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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Inclusive Pedagogy and Student Engagement in Secondary Filipino Classrooms: A Qualitative Study

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#### Abstract

*Inclusive pedagogy plays a critical role in fostering meaningful student engagement, particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. This study explores how inclusive teaching practices are enacted and how they influence student engagement in secondary Filipino classrooms at Bangbang National High School, Hungduan, Ifugao. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study examined the lived pedagogical experiences of Filipino teachers handling Grades 7 to 10. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Findings revealed five major themes: (1) Inclusion as Culturally Responsive and Linguistically Sensitive Pedagogy, (2) Differentiated Instruction as a Catalyst for Engagement, (3) Dialogic and Participatory Learning Practices, (4) Relational Teaching and Learner Motivation, and (5) Structural Challenges and Teacher Agency. Results indicate that inclusive pedagogy enhances student engagement through contextualized instruction, interactive strategies, and strong teacher-student relationships. However, challenges related to resources and training persist. The study contributes to inclusive education literature by highlighting context-specific practices in Filipino language instruction and underscores the need for strengthened institutional support.*

*Keywords: Inclusive Pedagogy, Student Engagement, Filipino Language Education, Qualitative Study, Secondary Education, Philippines*

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## Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a fundamental principle in contemporary educational reform, emphasizing the need to create learning environments that are equitable, participatory, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners. Central to this paradigm is inclusive pedagogy, which shifts the focus from accommodating individual learners to designing instruction that inherently addresses diversity within the classroom. In language education, particularly in Filipino classrooms, inclusive pedagogy becomes even more significant as it intersects with linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and learners' lived experiences.

Student engagement, defined as the level of learners' active participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment in the learning process, is a key indicator of effective teaching and meaningful learning. Research suggests that engagement is not solely dependent on content delivery but is significantly influenced by the inclusivity of pedagogical practices. When learners feel valued, represented, and supported, they are more likely to participate actively and develop a deeper connection with the subject matter.

In the Philippine context, secondary Filipino classrooms serve as spaces where language, culture, and identity converge. However, these classrooms often consist of learners with varied linguistic backgrounds, learning abilities, and socio-cultural experiences. In rural settings such as Bangbang National High School in Hungduan, Ifugao, these complexities are further intensified by limited resources and contextual challenges. Teachers are thus tasked with implementing inclusive practices that not only address these diversities but also sustain student engagement.

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, there remains a gap in understanding how inclusive pedagogy is experienced and enacted in Filipino language classrooms, particularly in rural secondary schools. Much of the existing literature focuses on general pedagogical practices or quantitative measures of engagement, leaving limited exploration of teachers' lived experiences and classroom realities.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the pedagogical experiences of Filipino teachers in implementing inclusive practices and fostering student engagement. By adopting a qualitative lens, the study provides a deeper understanding of how inclusion is operationalized in language instruction and how it shapes learners' participation and motivation. The findings aim to contribute to both theoretical and practical discussions on inclusive pedagogy, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse educational contexts.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

Inclusive pedagogy emphasizes designing instruction that accommodates all learners while promoting participation and engagement (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020). In language education, culturally responsive teaching enhances learner engagement by connecting instruction to learners' identities and experiences (Gay, 2018). Theoretical foundations include Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984), and dialogic teaching approaches, which emphasize interaction and meaning-making.

However, studies indicate that challenges such as limited resources, inadequate training, and contextual constraints affect the implementation of inclusive practices (OECD, 2019; EDCOM II, 2023). This highlights the need for context-specific research in Filipino classrooms.

## 3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Filipino teachers implementing inclusive pedagogy in secondary classrooms. The phenomenological approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of how teachers perceive and enact inclusive practices in fostering student engagement. Participants were purposively selected Filipino teachers handling Grades 7 to 10 at Bangbang National High School.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials. Interviews captured teachers' perspectives and experiences, while observations provided insights into actual classroom practices. Document analysis served to triangulate the findings.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, involving coding, theme development, and interpretation. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, audit trails, and thick description.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### Theme I: Inclusion as Culturally Responsive and Linguistically Sensitive Pedagogy

Teachers conceptualize inclusive pedagogy as deeply intertwined with cultural responsiveness and linguistic sensitivity, particularly in Filipino classrooms where language serves as both a medium of instruction and a carrier of identity. Participants emphasized the importance of integrating learners' local language, cultural practices, and lived experiences into lesson delivery to enhance comprehension and participation. By contextualizing instruction within familiar cultural

frameworks, teachers create learning environments that validate students' identities and reduce barriers to engagement. This approach is especially significant in rural settings like Hungduan, Ifugao, where learners bring rich indigenous knowledge and linguistic diversity into the classroom. Teachers' practices reflect an intentional effort to bridge formal curriculum content with students' socio-cultural realities, thereby fostering inclusivity through relevance and representation.

## Participant Responses

- *"Ginagamit ko ang lokal na wika para mas maintindihan nila."*
- *"Tkinokonek ko ang lesson sa kultura nila."*
- *"Mas engaged sila kapag relatable ang topic."*

These findings align with culturally responsive teaching, which emphasizes the use of learners' cultural knowledge and experiences as a foundation for effective instruction (Gay, 2018). The integration of local language and culture enhances comprehension and engagement by making learning more meaningful and accessible. From a theoretical perspective, this is supported by Lev Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory, which posits that learning is socially mediated and constructed through interaction within a cultural context. Research further indicates that culturally responsive pedagogy improves both academic achievement and student engagement, particularly among learners from diverse backgrounds (UNESCO, 2020; Azorín & Ainscow, 2020). Thus, inclusion in Filipino classrooms is effectively operationalized through culturally grounded and linguistically responsive teaching practices that affirm learners' identities and promote active participation.

## Theme 2: Differentiated Instruction as a Catalyst for Engagement

Teachers employ differentiated instructional strategies to address the diverse abilities, learning styles, and readiness levels of students. Differentiation is manifested through varied tasks, flexible grouping, and adaptive assessment methods that allow learners to engage with content in ways that suit their individual needs. Teachers design activities that cater to both high-performing and struggling learners, ensuring that each student has an opportunity to participate meaningfully. This approach not only supports academic development but also fosters inclusivity by acknowledging and accommodating learner diversity. In the Filipino classroom, differentiation is often integrated into reading, writing, and comprehension tasks, where learners are given multiple pathways to demonstrate understanding.

## Participant Responses

- *"Iba-iba ang tasks depende sa kakayahan."*
- *"May group work at individual activities."*
- *"Flexible ang assessment ko."*

The findings support the principles of inclusive pedagogy, which advocate for extending learning opportunities to all students through flexible instructional design (Florian, 2019). Differentiated instruction enables teachers to respond to individual learner needs without segregating students, thereby promoting equity and participation. According to Mel Ainscow (2020), adaptive teaching strategies are essential in creating inclusive classrooms that accommodate diversity. Empirical studies also demonstrate that differentiation enhances student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement by providing appropriate levels of challenge and support (Núñez et al., 2023). Therefore, differentiation serves as a key mechanism for fostering engagement and inclusion, allowing learners to access the curriculum in meaningful and personalized ways.

## Theme 3: Dialogic and Participatory Learning Practices

Teachers emphasize the use of dialogic and participatory learning approaches to actively involve students in the learning process. These practices include open discussions, collaborative activities, and opportunities for learners to express their ideas and perspectives. By shifting from teacher-centered instruction to interactive and student-centered approaches, teachers create a classroom environment that encourages critical thinking, communication, and active engagement. Dialogic teaching allows learners to co-construct knowledge through dialogue, fostering deeper understanding and reflective thinking. In Filipino classrooms, where language is both the subject and medium of instruction, such practices are particularly effective in developing communication skills and confidence.

## Participant Responses

- *"Pinapadiscuss ko sila ng ideas."*
- *"Open sharing ang ginagawa namin."*
- *"Mas natututo sila kapag active sila."*

These findings align with dialogic teaching, which emphasizes the role of dialogue and interaction in learning (Alexander, 2020). Through structured discussions and participatory activities, learners engage more deeply with content and develop higher-order thinking skills. The approach is also consistent with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) view that learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative meaning-making. Research indicates that participatory learning environments enhance student engagement, improve comprehension, and promote critical thinking (Gillies, 2016; UNESCO, 2020). Thus, dialogic and participatory practices function as powerful pedagogical strategies for sustaining engagement and fostering inclusive learning environments.

### Theme 4: Relational Teaching and Learner Motivation

Teachers highlight the importance of building strong interpersonal relationships with students as a foundation for effective teaching and sustained engagement. Relational teaching involves creating a supportive and respectful classroom environment where learners feel valued, understood, and motivated to participate. Teachers emphasize the need to know their students personally, understand their backgrounds, and establish trust and mutual respect. Such relationships contribute to a positive classroom climate that encourages learners to take risks, express themselves, and engage actively in learning activities. In the context of Filipino classrooms, relational teaching is closely tied to cultural values of respect (*paggalang*) and care (*pag-aaruga*), which further strengthen teacher–student connections.

#### Participant Responses

- “*Mas nakikinig sila kapag may connection kami.*”
- “*Importante ang respeto at tiwala.*”
- “*Kilalanin mo ang estudyante.*”

The findings are consistent with the Ethics of Care framework proposed by Nel Noddings (2005), which emphasizes the centrality of caring relationships in education. Additionally, Andy Hargreaves (1998) identifies teaching as an emotional practice that involves building meaningful connections with learners. Research by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) further demonstrates that positive teacher–student relationships enhance student motivation, engagement, and academic success. In inclusive classrooms, where learners may have diverse needs and challenges, relational teaching becomes even more critical in fostering a sense of belonging and participation. These findings suggest that inclusion is not only a pedagogical process but also a relational practice grounded in trust, empathy, and mutual respect.

### Theme 5: Structural Challenges and Teacher Agency

Despite their commitment to inclusive pedagogy, teachers face significant structural challenges that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices. These challenges include limited instructional materials, insufficient training, large class sizes, and lack of institutional support. Such constraints create a gap between policy expectations and classroom realities, requiring teachers to rely on their own initiative and creativity to address learner needs. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrate strong agency by adapting their practices, improvising resources, and maintaining a commitment to inclusive education. This resilience highlights the critical role of teachers as agents of change within constrained educational systems.

#### Participant Responses

- “*Kulang sa materials.*”
- “*Kailangan pa ng training.*”
- “*Ginagawa ko ang best ko.*”

These findings reflect systemic challenges identified by OECD (2019), which highlights disparities in resource allocation and teacher support, particularly in rural contexts. The Second Congressional Commission on Education (2023) also reports gaps in training and institutional support within the Philippine education system. While these challenges persist, teacher agency emerges as a critical factor in sustaining inclusive practices. Ainscow (2020) emphasizes that teachers play a central role in driving inclusive change, even in the absence of adequate systemic support. However, reliance on individual effort alone is insufficient for long-term sustainability. These findings underscore the need for systemic reforms and institutional support to complement teacher agency in achieving effective and sustainable inclusive education.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that inclusive pedagogy in secondary Filipino classrooms plays a crucial role in enhancing student engagement through culturally responsive, differentiated, and participatory teaching practices. Teachers serve as key agents in translating inclusive principles into meaningful classroom experiences, fostering both academic and socio-emotional development. However, systemic challenges such as limited resources and training continue to constrain the full realization of inclusive education. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts at the policy, institutional,

and classroom levels to ensure sustainable and effective inclusive practices.

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