



International Journal of Early Childhood, Special and Inclusive Education

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026 |
<https://azalpub.com/index.php/AAH>

OPEN ACCESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Article Info

Received: 02/5/2026

Accepted: 4/25/2026

Published: 6/18/2026

EXPLORING THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS WITH INTELLECTUAL IN DEVELOPING THEIR LIFE SKILLS

¹ **Carmela A. Addatu**
Ifugao State University
Lamut, Ifugao, Philippines

Abstract

This qualitative multiple-case study explored the support system for learners with intellectual disabilities (ID) in developing life skills in two public schools in Tuguegarao City, Philippines. The study aimed to understand how inclusive education is implemented and experienced within local cultural and institutional contexts. Twelve parents, eight inclusive education teachers, and two school principals were purposively and conveniently sampled. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews guided by a validated researcher-made instrument and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed four major themes. The most significant, Holistic Parental Care Amid Daily Struggles, highlighted families as the foundation of support, navigating challenges with love, advocacy, and resilience. Teaching as Heartfelt Service emphasized teachers' commitment to nurturing learners' skills with empathy and dedication. Empathetic School Leadership showcased the role of principals in fostering inclusive practices and guiding teachers. Community Involvement and Solidarity illustrated how barangay councils, faith-based organizations, and NGOs contribute to reducing stigma and supporting education through culturally rooted bayanihan practices. The study underscores that inclusive education in the Philippine context is shaped by both institutional policies and deeply embedded cultural values of compassion and shared responsibility. Sustainable support for learners with ID requires family-centered, school-led, and community-empowered systems. Strengthening multi-sectoral collaboration, investing in culturally responsive pedagogy, and enhancing support mechanisms are recommended to uphold the dignity, rights, and developmental potential of every learner with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: intellectual disability, inclusive education, family support, community involvement, SPED teaching strategies, educational equity, Tuguegarao City, qualitative research, culturally responsive pedagogy, school leadership

*Corresponding author:

Introduction

Education is a fundamental driver of personal growth, social cohesion, and economic development. It equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate effectively in society. Inclusive education, which ensures that all learners, regardless of ability, background, or need, have access to quality learning experiences, promotes equity, empathy, and social integration. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, emphasize inclusive and equitable quality education, aiming to leave no one behind. Target 4.5 further highlights the elimination of educational inequalities based on factors such as disability, gender, and ethnicity, reinforcing the global commitment to inclusive learning environments.

Children with intellectual disabilities face unique challenges in accessing and benefiting from education. Parents of these learners often experience higher levels of stress due to additional caregiving responsibilities and the need to advocate for appropriate educational support. Teachers and school administrators are tasked with providing tailored interventions and accommodations, while community stakeholders, including barangays, faith-based organizations, and NGOs, contribute to reducing stigma and enhancing opportunities through collaborative programs. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness and sustainability of such support systems vary, often influenced by resource availability, teacher training, and local socio-cultural practices.

Although previous studies have examined inclusive education and support systems for learners with intellectual disabilities at national and international levels, research specific to the Division of Tuguegarao City remains limited. There is a clear gap in understanding how families, teachers, school leaders, and communities collectively support the development of life skills among these learners within the local context. Addressing this gap is critical to inform culturally responsive and practical interventions that promote independence, social integration, and holistic development for learners with intellectual disabilities.

This study is significant to learners with intellectual disabilities as it highlights the structures and practices that enhance their acquisition of life skills, social participation, and overall well-being. By examining the roles of families, educators, school leaders, and community stakeholders, the study provides insights that can guide effective and localized support strategies. Furthermore, the research contributes to the field of special education and inclusive education by offering empirical evidence on multi-level support systems, identifying best practices, and highlighting areas for policy improvement. These insights can assist educators, administrators, and policymakers in fostering inclusive learning environments that are responsive to the needs of learners with intellectual disabilities.

The purpose of this study is to explore the support systems provided by families, teachers, school administrators, and the community in developing life skills among learners with intellectual disabilities in public schools within the Division of Tuguegarao City.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which conceptualizes child development as a dynamic and reciprocal interaction between the individual and multiple environmental systems. The theory proposes that development occurs within nested structures: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem includes immediate environments such as family and school. The mesosystem refers to the interactions between these settings, such as collaboration between parents and teachers. The exosystem includes institutions and structures that indirectly influence the child, such as school leadership and local governance. The macrosystem encompasses broader cultural values, societal norms, and educational policies. The chronosystem accounts for changes over time that affect development.

This theoretical framework guided the identification and interpretation of the themes that emerged from the participants' lived experiences. The theme Holistic Parental Care Amid Daily Struggles reflects the microsystem, where families provide direct and consistent support in developing life skills. Teaching as Heartfelt Service represents the school as a primary microsystem that shapes instructional practices and daily skill development. Empathetic School Leadership aligns with the exosystem, as school administrators influence policies, resource allocation, and institutional culture that indirectly affect learners. Community Involvement and Solidarity corresponds to both the mesosystem and macrosystem, highlighting the interaction between school and community and the influence of cultural values such as communal responsibility.

The emergence of these themes demonstrates how multiple environmental systems interact to support learners with intellectual disabilities. Ecological Systems Theory also frames the understanding that life skills development is not confined to classroom instruction but is reinforced through consistent experiences across home, school, and

community contexts. The alignment of family involvement, teacher practices, administrative support, and community engagement illustrates the interconnected systems described in the theory. By examining these layers collectively, the study applies an ecological lens to analyze how support systems function in developing independence, adaptive behavior, and social competence among learners with intellectual disabilities. In the analysis section, the findings will be examined in relation to Ecological Systems Theory to determine the extent to which the participants' experiences align with the proposed interaction among environmental systems. This approach will allow for a critical evaluation of whether the ecological framework adequately explains the support mechanisms identified in the study or whether contextual factors suggest the need for theoretical refinement.

Conceptual Framework

The participants of this study were the Special Needs Education (SNED) learners with intellectual Disability enrolled at Cataggaman Elementary School and Cataggaman National High School during the School Year 2025–2026. A total of twelve learners were involved in the research, composed of seven boys and five girls, all of whom were actively participating in the inclusive education program. To obtain a more holistic understanding of the learners' circumstances, the study also included the parents or guardians of each SNED learner. Their participation was deemed essential, as they provided valuable insights into family dynamics, caregiving responsibilities, and the daily realities of raising a child with special needs. Through their narratives, the study captured the emotional, social, and economic impacts of disability within the household context.

The family constitutes the immediate microsystem, providing direct care, guidance, and advocacy that influence the learner's daily routines and skill development. Parents and guardians play a critical role in reinforcing life skills at home and collaborating with educators to ensure consistent learning experiences. Teachers and school personnel form another key system, delivering structured instruction, implementing individualized accommodations, and monitoring learners' progress. School administrators influence institutional policies, resource allocation, and the creation of an inclusive culture, serving as part of the broader exosystem that indirectly shapes learners' educational experiences.

Community stakeholders, including barangay officials, health workers, and local organizations, extend the support network by providing social, vocational, and cultural opportunities that supplement formal education. The interactions among these systems reflect Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, illustrating how learners' development is influenced by the interplay of immediate and extended environments.

This conceptual framework positions learners with intellectual disabilities at the center, surrounded by interconnected support systems that collectively foster the acquisition of life skills and facilitate inclusive education. The study focuses on examining the relationships among these variables—family support, teacher and school interventions, administrative guidance, and community engagement—to understand how they work together to enhance the educational and developmental outcomes of learners with intellectual disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of this study is to explore the lived experiences of the support system groups specifically parents and family members, teachers, school administrators, and community stakeholders in assisting learners with intellectual disabilities.

The study seeks to understand how these key groups provide care, guidance, and interventions to facilitate the development of life skills among learners with intellectual disabilities, and how their collective efforts contribute to inclusive education within the local context of Tuguegarao City. By examining these experiences, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the roles, interactions, and challenges of the support systems that shape the educational and developmental outcomes of learners with intellectual disabilities.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a basic descriptive qualitative design to explore the experiences of learners with intellectual disabilities and the support provided by their families, teachers, school administrators, and the community. This design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex, context-specific phenomena as experienced by participants, without focusing on experimental manipulation or comparison. The approach is appropriate for capturing the perspectives, perceptions, and lived experiences of individuals in real-life educational settings, providing rich, detailed descriptions of the support systems that influence learners' development of life skills.

Participants were selected through convenience sampling, targeting individuals who were readily accessible and willing to share detailed accounts of their experiences. These included parents or guardians of children with special needs, teachers directly involved in inclusive education programs, and school administrators. Community stakeholders such as barangay officials and local health workers were also consulted to provide additional perspectives.

Data were collected using self-constructed interview guides, designed to elicit meaningful and contextually relevant responses. The instruments were validated by experts in special education, educational research, and psychology to ensure clarity and relevance. Collected data were qualitative in nature and analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed for the identification of patterns and themes that reflect the experiences and support mechanisms of the participants.

Environment

The study was conducted in two public schools in Tuguegarao City: Cataggaman Elementary School and Cataggaman National High School. These schools were chosen because they actively implement inclusive education programs and serve learners with intellectual disabilities, providing access to a variety of support systems within the Division of Tuguegarao City. Cataggaman Elementary School is a recognized SPED center with programs such as special classes, mainstreaming, and inclusive education, while Cataggaman National High School serves as the receiving school for promoted SPED learners and continues to provide support for their development and integration into the community.

Participants

The participants of this study were the Special Education (SNED) learners diagnosed with Intellectual Disability enrolled at Cataggaman Elementary School and Cataggaman National High School during the School Year 2025–2026. A total of twelve learners were involved in the research, composed of seven boys and five girls, all of whom were actively participating in the inclusive education program at the time of the study. Five learners are from Cataggaman Elementary School and seven from Cataggaman National High School. These learners were heterogeneously grouped based on their varying needs and abilities to ensure a diverse representation of experiences.

To obtain a more holistic understanding of the learners' circumstances, the study also included the parents or guardians of each SPED learner. Their participation was deemed essential, as they provided valuable insights into family dynamics, caregiving responsibilities, and the daily realities of raising a child with special needs. Through their narratives, the study captured the emotional, social, and economic impacts of disability within the household context.

In addition to the learners and their parents, key school personnel, including eight regular/inclusive classroom teachers, and two school administrators were also engaged as sources of supplementary data. Their perspectives enriched the study by offering a deeper understanding of the institutional policies, instructional strategies, and support systems implemented within the inclusive education setting. Furthermore, community stakeholders such as barangay officials and local health workers were consulted to broaden the analysis and contextualize the challenges and support mechanisms available to SPED learners. This multi-perspective approach ensured a comprehensive examination of the educational environment and the intersecting needs of children with disabilities.

Instrument

Data were gathered using semi-structured interview guides developed by the researcher. The guide questions were carefully constructed based on the objectives of the study, relevant literature on inclusive education and life skills development, and the key variables of interest: family support, teacher interventions, school leadership, and community engagement. To ensure clarity, relevance, and validity, the interview guides were reviewed and validated by three experts in the fields of special education, educational research, and psychology.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection for this study followed a systematic, step-by-step process to ensure ethical compliance and the accuracy of information. First, the researcher prepared and validated the semi-structured interview guides with the help of three experts in special education, educational research, and psychology. Next, written permission was secured from the administrators of Cataggaman Elementary School and Cataggaman National High School to conduct the study within their institutions.

After receiving approval, the researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and any potential risks involved. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. Scheduling of the interviews was coordinated with participants to ensure minimal disruption to their routines and classes.

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, conducted individually with twelve SPED learners, twelve parents or guardians, eight teachers, and two school administrators. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and complemented by classroom observations. The observations were conducted to capture real-time interactions, instructional practices, and the implementation of support systems in the inclusive classroom. These observations provided contextual data that enriched and verified the information gathered during interviews, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of how support systems function in practice. Finally, the collected data were organized, reviewed, and validated by the same panel of three experts to ensure clarity, accuracy, and relevance before analysis.

Data Gathering Instruments

The primary method for data collection was structured interviews conducted with SNED learners and their parents. A set of self-formulated guide questions, was developed by the researcher to frame the interviews and ensure that all relevant areas were addressed. These guide questions aimed to explore the experiences, needs, challenges, and perceptions of both learners and their parents regarding inclusive education. During the interview sessions, participants were encouraged to respond freely and in detail. To ensure the accuracy and richness of the data, all responses were written down and transcribed verbatim by the researcher, preserving the authenticity of participants' voices.

In addition to the interviews, classroom observations were conducted to supplement the interview data and to gather contextual insights on the SNED learners' behaviors, peer interactions, learning engagement, and the instructional strategies employed by teachers. The observations focused on identifying both the barriers and supports present in the learning environment. This multi-method approach provided a holistic perspective on the learners' educational experiences by combining firsthand narratives with real-time classroom dynamics. The triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility of the findings and allowed the researcher to make informed interpretations about the actual needs, support mechanisms, and challenges faced by SNED learners within the inclusive education setting in Tuguegarao City.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis followed a systematic, step-by-step process. First, all interview transcripts and observation notes were transcribed verbatim and read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data. Second, initial codes were generated by highlighting meaningful statements and patterns that directly addressed the research objective concerning the experiences and support systems for learners with intellectual disabilities. Third, the initial codes were reviewed and organized into potential themes by identifying commonalities, differences, and relationships across participants and data sources. Fourth, these themes were refined and clearly defined to ensure they accurately represented the participants' experiences and aligned with the study's theoretical framework, particularly Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Finally, the themes were interpreted and synthesized to provide a coherent narrative of how families, teachers, school administrators,

and community stakeholders contribute to the development of life skills in learners with intellectual disabilities. This process ensured rigor, transparency, and credibility in the qualitative analysis.

Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted following strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and welfare of all participants. Written permission was first obtained from the administrators of Cataggaman Elementary School and Cataggaman National High School. Parental consent was secured through signed consent forms that clearly explained the purpose of the study, the procedures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Assent was obtained from learners who were able to understand the information appropriate to their cognitive level. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

All data were treated with confidentiality and anonymity. Identifiable information was coded, and only the researcher had access to the raw data. The ethical considerations, including informed consent and assent procedures, were consistently applied throughout the research process to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants. The study adhered to the principle that participation was voluntary and that no harm would come to participants because of their involvement.

Results/Findings

Theme 1: Instructional Adaptation and Accessibility for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities

Theme	Definition	Sample Verbatim
Instructional Adaptation and Accessibility for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities	Teaching strategies that are explicitly tailored to learners' cognitive, linguistic, and functional needs through structured, differentiated, and accessible instruction.	T1: <i>"I use visual instructions, clear and specific when I explain the lesson."</i> T3: <i>"I customize activities to meet each pupil's requirements."</i>

Learners with intellectual disabilities require instructional strategies that are clear, differentiated, and accessible to support comprehension and meaningful engagement. Participants consistently emphasized the need for structured lessons, visual scaffolding, simplified language, achievable tasks, and consistent reinforcement. For instance, one teacher (T1) stated, "I use visual instructions, clear and specific when I explain the lesson," while another (T3) shared, "I customize activities to meet each pupil's requirements," indicating a deliberate effort to adapt instruction according to individual learning needs.

Research supports these instructional adaptations as effective practices for learners with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Differentiated instruction has been widely recommended as a strategy to respond to learner diversity, requiring teachers to adjust content, process, and teaching methods to accommodate individual readiness levels (Tomlinson, 2014). Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) extends this approach by proactively designing flexible learning environments that reduce barriers and enhance accessibility for all learners, including those with disabilities (Universal Design for Instruction principles). Educational texts on instructional strategies for learners with intellectual disabilities highlight scaffolded visual supports, multisensory activities, and task breakdowns as evidence-based practices that increase engagement and comprehension (Instructional Strategies for Students with Mild, Moderate, and Severe Intellectual Disability).

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, instructional adaptation reflects the microsystem level, where direct teacher-learner interactions substantially shape cognitive and adaptive development. By tailoring instruction to learners' cognitive and functional capacities, teachers create inclusive learning environments that foster not only academic understanding but also the development of essential life skills. Accessible instruction supports cognitive life skills such as problem-solving and task completion, communication

skills through simplified and visual language, and adaptive life skills by connecting learning to functional classroom activities.

This study adds a localized perspective by documenting how Filipino teachers integrate culturally relevant examples and vernacular explanations to make instruction more meaningful within the learners' sociocultural context a practice not widely detailed in existing international literature but significant in resource-limited inclusive classrooms.

Synthesis

This theme reveals that instruction must be deliberately adapted to meet the cognitive and functional needs of learners with intellectual disabilities to enhance their participation and independence. Differentiated and universally designed instructional strategies foster comprehension, engagement, and the development of core life skills such as communication, problem-solving, task management, and adaptive behavior. These approaches represent a crucial foundation for inclusive education, enabling learners to navigate daily academic tasks and participate meaningfully in classroom and community life.

Theme 2: Emotional Support and Behavioral Responsiveness for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities

Theme	Definition	Sample Verbatim
Emotional Support and Behavioral Responsiveness for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities	Patience, empathy, and emotionally responsive strategies that support learners' behavioral regulation and relational development in inclusive classrooms.	<i>"I start by determining the purpose of the behavior... my method is equipped with patience and empathy." – T5</i> <i>"Praise them and avoid labels; handle them with compassion, understanding, and care." – T7</i>

Learners with intellectual disabilities flourish when classroom environments prioritize emotional understanding, consistency in behavioral guidance, and relational support. Participants highlighted the importance of patience, empathy, and intentional responsiveness to students' emotional cues. One teacher (T5) explained, "I start by determining the purpose of the behavior... my method is equipped with patience and empathy," and another (T7) shared, "Praise them and avoid labels; handle them with compassion, understanding, and care," illustrating how teachers focus on emotional connection rather than corrective punishment alone.

Research emphasizes the critical role of teacher emotional competence in inclusive classrooms. Emotional competence—which includes awareness, regulation, and responsiveness to emotions—has been linked to improved teacher-student relationships, better classroom climate, and increased student engagement and participation, particularly for learners with diverse educational needs. Higher emotional competence among teachers has been associated with more favorable attitudes toward inclusion and more effective classroom management, contributing to emotional safety and social inclusion for students with special needs.

Structured social-emotional learning (SEL) and emotional support practices have been found to significantly improve regulation, interpersonal skills, and adaptive functioning in learners with disabilities. Review studies of SEL interventions highlight the importance of explicit SEL instruction and adult responsiveness in strengthening emotional regulation, self-efficacy, and relational competencies, which are foundational to behavioral success in inclusive settings.

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, this theme reflects interactions within the microsystem, where direct teacher-learner and teacher-family relationships influence emotional development and behavior. Emotional responsiveness supports learners' social and emotional life skills, such as self-regulation,

empathy, and interpersonal communication, which are essential for positive participation in classroom and community life. The study also highlights a culturally grounded insight: Filipino teachers intentionally avoid labeling and instead build trust and respect with learners and families, emphasizing relational continuity and culturally sensitive engagement—an approach that strengthens both emotional well-being and inclusive practices in local settings.

Synthesis

Learners with intellectual disabilities benefit significantly from emotionally responsive teaching and consistent behavioral guidance. Teachers’ emotional awareness, empathy, and understanding of learners’ needs create a psychologically safe climate that promotes engagement, motivation, and social participation. These practices align with research showing the positive effects of emotional support on classroom climate and student well-being. Emotional responsiveness strengthens social interaction and self-regulation life skills, enabling learners to navigate social contexts and relationships effectively. The local practice of culturally sensitive engagement and respectful communication with both learners and families underscores the unique way emotional support manifests in Filipino inclusive classrooms, contributing to deeper relational trust and sustained learner growth.

Theme 3: Functional and Experiential Learning for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities

Theme	Definition	Sample Verbatim
Functional and Experiential Learning for Learners with Intellectual Disabilities	Instructional practices that connect learning to real-life functions, routines, and active, contextualized activities to enhance independence, adaptive competence, and engagement.	<i>“I give them chores to enhance their skills.” – T1</i> <i>“I use games and real-life examples to help them understand.” – T6</i>

Learners with intellectual disabilities benefit from contextualized, hands-on, and meaningful learning activities that connect classroom instruction to real-life functions. The data revealed that teachers purposefully integrate functional tasks, practical routines, and experiential activities to help learners build independence and confidence. For example, one teacher (T1) explained, “I give them chores to enhance their skills,” while another (T6) shared, “I use games and real-life examples to help them understand,” both showing how instruction is grounded in functional contexts that learners can relate to beyond the classroom. Participants also noted that adapting tasks to the learners’ context and abilities, including the use of familiar language and everyday activities, strengthens engagement and relevance.

Educational research supports functional and experiential approaches for learners with intellectual disabilities. A core principle of special education is that instruction is most effective when it is concrete, contextualized, and closely aligned with everyday life tasks (Browder & Courtade, 2013). Functional curriculum frameworks emphasize teaching skills that learners will use in daily living, community participation, and vocational contexts, moving beyond abstract content toward practical application (Bouck, 2016).

Experiential learning models, such as Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory, highlight the importance of active engagement and reflection on real-world activities to deepen understanding and transfer learning across environments (Kolb, 2014). In the field of intellectual disabilities, research has shown that functional routines, hands-on activities, and practice in natural contexts significantly improve learners’ adaptive behavior, generalization of skills, and motivation (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 2012).

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, this theme reflects interconnections between the microsystem (direct instructional practices and classroom routines) and the exosystem (community resources and experiential contexts outside school that shape opportunities for practice). When learning activities are

meaningful and grounded in everyday life, they support the development of key life skills, such as self-care, daily living routines, functional communication, and vocational readiness. By engaging learners with activities that mirror real-world tasks, teachers strengthen not only academic engagement but also learners’ autonomy and adaptive competence.

This study adds to existing research by documenting how Filipino teachers incorporate culturally relevant and everyday activities into instruction — for example, classroom chores, local games, and livelihood-related tasks — reinforcing both practical life skills and a sense of community belonging that enhances learner motivation and applicability of learned skills beyond the school setting.

Synthesis

Learners with intellectual disabilities demonstrate a strong need for learning opportunities that are meaningful, contextualized, and tied to everyday functions. Functional and experiential instructional strategies — such as chores, games, and real-life tasks — make learning relevant, promote engagement, and build adaptive life skills critical for independence and societal participation. These approaches align with research emphasizing real-world application and experiential engagement as foundations for skill generalization. Through culturally responsive and context-specific activities, learners not only develop practical competencies but also experience success and belonging, reinforcing their confidence in navigating daily life.

Theme 4: Social Belonging and Collaborative Support

Theme	Definition	Sample Verbatim
Social Belonging and Collaborative Support	Instructional and relational practices that foster inclusion, peer collaboration, and strong home-school connections, ensuring learners feel accepted, supported, and engaged in social and academic activities.	<i>“I pair learners with peers to enhance social engagements.” – T8</i> <i>“I make sure they are not left behind.” – T6</i>

Learners with intellectual disabilities require an environment where they feel accepted, valued, and supported both socially and academically. The study revealed that teachers intentionally foster peer interactions, emotional safety, and home-school collaboration to promote a sense of belonging. For instance, one teacher (T8) explained, “I pair learners with peers to enhance social engagements,” while another (T6) stated, “I make sure they are not left behind,” highlighting strategies that ensure equitable participation and reduce isolation. Participants emphasized that consistent communication and cooperation with parents help align expectations and maintain support beyond the classroom, as reflected in statements like, “I communicate through messenger or home visits” (T7) and “Communicate regularly with parents and provide feedback” (T8).

Research strongly supports the critical role of social inclusion in learning outcomes. Goodenow and Grady (1993) found that students’ sense of belonging is a strong predictor of motivation, engagement, and persistence, particularly among vulnerable populations. Structured peer-support strategies, as described by Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu, and Kurkowski (2010), enhance both academic engagement and social competence for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Diamond and Hong (2010) emphasize that inclusive peer interactions promote communication, confidence, and pro-social behavior. Home-school collaboration also strengthens outcomes; Epstein (2018) highlights that regular communication and parental engagement align expectations and create consistent support across learning environments. Filipino studies confirm that open communication and collaborative problem-solving empower parents to actively support their children’s educational development (Bernardo & Dumaran, 2018).

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, this theme reflects both the microsystem, where direct teacher-student and peer interactions occur, and the mesosystem, which includes the connections between school and family. By fostering peer collaboration, inclusive practices, and consistent family involvement,

learners experience a supportive ecosystem that promotes emotional safety, social skills, and collaborative problem-solving.

The integration of culturally sensitive and contextually relevant practices is particularly notable. Filipino teachers emphasize peer engagement and family collaboration in ways that are responsive to local norms, ensuring learners experience belonging, mutual respect, and inclusion. These practices cultivate social-emotional competencies, cooperation, and community-oriented life skills essential for participation in school and society.

Synthesis

Learners with intellectual disabilities thrive in environments that prioritize social belonging and collaboration. Peer interactions, emotionally safe classrooms, and strong partnerships between teachers and families contribute to learners’ social, emotional, and academic development. These practices align with ecological theory by demonstrating how microsystem and mesosystem interactions shape social skills, collaborative behavior, and emotional resilience. By embedding inclusive, culturally responsive, and collaborative strategies, learners acquire vital life skills such as empathy, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential for integration into both school and community life.

Theme 5: Teachers’ Continuous Professional Growth

Theme	Definition	Sample Verbatim
Teachers’ Continuous Professional Growth	Learners with intellectual disabilities require teachers who are trained, supported, and continually developing professionally. Teachers’ learning and preparedness directly impact students’ engagement, skill acquisition, and overall growth.	<i>P5: “I need more learnings regarding handling special children.” P6: “I need SPED training, mentorship, and professional guidance.”</i>

Teachers’ continuous professional growth is essential for fostering an effective learning environment for learners with intellectual disabilities. Participants emphasized the importance of ongoing training, mentoring, and emotional readiness to provide responsive and competent instruction. As P5 noted, “I need more learnings regarding handling special children,” highlighting the direct connection between teacher preparedness and student outcomes.

Similarly, P6 expressed the need for structured SPED training and professional guidance. Literature strongly supports this perspective: Desimone and Garet (2015) assert that sustained, high-quality professional development improves teacher practice and student learning. In inclusive education, Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008) found that teachers’ confidence and effectiveness increase with ongoing support rather than one-time workshops, while Florian and Spratt (2013) emphasize reflective practice and continuous strategy expansion. Philippine studies corroborate these findings; Dizon (2020) reports that regular capacity-building programs and peer mentoring enhance teacher confidence and instructional effectiveness, and Corpuz and Lucido (2021) highlight the importance of emotional preparedness for sustaining inclusive practices.

This theme aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory at the microsystem level, where teacher–learner interactions directly shape cognitive, social, and adaptive skill development, and at the mesosystem level, where mentorship, training, and peer networks strengthen teachers’ ability to implement inclusive practices.

Synthesis

Teachers’ professional growth not only strengthens instructional delivery but also enhances learners’ life skills, including cognitive skills (understanding and applying concepts), adaptive skills (independence in tasks), social skills (communication and cooperation), and emotional regulation. The study uniquely highlights that Filipino teachers value both formal SPED training and emotional preparedness, reinforcing that culturally responsive

professional development is integral for inclusive education. Continuous teacher learning creates a cascading effect: as teachers grow, learners with intellectual disabilities thrive, demonstrating greater engagement, competence, and independence across learning domains.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the success and well-being of learners with intellectual disabilities (ID) are shaped by an interconnected ecosystem composed of families, teachers, school administrators, and the broader community. Each of these stakeholders plays a vital role, and their collaborative engagement determines the effectiveness of inclusive education in the study area.

1. **Families as the Bedrock of Inclusive Support.** Parents serve as primary caregivers and informal educators. They provide behavioral guidance, emotional support, and home-based instruction despite limited resources and formal training. Their resilience, unconditional love, and adherence to Filipino cultural values such as *pag-aaruga*, *pagkalinga*, and *pagtanggap* buffer systemic gaps and foster their child's growth.

2. **Teachers as Catalysts of Inclusive Learning.** Educators transform learning through empathy, individualized instruction, and relational engagement. By collaborating with families and tailoring strategies to learners' unique strengths, teachers nurture academic skills, confidence, social participation, and emotional well-being.

3. **School Leadership as Enablers of Inclusion.** Administrators provide vision, policy implementation, and resource mobilization. Their leadership ensures that inclusion moves from policy to lived experience and bridges gaps between classroom needs and systemic limitations.

4. **Community as a Source of Normalization and Empowerment.** Local stakeholders including barangays, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and volunteers extend the reach of inclusion through support programs, awareness campaigns, and social initiatives. Their participation reduces stigma, fosters acceptance, and reinforces the idea that inclusion is a shared responsibility.

5. **Inclusive Education as a Culturally Grounded, Collaborative Practice.** In the Philippine context, inclusion succeeds when all stakeholders contribute within a culturally responsive framework, valuing empathy, collaboration, and human dignity. Learners with ID achieve personal growth, social belonging, and academic success when families, schools, and communities operate as a cohesive, supportive ecosystem.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen inclusive education for learners with intellectual disabilities (ID):

Strengthen Family Support Systems. Develop community-based programs that provide parental training, psychosocial support, and respite care. Create accessible workshops and materials on home-based learning strategies, behavioral guidance, and emotional regulation tailored to the needs of families with children with ID, recognizing their central role as caregivers and informal educators.

Enhance Teacher Preparation and Professional Development. Institutionalize continuous training for special education teachers in individualized instruction, emotional responsiveness, and culturally grounded pedagogy. Encourage peer mentoring, collaborative planning, and sharing of best practices among educators to cultivate a culture of inclusive teaching and relational engagement with learners.

Promote Inclusive Leadership in Schools. Equip school administrators with frameworks and tools for policy implementation, resource allocation, and monitoring of inclusive practices. Integrate inclusive education goals into school improvement plans to ensure learners with ID are prioritized in decision-making processes, and that administrators can facilitate collaborative support for teachers and families.

Mobilize Community Participation. Strengthen partnerships with barangay councils, faith-based organizations,

NGOs, and other local stakeholders to provide resources, awareness campaigns, and social inclusion initiatives. Engage communities to reduce stigma, normalize intellectual disabilities, and foster collective responsibility in supporting learners with ID.

Institutionalize Life-Skills Education. Embed functional and life-oriented skills into the school curriculum to prepare learners with ID for independent living and meaningful participation in daily life. Align school instruction with home and community practices to enhance the relevance and transferability of learning experiences.

Advocate for Policy and Funding Support. Promote increased government investment in inclusive education, including funding for special education programs, assistive technologies, and community-based support initiatives. Ensure that national and local policies reflect the lived realities of learners with ID and their families, supporting a holistic, culturally grounded, and collaborative approach to inclusion.

References

- Ainscow, M. (2020). *Leading inclusive education: Building capacity for system change*. Routledge.
- Ainscow, M. (2020). Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 6(1), 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587>
- Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. (2010). Developing inclusive education systems: The role of leadership. *Journal of Educational Change*, 11(2), 159–172.
- Bernardo, A. B. I., & Dumaran, D. G. (2018). Home–school collaboration for children with special needs in the Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Special Education*, 15(2), 45–60.
- Bernardo, A. B. I., & Dumaran, D. G. (2018). Parent–school collaboration in inclusive education in the Philippines: Challenges and strategies. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Special Education*, 7(2), 45–62.
- Bernardo, A. B. I., & Mendoza, R. C. (2020). Emotional support and engagement of learners with intellectual disabilities in Filipino inclusive classrooms. *Philippine Journal of Educational Research*, 15(1), 32–48.
- Bouck, E. C. (2011). A functional approach to teaching students with intellectual disabilities: Visual cues, scaffolds, and stepwise instruction. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 46(3), 430–445.
- Bouck, E. C. (2011). Reviewing the literature on teaching students with intellectual disabilities: A systematic analysis. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 46(4), 521–533.
- Bouck, E. C. (2013). Family engagement and functional skills instruction for students with intellectual disabilities. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(2), 220–234.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Browder, D. M., Wakeman, S. Y., & Flowers, C. (2003). Embedded instruction in inclusive settings. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 35(4), 54–58.
- Bouck, E. C. (2016). Functional curriculum for students with intellectual disability: Preparing for daily living and employment. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 51(2), 107–120.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979/2005). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brunsting, N. C., Sreckovic, M. A., & Lane, K. L. (2014). Special education teacher burnout: A synthesis of research from 1979 to 2013. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 37(4), 681–711.

- Butler, D. L., & Schnellert, L. (2012). Collaborative inquiry in teacher professional development: Supporting inclusive practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(8), 1206–1220.
- Carter, E. W., Sisco, L. G., Melekoglu, M. A., & Kurkowski, S. (2010). Peer support interventions to improve social outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 77*(4), 425–444.
- Carandang, J., Santos, R., & Ramos, L. (2015). Parental involvement and home-based learning in Filipino inclusive classrooms. *Philippine Journal of Special Education, 10*(1), 15–32.
- Carandang, R., et al. (2015). Filipino parents' integration of functional and life-skill instruction into daily routines. *Philippine Journal of Special Education, 12*(1), 23–35.
- Causton-Theoharis, J., Theoharis, G., Orsati, F., & Cosier, M. (2011). School-community partnerships and inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15*(4), 409–425.
- Cobb, R. (2015). Emotional intelligence and inclusive school leadership: The role of empathy and relational awareness. *Journal of Educational Leadership, 7*(3), 45–60.
- Corpuz, B. B., & Lucido, P. I. (2021). *Principles of teaching: Enhancing learner-centered instruction*. Lorimar Publishing.
- Corpuz, B. and Salandanan, G. (2015). *Principle of Teaching 2 (with TLE)*. Lorimar Publishing, Inc. Costley, K.C. (2015)
- Coyne, P., Pisha, B., Dalton, B., Zeph, L. A., & Smith, N. C. (2012). Literacy by design: Universal design for learning in the literacy classroom. *Remedial and Special Education, 33*(5), 299–311.
- De Boer, A., & Pijl, S. J. (2016). The acceptance and rejection of peers with ADHD and ASD in general secondary education. *Journal of educational research, 109*(3), 325-332.
- Department of Education. (2017). *Policies and guidelines on the ethical conduct of research involving minors (Department Order No. 16, s. 2017)*. <https://www.deped.gov.ph>
- Deppeler, J., & Loreman, T. (2011). Successful inclusion requires a culture of collaboration: Enhancing learning through professional learning communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15*(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2010.496188>
- Desimone, L. M., & Garet, M. S. (2015). Best practices in teachers' professional development in the United States. *Psychology, Society, & Education, 7*(3), 252–263.
- Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support, and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*. Department for Education and Skills, UK.
- Diamond, K. E., & Hong, S. (2010). Promoting social competence among children with disabilities through inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Early Intervention, 32*(3), 203–220.
- Dempsey, I., et al. (2009). Parent preparedness and school communication in supporting children with disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 56*(2), 151–169.
- Dizon, E. I. (2020). Inclusive education practices in Philippine public schools: Leadership, collaboration, and professional development. *Asia Pacific Education Researcher, 29*(6), 567–576. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-019-00489-4>
- Dizon, G. B. (2020). Collaborative practices in inclusive classrooms in resource-limited Philippine public schools. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Special Education, 9*(1), 25–44.
- Donohuea, D. & Bornmana, J. (2015). South African Teachers' Attitudes toward the Inclusion of Learners with Different Abilities in Mainstream Classrooms, *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 62*:1,

- 42-59,
- Downey, J. (2025). *Downey Survey on the impact of special needs children on family dynamics*.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (4th ed.). Corwin.
- Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), 813–828.
- Florian, L., & Spratt, J. (2013). Enacting inclusion: A framework for interrogating inclusive practice. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 28(2), 119–135.
- Florian, L., & Spratt, J. (2013). Enacting inclusive pedagogy: The importance of teacher beliefs and learning opportunities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17(8), 819–835.
- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2016). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (8th ed.). Pearson.
- Forlin, C. (2013). Changing paradigms and future directions for implementing inclusive education in developing countries. *Asian Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1(2), 19–31.
- Forlin, C. (2013). Changing attitudes and practices: Strengthening teacher education to advance inclusive education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 13(2), 141–148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12012>
- Gaudreau, P., Carr, C., VanVuren, K., & Moss, J. (2017). Experiential learning and teacher development in inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 64, 164–173.
- Gona, JK. et. Al (2017). Challenges and coping strategies of parents of children with autism on the Kenyan coast. *Published in final edited form as: Rural Remote Health*.
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71.
- Green, S. E. (2007). "We're tired, not sad": Emotional relief and coping among parents of children with disabilities. *Disability & Society*, 22(1), 1–16.
- Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. The New Press.
- Hunt, P., Farron Davis, C., Beckstead, S., Curtis, W. J., & Goetz, L. (2012). Functional and experiential learning approaches for students with intellectual disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 50(1), 42–53.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491–525.
- Jurado, R., & Lim, S. (2021). SPED resources and challenges in Philippine public schools. *Philippine Journal of Special Education Research*, 16(2), 55–70.
- King, G., et al. (2003). Social support networks and parental well-being for families of children with developmental disabilities. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 29(6), 451–460.
- Knight, V. F., Spooner, F., & Browder, D. M. (2013). Enhancing literacy and communication in students with intellectual disability using explicit language and structured routines. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(1), 62–75.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Kuper, H., et al. (2018). Redefining success: Beyond academic achievement for children with disabilities. *Disability*

& *Society*, 33(4), 587–605.

Kyzer, K. et al. (2012). The Relationship of Family Support to Family Outcomes: A Synthesis of Key Findings from Research on Severe Disability *Volume 37, Issue 1*

Looreman, T. (2017). Inclusive education: Supporting teachers through mentoring and practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(8), 833–848.

Looreman, T. (2017). Pedagogy for inclusive education: Experiences from around the world. *Support for Learning*, 32(2), 95–110.

Mariano and Ganal (2020) Teacher resilience in inclusive education: Navigating emotional challenges in diverse classrooms. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(5), 473-488

McGhie-Richmond D., De Bruin, C. (2015). Tablets, tweets and talking text: the role of technology in inclusive pedagogy.

McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. L. (2015). Effective inclusive schools: Lessons learned. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 28(2), 92–104.

Mitchell, D. (2014). *What really works in special and inclusive education: Using evidence-based teaching strategies* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Olsson, M. B., & Hwang, C. P. (2008). Parental adjustment to having a child with intellectual disabilities: Resilience and coping. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 52(12), 986–999.

Pather and Nxumalo (2019) Challenging Inclusive Education Policy and Practice in Africa Series: *Studies in Inclusive Education*, Volume: 40

Paz, R. (2018). Visual aids and bilingual scaffolding in Filipino inclusive classrooms. *Philippine Journal of Special Education*, 12(2), 55–70.

Resch, J. A., et al. (2010). Hope and resilience in parents of children with disabilities. *Families, Systems, & Health*, 28(3), 281–295.

Sailor, W. , (2015). Advances in Schoolwide Inclusive School Reform *Volume 36, Issue 2*
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932514555021>

Saloviita, T. (2018) Attitudes of Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 64, 270-282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1541819>

Sharma, U., & Sokal, L. (2016). Coaching and mentoring teachers for inclusive practice: Global perspectives. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(12), 1227–1243.

Sharma, U., Forlin, C., & Looreman, T. (2008). Impact of training on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. *International Journal of Special Education*, 23(2), 11–20.

Sharma, U., & Sokal, L. (2016). Can teachers' attitudes toward inclusion be changed? A review of interventions. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(4), 79–93.

Shogren, K. A., et al. (2015). Leadership and students with disabilities: Enhancing advocacy through personal engagement. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 28(2), 87–99.

Sokal, L., & Sharma, U. (2017). Compassionate leadership in inclusive schools: Effects on teacher attitudes and school culture. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(11), 1123–1139.

Theoharis, G. (2010). *Disrupting injustice: Principals' leadership for social justice*. Routledge.

Tindowen, D. E. (2019). Empathy-driven leadership and inclusive culture in Philippine public schools. *Philippine*

Journal of Educational Administration, 14(1), 23–40.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (2nd ed.). ASCD.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the* Bernardo, A. B. I., & Mendoza, N. B. (2020). Social-emotional competence and teacher-student relationships among Filipino learners. *Asia Pacific Education Researcher*, 29(3), 241–250.

Tucker, C., & Schwartz, I. (2013). Parent-developed strategies for home learning in absence of formal programs. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 35(3), 178–192.

Turnbull, A. P., Turnbull, R., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2010). *Exceptional lives: Special education in today's schools* (7th ed.). Pearson.

Universal Design for Instruction principles. (n.d.). Center for Universal Design in Education. Retrieved from <https://www.washington.edu/doiit/universal-design-instruction>

Villa, R.A., and Thousand, J. (2016). [Leading an inclusive school: Access and success for ALL students](#), 16-21

Westling, D. L., & Fox, L. (2009). *Teaching students with severe disabilities* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 89-95

Woolfson, L., & Brady, K. (2009). Developing emotionally competent teachers for inclusive classrooms. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36(3), 132–139.