

## **TEACHING BEYOND THE NORM: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS ADAPTING STRATEGIES FOR PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explored teachers' experiences in adapting instruction for learners with learning difficulties using a qualitative narrative design. Seventeen teachers participated, including ten in in-depth interviews and seven in a focus group discussion. The first result revealed that teachers' lived experiences centered on differentiated instruction, structured classroom management, inclusive practices, and strong professional commitment, demonstrating how they continuously adjusted content, behavior strategies, and learning environments to meet diverse needs. The second result showed that teachers employed coping strategies such as scaffolding, diagnostic assessment, emotional self-regulation, and collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders, enabling them to manage instructional and emotional challenges effectively. The third result highlighted key insights emphasizing adaptive mindsets, the need for supportive policies, targeted professional development, and the importance of an inclusive school culture in sustaining effective teaching practices. Overall, the findings underscored that inclusive teaching requires both individual adaptability and institutional support to ensure meaningful learning experiences. This study recommended strengthening professional development programs, enhancing collaborative support systems, and improving policy frameworks to better equip teachers in addressing the needs of learners with difficulties.

**Keywords:** *Education, Teachers' Lived Experiences, Adapting Strategies, Pupils Learning Difficulties, Qualitative Study, Municipality of Makilala, Philippines*

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Aligned:

SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

## **INTRODUCTION**

Globally, adapting classroom instruction to support pupils with learning difficulties is a critical equity issue: UNICEF estimates nearly 240 million children worldwide have some form of disability (UNICEF, 2021) report that 12.5% of children aged 5–17 and 10.1% of children aged 0–17 experience moderate-to-severe disabilities—numbers that translate into hundreds of millions of learners needing differentiated instruction (Olusanya et al., 2022). Despite this, many mainstream teachers feel underprepared, lacking both time and specialized training to address such diverse needs effectively (UNESCO, 2020).

In the Philippines, the challenge is acute: UNICEF estimates that one in seven Filipino children—around 5 million—live with disabilities (UNICEF Philippines, 2018). Other sources, including UNICEF's 2022 and CRPD-related reports, estimate that approximately 1.6 million children (about 8% of the child population) experience disabilities, though only about 20% are officially recognized via disability ID cards—pointing to serious under-identification and policy gaps (UNICEF, 2022; OHCHR, 2024). Furthermore, households with children with disabilities bear 40–80% higher expenses than those without, compounding financial stress and limiting access to education and support (UNICEF Philippines, 2022).

Several interlocking factors amplify this issue in educational systems today: first, rising diagnostic awareness has increased the number of learners identified as having learning challenges; second, growing curriculum demands and large class sizes constrain teachers' ability to plan individualized interventions; third, many educators report low self-efficacy and insufficient professional development focused on practical adaptive strategies; and fourth, persistent resource limitations—ranging from teaching materials to assistive technologies—undermine inclusive practices (Cook, 2022). Recent global reviews also emphasize that without sustained institutional support, inclusive instruction remains difficult to implement consistently, particularly in low-resource schools (Ainscow, 2021). These factors collectively make adapting strategies for pupils with learning difficulties a systemic, unresolved challenge rather than a solved classroom issue (Rincón-Flores, 2024).

Although existing literature offers valuable statistical overviews and surveys on inclusive education and teacher challenges, few studies provide rich, phenomenological explorations of how teachers actually experience, negotiate, and adapt strategies in real classrooms—particularly in low- and middle-income environments like the Philippines (Sankalaité, 2023). Comparative reviews further highlight that cultural, institutional, and socio-economic conditions significantly shape how teachers approach inclusion, yet these contextual dynamics remain underexamined in much of the existing scholarship (Miles, 2022). Most prior research relies on quantitative surveys or examines single interventions; very few foreground teachers' voices, contextual constraints, and creative coping in-depth (Connors Buono, 2024). A phenomenological study centering teachers' lived experiences is thus essential to uncover context-sensitive insights about

feasible adaptations, the emotional labor behind them, and what policy supports can effectively reduce classroom barriers.

This study holds significance for the educational field as it highlights how teachers navigate the challenges of supporting learners who struggle with classroom tasks and academic progress. By capturing their perspectives and experiences, the study can provide valuable insights into practical approaches that work in real classroom settings, as well as the gaps that hinder effective teaching. The findings can guide teacher training programs in developing more responsive strategies, help policymakers design inclusive policies that are grounded in teachers' realities, and encourage schools to strengthen support systems for both educators and learners. Ultimately, this research contributes to improving classroom practices, promoting inclusivity, and fostering better learning outcomes for students who face difficulties.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative narrative research design to explore how educators modified their instructional methods to accommodate students with learning difficulties. This approach allowed the researcher to capture teachers' personal stories, reflections, and experiences in their own words, providing a rich and in-depth understanding of their strategies, motivations, and classroom practices.

The use of a narrative qualitative design was useful for this study because it enabled the collection of detailed, context-rich data that revealed how teachers navigated challenges and implemented effective strategies for pupils with diverse learning needs. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2020), narrative inquiry allowed researchers to understand the meanings people ascribed to their experiences and to explore how these experiences influenced their actions and decisions in real-world settings.

### **Participants**

This study involved 17 teachers to explore how educators adapted strategies for students with learning difficulties. Ten teachers participated in in-depth interviews, while seven joined a focus group discussion. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they had direct experience in adapting teaching methods, providing rich and meaningful insights (Palinkas et al., 2015). Teachers were drawn from various schools in the Municipality of Makilala to capture diverse experiences across different educational settings.

For inclusion, the study focused on full-time teachers with experience in adapting strategies for students with learning difficulties who were willing to share their experiences. Part-time teachers, those without relevant experience, or those

unwilling to participate were excluded. These criteria ensured that the data collected was relevant, reliable, and reflective of teachers actively supporting students with diverse learning needs.

### **Data Collection Tools**

To gather comprehensive insights, this study used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as the primary data collection tools. The in-depth interviews allowed participants to share detailed narratives of their classroom experiences and instructional adaptations, while the focus group discussions facilitated dialogue among teachers to uncover common themes and strategies. Additionally, observation checklists were employed during classroom visits to complement the interviews and discussions, providing contextual information on teaching practices and student interactions. These tools together ensured a rich, triangulated understanding of how educators modified their teaching approaches to meet diverse student needs.

### **Procedures**

The study began by securing the necessary approvals from school administrators and obtaining informed consent from all participating teachers. Teachers were then invited to participate in either in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, scheduled at their convenience to minimize disruption to classroom activities. Each interview was audio-recorded with permission, and detailed notes were taken during both interviews and classroom observations. The focus group discussions encouraged participants to share experiences collaboratively, allowing the researcher to identify shared challenges, strategies, and perceptions regarding instructional adaptations for students with learning difficulties.

### **Data Analysis**

Collected data were analyzed through a combined narrative and thematic approach, drawing from Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis and Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method to ensure a rigorous and authentic interpretation of teachers' lived experiences. Interview and focus group transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion, followed by systematic coding to identify significant statements and recurring patterns related to instructional adaptations and classroom management challenges. Colaizzi's steps—such as extracting meaning units, clustering themes, and validating findings with participants—guided the interpretation of the deeper meanings behind teachers' accounts, while Braun and Clarke's framework supported the organization and refinement of themes across the dataset. Observational notes were triangulated with narrative data to provide contextual depth. The final synthesis constructed a coherent, evidence-based account of how teachers

navigated difficulties and enacted strategies, ensuring that interpretations remained faithful to participants' authentic voices and experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Lived experiences of teachers in adapting to pupils with learning difficulties

This section presents the lived experiences of teachers in adapting strategies for pupils with learning difficulties. The table 1 summarizes the qualitative themes, codes, and meanings derived from participants' responses. Four major themes emerged: differentiating content, materials, and pacing; managing attention, behavior, and classroom participation; fostering inclusion, confidence, and belonging; and emotional rewards, professional fulfillment, and ethical commitment. These themes collectively reflect how teachers navigate instructional, behavioral, social, and emotional dimensions of inclusive education.

Table 1. Lived experiences of teachers in adapting strategies

Issues Probe	Codes / Significant Category	Statements	Themes	Meanings
Instructional adjustments; content modification	IDI 1; IDI 3; IDI 4; IDI 5; IDI 10	short passages visuals; concrete real-life examples; oral responses organizers; broken smaller steps; simplified vocabulary visuals movement breaks	Differentiating content, materials, and pacing	Teachers modify instruction to match learners' cognitive needs
Classroom management; learner engagement	IDI 2; IDI 6; IDI 7; FGD 4; FGD 5	hands-on; structured group roles; extended assessment time; shortened activities routines; clarified instructions time supportive peers audio; increased participation	Managing attention, behavior, and classroom participation	Structured strategies improve focus and participation
Inclusion practices; learner participation	IDI 8; IDI 2; FGD 6	attention; guided peer collaboration; confident group discussions	Fostering inclusion, confidence, and belonging	Inclusive practices enhance confidence and social belonging
Teacher emotions;	IDI 1; IDI 3; IDI 4	steady improvement fulfillment; solved	Emotional rewards,	Positive outcomes

Issues Probe	Codes / Significant Category	Statements	Themes	Meanings
professional values		problems independently; clearer work confidence; equity individual needs; commitment differentiated instruction	professional fulfillment, and ethical commitment	reinforce teachers' commitment to inclusive teaching

**Theme 1: Differentiating content, materials, and pacing**

This theme highlights how teachers actively modify instructional approaches to address diverse cognitive and learning needs among pupils with difficulties. It reflects the adaptive nature of teaching beyond standardized methods, where educators tailor content, materials, and pacing to ensure accessibility and comprehension. In relation to the study, this demonstrates that effective teaching for learners with difficulties requires continuous adjustment, responsiveness, and intentional planning grounded in learner variability.

*“In one class, I had a pupil who struggled with reading comprehension, so I replaced lengthy texts with short passages and visuals, then guided discussions slowly to support understanding and confidence.” (IDI 1)*

*“During math lessons, I noticed a pupil confused by abstract explanations, so I shifted to concrete materials and real-life examples, allowing her to manipulate objects to grasp concepts gradually.” (IDI 3)*

*“I had a student with writing difficulties, so I allowed oral responses and used graphic organizers to structure ideas before writing, which reduced anxiety and improved clarity.” (IDI 4)*

*“In science class, I taught a learner who struggled with instructions, so I broke tasks into smaller steps and used visual cues, checking understanding frequently before moving forward.” (IDI 5)*

*“I taught a learner with language challenges, so I used*

*simplified vocabulary, visuals, and repetition, ensuring gradual comprehension before progressing to complex tasks.” (IDI 10)*

The findings align with contemporary research emphasizing adaptive instruction as a core component of inclusive education. Studies indicate that differentiating content and pacing allows teachers to respond effectively to diverse learner profiles and promotes meaningful engagement in classroom tasks (Arnauckas, 2023; Bach et al., 2024). Similarly, Hernandez et al. (2024) stress that evidence-based instructional adjustments improve comprehension and reduce learning barriers among students with special needs. Rincón-Flores (2024) further explains that adaptive learning strategies enhance both cognitive processing and learner autonomy when instruction is aligned with individual needs. Jardinez (2024) also highlights that teachers who modify materials and pacing demonstrate greater instructional effectiveness in inclusive settings. Moreover, Hove (2024) underscores that teacher-led adaptations, such as scaffolding and simplification, are essential in supporting learners with learning disabilities, reinforcing the importance of flexible instructional design in achieving equitable learning outcomes.

## **Theme 2: Managing attention, behavior, and classroom participation**

This theme focuses on how teachers address challenges related to learners' attention, behavior, and participation through structured and responsive strategies. It reflects the need for classroom management approaches that go beyond discipline and instead promote active engagement and accessibility. Within the context of the study, this theme demonstrates that adapting strategies involves not only instructional changes but also behavioral supports that enable learners to participate meaningfully in classroom activities.

*“I once taught a learner who could not focus during lectures, so I incorporated short movement breaks and hands-on activities, allowing him to process lessons actively instead of passively listening.” (IDI 2)*

*“A pupil with attention difficulties struggled during discussions, so I implemented structured group roles and shorter tasks, allowing manageable participation without overwhelming distractions.” (IDI 6)*

*“I once handled a learner with slow processing speed, so I extended time for assessments and provided simplified instructions, ensuring comprehension before expecting responses.” (IDI 7)*

*“I handled a pupil with attention challenges by shortening*

*activities and establishing clear routines, which provided structure and minimized distractions during lessons.” (FGD 4)*

*“I supported a learner with slow processing speed by extending assessment time and clarifying instructions carefully before expecting responses.” (FGD 5)*

Existing literature supports the importance of structured classroom strategies in addressing behavioral and attentional challenges among learners with difficulties. Catubig et al. (2024) emphasize that teachers' use of routines and task modifications significantly improves learner engagement and reduces disruptive behaviors. Cunningham et al. (2022) highlight that structured participation strategies, such as group roles and scaffolded tasks, enable learners with special needs to engage without cognitive overload. Sankalaitè (2023) also found that adapting instructional pacing and providing clear guidance enhances memory retention and participation among students with learning difficulties. Selvik et al. (2024) further note that flexible classroom management practices are essential in maintaining inclusive learning environments, particularly during periods of educational disruption. Additionally, Kauffman et al. (2022) argue that effective behavior and attention management strategies are integral to inclusive teaching, as they directly influence learners' ability to access and engage with instructional content.

### **Theme 3: Fostering inclusion, confidence, and belonging**

This theme captures how teachers intentionally create inclusive classroom environments that promote learners' confidence and sense of belonging. It reflects the social dimension of teaching beyond the norm, where emotional safety and peer support are integral to learning. In the study, this theme underscores that successful adaptation is not only academic but also relational, as teachers cultivate environments where learners feel valued and capable.

*“A student with reading difficulties struggled during group work, so I assigned supportive peers and provided audio materials, helping him access content without embarrassment.” (IDI 8)*

*“Observing active participation and improved confidence fills me with satisfaction, because inclusive strategies promote both academic competence and a stronger sense of belonging within the classroom community.” (IDI 8)*

*“Seeing increased participation and sustained attention makes me feel proud and validated, because it demonstrates that adapting instruction thoughtfully can*

*positively transform both engagement and academic performance over time.” (IDI 2)*

*“I adapted lessons for a struggling reader by integrating audio materials and guided peer collaboration, which improved comprehension and classroom inclusion.” (FGD 6)*

*“Seeing the student contribute confidently to group discussions made me feel genuinely pleased because the support enhanced both competence and belonging.” (FGD 6)*

Research consistently affirms that inclusive practices contribute significantly to learners' confidence and social integration. Hornby (2024) explains that inclusive education frameworks emphasize belonging as a key outcome, where students feel accepted and supported within the learning environment. Hughes (2023) further argues that centering learners' experiences and voices fosters empowerment and active participation in classroom settings. Hovorková (2025) highlights that inclusive strategies, particularly peer support and accessible materials, enhance both engagement and self-confidence among learners with difficulties. Musyoka (2025) also found that teachers who prioritize relational approaches create more supportive and effective inclusive classrooms. Additionally, Kazmi (2023) emphasizes that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion directly influence learners' sense of belonging, reinforcing the importance of positive and supportive classroom interactions.

#### **Theme 4: Emotional rewards, professional fulfillment, and ethical commitment**

This theme reflects the emotional and professional dimensions of teachers' experiences, highlighting how successful adaptations lead to fulfillment, motivation, and a strong sense of ethical responsibility. It illustrates that teaching beyond the norm is not only a technical process but also an emotionally driven commitment to equity and student success. In relation to the study, this theme shows that teachers' persistence and dedication are sustained by meaningful outcomes and a deep belief in inclusive education.

*“When I notice steady improvement after adjustments, I feel deeply fulfilled and reassured because it confirms that intentional support truly impacts learning and shows that the pupil can succeed with guidance.” (IDI 1)*  
*“When she successfully solves problems independently, I feel accomplished and encouraged, because the adapted strategy clearly bridged her understanding and reduced frustration previously seen during abstract explanations.” (IDI 3)*  
*“Observing clearer written work and greater confidence makes me feel hopeful and satisfied, since the adjustments not only improved academic output but also strengthened the student's belief in personal abilities.” (IDI 4)*

“I stay motivated because I believe equity in education means adjusting instruction to meet individual needs, ensuring that every learner, regardless of difficulty, receives meaningful opportunities to grow and succeed.” (IDI 1)  
 “I remain motivated because every breakthrough reinforces my commitment to differentiated instruction, reminding me that patient adjustments can significantly influence both conceptual understanding and long-term academic confidence.” (IDI 3)

The emotional and ethical dimensions of teaching in inclusive settings are widely recognized in recent literature. Depuydt (2024) highlights that teachers’ sense of efficacy and fulfillment is closely linked to their ability to support at-risk learners successfully. LaPoma (2024) also found that strong teacher-student relationships and positive learning outcomes enhance professional satisfaction and commitment. Sampan and Caballes (2023) emphasize that a sense of accomplishment and purpose reduces burnout and strengthens teachers’ resilience in challenging classroom contexts. Delos Reyes and Francia (2024) further note that teachers’ lived experiences in inclusive education are often characterized by perseverance and a strong moral commitment to equity. Moreover, Miña (2024) explains that teachers’ emotional rewards and intrinsic motivation are essential in sustaining long-term engagement in inclusive practices, reinforcing the importance of both personal and professional fulfillment in teaching learners with difficulties.

**Coping strategies teachers use in addressing challenges**

This section presents the coping strategies employed by teachers in addressing challenges encountered when teaching pupils with learning difficulties. The table 2 summarizes the qualitative themes, codes, and meanings derived from participants’ responses. Three major themes emerged: instructional coping through scaffolding, diagnostics, and flexible design; emotional self-regulation and reframing setbacks; and collaborative supports and professional communities. These themes illustrate how teachers navigate instructional demands, emotional pressures, and professional collaboration in sustaining inclusive teaching practices.

Table 2. Coping strategies teachers use in addressing challenges

<b>Issues Probe</b>	<b>Codes / Significant Category Statements</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Meanings</b>
Instructional strategies; lesson adaptation	IDI 1; IDI 2; IDI 3; IDI 4; FGD 1	smaller lesson segments; modeling guided practice; varied learning	Instructional coping: scaffolding, diagnostics, structured strategies support

Issues Probe	Codes / Significant Category	Statements	Themes	Meanings
Emotional coping; stress management	IDI 1; IDI 2; IDI 3; IDI 4; FGD 7	modalities; short diagnostic assessments; identify learning gaps reflect calmly setbacks; focus small progress; reassess student needs; deep breathing reflection; maintain resilience perspective collaborate special education; professional learning communities;	and flexible design Emotional self-regulation and reframing setbacks Collaborative supports and professional communities	learning adaptation Reflection helps manage frustration Collaboration strengthens support systems
Collaboration; support systems	IDI 1; IDI 2; IDI 3; IDI 4; FGD 5	guidance instructional coaches; consultations fellow teachers; collaboration parents staff		

**Theme 1: Instructional coping: scaffolding, diagnostics, and flexible design**

This theme highlights how teachers intentionally apply structured and responsive instructional strategies to address diverse learning needs. It reflects the practical dimension of “teaching beyond the norm,” where educators actively modify lesson delivery, pacing, and assessment based on learners’ difficulties. Within the context of the study, this theme demonstrates that teachers rely on systematic approaches such as scaffolding, formative diagnostics, and flexible instructional design to ensure that learning remains accessible, meaningful, and responsive to individual differences.

*“I usually break lessons into smaller achievable segments and observe student responses closely, adjusting materials gradually to address misunderstandings before they become larger barriers to comprehension and participation.” (IDI 1)*

*“I apply scaffolding techniques by modeling tasks first, then guiding practice slowly, ensuring students gain confidence*

*before attempting independent work, which reduces confusion and supports meaningful engagement.” (IDI 2)*

*“I differentiate content through varied learning modalities such as visuals, discussions, and hands on materials, allowing students to access concepts through approaches aligned with their strengths and preferences.” (IDI 3)*

*“I conduct short diagnostic assessments before modifying lessons, ensuring adaptations directly target identified gaps instead of applying generalized strategies that may not address specific learning difficulties.” (IDI 4)*

*“I usually begin by identifying specific learning gaps through short formative assessments, then carefully adjust pacing, materials, and instructional delivery to ensure adaptations directly respond to students’ actual needs rather than assumptions.” (FGD 1)*

The findings are supported by recent literature emphasizing the importance of adaptive and evidence-based instructional strategies in inclusive education. Papanthymou (2022) explains that teachers who implement structured adaptations such as scaffolding and differentiated instruction are more effective in addressing the diverse needs of learners with difficulties. Serry et al. (2022) further highlight that the use of multiple modalities and guided practice enhances comprehension and reduces cognitive overload among students with reading and learning challenges. Shelton et al. (2023) note that formative assessment and diagnostic approaches allow teachers to tailor instruction more precisely, ensuring that interventions directly respond to identified learning gaps. Tuvida (2023) also found that teachers’ ability to adjust pacing and instructional materials significantly improves engagement and participation among learners with disabilities. Additionally, Mosca (2023) emphasizes that flexible instructional design grounded in continuous assessment fosters inclusive learning environments where students can progress at their own pace, reinforcing the critical role of structured instructional coping strategies in addressing classroom challenges.

## **Theme 2: Emotional self-regulation and reframing setbacks**

This theme reflects how teachers manage the emotional demands of teaching learners with difficulties through reflection, resilience, and cognitive reframing. It emphasizes the internal processes teachers undergo in sustaining motivation and maintaining effectiveness despite challenges. In relation to the study, this theme demonstrates that teaching beyond the norm is not only instructional but also emotional, requiring teachers to regulate frustration, remain patient, and reinterpret setbacks as opportunities for growth.

*“When strategies fail, I step back and reflect calmly, reminding myself that adaptation requires patience and that setbacks provide insight into refining instructional approaches more effectively next time.” (IDI 1)*

*“I manage frustration by focusing on small progress indicators and practicing self-reflection, understanding that continuous adjustment is part of effective inclusive teaching.” (IDI 2)*

*“When plans do not succeed, I pause and reassess student needs objectively, viewing challenges as opportunities for professional growth rather than personal shortcomings.” (IDI 3)*

*“During stressful moments, I practice brief reflection and deep breathing, reminding myself that persistence and flexibility eventually lead to more effective solutions.” (IDI 4)*

*“I cope with frustration by maintaining perspective and reminding myself that inclusive education demands resilience, flexibility, and long term commitment.” (FGD 7)*

The emotional dimension of teaching in inclusive settings is strongly emphasized in contemporary research. Lombardi (2022) found that teachers frequently experience emotional strain when addressing diverse learner needs, yet reflective practices and coping mechanisms help sustain their effectiveness. Mason-Williams et al. (2020) also highlight that teacher wellbeing is closely linked to their ability to manage stress and adapt to complex classroom demands, particularly in inclusive environments. Sampan and Caballes (2023) emphasize that resilience and self-efficacy play a crucial role in preventing burnout, allowing teachers to remain committed to inclusive practices. Narayanan (2024) further explains that teachers who engage in reflective thinking and emotional regulation are better equipped to reinterpret challenges as learning opportunities, enhancing both professional growth and instructional quality. Moreover, Frearson (2024) underscores that emotional awareness and coping strategies are essential in maintaining teacher stability and effectiveness, especially when working with learners who require continuous adaptation and support.

### **Theme 3: Collaborative supports and professional communities**

This theme underscores the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility in addressing the challenges of inclusive teaching. It highlights how teachers rely on professional networks, including colleagues, specialists, administrators, and parents, to enhance their capacity to support learners with difficulties. Within the study, this theme demonstrates that teaching beyond the norm is not an isolated endeavor but a collective process that benefits from shared expertise, guidance, and emotional support.

*"I collaborate regularly with special education teachers and colleagues, sharing observations and strategies, which strengthens my confidence and provides practical guidance when navigating instructional challenges." (IDI 1)*

*"Participating in professional learning communities allows me to exchange ideas with peers, offering emotional reassurance and practical solutions that make difficult adaptations more manageable." (IDI 2)*

*"Guidance from instructional coaches and open communication with administrators provide encouragement and shared responsibility when instructional adjustments feel overwhelming." (IDI 3)*

*"Regular consultations with counselors and fellow teachers create a supportive network where I can seek advice and maintain perspective." (IDI 4)*

*"Collaboration with parents and special education staff ensures consistent strategies across environments, which strengthens student support and reduces instructional uncertainty." (FGD 5)*

The role of collaboration in inclusive education is widely supported in recent studies. Gilson (2024) emphasizes that collaboration among teachers and support staff enhances the effectiveness of instructional adaptations and reduces professional isolation. Francis, Reed, and Conn-Reda (2024) highlight that shared experiences and teamwork among educators lead to more consistent and effective support for learners with extensive needs. Connors Buono (2024) also found that professional collaboration strengthens teachers' confidence and provides practical strategies for addressing complex classroom challenges. Motus and Tayco (2024) further note that engaging with colleagues and parents creates a more holistic support system for learners, ensuring continuity between school and home environments. Additionally, Pilapil (2024) emphasizes that professional learning communities serve as critical spaces for reflection, knowledge sharing,

and emotional support, reinforcing the importance of collaborative networks in sustaining inclusive teaching practices.

**Insights and policy/PD recommendations to support teachers**

This section presents Table 3: Insights and Policy/Professional Development (PD) Recommendations to Support Teachers, highlighting how participants articulated practical advice, institutional needs, and systemic supports when teaching learners with difficulties. The table reveals four major themes: (1) key insights and advice for new teachers, (2) policy directions related to time, workload, and resources, (3) professional development priorities, and (4) building an inclusive school culture. These themes collectively demonstrate that teaching beyond the norm requires not only individual adaptability but also strong institutional and collaborative support systems.

Table 3. Insights and policy/PD recommendations to support teachers

Issues Probe	Codes / Category	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings
Policy support; workload management	IDI 1; IDI 2; IDI 3; IDI 5; IDI 7	inclusive frameworks; access instructional materials; reduce administrative burdens practical workshops instruction; inclusive	Creating policy directions	Policies enable effective teaching
Training needs; professional learning	IDI 1; IDI 2; IDI 3; IDI 4; IDI 5	pedagogy training; learning community's case; coaching follow-up sessions; data-driven workshops decisions strong classroom relationships; embrace	Prioritizing Professional development	Training improves teaching practices
School culture; collaboration emphasis	IDI 6; IDI 8; IDI 9; FGD 7	continuous learning; seek collaboration peers; foster inclusive culture; shared responsibility support	Building an inclusive school culture	Inclusive culture supports teachers

**Theme 1: Creating policy directions**

This theme highlights the structural and institutional conditions necessary for teachers to effectively implement adaptive strategies. In relation to the study, it becomes evident that even highly capable teachers face limitations when policies do not support adequate time, manageable workloads, and sufficient

resources. Teaching beyond the norm therefore extends beyond classroom practice and requires systemic alignment that enables teachers to plan, implement, and evaluate differentiated instruction without being overwhelmed.

*"I believe school policies should provide structured time for collaborative planning and reflection, ensuring teachers have space to design and evaluate adaptive strategies without excessive workload pressures." (IDI 1)*

*"Policies could improve by allocating additional classroom support personnel, reducing class sizes, and ensuring accessible resources that enable teachers to implement individualized strategies effectively." (IDI 2)*

*"Schools should establish clear frameworks for inclusive practices and provide continuous monitoring systems that guide teachers while reducing ambiguity in implementing adaptations." (IDI 3)*

*"Policies could support teachers better by providing access to updated instructional materials and dedicated time for individualized lesson preparation." (IDI 5)*

*"Policies should reduce administrative burdens so teachers can devote more time to planning and individualized instruction." (IDI 7)*

Supporting literature strongly indicates that institutional support is a critical determinant of successful inclusive education. Hove (2024) explains that teachers require structured support systems, including time allocation and resources, to effectively address diverse learning needs. Likewise, Jardinez (2024) highlights that unclear policies and heavy workloads hinder teachers' ability to implement inclusive practices consistently. Selvik (2024) further demonstrates that adequate institutional support during challenging periods significantly improves teacher capacity to adapt instruction. Additionally, LaPoma (2024) emphasizes that teacher self-efficacy is closely linked to administrative support and availability of instructional resources, while Hornby (2024) argues that inclusive education frameworks must be supported by clear policies and sufficient resourcing to be effective. These findings collectively affirm that policy-level interventions are essential in enabling teachers to sustain adaptive practices.

## **Theme 2: Prioritizing Professional development**

This theme focuses on the need for continuous, practical, and context-responsive professional development to enhance teachers' ability to adapt

instruction. Within the study, it becomes clear that teaching learners with difficulties requires specialized knowledge and skills that go beyond initial teacher training. Effective professional development equips teachers with strategies, confidence, and opportunities for collaborative learning, thereby strengthening their capacity to respond to diverse classroom challenges.

*“Professional development should include practical workshops focused on differentiated instruction, offering real classroom simulations that prepare teachers to respond confidently to diverse learning challenges.” (IDI 1)*

*“Training programs should emphasize inclusive pedagogy and hands-on strategy development, allowing teachers to practice designing accommodations aligned with varied cognitive and behavioral needs.” (IDI 2)*

*“Ongoing professional learning communities focused on case studies and shared experiences would strengthen teachers' confidence and instructional adaptability.” (IDI 3)*

*“Professional development should integrate coaching sessions and follow-up evaluations, ensuring strategies learned during training are effectively applied in classroom contexts.” (IDI 4)*

*“Training should include data-driven decision making workshops, helping teachers analyze student progress and refine strategies systematically.” (IDI 5)*

Empirical studies emphasize that sustained and practice-oriented professional development significantly enhances teachers' adaptive capacities. Rincón-Flores (2024) highlights that adaptive learning strategies are most effective when teachers receive ongoing training that connects theory to classroom practice. Similarly, Miña (2024) notes that teachers develop stronger instructional strategies when professional learning includes real-life applications and reflective components. Serry (2022) further explains that targeted training improves teachers' ability to support learners with specific difficulties such as reading challenges. Moreover, Shelton (2023) demonstrates that professional development during systemic disruptions enabled teachers to adapt more effectively to diverse needs, while Terrell (2023) emphasizes the importance of coaching and follow-up support in ensuring that training translates into classroom practice. These studies collectively show that meaningful professional development is continuous, collaborative, and grounded in actual teaching contexts.

### **Theme 3: Building an inclusive school culture**

This theme underscores the importance of a supportive and collaborative school environment in sustaining adaptive teaching practices. In the context of the study, inclusive culture emerges as a critical factor that enables teachers to share responsibility, collaborate effectively, and create safe learning spaces for students with difficulties. Teaching beyond the norm is therefore not an individual endeavor but a collective effort shaped by shared values, relationships, and institutional commitment to inclusion.

*"I would suggest building strong classroom relationships first, because trust creates a foundation where students feel safe to express learning challenges openly." (IDI 6)*

*"I would advise embracing continuous learning, understanding that adapting teaching methods evolves through experience and openness to feedback." (IDI 8)*

*"I would recommend seeking collaboration rather than working independently, because shared expertise often leads to more creative and effective solutions." (IDI 9)*

*"Schools could better support teachers by fostering inclusive cultures that prioritize shared responsibility and accessible instructional resources." (IDI 8)*

*"School policies could foster inclusive cultures emphasizing shared responsibility, ensuring teachers feel supported collectively rather than individually accountable for every challenge." (FGD 7)*

Literature consistently highlights that inclusive school culture significantly influences teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Cunningham (2022) explains that collaborative school environments enable teachers to share strategies and support learners more effectively. Hernandez (2023) further emphasizes that strong teacher relationships and reflective collaboration enhance instructional adaptability. Additionally, Gilson (2024) identifies that inclusive cultures reduce teacher isolation and promote shared responsibility in addressing student needs. Frearson (2024) also highlights the role of trust and relationships in supporting learners with complex needs, while Musyoka (2025) demonstrates that inclusive environments empower teachers to innovate and adapt their practices more effectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study offer meaningful implications for improving instructional practices, strengthening teacher support, and enhancing policy implementation in inclusive education.

1. The results on teachers' lived experiences indicate that inclusive teaching requires continuous adaptation of instruction, classroom management, and student engagement strategies. This suggests that teachers need sustained support in developing flexible and responsive teaching approaches that address diverse learner needs while maintaining an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.
2. The findings on coping strategies reveal that teachers depend on a combination of instructional techniques, emotional regulation, and collaboration to manage challenges effectively. This implies that schools should promote teacher wellbeing, encourage reflective practices, and establish strong professional learning communities that provide both emotional support and practical teaching strategies.
3. The insights related to policy and professional development highlight that teachers' ability to implement inclusive practices is influenced by systemic support such as training, time, and resources. This underscores the need for educational leaders to design responsive policies and relevant professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills and confidence to sustain inclusive teaching practices.

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