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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Inclusive Pedagogical Practices and Classroom Involvement in a Rural Integrated School

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#### Abstract

*Inclusive pedagogy is essential in rural schools where learners present diverse cultural backgrounds, abilities, and learning needs. This qualitative descriptive study examined inclusive pedagogical practices and their influence on classroom involvement in a rural integrated school. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus group discussions with learners. Thematic analysis revealed four interrelated themes: inclusive strategies as engagement catalysts, differentiated instruction supporting participation, culturally responsive practices strengthening belonging, and contextual challenges shaping inclusion. Findings show that inclusive pedagogical practices significantly enhance learners' classroom involvement by fostering participation, confidence, and a sense of belonging. However, resource limitations and workload demands remain persistent challenges. The study concludes that inclusive pedagogy, when grounded in responsiveness, differentiation, and cultural relevance, promotes meaningful classroom involvement even in resource-constrained rural contexts.*

**Keywords:** *inclusive pedagogy, classroom involvement, rural education, qualitative study, integrated school*

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# Inclusive Pedagogical Practices and Classroom Involvement in a Integrated School

## 1. Introduction

Inclusive education emphasizes the fundamental right of all learners—regardless of ability, cultural background, language, or learning needs—to participate meaningfully in the teaching–learning process (UNESCO, 2020). This principle is rooted in equity and social justice, recognizing diversity as a normal and valuable characteristic of classrooms rather than a problem to be managed (Ainscow et al., 2012). In rural integrated schools, inclusivity is particularly critical because classrooms often comprise heterogeneous learner populations, including indigenous learners, learners with special educational needs, and learners affected by poverty and geographic isolation. Studies have shown that such diversity, when not adequately addressed, can lead to disengagement and marginalization; however, when embraced through inclusive pedagogy, it can enhance learning experiences and social cohesion (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Gay, 2018). Pedagogical practices that intentionally recognize and respond to learner diversity are therefore central to improving both classroom involvement and learning outcomes in rural settings.

Classroom involvement refers to learners' active participation in academic tasks, discussions, collaborative activities, and decision-making processes during instruction. It encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, all of which are essential for meaningful learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Research consistently indicates that inclusive pedagogical practices—such as differentiated instruction, learner-centered strategies, and culturally responsive teaching—significantly enhance learner engagement and participation by creating safe, supportive, and responsive learning environments (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014). Differentiation allows learners to access content at appropriate levels of challenge, while learner-centered approaches promote autonomy and voice. Culturally responsive pedagogy further strengthens engagement by affirming learners' identities and connecting instruction to their lived experiences, which has been shown to be particularly effective for indigenous and rural learners (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Despite the growing body of literature supporting inclusive pedagogy, empirical studies focusing specifically on rural integrated schools remain limited. Much of the existing research has concentrated on urban or well-resourced contexts, leaving gaps in understanding how inclusive practices are enacted amid the constraints common in rural schools, such as limited instructional materials, large class sizes, and multiple teacher roles (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Understanding how teachers and learners experience inclusive pedagogy in rural settings is therefore essential for informing practice and policy. In response to this gap, the present study examined inclusive pedagogical practices and their influence on classroom involvement at Tinib-Calanguasan Integrated School, a rural public school serving learners with diverse needs and backgrounds. By documenting localized experiences, the study seeks to contribute context-sensitive evidence on how inclusive education can be meaningfully implemented to enhance learner participation and engagement in rural integrated schools.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to examine inclusive pedagogical practices and their influence on classroom involvement in a rural integrated school. It specifically sought to identify the inclusive teaching strategies employed by teachers in addressing diverse learner needs, explore learners' experiences and perceptions of their involvement in classroom activities, and examine how inclusive pedagogical practices shape learners' participation and engagement in the teaching–learning process. In addition, the study aimed to identify the challenges encountered in implementing inclusive pedagogy within a rural context, particularly those related to resources, classroom conditions, and instructional demands.

## 3. Methodology

A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to capture in-depth perspectives on inclusive teaching and classroom involvement. Participants included general education teachers handling diverse learners and students from different grade levels. Purposive sampling ensured relevance and richness of data.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

## 4. Results and Findings

Analysis of the data generated four compelling themes illustrating how inclusive pedagogy shapes classroom involvement.

### Theme 1: Inclusive Strategies as Catalysts for Participation

Teachers described deliberately using inclusive strategies such as group work, peer tutoring, and flexible questioning to encourage participation among all learners, particularly those who were hesitant or struggled academically. Group work was viewed as an effective way to distribute responsibility and allow learners to contribute according to their strengths, while peer tutoring enabled learners to support one another in a non-threatening and collaborative manner. Flexible questioning strategies, such as allowing multiple responses and providing guiding prompts, helped teachers engage learners at different levels of understanding without singling out or discouraging them.

Learners reported that they felt more willing and confident to participate when lessons were designed to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities. Activities that allowed for discussion, movement, visual aids, or hands-on tasks helped learners choose how they could best engage with the lesson. This flexibility reduced anxiety and fear of making mistakes, making participation more accessible and inclusive. As a result, learners experienced the classroom as a supportive space where differences were respected, leading to increased involvement and more active engagement in learning activities.

#### Participant responses :

*“Kapag group work, kahit mahiyain nakakasali.”* (Learner 5)

*“Hindi lang iilan ang sumasagot, halos lahat nakikibahagi.”* (Teacher 15)

*“Mas gusto kong sumagot kasi hindi ako napag-iiwanan.”* (Learner 11)

These responses indicate that inclusive strategies serve as powerful catalysts for classroom involvement by lowering barriers that often prevent learners from participating actively. Strategies such as flexible grouping, peer support, and varied modes of participation allow learners with different abilities, confidence levels, and learning styles to engage in ways that suit them best. By removing rigid expectations and allowing multiple entry points into learning activities, inclusive pedagogy creates opportunities for all learners to contribute meaningfully to classroom discussions and tasks.

When instruction is flexible and collaborative, learners experience a sense of safety and acceptance that encourages them to take part without fear of judgment or failure. This supportive environment builds confidence, particularly among learners who may otherwise remain silent or disengaged in traditional, teacher-centered classrooms. Such findings support existing research that inclusive pedagogy enhances participation by valuing learner diversity and recognizing differences as assets rather than obstacles to learning (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). As a result, classroom involvement becomes more equitable, sustained, and reflective of the diverse learner population.

### Theme 2: Differentiated Instruction Supporting Active Involvement

Teachers emphasized adapting tasks, pacing, and assessment methods to meet varied learner needs. Learners appreciated having choices in activities and tasks aligned with their abilities.

#### Participant responses :

*“Iba-iba ang activity depende sa kaya ng bata.”* (Teacher)

*“Mas naiintindihan ko kapag may option kung paano gagawin.”* (Learner)

*“Hindi kami pare-pareho pero lahat may ginagawa.”* (Learner)

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These responses show that differentiated instruction plays a critical role in supporting active classroom involvement by ensuring that all learners can participate in ways that are appropriate to their abilities, interests, and learning needs. By offering varied tasks, flexible grouping, and multiple ways for learners to demonstrate understanding, teachers are able to create inclusive learning experiences where no learner is left behind. Differentiation allows learners to engage with content at a level that is challenging yet attainable, which increases their confidence and willingness to take part in classroom activities.

Moreover, differentiated instruction aligns learning tasks with learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles, thereby sustaining engagement and minimizing feelings of frustration or exclusion (Tomlinson, 2014). When learners are given options and support that match their individual learning characteristics, they are more likely to remain focused, motivated, and actively involved in lessons. This approach not only enhances participation but also fosters a classroom climate where diversity is viewed as a strength, reinforcing inclusive practices that promote equitable learning opportunities for all learners.

## Theme 3: Culturally Responsive Practices Strengthening Belonging

Participants emphasized the deliberate integration of local culture, community language, and everyday lived experiences into classroom lessons as a key inclusive practice. Teachers described drawing examples from community life, local traditions, and familiar situations to make lessons more relatable, while learners noted that the use of their language and cultural references helped them understand concepts more easily. Indigenous and rural learners, in particular, expressed that such practices allowed them to see their own experiences reflected in classroom instruction rather than feeling disconnected from the content.

These accounts indicate that when instruction is grounded in learners' cultural and social contexts, learners feel acknowledged and respected within the classroom environment. Indigenous and rural learners reported feeling more confident to participate when lessons resonated with their realities, as this reduced feelings of exclusion and enhanced their sense of belonging. By valuing learners' identities and experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge, culturally responsive instruction fosters inclusive participation and encourages sustained classroom involvement.

### Participant responses:

*"Mas naiintindihan namin kapag may halimbawa sa buhay namin."* (Learner)

*"Ginagamit ang kultura ng komunidad sa lesson."* (Teacher)

*"Pakiramdam namin parte kami ng klase."* (Learner)

These responses suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy plays a crucial role in strengthening learners' sense of belonging, which is closely linked to sustained classroom involvement. When teachers intentionally integrate learners' cultural backgrounds, local knowledge, language, and lived experiences into classroom instruction, learners are more likely to feel recognized and valued within the learning environment. This sense of recognition fosters emotional safety and trust, enabling learners to participate more openly in discussions, group activities, and collaborative tasks without fear of marginalization or misunderstanding.

Existing studies affirm that when learners see their identities, histories, and cultural practices reflected in instructional content, participation becomes more authentic and meaningful rather than obligatory (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive pedagogy affirms learners' identities and bridges school knowledge with community contexts, thereby increasing motivation and engagement. As learners perceive the classroom as a space that respects and reflects who they are, they develop stronger connections to both the learning process and their peers, resulting in more sustained involvement and active participation across classroom activities.

## Theme 4: Contextual Challenges in Sustaining Inclusive Pedagogy

Despite the presence of positive inclusive practices, participants identified several challenges that affect the consistent implementation of inclusive pedagogy in rural school settings. One of the most frequently mentioned

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concerns was the limited availability of instructional materials, which restricted teachers' ability to design varied and engaging activities that cater to diverse learning needs. Without sufficient teaching aids, learning resources, or assistive materials, teachers often relied on improvised strategies, which, while creative, could not always fully address learner differences.

Participants also emphasized that large class sizes posed significant difficulties in sustaining inclusive classroom involvement. Managing diverse learners within crowded classrooms made it challenging for teachers to provide individualized attention, monitor participation, and implement differentiated instruction effectively. In addition, the presence of multiple teacher roles such as handling administrative tasks, coordinating programs, and addressing community responsibilities further strained teachers' time and energy. These overlapping responsibilities reduced opportunities for lesson preparation, reflection and targeted learner support. Collectively, these challenges underscore the complexity of implementing inclusive pedagogy in rural schools and highlight the need for systemic interventions to support teachers and ensure equitable learning experiences for all learners.

## Participant responses included:

*"Mahirap mag-differentiate kapag kulang ang gamit."* (Teacher 5)

*"Minsan kulang ang oras para sa lahat."* (Teacher 3)

*"Gusto naming mas maraming activity pero kulang ang resources."* (Learner 10)

These challenges highlight how contextual constraints significantly influence the sustainability of inclusive pedagogy, particularly in rural integrated school settings. While teachers consistently demonstrate commitment, creativity, and professional responsibility in addressing learner diversity, their efforts are often shaped and at times limited by factors beyond their control. Conditions such as limited instructional materials, large and multi-grade classes, heavy teaching loads, and multiple ancillary roles can reduce opportunities for sustained differentiation, individualized support, and inclusive classroom interaction. As a result, inclusive practices may become situational or episodic rather than consistently embedded in daily instruction.

Related studies emphasize that inclusive pedagogy cannot rely solely on individual teacher initiative but requires strong institutional structures to thrive (Ainscow, 2020; Ainscow et al., 2012). Institutional support in the form of adequate resource allocation, professional development, collaborative planning time, and supportive leadership is essential to maintaining high levels of classroom involvement. Without these supports, even well-intentioned inclusive practices may be difficult to sustain over time, leading to teacher fatigue and uneven learner participation. Thus, sustaining inclusive pedagogy requires a whole-school and systems-level approach that aligns leadership, resources, and policy with the goal of inclusive and meaningful learner engagement.

## 5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that inclusive pedagogical practices significantly enhance classroom involvement in a rural integrated school by creating learning environments that actively accommodate learner diversity and promote equitable participation. Inclusive strategies such as flexible grouping, peer support, and varied instructional approaches enable learners with different abilities and backgrounds to engage meaningfully in classroom activities. Research supports that when instruction is designed to include all learners rather than focusing on remediation for a few, participation increases and learners develop a stronger sense of agency in the learning process (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020). In rural contexts, where classrooms often include mixed-ability learners and culturally diverse groups, inclusive pedagogy becomes a critical mechanism for ensuring that no learner is marginalized during instruction.

Differentiated instruction further strengthens classroom involvement by aligning learning tasks with learners' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Studies have shown that differentiation enhances engagement and motivation by allowing learners to work at appropriate levels of challenge and experience success in learning activities (Tomlinson, 2014; Subban, 2006). In this study, differentiated practices enabled learners to participate confidently without fear of failure, thereby increasing their willingness to contribute to discussions and collaborative tasks. This aligns with existing research indicating that differentiated and learner-centered approaches foster confidence and sustained engagement, particularly among learners who may otherwise remain

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passive in traditional, one-size-fits-all classrooms.

Culturally responsive pedagogy also emerged as a key factor in promoting classroom involvement by strengthening learners' sense of belonging. When teachers integrate local culture, language, and community experiences into instruction, learners are more likely to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and feel valued within the classroom (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Empirical studies have consistently shown that culturally responsive teaching enhances participation, motivation, and academic engagement, especially among indigenous and rural learners (Paris & Alim, 2017). In the present study, cultural responsiveness helped normalize participation and fostered inclusive classroom interactions grounded in shared experiences.

However, despite the positive impact of inclusive pedagogical practices, the findings also highlight persistent contextual challenges that underscore the need for systemic support. Limited instructional resources, large class sizes, and multiple teacher responsibilities common conditions in rural schools can hinder the consistent implementation of inclusive strategies. Previous research indicates that inclusive education is most effective when supported by strong institutional leadership, adequate resources, and coherent policy frameworks (Ainscow et al., 2012; UNESCO, 2020). Without such systemic support, inclusive practices may rely solely on individual teacher effort, making them difficult to sustain over time. These findings reinforce the importance of coordinated school-level and policy-level support to ensure that inclusive pedagogy continues to enhance classroom involvement and promote equitable learning opportunities in rural integrated schools.

## 6. Conclusions

This study concludes that inclusive pedagogical practices play a vital role in promoting classroom involvement in rural integrated schools by creating learning environments where all learners feel recognized, supported, and encouraged to participate. Inclusive, differentiated, and culturally responsive strategies enable teachers to address learner diversity in terms of abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs, thereby reducing barriers to participation. When instruction is responsive to learners' contexts and capacities, students are more willing to engage in discussions, collaborate with peers, and take active roles in classroom activities, leading to richer and more meaningful learning experiences.

Moreover, the study highlights that sustained classroom involvement is closely linked to how well inclusive practices are supported within the broader school context. While teachers demonstrate commitment and creativity in implementing inclusive pedagogy, contextual challenges such as limited resources, heavy workloads, and multiple teaching responsibilities can constrain their efforts. Addressing these challenges through adequate institutional support, resource provision, and supportive leadership is essential to sustaining inclusive education in rural settings. Strengthening these support systems ensures that inclusive pedagogical practices are not only implemented but also maintained over time, thereby promoting equitable and meaningful participation for all learners in rural integrated schools.

## 7. Implications

The findings of this study carry important pedagogical implications for classroom practice in rural integrated schools. Teachers are encouraged to sustain and further develop inclusive and differentiated instructional practices that actively involve all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or learning needs. By employing flexible strategies such as varied tasks, collaborative learning, culturally responsive examples, and adaptive assessments, teachers can create learning environments where every learner feels valued and capable of participation. Sustaining these practices supports learner engagement, confidence, and a sense of belonging, which are essential to meaningful classroom involvement.

In terms of school leadership implications, the study underscores the critical role of school leaders in fostering inclusive education. School administrators may strengthen inclusion by ensuring equitable resource allocation, such as providing instructional materials, assistive tools, and support services that enable teachers to implement inclusive strategies effectively. Additionally, thoughtful workload management is essential in rural schools where teachers often handle multiple roles. By addressing workload demands and supporting collaborative planning, school leaders can create conditions that allow teachers to focus on inclusive pedagogical practices without compromising instructional quality.

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Finally, the study highlights significant policy implications for education stakeholders and policymakers. Education policies should strengthen support mechanisms for inclusive education in rural schools by prioritizing funding, capacity-building, and targeted programs that address contextual challenges. Policies that institutionalize professional development on inclusive and differentiated instruction, provide incentives for teachers in rural areas, and ensure sustained support for indigenous and special education programs can help translate inclusive education goals into consistent classroom practice. Strengthening these policy frameworks is essential to promoting equitable access to quality education and meaningful learner involvement in rural school settings.

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## Conflicts of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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