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Grade 3 Teachers' Experiences in Implementing Inclusive Group Strategies for Learners with Disabilities

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Abstract: Inclusive education requires more than placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms; it calls for meaningful participation, responsive instruction, and sustained support. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of seven Grade 3 teachers in public elementary schools in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, Philippines, in implementing inclusive group strategies for learners with disabilities. Participants were purposively selected based on their classroom experience. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis process of Braun and Clarke (2022). Five themes emerged: inclusive group strategies as opportunities for participation and support; differentiated activities and instructional adaptation based on learner needs; challenges in managing diverse learner needs and classroom demands; the need for continuous training, resources, and professional support; and peer support, structured roles, and collaborative learning as effective practices. Teachers used simplified instructions, visual aids, adapted worksheets, hands-on activities, additional time, and peer assistance to facilitate learner participation. However, they encountered difficulties involving large class sizes, varied learning paces, behavioral and attention concerns, preparation demands, and limited resources. Participants emphasized that training did not always address classroom conditions and that continuous professional guidance and institutional assistance were necessary for teachers. The findings indicate that effective inclusive group instruction depends on flexible teaching practices, group organization, collaborative support, and adequate school-level resources. The teachers' experiences provide a basis for an Inclusive Group Strategy Implementation Framework to guide and strengthen inclusive practices in mainstream classrooms.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education; Inclusive Group Strategies; Learners with Disabilities; Teachers' Lived Experiences; Mainstream Classrooms*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is now a big deal worldwide, focusing on making sure everyone, especially those with disabilities, gets fair access to quality education. This shift is moving us away from separate education systems to more inclusive classrooms that cater to different learning needs. At the heart of this change are teaching methods that focus on getting all students involved, interacting with peers, and offering varied instruction to ensure that everyone is truly engaged, not just physically present. Teachers are key players here, connecting policy with what actually happens in the classroom, especially through group-based strategies that encourage cooperation and active participation among students with different abilities (Bunga et al., 2025; Fajardo et al., 2026). Global goals, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), emphasize that inclusive education is crucial for quality learning. SDG Target 4.5 discusses removing educational disparities and ensuring equal access for vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities. Inclusive group strategies highlight the importance of equity, accessibility, participation, and focusing on the learner, stressing the need for collaborative learning environments where students with disabilities are fully involved in classroom activities. To make this happen, we need to align policy commitments with practical teaching strategies, prepare

teachers, provide accessible learning resources, and have support systems in place in the classroom (Chen et al., 2026; Fajardo et al., 2026).

In the Philippines, there is a strong push for inclusive education, backed by policies and laws that aim to integrate students with disabilities into regular classrooms. However, teachers face some real hurdles, such as large class sizes, insufficient teaching materials, limited training in inclusive methods, a wide range of student abilities, behavioral issues, and insufficient time for one-on-one instruction. That's where group-based strategies come in handy. They encourage interaction, cooperation, peer support, and participation among diverse learners. It is crucial to understand how teachers handle and adapt these group dynamics in the complex environment of Philippine mainstream classrooms (Bunga et al., 2025; Fajardo et al., 2026). Looking at the bigger picture, inclusive education is more than just having students with disabilities physically present in general classrooms. It requires meaningful engagement, well-rounded teacher skills, and teaching methods that fit the context to provide equitable and quality education for everyone.

Grade 3 teachers in mainstream classrooms embark on the intricate dance of orchestrating group activities while catering to the kaleidoscope of learner needs. These educators juggle varying abilities, communication styles, behavior, attention, participation, and learning pace. They weave learners into diverse groups, tailor instructions to individual needs, offer extra guidance, and nurture peer cooperation, all while maintaining classroom harmony and balancing the needs of students with disabilities alongside their peers. To truly grasp the challenges and strategies these teachers employ, one must look beyond inclusive education policies or theoretical models and delve into their real-life experiences. Existing research underscores that while teachers generally champion inclusion, they face hurdles such as inadequate specialized training, scarce resources, and the complexities of managing diverse learner needs (Gal et al., 2025; Wu, 2025). Studies also highlight a disconnect between teacher perceptions and students' actual participation, revealing the intricate cognitive and emotional demands of inclusion that are often overlooked (Hardebeck et al., 2026). Moreover, teachers express a yearning for comprehensive professional development, collaborative support, and practical strategies to foster meaningful participation and differentiated instruction in group settings (Filippatou et al., 2025; Hove & Phasha, 2023). Despite extensive examinations of inclusive education, a significant gap persists in understanding how Grade 3 teachers concretely organize, adapt, and manage inclusive group activities. This study seeks to bridge this gap through a qualitative phenomenological approach centered on teachers lived experiences, aiming to craft a practical framework to guide inclusive group strategies in mainstream classrooms.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study explored the lived experiences of Grade 3 teachers in implementing inclusive group strategies for learners with disabilities (LWD) in mainstream classrooms. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do Grade 3 teachers describe their lived experiences of implementing inclusive group strategies for learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms?
2. What challenges do Grade 3 teachers encounter in implementing inclusive group strategies while addressing the diverse learning needs of learners with disabilities?
3. What instructional adaptations and collaborative practices do Grade 3 teachers employ to facilitate the participation and learning of learners with disabilities during group activities?
4. What support, training, and resources do Grade 3 teachers identify as necessary for strengthening the implementation of inclusive group strategies?
5. What practical framework can be developed based on teachers lived experiences to strengthen the implementation of inclusive group strategies in mainstream classrooms?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Grade 3 teachers in implementing inclusive group strategies for learners with disabilities in mainstream education. The phenomenological approach was used to understand how teachers

experienced, interpreted, and responded to the demands of inclusive group instruction within their classroom contexts, particularly regarding instructional practices, classroom challenges, adaptations, collaborative approaches, and perceived support needs.

The participants consisted of seven Grade 3 teachers from selected public elementary schools in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, Philippines, who had experience handling learners with disabilities in mainstream classroom settings. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide relevant and in-depth accounts of their experiences implementing inclusive group strategies. Selection was based on their teaching assignments, experience handling learners with disabilities, familiarity with inclusive classroom practices, and willingness to participate in the study.

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' experiences, perceptions, and instructional practices in implementing inclusive group strategies. The interview questions focused on facilitating group activities, adapting instructional materials and tasks, managing diverse learning needs, encouraging peer collaboration, addressing classroom challenges, and identifying the support and resources necessary for effective inclusive instruction. Follow-up and probing questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses and provide specific examples of their classroom experiences. Before conducting the interviews, permission was sought from the appropriate educational authorities and school administrators of the selected schools. The purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and the data collection procedures were explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted according to the participants' availability, with each interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2022). The analysis involved familiarization with the interview transcripts, identification of significant statements and recurring ideas, generation of initial codes, organization of codes into potential themes, review and refinement of themes, and final definition and interpretation of the identified themes. The resulting themes were presented through thematic narratives supported by selected verbatim quotations from the participants. These themes reflected teachers' experiences concerning inclusive group strategies as opportunities for participation and support, differentiated instructional adaptations, classroom challenges, professional and institutional support, and peer collaboration and structured group roles. The findings served as the basis for developing the proposed Inclusive Group Strategy Implementation Framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Profile of Teacher Participants and Their Inclusive Classroom Experiences

Participant Code	Teaching Experience Reported	Classroom Context Reported
T1	One year of experience teaching a learner with autism and visual impairment.	40 learners; at least one learner suspected by the teacher of having a disability, such as ADHD.
T2	The experience was described as difficult but fulfilling; the duration was not specified.	Approximately 40 learners, two to three of whom were suspected to have disabilities.
T3	Two years of experience teaching learners with disabilities or special needs.	This study included 52 learners, including two with special needs.
T4	Two years of teaching experience with learners with varied abilities and needs.	Diverse learning needs: exact class size is not specified.
T5	The experience was described as difficult but fulfilling; the duration was not specified.	Learners with different needs; exact class size not specified.
T6	Second year of teaching learners described as having special needs.	Forty-five learners with varied learning capabilities.

T7	They reported being in their first year of teaching.	Approximately 52 learners were enrolled in the three sections.

Note. Participant codes protect confidentiality. Descriptions reflect information reported by teachers and should not be interpreted as independent clinical diagnoses.

The profile of the teachers involved shows a mix of experience levels and a variety of classroom settings, highlighting the complexity of inclusive education in mainstream Grade 3 classes. Some teachers, such as T1 and T6, are new to the game, with just a year or two of experience teaching children with disabilities such as autism, visual impairments, and other special needs. And they're doing this in classrooms packed with 40 to 45 students. Others, such as T3 and T7, handle even bigger classes, up to 52 students, some of whom also have special needs or disabilities. Many of these teachers find their work challenging but rewarding, which shows how difficult it is to support inclusion with such a diverse group of learners. These classroom situations are exactly what the literature talks about, pointing out that mainstream teachers often have to juggle overcrowded classrooms while supporting students with a range of challenges, such as ADHD, learning disabilities, and other special needs (Hove & Phasha, 2023; Mohd Asraf & Kaur, 2026). Research highlights the importance of teachers being well-prepared, as their ability to engage students with disabilities depends on their knowledge, skills, and confidence to adapt their teaching effectively (Mohd Asraf & Kaur, 2026). Teachers often use strategies such as multi-level teaching, differentiated instruction, and collaborative support to handle these complexities (Hove & Phasha, 2023). However, big class sizes and limited resources often get in the way of inclusion, showing just how crucial systemic support and professional development are, tailored to what teachers actually experience (Malahlela & Johnson, 2024). Understanding these teachers' real-life experiences in specific schools and classrooms is key to connecting the dots between theoretical inclusion policies and what actually happens in teaching, helping to shape effective frameworks for inclusive education in mainstream settings.

Thematic Narratives with Verbatim Quotes

Theme 1: Inclusive Group Strategies as Opportunities for Participation and Support

Participants described inclusive group strategies as approaches that encourage learners with disabilities to participate alongside their classmates while receiving appropriate assistance. Teachers emphasized that inclusion involved creating opportunities for learners to interact, contribute, and experience support within classroom activities. Participants explained that inclusive group strategies were important because learners with disabilities often require additional guidance compared to other learners. Teacher 4 described inclusive group strategies as follows:

"Allowing all learners including those disabilities of learning difficulties to participate and work together as groups while receiving the support they need." —Teacher 4

Similarly, Teacher 5 expressed that inclusive strategies involve allowing learners with disabilities to participate and work together with their classmates while receiving support. Teacher 6 also explained that learners with special needs should be grouped with other learners and guided while working together. The participants further described inclusive group strategies as important in helping learners feel accepted and supported.

Teacher 7 stated that these strategies help learners with learning needs to participate, feel included, and receive guidance from both teachers and classmates.

For some participants, inclusive strategies also involved modifying activities according to learners' needs. Teacher 1 stated that the participant prepared separate activities for learners with disabilities. Teacher 2 explained

that inclusive strategies helped teachers handle identified and suspected learners with disabilities. Teachers also described the differences between whole-class instruction and inclusive group instruction.

Teacher 4 explained:

"Class instruction involves teaching everyone together while group instruction allows me to give more specific attention and support to learners." —Teacher 4

This response reflected the participants' understanding that group strategies provide opportunities for teachers to focus on specific learner needs while maintaining classroom participation.
The participants also emphasized the importance of these strategies in helping learners experience progress and participation. Teacher 3 explained:

"It is important because students with special needs cannot perform the same way as ordinary learners. Using these strategies provides avenue for them to attain learning success and growth." —Teacher 3
Teacher 4 similarly stated that inclusive strategies are important because they help learners participate with others and become included in the learning process. Teacher 5 added that learners need guidance from teachers and assistance from peers while working with others. These findings are consistent with Perlado Lamo de Espinosa et al. (2021), who highlighted the contribution of cooperative learning strategies to the participation and learning of students with special educational needs in ordinary classrooms. Similarly, Van Ryzin et al. (2024) found that cooperative learning strengthens peer relationships, academic support, and classroom engagement among students with disabilities. Bowman-Perrott et al. (2023) identified peer-mediated interventions as evidence-based approaches for facilitating positive peer relationships and social outcomes among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Collectively, these studies support the importance of structured peer interactions and collaborative learning in creating more inclusive classroom experiences.

Theme 2: Differentiated Activities and Instructional Adaptation Based on Learner Needs
Participants reported that adapting instructional activities and materials was a necessary part of implementing inclusive group strategies. Teachers explained that learners with disabilities have different abilities, learning speeds, and support requirements, which require adjustments in teaching approaches.
Teachers described adapting activities by considering learners' abilities and needs when forming groups during the interview.
Teacher 3 explained:
"I consider learners disabilities, needs, and personalities to create balanced groups. I adjust instructions, tasks and support according to learners' needs." —Teacher 3

Other participants similarly described creating groups based on learner characteristics as follows: Teacher 7 explained that groups were created by considering differences in learning needs, capabilities, and pace of learning.
Teachers reported using different classroom activities to support learners with disabilities. These included worksheets, drawing activities, reading exercises, problem-solving tasks, and hands-on activities.

Teacher 2 shared that the participant used.
"Group activities, worksheets, drawing and reading and problem-solving task." —Teacher 2

Teacher 4 also described using group discussions, worksheets, drawing, reading, and simple problem-solving activities to teach mathematics. Teacher 6 reported using simple hands-on activities, simple problem-solving tasks, drawing, and reading. Participants also explained that instructional materials needed to be modified to make learning more accessible to students with disabilities. Teacher 3 stated:

"I simplify instruction, use visual aids, provide additional examples and adjust activities based on their needs." —Teacher 3

Teacher 4 described using pictures and hands-on tools, breaking lessons into smaller steps, and allowing additional time for completing assignments. Teacher 5 also reported simplifying instructions, using visual aids, and providing additional time and support to students. Some teachers developed their own adaptations based on their classroom observations. Teacher 4 shared:

"I made a visual schedule with Velcro pictures to help students follow class routines without getting confused."—Teacher 4

Teacher 5 explained creating simplified worksheets with pictures and brief instructions. Teacher 7 described adapting existing presentations as follows:

"Making my own version of discussions by editing, adapting the pre-made presentations that is suited for the learners."—Teacher 7

The responses demonstrated that teachers adjusted their teaching approaches through differentiated activities, simplified instructions, visual materials, and modified classroom tasks to address the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

Theme 3: Challenges in Managing Diverse Learner Needs and Classroom Demands
Participants consistently reported that implementing inclusive group strategies involved several challenges related to learner diversity, classroom management, preparation demands, and limited resources. Teachers described the difficulty of balancing the needs of learners with disabilities while ensuring that the entire class remained engaged and able to participate in learning activities.

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was ensuring equal participation among learners during group activity. Teachers explained that learners had different abilities, learning speeds, and levels of engagement, making it challenging to ensure that all members contributed to the group tasks.

Teacher 3 identified the difficulty of maintaining equal participation among learners with different abilities:
"My biggest challenge is ensuring that learners with different abilities participate equally in group activities."—Teacher 3

Teacher 4 expressed a similar sentiment:
"The biggest challenge is making sure that all learners participate equally especially when some learners use more attention and assistance."—Teacher 4

Teacher 6 also described the challenge of gaining learner attention and ensuring that learners with disabilities could participate with their classmates.
In addition to learner participation, teachers also identified the preparation of materials as a significant challenge. Developing appropriate activities required additional time and effort because teachers needed to consider different learning abilities.

Teacher 1 shared:
"The preparation of materials sometimes, I cannot consistently prepare."—Teacher 1

Teacher 5 also identified material preparation and motivating learners to participate as major concerns. The teachers' emotional experiences while managing these challenges were also reflected in their responses. Some participants described feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and concern, whereas others viewed the difficulties as motivation to improve their practices.

Teacher 1 stated: "I felt sad and tired."—Teacher 1

Teacher 3 described experiencing challenges but remained motivated to search for ways to support learners:
"I felt challenged but motivated to find ways to support every learner."—Teacher 3
Teacher 4 similarly shared: "I felt challenged and a little worried, but it encourages me to find better ways to support my learners."—Teacher 4

Participants also identified that challenges were influenced by learner differences, limited resources, and classroom conditions. Teacher 3 explained that difficulties were mainly connected to learners' varying needs and abilities, along with limited available resources.
Teacher 4 described similar concerns involving learner differences, limited time, and insufficient resources: Managing different learning paces was another concern of the teachers. Teachers explained that some learners required additional time, repeated instruction, and closer guidance.
Teacher 5 stated: "Some learners need more time and repeated instructions."—Teacher 5
Teacher 6 also explained that differences in learning pace sometimes required considerably more time for learners to complete the activities.

Behavior and attention management were also identified as challenges by the participants. Teacher 3 mentioned learner tantrums as a difficulty encountered during the implementation.
Teacher 4 reported that some learners lost focus quickly and worked more slowly, which could affect group progress. To respond to these challenges, teachers described using patience, clearer instructions, peer assistance, and continuously searching for strategies to help students. Teacher 4 explained that the participant handled difficulties by providing clear instructions and guidance to learners who needed additional support. Teacher 6 reported using patience, simple instructions, and asking peers to help guide learners. Teacher 7 stated that the participant researched different strategies and watched videos related to special learners' needs.
The responses indicate that teachers experienced inclusive group strategies as demanding practices that require continuous adjustment, preparation, patience, and responsiveness to diverse learner needs.

Theme 4: Need for Continuous Training, Resources, and Professional Support
Participants emphasized that implementing inclusive group strategies required continuous professional development, accessible instructional resources, and support from colleagues and school administrators. Although teachers had received some training related to inclusive education, many expressed that additional practical preparation was still needed. Several teachers described their current level of preparedness as incomplete. Teacher 1 stated that additional guidance and training were needed. Teacher 5 also expressed the need for more training to gain additional strategies. Teacher 6 explained:

"I feel somewhat prepared, but I still need more training and experience in inclusive education."—Teacher 6
Teacher 7 similarly stated:
"I am not that good, but I am trying and I am constantly learning and looking for more ways to be an effective teacher for special needs learners."—Teacher 7

The participants reported receiving different forms of training from their schools. These include teaching strategy seminars, school-based orientations, and discussions during professional learning activities. Teacher 1 reported attending teaching strategy seminars and school-based instruction. Teacher 4 stated that the participant attended basic school seminars related to inclusive education. Teacher 7 mentioned receiving school-based instruction and seminars on special learners' needs. However, teachers explained that training was not always sufficient for actual classroom reality. Teacher 3 stated:

"Not sufficient because sometimes the things we learned during the trainings is not practical instead very ideal and hard to achieve."—Teacher 3

Teacher 4 explained that classroom situations were more unpredictable and crowded than training

experiences. Teacher 7 expressed the need for more training, resources, materials, and guidance from colleagues with field expertise. Participants also emphasized the importance of continuous support over one-time training. Teacher 2 stated:
"The support must not end to training but it must be continuous." —Teacher 2 Teachers also identified the need for additional classroom resources, including differentiated worksheets, visual aids, adapted materials, and ready-to-use learning tools. Teacher 2 expressed the need for ready-made visual materials, adapted worksheets, and simple group activity tools to support learners with diverse needs. The participants also recognized the value of additional classroom assistance. Teacher 3 explained that a co-teacher or teaching aide would allow more individualized support and make group activities easier to manage, while Teacher 7 stated that additional assistance could reduce the stress experienced when implementing inclusive strategies. The responses showed that teachers considered training, materials, and collaborative support systems essential for strengthening their capacity to implement inclusive group strategies.

Theme 5: Peer Support, Structured Roles, and Collaborative Learning as Effective Practices
Participants identified peer support, structured group responsibilities, and collaborative activities as important approaches that helped learners with disabilities participate more effectively in the classroom. Teachers described that group strategies became more successful when learners understood their responsibilities, received clear instructions, and were encouraged to support each other. A common pattern among the participants was the importance of assigning clear roles and responsibilities within groups. Teachers explained that learners were more engaged when they knew what was expected of them during the activities.
Teacher 1 shared that:

"Working in group works better especially if they are giving roles and tasks." —Teacher 1
Teacher 3 explained similarly:
"Group activities are very effective, especially when the responsibility is clear and designated to all learners. It doesn't work if we only use discussion in the whole duration." —Teacher 3

Teacher 4 emphasized that structured groups were more effective because learners were able to understand their responsibilities. The participant stated that highly structured groups with clear visual roles worked better, while unstructured discussions often resulted in learners losing focus. Participants also highlighted the role of peer interaction in supporting learners with disabilities. Teachers observed that some learners responded positively when they were able to work with classmates.

Teacher 1 reported:
"Yes, they enjoy learning with peers." —Teacher 1
Teacher 3 explained that learners who enjoyed working with others and participating in activities responded better to inclusive group strategies.
Teacher 5 shared a similar observation, stating that learners who enjoyed working with others and participating in activities, responded better.

The participants also described using peer support as part of their classroom strategy.
Teacher 5 identified peer support, differentiated activities, and simple instructions as strategies that created positive differences among the learners.
Teacher 6 also identified simple instructions, peer support, and differentiated activities as effective. Teachers explained how these strategies were applied to classroom activities.
Teacher 1 described pairing learners who could support each other and provide clear, simple instructions.
Teacher 3 explained:
"I grouped learners based on their abilities and gave each learner a specific task. I provided clear instructions, guided them during the activity, and encouraged classmates to support one another." —Teacher 3
Teacher 6 also described grouping or pairing learners so that they could guide each other while completing activities.

The participants believed that these strategies should be shared with other teachers.
Teacher 1 explained that this strategy encouraged participation and helped learners feel included and supported.
Teacher 3 recommended this approach because clear roles, proper guidance, and teamwork helped make the strategy effective.
Teacher 6 similarly explained that these approaches encouraged participation and helped learners feel included and supported in the learning process.

The responses indicate that participants viewed peer collaboration and structured group organization as effective practices because these approaches allowed learners to contribute according to their abilities while receiving assistance from their classmates and teachers.

Integration of Participant Voices

The experiences shared by the seven grade 3 teachers revealed common patterns regarding the implementation of inclusive group strategies for learners with disabilities. Although participants differed in their classroom experiences, teaching backgrounds, and specific approaches, their responses reflected several shared experiences related to inclusion, adaptation, challenges, and support needs.

One consistent observation among the participants was that inclusive group strategies were viewed as important in helping learners with disabilities participate in classroom activities. Teachers emphasized that learners should not only be present in group activities but also receive appropriate guidance and opportunities to contribute. Teacher 4 explained that inclusion involves allowing all learners, including those with learning difficulties, to participate and work together while receiving the necessary support. Teacher 7 similarly emphasized that inclusive strategies help learners participate and receive guidance from their teachers and peers.

Another shared experience among the participants was the need to adjust teaching approaches based on learner differences. Teachers reported using simplified instructions, visual materials, adapted worksheets, hands-on activities, and modified tasks to support learners with different abilities. Teacher 3 described adjusting instructions, tasks, and support according to learners' needs when creating balanced groups. Teacher 4 also reported using pictures, hands-on tools, smaller lesson steps, and additional time to support learners.

Despite their efforts, participants consistently identified challenges in implementation. These challenges included managing different learning paces, maintaining learner participation, preparing appropriate materials, and addressing behavioral concerns. Teachers reported that some learners required additional time, repeated instructions, and increased guidance. Teacher 5 explained that some learners needed more time and repeated instructions. Teacher 6 also noted that differences in learner pace sometimes required additional time for the completion of activities.

Participants also shared similar concerns regarding professional preparation and available resources. Although teachers had received school-based orientations and seminars related to inclusive education, many expressed that additional practical training and materials were still necessary. Teacher 3 stated that training was insufficient because some strategies learned were difficult to apply in actual classroom situations. Teacher 7 expressed the need for additional training, resources, materials, and guidance from individuals with expertise in the field.

Simultaneously, the participants recognized the value of collaboration and support from colleagues and school administrators. Teachers reported receiving guidance, recommendations, instructional materials, and assistance from their colleagues. Teacher 3 shared that the participants received guidance and assistance from their colleagues. Teacher 7 explained that support from colleagues and administrators through guidance, shared resources, and suggestions helped improve group strategies and address learners' needs.

The participants also shared personal insights gained from their experiences in teaching learners with disabilities. Many emphasized the importance of patience, flexibility, and understanding individual learner differences.

Teacher 5 stated:

"Every learner is unique, so we need to bend to them, with patience and flexibility." —Teacher 5

Teacher 6 explained similarly:

"Each learner is different, so patience and flexibility are important." —Teacher 6

The participants' experiences also reflected meaningful moments when the learners demonstrated progress and confidence. Teacher 1 described seeing a learner participate confidently after receiving support as being a memorable experience. Teacher 2 shared that seeing learners gain confidence after they successfully completed tasks was rewarding. Teacher 6 described observing learners working well with other learners as a meaningful experience.

Overall, the integration of participant voices showed that teachers viewed inclusive group strategies as valuable for supporting learners with disabilities. However, successful implementation requires continuous adaptation, adequate preparation, sufficient resources, professional development, and collaboration among teachers and school support systems.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that implementing inclusive group strategies in mainstream classrooms is a meaningful but challenging process that requires teachers to continuously adapt their instructional practices to address the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. The lived experiences of the seven Grade 3 teachers revealed that structured group activities, differentiated instruction, simplified learning tasks, visual materials, and peer collaboration provide valuable opportunities for learners with disabilities to participate, interact with, and contribute alongside their classmates. However, these practices are often constrained by large class sizes, varying learning abilities, behavioral concerns, limited instructional resources, and insufficient opportunities for practical training. The findings further establish that effective inclusion cannot depend solely on teachers' individual commitment but requires sustained institutional support, accessible learning materials, collaborative professional practice, and appropriate classroom assistance. Ultimately, meaningful inclusion goes beyond placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms; it requires creating learning environments where every learner is recognized, supported, and given genuine opportunities to participate and succeed. The participants' experiences provide a foundation for the proposed Inclusive Group Strategy Implementation Framework, which emphasizes differentiated instruction, structured peer collaboration, meaningful learner participation, and continuous professional and institutional support as essential elements in strengthening inclusive classroom practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, schools and educational administrators should strengthen inclusive education through sustained, practice-oriented professional development that equips teachers with appropriate competencies in differentiated instruction, disability-responsive teaching, classroom management, and inclusive group facilitation. Adequate instructional resources, including visual aids, adapted worksheets, hands-on learning materials, and simplified activity guides, should be made accessible to support the diverse learning needs of learners with disabilities while reducing teachers' preparation demands. Teachers are likewise encouraged to implement structured collaborative activities with clearly assigned group roles, appropriate peer-support arrangements, flexible learning tasks, and individualized guidance to ensure that every learner has meaningful opportunities to participate. School administrators should establish stronger support mechanisms through collaboration among mainstream teachers, special education professionals, colleagues, and relevant specialists, including the provision of teaching aides or additional classroom assistance whenever feasible. Furthermore, the proposed Inclusive Group Strategy Implementation Framework should be considered for classroom application and subsequent evaluation to determine its practicality, relevance, and effectiveness in strengthening inclusive group instruction. Future researchers are encouraged to examine inclusive group strategies across different grade levels and school contexts, incorporate the perspectives of learners with disabilities, parents, and school administrators, and conduct further investigations into the implementation and effectiveness of structured inclusive teaching interventions.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the lived experiences of seven Grade 3 teachers from selected public

elementary schools in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, Philippines, who have experience managing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The use of purposive sampling and a qualitative phenomenological design offered detailed insights into the participants' experiences but limited the applicability of the findings to other grade levels, school settings, and educational contexts. Additionally, the findings were primarily derived from participants' self-reported experiences and perspectives collected through semi-structured interviews, which may reflect individual interpretations and classroom-specific circumstances. The study also did not independently verify the clinical diagnoses of learners described by the participants, as the reported learner conditions were based on teachers' accounts. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable contextual understanding of the instructional practices, challenges, and support needs associated with implementing inclusive group strategies in mainstream classrooms.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research should broaden its scope to include teachers from various grade levels, both public and private schools, and diverse geographical contexts to enhance the understanding of inclusive group strategies in mainstream education. Subsequent studies should also incorporate the perspectives of learners with disabilities, parents, school administrators, and special education teachers to provide a more comprehensive view of inclusive classroom experiences. Quantitative or mixed-methods investigations could further explore the relationship between teachers' professional preparation, the availability of instructional resources, classroom conditions, and the implementation of inclusive teaching practices. Additionally, the proposed Inclusive Group Strategy Implementation Framework should undergo expert evaluation, pilot implementation, and empirical assessment to determine its relevance, applicability, and effectiveness in real classroom settings. These investigations may contribute to the development of evidence-based instructional approaches and sustainable school-level support mechanisms that promote meaningful participation and equitable learning opportunities for learners with disabilities.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the study. Approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities and school administrators of the selected schools prior to data collection. The research purpose, nature of participation, and data collection procedures were explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained before conducting the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and participant confidentiality was maintained by using identification codes instead of personal names in the findings. Audio recordings were made with participants' consent and used for research and analysis. Interview responses were transcribed and presented with careful attention to participants' privacy and responsible handling of research information.

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AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

AI tools were used to assist with the language and formatting of the manuscript. The research, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings were conducted by the author.