessions provided by the school not only enhance teachers’ instructional strategies but also renew their sense of capability and enthusiasm. This suggests that targeted training is not just skill-based but also motivational. Moreover, as shared in FGD 5, even informal peer interactions—like venting, exchanging tips, or simply

laughing—play a substantial role in sustaining teacher well-being. These informal exchanges contribute to a positive work culture where emotional resilience is nurtured. Together, these testimonies illustrate that while teaching in diverse classrooms is complex, a strong culture of collegiality and continuous learning can empower teachers to not only cope but thrive. This insight aligns with Hattie et al. (2021), who highlight the importance of collective teacher efficacy as a strong predictor of student achievement. Moreover, Moolenaar et al. (2022) emphasize that professional networks and collaborative cultures significantly buffer teacher stress and foster innovation in inclusive settings. Recent studies by Timperley et al. (2020) also show that sustained, inquiry-based professional learning communities enhance teachers’ confidence and adaptability—particularly in diverse classrooms. This support structure transforms inclusion from a daunting mandate into a shared mission. In essence, this study reaffirms that inclusive education flourishes through adaptive teaching, identity-affirming practices, and strong networks of support. It is not a solo endeavor, but a collective journey grounded in empathy, equity, and the belief that every learner—regardless of background—deserves to be seen, supported, and celebrated. Figure 5 illustrates the core educational insights drawn from the findings of the study, highlighting three interconnected themes: Inclusive Practices Foster Belonging and Growth, Cultural Responsiveness Enhances Connection and Learning, and Support Systems Matter: Collaboration and Growth Fuel Resilience. These insights capture the collective experiences of teachers working in diverse

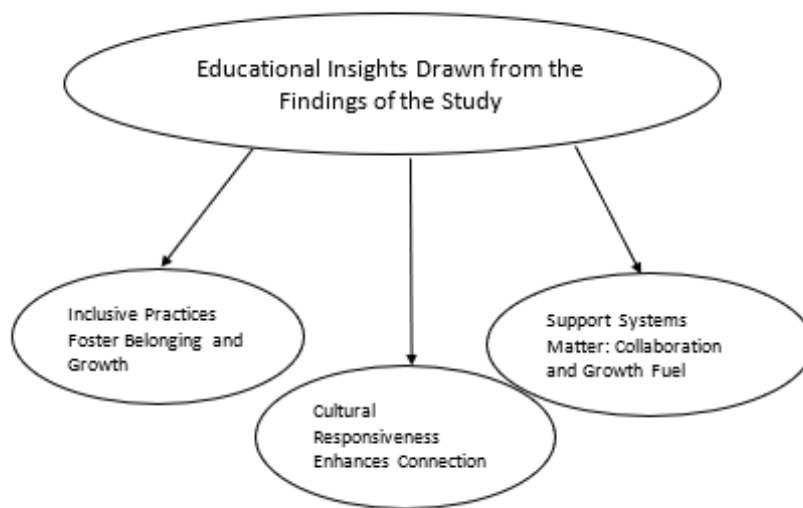


Fig. 5. Educational Insights Drawn from the findings of the Study and inclusive school settings. The figure emphasizes that inclusive education is not a static goal but a continuous process shaped by empathy, adaptability, and collaboration. By fostering inclusive practices, valuing students' cultural identities, and building strong support systems, educators create environments where all learners feel valued, connected, and empowered to succeed.

4. Implications and Future Directions

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study and presents their broader implications, along with suggested future directions. The research focused on exploring the lived experiences of teachers working in diverse classrooms within an integrated school setting. It aimed to understand not only the challenges they face but also the coping mechanisms they employ and the insights they gain from navigating such complexity.

4.1. Findings—This chapter highlights how teachers' voices shed light on the real-world demands of inclusion, cultural responsiveness, and differentiated instruction. It also emphasizes the critical role of ongoing collaboration and professional growth in enhancing classroom practice. The findings offer practical implications for school leaders, policymakers, and teacher education programs—particularly in supporting educators as they balance curriculum standards with the diverse needs of learners. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive education by centering the experiences of those at the forefront of its implementation.

4.2. Implications—The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into how teachers in integrated school settings navigate the complexities of teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. These implications are informed by the lived experiences of the participants and are anchored in the theoretical lenses of Social Constructivism and Multi-

cultural Education Theory, both of which emphasize learner-centered, inclusive, and socially grounded educational practices. Grounded in Social Constructivism, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction and collaborative learning, the study reveals that teachers rely heavily on scaffolding and flexible grouping techniques to meet the varying academic and language needs of their students. For instance, several participants shared how they strategically formed groups that allowed learners to support one another, promoting peer-assisted learning and dialogue-rich environments. This approach not only made learning more accessible but also built a sense of shared responsibility and community within the classroom—key principles in constructivist teaching. The implication here is that teacher education and professional development programs must train educators to design tasks that encourage meaningful student interaction, inquiry, and cooperative problem-solving in multicultural classrooms. Likewise, the study found that the strategic use of multilingual and culturally relevant resources helped teachers bridge gaps in understanding and connect learning to students' real-life experiences. This practice is strongly aligned with Multicultural Education Theory, which advocates for inclusive curricula and culturally responsive teaching. Teachers who intentionally integrated local languages, traditions, stories, and examples into their lessons demonstrated a deep respect for their students' identities and backgrounds. As such, the implication for policy and curriculum design is clear: schools should provide access to diverse teaching materials and support teachers in contextualizing content to reflect the cultures and languages of their learners. Doing so affirms student identity and fosters an inclusive environment where all learners feel seen and valued. Another significant finding was the reliance on continuous professional learning and peer collaboration as a coping mechanism. Par-

ticipants emphasized how collaboration with fellow teachers—both formally through Learning Action Cells (LAC) and informally in day-to-day exchanges—allowed them to co-develop solutions to shared challenges, whether in classroom management, lesson planning, or cultural sensitivity. This echoes the constructivist view that teacher learning is also a social process. The implication for school leaders and policymakers is to invest in structured opportunities for peer learning and mentorship that are embedded into teachers' regular schedules. Encouraging collective reflection and knowledge sharing not only improves teaching practice but also builds a stronger sense of community among educators in diverse school settings. Finally, the findings reveal that these strategies are not merely about managing diversity but about leveraging it as a strength. Teachers who embraced openness, adaptability, and inclusivity reported stronger student engagement and more meaningful learning experiences. These narratives point to the transformative potential of multicultural classrooms when teachers are empowered with the right mindset, tools, and support systems. The implication is that teacher training must go beyond technical skills to include deep engagement with cultural awareness, anti-bias education, and equity-based pedagogical practices. In summary, the implications of this study extend to multiple levels of the education system. At the classroom level, there is a need for ongoing support in implementing flexible, student-centered strategies grounded in social interaction and real-world relevance. At the institutional level, schools should provide culturally inclusive resources, time for collaboration, and spaces for professional growth. At the policy level, education systems must recognize and respond to the realities of diverse classrooms by embedding multicultural and constructivist principles in curriculum development and teacher training frameworks. By understanding how teachers adapt to and thrive in diverse inte-

grated classrooms, educational stakeholders can design systems that are not only responsive to

diversity but celebrate it as a powerful catalyst for learning and growth.

4.3. Future Directions—Based on the findings of this study, it is essential that the individuals and institutions for whom this research was intended not only understand but also act upon the insights shared by the teachers. These future directions offer practical recommendations for key education stakeholders to improve teaching and learning in diverse junior high school classrooms, especially in the post-pandemic context where inclusion, equity, and adaptability are more crucial than ever.

Learners

Significantly benefits learners by shedding light on the real-life challenges and effective practices that teachers employ in diverse educational settings. As the voices of teachers are amplified, their insights can lead to more responsive teaching strategies that consider the varied learning needs of students. Understanding how teachers adapt their instruction in integrated environments helps identify what truly supports student engagement, equity, and achievement in classrooms with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles.

Teachers

For teachers, this study underscores the importance of continuing to reflect on their roles not only as instructors but also as cultural bridge-builders and advocates of inclusion. The insights revealed the value of contextualizing lessons, using multilingual support, and embracing the diverse backgrounds of learners to boost engagement and participation. Teachers are encouraged to develop patience, cultural sensitivity, and resilience as core traits in their practice. Further, they must continue to seek professional growth opportunities, share best practices, and advocate for classroom strategies that uphold equity and respect for diversity.

School Principals and School Heads

School leaders have the power to shape inclusive school cultures where teachers feel supported, especially in high-stress environments such as integrated schools. Findings from this study revealed that when school heads provided professional development opportunities, encouraged peer mentoring, and promoted resource sharing, teachers felt more empowered to address their students' varied needs. Moving forward, principals must adopt leadership approaches that prioritize collaboration, contextualized teaching, and wellness—acknowledging that teachers need both emotional and instructional support to thrive in diverse classrooms. Additionally, they must bridge gaps caused by limited internet connectivity in remote areas, helping teachers deliver engaging science lessons even under technological constraints.

The Department of Education

The Department of Education plays a crucial role in addressing the complex realities faced by teachers in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. The findings of this study suggest that policies and programs must go beyond academic standards and integrate flexible, inclusive teaching frameworks rooted in multicultural and constructivist pedagogies. Teachers' lived experiences indicate a pressing need for continuous training, localized instructional materials, and support systems that are sensitive to learners' cultural backgrounds and language differences. The Department can enhance curriculum development by ensuring that the science curriculum includes real-world, culturally relevant examples, promotes critical thinking, and values learners' diverse identities. In doing so, science education can become more relatable, equitable, and engaging for all students.

Other Stakeholders (LGUs, NGOs, Private Partners, Community Leaders)

The role of external stakeholders is also vital in sustaining inclusive education. These groups may serve as partners in addressing infrastructure gaps, offering supplementary resources, or facilitating training sessions that promote cultural awareness and technological innovation. Stakeholders can also contribute to school-based programs that prioritize psychosocial support for both teachers and students, especially those affected by post-pandemic challenges or displacement. Their involvement must be grounded in genuine collaboration with educators, ensuring that interventions are responsive to teachers' actual needs on the ground.

Future Researchers

Future researchers may explore the learners'

perspectives to complement the teacher-focused lens of this study. Investigating how junior high school students experience blended learning in culturally diverse settings—particularly how they respond to differentiated instruction and inclusive strategies—would offer a fuller picture of teaching and learning dynamics. Additionally, future studies could focus on other academic subjects beyond science, or conduct comparative analyses across different regions or school types. Publishing these findings in peer-reviewed journals will also ensure that the research contributes to the broader academic discourse on inclusive education and guides policy and practice moving forward.

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