

## Voices from the field: A narrative case study on inclusive education as reflection for practice, policy, and research

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received: May 15, 2025

Revised: June 20, 2025

Accepted: June 23, 2025

#### Keywords:

alternative learning

inclusive education

indigenous education

narrative case study

### ABSTRACT

This narrative case study explored the lived experiences of teachers involved in four inclusive education programs under the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Davao Region: Special Education (SPED), Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED), the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), and the Alternative Learning System (ALS). Two teachers per program, from a specific locality, shared in-depth narratives. Using Cortazzi's narrative analysis framework, the study examined how educators interpret and navigate their teaching contexts. Eight initial themes emerged and were synthesized into four core themes representing each program. SPED emphasized high-quality education through integrated assessment and differentiated instruction. IPED focused on inclusivity, equity, and opportunity for Indigenous learners. The 4Ps narratives highlighted equitable access and teacher support, while ALS underscored collaboration and impactful teaching to foster inclusive excellence. These findings revealed the power of teacher narratives in shaping inclusive education. The study advocates for integrating these insights into practice, policy, and research to create a more equitable and responsive educational system for all learners.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has been globally recognized as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of equitable, quality education. Rooted in the frameworks of Education for All (EFA), Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), it aimed to eliminate disparities in access to learning for marginalized populations such as children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, working children, and those in conflict-affected areas (Hardy & Woodcock, 2023). Inclusive education was regarded as a dynamic, evolving process that sought to provide all learners regardless of ability or background—with equitable learning opportunities in non-discriminatory environments (Oswal et al., 2025). Education systems across the world had been shifting toward systemic inclusion, identifying four unifying principles: a human rights-based framework, responsiveness to the needs of marginalized groups, community involvement, and holistic systemic reform (Roberts & Simpson, 2016). While “integration” and “mainstreaming” were once prevalent in Western discourse, the term “inclusion” became preferred for its emphasis on full participation and systemic transformation (Thomazet, 2009).

In the Philippines, special education (SPED) and general education (GenEd) have evolved independently, resulting in uneven responses to inclusive education. Some existing policies in both fields present challenges to effective inclusive education implementation. Differences and overlaps were identified across eight key domains: learners, governance, curriculum, instruction, teacher development, assessment, environment, and sustainability. There is a need for a unified approach to align efforts and address gaps in policy and practice toward inclusive education in the Philippines (Wong & Alcantara-Doroja, 2015).

Among these programs, ALS served as a parallel learning system designed to meet the needs of out-of-school youth and adult learners, as legislated under the Basic Education Governance Act of 1991. Executive Order No. 356 institutionalized ALS by transforming the Bureau of Non-Formal Education into

the Bureau of Alternative Learning System, thereby expanding its capacity to serve “deprived, depressed, and underserved” populations. Similarly, the 4Ps program administered by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in collaboration with DepEd, the Department of Health (DOH), and the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) provided conditional cash transfers to promote education and health.

Despite initiatives in the indigenous education, systemic challenges persisted. Geographic isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and deep-rooted poverty continued to restrict educational access for many Filipino learners (Mirasol et al., 2021). Moreover, successful inclusive practices were highly dependent on teachers’ beliefs, competencies, and access to professional growth. Teacher attitudes significantly influenced the implementation of inclusive education (Muega, 2016), while Radojlovic et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of self-efficacy, positive dispositions, and continuous professional training. Manguilimotan et al. (2024) further affirmed the dedication of Filipino teachers, particularly those supported through localized, school-based capacity-building efforts.

Nonetheless, gaps in policy implementation and academic research remained. Finkelstein et al. (2019) emphasized the need for research-based frameworks in professional development and the systematic assessment of inclusive teaching. Guillemot et al. (2022) called for clearer articulation of teacher expectations in inclusive settings, while Berrío et al. (2020) underscored the pressing need for more personnel trained in differentiated instruction. In the Philippine context, Macabenta et al. (2023) pointed to the necessity of exploring teachers’ lived experiences, particularly their sources of stress and resilience, to inform sustainable inclusive policies.

At the regional level, particularly in Region XI, inclusive education had been implemented through various modalities. According to the Basic Education Information System (2022), for School Year 2021–2022, there were 124 SPED enrollees, 4,361 IP learners, 3,505 ALS participants, and 1,259 students supported by the 4Ps program. These figures reflected both a strong regional commitment and the complexities associated with scaling inclusive practices.

In light of these global, national, and regional developments, this study employed a qualitative narrative case study approach to explore the lived experiences of secondary school teachers involved in inclusive education. As Riessman (2007) explained, narrative inquiry enabled researchers to understand how individuals constructed meaning from their experiences. Through in-depth storytelling, this study aimed to provide actionable insights for school leaders and policymakers in designing inclusive systems responsive to the contexts of Filipino learners.

By foregrounding the narratives of teachers navigating inclusive classrooms, the study offered a platform for self-reflection, voice, and agency. Narrative methodology empowered participants to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and practices in meaningful ways. Hancock (2002) emphasized that narrative research was “concerned with the opinions, pieces of knowledge, and feelings of individuals, producing subjective data and describing social phenomena as they occur.” Drawing on a bottom-up paradigm and Gibson’s (2014) ecological learning theory, this study positioned teachers as agents of transformation—asserting that inclusive education was most impactful when shaped by those who worked closest to the learners.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Design

This study employed a qualitative research design that combined narrative inquiry and narrative case study approaches to explore the lived experiences of teachers involved in four inclusive education programs in the Philippines: SPED, IPed, 4Ps, and ALS. Each program served as a distinct case (Creswell, 2013), enabling a focused, context-rich analysis of inclusive practices.

Guided by Cortazzi’s (1993) framework, narrative inquiry facilitated the collection and interpretation of personal stories, capturing how teachers constructed meaning, responded to challenges, and shaped their professional identities within inclusive settings. This methodological integration allowed for a deeper understanding of both individual experiences and systemic influences on inclusive education.

Ethical considerations were observed through participant anonymization. The diverse backgrounds of the teachers enriched the data, revealing both barriers and transformative moments in inclusive teaching. The findings emphasized inclusive education as a reflective and responsive practice shaped by teacher agency and collaboration—offering valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers.

## 2.2. Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in the Department of Basic Education public schools in Region XI. One (1) participant per school was chosen among the eight (8) identified city school division offices within the region, namely: Mati City Division, Davao City Division, Davao Occidental Division, Tagum City Division, IGACOS Division, Digos City Division, Panabo City Division, and Davao de Oro Division. The participants in the study were teachers facilitating inclusive education. Participants were purposefully chosen based on their qualifications and criteria for inclusion, availability, and willingness to participate in the study. The interviews were done with the utmost consideration of their schedules and work locations. This study revolved around the narratives of teachers involved in implementing inclusive education.

## 2.3. Sampling

This study used a purposive sampling method to select participants who were "information rich" (Patton, 2025), which was appropriate for the research inquiry. Credibility criteria like knowledge of the subject of investigation, willingness, and ability to articulate and share their life narratives were used to select participants. The study included eight research participants who experienced facilitating inclusive education programs. These teachers had at least five years of teaching experience in SPED, IPs, 4PS, and ALS programs. Participants were selected purposively and focused on schools' divisions in Region XI known for their active and robust implementation of inclusive education. The rich and detailed narratives were gathered by involving these participants, which could offer deeper insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013).

## 2.4. Research Instrument

A researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide served as the primary instrument for collecting rich, qualitative data from teachers facilitating inclusive education programs. The guide comprised open-ended questions aimed at eliciting in-depth narratives about participants' experiences, instructional strategies, challenges, perceptions of inclusion, and professional growth. These questions were closely aligned with the study's objectives and were framed around key themes such as teacher identity, agency, and classroom practices in inclusive settings.

To ensure content validity, the interview guide underwent expert evaluation by three professionals: one Alternative Learning System (ALS) Supervisor, one School Head, and one Master Teacher. Their insights and suggestions were carefully reviewed and integrated into the final version of the instrument (Zohrabi, 2013). A pilot test was subsequently conducted with teachers who were not part of the main study sample. In line with best practices in qualitative research (Turner, 2014), this pilot testing helped verify the clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the questions. Based on the feedback, the guide was refined and supplemented with additional prompts to ensure that the interview items aligned with the research goals and elicited meaningful, reflective responses (Syed, 2015).

## 2.5. Data Gathering Procedures

The narrative interview method was employed, with individual semi-structured interviews conducted to capture in-depth personal accounts from teachers involved in inclusive education (Kim, 2016). Clear protocols for data collection were established, including defined research boundaries and recording procedures. After the research instrument had been approved, formal permission to conduct the study was requested from the Regional Director of Region XI. Endorsement letters were subsequently sent to eleven School Division Superintendents to allow access to teacher participants. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online at times and venues that had been mutually agreed upon. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures prior to being interviewed. A guided but flexible interview format was utilized, enabling open, conversational exchanges. This approach allowed teachers to speak freely in their preferred language and to share authentic narratives of their experiences in inclusive education.

## 2.6. Ethical Considerations

This study adopted reciprocity, confidentiality, informed consent, data access, and ownership. All transcripts, pictures, notes, and audiotapes were kept by the researcher for security reasons and equally to protect the importance and value of stories, ideas, and opinions of teachers facilitating the implementation of inclusive education. During the conduct of the study, an informed consent form or written communication for the study's conduct and a letter requesting an endorsement from the Schools Division Superintendent prior to the meeting of the teachers were prepared by the researcher. Confidentiality, protecting the anonymity of the stakeholders through number codes, was maintained by the researcher, and respect for one's ideas and views was assured to the participants.

## 2.7. Data Analysis

After collecting and transcribing the narratives of teachers facilitating inclusive education, Polkinghorne's (2007) narrative analysis was employed. The process began by identifying small, event-focused stories within the narratives, drawing on Cortazzi's (1993) approach. These stories, typically in the past tense and temporally ordered, were analyzed to identify common themes. The coding process followed Labov's (1972) Evaluation Model of Tales, which categorizes narratives into six components: (1) abstract – a brief introduction or purpose; (2) orientation – context and characters; (3) complicating action – the sequence of events; (4) evaluation – the meaning or significance of the story; (5) result – the resolution or outcome; and (6) coda – a return to the present. This framework, based on sociolinguistic principles, helped in understanding how the narratives functioned within the social context of inclusive education. By analyzing these components, the research aimed to extract themes reflecting the teachers' evolving understanding of their roles in inclusive education.

## 3. RESULTS

This study examines teachers' narratives in inclusive education, offering valuable insights for practice, policy, and future research. It focuses on four key programs under the Department of Education: (SPED), (IPED), (4Ps), and (ALS). Through narrative analysis, eight central themes emerged: (1) commitment and effective assessment, (2) customized instruction for diverse learners, (3) pursuit of academic excellence, (4) empowerment through education, (5) inclusivity and equity, (6) teacher preparation and support, (7) collaboration, and (8) dedicated, impactful teaching. These themes were synthesized into four program-specific categories: SPED: Emphasizing tailored instruction, commitment, and assessment to improve learning outcomes; IPED: Promoting equity and opportunities for Indigenous learners; 4Ps: Advancing educational access through inclusive practices and teacher support; and, ALS: Fostering inclusive excellence through collaboration and transformative teaching. These narratives highlight the essential role of inclusive education in creating responsive and equitable learning environments for all students.

### 3.1. Case I: Narrative Case Study on SPED: Optimizing High -Quality Education through Integrating Assessment and Commitment, and Tailored Instruction for Program Success

Teacher Rubi and Teacher Chen play a vital role in SPED, combining expertise and empathy to support diverse learners. Through individualized instruction, inclusive practices, and a nurturing environment, they help students with special needs thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

#### 3.1.1. Story of SPED Teacher Rubi on Optimizing High-Quality Education through Integrating Assessment and Commitment

**Abstract.** The narrative originated from the act of storytelling. Teacher Rubi commenced by sharing her direct involvement in implementing inclusive education and how their school actively establishes an Inclusive Learning Resource Center. She said: *"I participated in a training program that specifically focused on inclusive education. Our school is actively competing to establish an Inclusive Learning Resource Center."*

**Orientation.** Teacher Rubi describes the necessary details and appreciates the inclusive education program. She asserted: *"Inclusive education goes beyond catering solely to Special Education (SPED) learners. It encompasses learners from diverse backgrounds, such as Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) and Alternative Learning System (ALS), and those classified as 4Ps learners are considered among the most marginalized and vulnerable."*

**Complicating Action.** Teacher Rubi explicitly states that implementing the SPED program is highly complex, considering the numerous obstacles that must be overcome. Many classrooms have a prevalent issue of inadequate resources and the need for proper equipment. She declared: *"The majority of classrooms need to be equipped with the necessary resources."*

**Evaluation.** The school has implemented essential practices to guarantee optimal teaching, fairness, and support for marginalized and vulnerable learners in the Special Education (SPED) program. A thorough assessment is necessary to determine suitable placements for learners of all types. She uttered: *"Proper assessment should be conducted to ensure appropriate placement for all types of learners."*

**Result.** Data revealed that early detection through accurate assessment proved the most effective approach. Subsequently, it would identify the learners in need and ensure they receive the necessary intervention and care by placing them appropriately. She declared: *"We found that early detection through appropriate assessment was the most effective approach. Following this, we would identify the learners and provide them with necessary intervention and care through proper placement."*

**Coda.** Teacher Rubi concluded her story by pleading for the proper evaluation of all implemented programs, projects, and activities, particularly those related to inclusive education. She emphasized the

importance of assessment as a feedback mechanism to ensure these programs' effectiveness and continuous improvement. She stated: *"If granted an audience with higher authority, I propose conducting a comprehensive assessment of every program, project, and activity to obtain valuable, crucial feedback."*

### 3.1.2. Story of SPED Teacher Chen on Creating Engaging and Tailored Instructional Materials for Diverse Learners

**Abstract.** Teacher Chen started her story by emphasizing the collaborative endeavors of the school principal, teachers, and stakeholders. She conveyed: *"The school principal and teachers have been proactive in taking the lead, creating and implementing innovative measures, in addition to the existing programs, specifically for learners with special needs."*

**Orientation.** Teacher Chen highlighted that the school's exceptional execution of inclusive education initiatives, specifically in special education (SPED), has been acknowledged and rewarded. The school achieved the top position in the recent Regional Monitoring and Evaluation assessment. She articulated: *"The school excels at implementing inclusive education and established the Inclusive Learning Resource Center (ILRC), a prime example of inclusivity in education."*

**Complicating Action.** Teacher Chen, a seasoned SPED teacher, recalls a memorable challenge with an autistic learner, despite her experience with students with intellectual disabilities. She struggled with the learner's unpredictable behavior, highlighting the complexities of inclusive education. The experience underscores the need for collective responsibility and comprehensive training for all teachers, not just SPED educators to effectively support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms. She shared: *"While all teachers are expected to implement inclusive education, regular school teachers often need more training."*

**Evaluation.** Teacher Chen stressed the importance of dedication in teaching and shared strategies for adapting methods to meet diverse learner needs. The school supported SPED students with varied resources and communication aids. She emphasized language stimulation, gestures, visual cues, and engaging activities to boost learning and responsibility, while also creating materials tailored to individual abilities and interests. She stated: *"I have created instructional materials specifically tailored to match our diverse learners' learning abilities and interests."*

**Result.** Teacher Chen used checklists to assess learners' behavior, aiding in proper placement and tagging in the LIS for government support. She emphasized engaging activities to boost responsibility and learning, and highlighted the vital role of external stakeholders in providing resources and support for SPED programs. She said: *"I have implemented a checklist to observe and assess learners based on their behavior. This method allows us to determine the appropriate placement for each child, ensuring a suitable learning environment."*

**Coda.** Teacher Chen concluded her narrative with a heartfelt expression of hope, emphasizing that the challenges faced by SPED teachers should serve as a powerful reminder to all schools and educators about the shared responsibility of fostering inclusivity in education within the department. She mentioned: *"We hope the challenges SPED teachers face will remind all schools and teachers that inclusivity in education is a responsibility shared by everyone within the Department."*

## 3.2. Case II: Narrative Case Study on IPED: Empowering Indigenous People (IP) by Promoting Inclusivity, Equity, and Opportunities for All

Indigenous people's education is a transformative approach that honors Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledge systems while nurturing identity and pride among learners. Teacher Kara and Teacher Eric exemplify this commitment by fostering inclusive, culturally responsive classrooms. Their narratives reveal the challenges they navigate, the strategies they implement, and the meaningful impact they make in the lives of Indigenous students.

### 3.2.1. Story of IPED Teacher Kara: Nurturing Academic Excellence through Enhancing Inclusivity and Instructional Design

**Abstract.** Teacher Kara shared her meaningful experience in implementing inclusive education, focusing on preventing discrimination against Indigenous People (IP) learners due to economic status. She fosters a strong sense of belonging, ensuring IP students feel accepted, valued, and supported equally. She expressed: *"I can attest that implementing inclusive education effectively fulfills its intended objective."*

**Orientation.** Teacher Mara observed the financial struggles faced by the Indigenous People (IP) community in accessing education. Despite lacking basic necessities like packed lunches, IP learners showed strong determination to attend school. These economic challenges greatly impact their ability to enroll and meet educational requirements. She stated: *"The IP community's financial situation poses significant challenges when enrolling in and covering the expenses of their children's education."*

**Complicating Action.** To surmount these obstacles, Teacher Kara demonstrated exceptional dedication by taking extra steps to learn the language of her Indigenous People (IP) learners. She affirmed: *“Another hurdle encountered was the need for more learning resources.”*

**Evaluation.** Teacher Kara stressed the need to prioritize teachers' training and provide appropriate learning materials to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education programs. She said: *“I require additional training to enhance my skills in creating instructional materials tailored to the local community's needs and context.”*

**Result.** Teacher Kara explicitly expressed that collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders in the Indigenous Peoples (IP) community have played a significant role in addressing the unique needs of these learners. She expressed: *“Indeed, collaboration among the stakeholders in the IP community helped to address the needs of these types of learners.”*

**Coda.** Teacher Kara emphasized that teacher training is key to effective inclusive education. She believes ongoing professional development equips educators to better meet diverse learner needs. Training helps us understand how to truly support every child in the classroom. She declared: *“Lastly, teachers' training must be considered to implement inclusive education successfully.”*

### 3.2.2. Story of IPED Teacher Eric: Empowering the Indigenous People (IP) Through Education and Opportunities

**Abstract.** Teacher Eric began his story by stating that his school is a leading example and innovator in implementing education programs to address Indigenous Peoples' requirements. He stated: *“Our school was chosen as a pilot school for IPED throughout the division.”*

**Orientation.** Teacher Eric described the Indigenous People (IP) group in their community, known as the “Taga Kulo,” a name reflecting the ideal habitat that provides all essential resources. *“Their ethnic group is recognized as the 'Taga Kulo,' denoting a habitat where all the necessities for sustenance, including water, shelter, and food, are readily available.”*

**Complicating Action.** Teacher Eric reflected on the challenges of working with Indigenous People (IP) learners, initially struggling with cultural insensitivity. He learned from his mistakes and gained a deeper understanding of their traditions. *“As a TLE teacher focused on agriculture, I taught my students about farming. In the textbooks, 'KAINGIN' is portrayed as a lazy activity, not realizing it held ancestral significance for them. 'KAINGIN' was a traditional practice involving respected figures like Datu and community leaders. Unfortunately, I overlooked their cultural sensitivities due to the misalignment between their practices and our cultural norms.”*

**Evaluation.** Despite challenges, Teacher Eric launched the program “Huwag pag-aralan ang IP, Pag-aralin ang IP” (Do not just study the Indigenous People; educate the IP), which aims to deepen understanding of Indigenous culture while ensuring IP learners receive the benefits of quality education. He envisions Indigenous individuals who are proud of their heritage and globally competitive. *“We educate them not to change who they are, but to strengthen who they are.”*

**Result.** Teacher Eric addresses challenges by prioritizing the integration of indigenous people (IP) and their stories into the curriculum, ensuring that the content aligns with their unique narratives and experiences. *“I emphasized integrating Indigenous People (IP) and their stories into the curriculum, ensuring the content closely aligns with their unique narratives and experiences.”*

**Coda.** Teacher Eric concluded by emphasizing the importance of embracing IP culture and being sensitive to their needs. He stressed the significance of respecting their heritage while addressing their unique requirements to create an inclusive and effective educational environment that fosters IP learners' holistic development. *“By fully embracing their culture, it is essential also to demonstrate sensitivity towards their specific needs.”*

### 3.3. Case III: Narrative Case Study of Teachers on 4Ps: Advancing Equitable Education via Inclusivity and Teacher Support

These accounts explore the experiences of two exceptional teachers, Teacher Mara and Teacher Ems, who played pivotal roles in facilitating the 4Ps program as part of inclusive education. The (4Ps) is a government initiative designed to alleviate poverty by providing conditional cash transfers to eligible families.

#### 3.3.1. Story of 4Ps Teacher Mara: Inclusivity and Equal Opportunities in Education

**Abstract.** Teacher Mara embarked on her story by expressing an appreciation for the implementation of the inclusive education program, explicitly highlighting the 4Ps program. This program assists indigent learners, enabling them to overcome economic obstacles and access educational opportunities. She declared: *“The 4Ps program, designed to provide financial assistance*

for educational expenses to those in need, is an effective initiative that supports disadvantaged students.”

**Orientation.** Teacher Mara further elaborates on her sharing by affirming the substantial support provided by the 4Ps program to underserved learners. She disclosed: *“I can confidently assert that the 4Ps program significantly supports these underprivileged learners.”*

**Complicating Action.** Teacher Mara faces various challenges as a teacher of 4PS learners. She strongly expressed that indigent learners experienced malnutrition, reading difficulties, and poor academic performance. She divulged: *“The majority of the 4Ps learners identified are those who experience malnutrition, struggle with reading difficulties, and exhibit poor academic performance.”*

**Evaluation.** Teacher Mara shared that inclusive education supports all learners by embracing diversity, ensuring equal opportunities, and encouraging collaboration and respect. It fosters a sense of belonging, empathy, and social integration, helping students thrive and prepare for an inclusive society. She mentioned: *“Inclusive education is beneficial as it is implemented to embrace, accommodate, and provide equal opportunities for learners of all types.”*

**Coda.** Teacher Mara highlighted the importance of continuous training to meet the evolving needs of learners and improve teaching practices. She said: *“I desire that such training provides teachers with the essential skills and knowledge to assist learners with special needs effectively.”*

### 3.3.2. Story of 4Ps Teacher Ems: Essentializing Teacher Preparation and Support in Education

**Abstract.** Teacher Ems began her recounts by acknowledging the significance of inclusive education, particularly the 4Ps program, which assists disadvantaged learners by covering their educational expenses. She emphasized the value of inclusive education in promoting acceptance and equality for learners of diverse backgrounds and abilities. She spoke: *“I am genuinely grateful for the 4Ps program, which is vital in providing opportunities for underprivileged learners to access education despite their financial challenges.”*

**Orientation.** Teacher Ems emphasized that inclusive education initiatives extend beyond the 4Ps program, encompassing not only economically disadvantaged learners but also students with disabilities and those from other marginalized groups. She narrated: *“The 4Ps program has been instrumental in providing significant support and meeting the needs of underprivileged learners under my supervision, especially considering that my class belongs to the lowest section.”*

**Complicating Action.** One notable experience shared by Teacher Ems involved a pregnant student, for whom she prepared learning modules to support continued education through a modular approach. This allowed the student to study independently while managing her personal circumstances. She uttered: *“One of the most unforgettable incidents I encountered was when a student became pregnant. To ensure her educational continuity, I provided modules that enabled her to participate in modular learning.”*

**Evaluation.** Teacher Ems emphasized the importance of inclusive education training to support students with special needs and those from marginalized backgrounds. She highlighted the role of preparedness in fostering a supportive learning environment. She mentioned: *“DepEd will take necessary measures to ensure teachers are well-prepared, including providing training opportunities and sustainable instructional materials.”*

**Result.** Teacher Ems prioritizes offering additional support to students with diverse needs to address the challenge. She customizes her teaching materials to cater to their learning abilities and pace, ensuring their inclusion and progress alongside their classmates. She said: *“As an educator, I prioritize supporting students with diverse needs. I tailor my teaching materials to accommodate their unique learning abilities and pace, ensuring their inclusion and progression alongside their peers.”*

**Coda.** She stressed that such training is vital in equipping educators to effectively support learners with special needs, ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed. She mentioned: *“My earnest request to the Department is that teachers receive comprehensive training on inclusive education. Such training would equip educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively support learners with special needs.”*

### 3.4. Case IV: Narrative Case Study on ALS: Building a Culture of Inclusive Excellence by Collaboration and Impactful Teaching

This narrative research highlights the experiences of Teachers Rose and Ted, who are instrumental in implementing the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as part of inclusive education. ALS provides flexible learning opportunities for marginalized and underserved learners. Their stories offer valuable insights into the challenges, motivations, and strategies they use to deliver inclusive education, showcasing the transformative impact of ALS on students’ lives.



### 3.4.1. Story of ALS Teacher Rose: Fostering Collaboration and Commitment in Inclusive Education

**Abstract.** Teacher Rose began her story by providing an overview of the ALS program, which ensures inclusive education for a broad range of learners, including individuals in SPED, IPED, street children, PDL, OFW, out-of-school youth and adults, abused children, and other marginalized groups. She said: *“The ALS program provides inclusive education for diverse learners, including those in SPED, IPED, street children, PDL, OFW, out-of-school youth and adults, abused children, and marginalized individuals.”*

**Orientation.** Teacher Rose strongly emphasized the significance of assessment results in determining the appropriate placement of learners. According to her, these assessments serve as a crucial guide in placing students in educational programs or classes that align with their unique needs and abilities. By matching learners with the proper placement, tailored instruction and support can be provided to meet their specific skill levels and learning requirements. She asserted: *“Learners undergo assessments based on numeracy and literacy tests to determine their appropriate placement.”*

**Complicating Action.** The complicating actions foreshadow the arrival of complex and unpredictable circumstances. Teacher Rose openly acknowledged her difficulties, mainly when teaching out-of-school adults who are resistant to instruction due to their pre-existing knowledge. She uttered: *“Out-of-school adult learners can sometimes be stubborn and resistant to accepting new knowledge due to their prior experiences and age.”*

**Evaluation.** Teacher Rose upholds that building strong community collaboration is essential to effectively implement inclusive education and provide teachers with the necessary training to support learners of diverse abilities, including those with special needs. She mentioned: *“Strengthening community collaboration is crucial for successfully implementing inclusive education and ensuring that teachers receive the necessary training to effectively support learners of all abilities, particularly those with special needs.”*

**Result.** Teacher Rose values collaboration with stakeholders as vital in successfully implementing ALS programs, including constructing shelters for senior citizen learners. This experience has instilled in her a deep appreciation for the steadfast dedication and commitment required for authentic teaching. She spoke: *“I actively collaborate with all stakeholders to implement our initiated programs, such as constructing modest shelters for senior citizen learners. Ultimately, teaching by heart requires unwavering dedication and commitment.”*

**Coda.** Teacher Rose concluded her story by underscoring that, as an educator entrusted with students' education, it is essential to exhibit innovation, resourcefulness, and a commitment to self-study. This resourcefulness includes acquiring basic sign language skills to effectively meet their specific needs. She proclaimed: *“As an educator responsible for their instruction, I must demonstrate innovation and resourcefulness and engage in self-study to learn basic sign language so that I can effectively cater to their needs.”*

### 3.4.2. Story of ALS Teacher Ted: Fulfilling and Impactful Dedicated Teaching

**Abstract.** Teacher Ted's narrative commenced by highlighting the Alternative Learning System's recognition and acknowledgment of the diverse nature of learners, encompassing individuals from various backgrounds with distinct learning levels and needs. He stated: *“Our Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners exhibit remarkable diversity in their learning levels and individual needs.”*

**Orientation.** Teacher Ted explicitly stated that learners undergo assessments, precisely basic literacy and numeracy tests, to determine their appropriate placement according to their skill levels and abilities. He spoke: *“The learners undergo assessment through basic literacy and numeracy tests to determine their suitable placement.”*

**Complicating Action.** Teacher Ted shared his experiences teaching ALS learners, which presents distinct challenges compared to traditional school environments. One common challenge he faces is learners considering themselves more knowledgeable, leading to resistance toward new ideas and displaying arrogance based on their existing life principles. This is especially true when teaching out-of-school adults. He said: *“A challenge I face is the learners' extensive knowledge and life experience, surpassing our own as teachers. This challenge can result in arrogance and stubbornness as they cling to their established principles.”*

**Evaluation.** Teacher Ted adopts an approach rooted in honesty and dedication, gradually guiding his learners toward a transformative shift in attitude and a newfound embrace of education. Despite the challenges and personal sacrifices involved, he finds immense fulfillment in teaching, particularly when he witnesses his students' remarkable growth and development. He stated: *“Our sincere teaching and dedication led to transformative changes in our learners. As educators, we understand the sacrifices and efforts involved in this noble profession. Witnessing the growth and development of our learners brings immense fulfillment.”*

**Result.** Teacher Ted implements effective strategies to address disparities among ALS learners. In addition to the modular program, he conducts home visitations to support absent learners, providing catch-up



opportunities and delivering learning modules directly to their homes. He conveyed: *“Besides the modular program, conducting home visits is a highly effective practice I employ to reach out to learners who cannot attend regular sessions.”*

**Coda.** Teacher Ted strongly desires to improve the program's resources continuously. Recognizing the ever-evolving needs of the learners, he aims to enhance the available tools, materials, and support systems. He stated: *“I propose enhancing community partnerships through continuous collaboration to ensure the program's long-term sustainability.”*

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Optimizing High-Quality Education through Integrating Assessment, Commitment, and Tailored Instruction for Program Success

The experiences of SPED Teacher Rubi underscore the vital role of proper assessment and strong teacher commitment in the success of SPED programs. Accurate and comprehensive assessments are essential for identifying learners' needs and designing appropriate, individualized interventions. Tools like the Multi-Factored Assessment Tool (MFAT) and the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) checklist help in diagnosing developmental delays and learning difficulties. Lipka et al. (2018) emphasized that quality assessment practices, including performance evaluation and feedback, enhance learning outcomes. However, Muega (2016) reveal that many teachers, especially in rural areas, lack adequate training in inclusive assessment, leading to ineffective teaching practices and limited student engagement.

Improving SPED implementation requires prioritizing early and accurate assessments, using diverse tools, and involving specialists when needed. Educators must adopt inclusive values and practices, while school leaders can support them through School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) sessions, inclusive school planning, and consultation with learners and their families. Institutionalizing inclusive assessment practices and training in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are also crucial. Teacher Rubi's narrative further highlights the importance of commitment—teachers who are passionate and resilient drive student success. Research by Deroncele-Acosta and Ellis (2024) confirms that teacher dedication influences both learner outcomes and school performance. Fostering this commitment involves peer mentoring, recognition, and professional development. Policymakers must invest in resources and support systems that empower teachers and sustain their commitment to inclusive education.

Teacher Chen's narratives emphasize the importance of creating engaging, personalized instructional materials tailored to the diverse needs and abilities of learners in Special Education (SPED) programs. Recognizing the value of differentiated instruction, Chen adapts teaching methods and materials based on students' cognitive abilities, interests, and backgrounds to foster inclusivity and academic success. Research by Barnard and Henn (2023) and Eikeland and Ohna (2022) supports this approach, highlighting the need for teachers to adapt their instruction to meet diverse learner needs. Differentiated instruction, as outlined by Goyibova et al. (2025), involves identifying essential learning outcomes, addressing student differences, and providing meaningful, flexible learning experiences that engage all students. Saborio-Taylor and Rojas-Ramírez (2024) also notes the importance of recognizing varied learning styles and tailoring teaching methods accordingly.

To enhance the effectiveness of these practices, teachers can integrate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles into their teaching strategies, offering diverse content formats and interactive materials that engage all learners. Embracing technology, teachers could develop mobile learning applications for flexible access to instructional materials and integrate gamification elements to motivate students and track their progress. Education leaders should support this approach by providing training on UDL principles, promoting differentiated teaching, and ensuring access to innovative tools that foster an inclusive and dynamic learning environment. This comprehensive policy approach can create a learning atmosphere that not only addresses individual needs but also inspires a passion for learning and academic success.

### 4.2. Empowering Indigenous People (IP) by Promoting Inclusivity, Equity, and Opportunities for All

The narratives shared by IPED Teacher Kara underscore the importance of enhancing educational excellence to foster holistic development and equip students with essential skills for success in a rapidly changing world. Educational excellence, as highlighted in the teacher's stories, goes beyond academic achievement to encompass fostering skills, values, and critical thinking abilities that are crucial for navigating a global landscape. This concept aligns with Mintrom's (2014) study, which emphasizes that cultivating a culture of excellence in education can motivate students and drive continuous improvement. Similarly, Arriagada-Poblete et al. (2022) noted that excellence in teaching is reflected in factors such as student engagement, effective communication, and the alignment of course content with learning objectives.

Educational excellence ensures that all children, regardless of background, have access to quality learning opportunities that enable them to reach their full potential.

Building on Teacher Kara's insights, educators are encouraged to adopt evidence-based strategies, student-centered learning approaches, and innovative teaching methods to foster a culture of excellence. Policy recommendations include prioritizing funding and resources for teacher professional development and creating inclusive, supportive learning environments that promote student engagement and critical thinking. Future research should explore the integration of teaching methods, technology, and personalized learning, along with the impact of teacher preparation, school leadership, and parent involvement on educational outcomes.

IPED Teacher Eric's narratives emphasize the importance of empowering Indigenous Peoples (IP) through education, recognizing their rights, strengths, and cultural heritage. By fostering inclusive and culturally responsive educational practices, educators can create environments where Indigenous learners can excel academically, preserve their cultural identity, and contribute meaningfully to society. Teacher Eric's approach, particularly through the innovative program "Huwag pag aralan ang IP, Pag-aralin ang IP" (Don't just study IP; let them be the subject of study), underscores the need for sustainable education that nurtures pride in Indigenous culture while preparing learners for global competitiveness. This aligns with Miole (2024) concept of the indigenous peoples' education framework, which emphasizes the localization, indigenization, and contextualization of education to ensure cultural rights. Further, Eduardo and Gabriel (2021) highlighted that indigenous peoples have the right to control their educational systems, providing education in their languages and in a culturally appropriate manner. Continuous support is important to improve the economic and social conditions of Indigenous communities, including access to education.

Building on Teacher Eric's insights, education systems should adopt culturally responsive teaching methods, integrate Indigenous knowledge systems, and expose Indigenous learners to the digital world to foster global competitiveness. Policy recommendations include prioritizing equitable access to quality education and culturally relevant curricula while addressing the socioeconomic challenges faced by Indigenous communities. Preserving Indigenous languages and cultures should be a key focus, and future research should explore the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching, the role of Indigenous languages in education, community involvement, and longitudinal studies on the empowerment of Indigenous Peoples through education.

#### **4.3. Advancing Equitable Education via Inclusivity and Teacher Support**

The narratives shared by 4Ps Teacher Mara underscore the theme of inclusivity and equal educational opportunities, emphasizing that every student, regardless of background or circumstance, deserves a chance to thrive. This approach advocates for removing barriers and creating environments where diversity is valued and all students feel a sense of belonging. Mara's focus aligns with the principle that inclusivity provides equitable opportunities, fostering an educational setting that respects students' rights and promotes growth for all. This concept is supported by research from Roldán et al. (2021), who highlighted that inclusion is an educational model designed to ensure equal opportunities for all students. Rossi and Brischetto (2024) also reinforce the idea that diversity, when properly embraced, can foster positive outcomes by appreciating individual qualities free from discrimination. Additionally, Ainscow (2020) found that diversity within schools and communities enhances both academic success and life skills, preparing students for a global, diverse workforce.

Building on Mara's insights, it is crucial that educators implement inclusive practices such as differentiated instruction, support for students with disabilities, and cultural sensitivity. Education leaders should prioritize professional development on inclusive teaching methods and foster a school climate that encourages dialogue and prevents discrimination. Furthermore, comprehensive policies supporting inclusive and equitable education should be implemented to ensure access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their background. Future research should explore the impact of inclusive education on various student outcomes, including academic performance, social integration, and emotional well-being.

The narratives shared by 4Ps Teacher Ems emphasize the critical importance of teacher preparation and support in education, highlighting the need for adequate training and ongoing professional development to equip educators with the necessary skills to address the diverse needs of students. Teacher preparation plays a crucial role in shaping effective teaching practices, especially when it comes to inclusive education, as Ems points out. She stresses the importance of being well-prepared and knowledgeable about inclusive programs like the 4Ps initiative and supporting students with disabilities or those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research by Theobald et al. (2021), supports the idea that comprehensive training contributes to the retention of well-prepared special education teachers, indicating that beginning teachers who receive robust preparation are more likely to stay in the profession. Additionally, Florian (2019) emphasizes that quality teacher training is vital for promoting inclusive teaching, noting that teachers' preparedness for

inclusive education is often limited by insufficient training in pedagogies and classroom management strategies.

Building on Teacher Ems' insights, it is essential for education leaders to integrate inclusive and special education training into teacher preparation programs. These programs should focus on diverse teaching strategies, classroom management, and collaboration with multi-professional teams. Furthermore, providing ongoing support through mentoring, coaching, and professional learning communities is key to sustaining teacher effectiveness. Policies should be developed to ensure that teacher education programs prioritize inclusive practices and provide ongoing professional development opportunities. By fostering collaborative partnerships during School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) sessions, educators can share best practices and address the specific needs of students, particularly those with special education requirements. Future research should explore the impact of specialized training on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes, assessing how well-prepared teachers contribute to creating inclusive educational environments.

#### **4.4. Building a Culture of Inclusive Excellence by Collaboration and Impactful Teaching**

The narratives of IPED Teacher Rose highlight the essential role of collaboration and teacher commitment in fostering effective inclusive education. The success of inclusive education practices depends largely on a supportive environment where collaboration between teachers and professionals, coupled with a deep commitment to inclusive education, is prioritized. Teacher Rose's findings underscore the significance of collaboration, noting that it enhances knowledge exchange, resource accessibility, and the development of innovative teaching methods. Research by Pozas and Letzel-Alt (2023) supports this, revealing that teachers who collaborated with Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) or Resource Teachers (RTs) benefited from diverse perspectives and improved curriculum planning. Additionally, teachers with specialized training in inclusive education were more proficient in collaborative skills, particularly in planning and communicating with families. Gunnþórsdóttir et al. (2024) further emphasized the role of principals in creating a shared vision of inclusion and promoting ongoing collaboration among staff, a perspective also supported by Malmberg-Heimonen et al. (2023), who highlighted the importance of interprofessional teamwork in inclusive education.

In terms of teacher commitment, the narratives of Teacher Rose further reinforce the value of teacher dedication to student success. Altun (2017) argue that teachers' strong commitment, including extended work hours and professional development, positively impacts student outcomes and motivates community involvement. Hart (2024) also emphasize that teachers' commitment to inclusive education reflects their dedication to ensuring every student can reach their full potential. Mart (2013) adds that teacher commitment is foundational to school success, as it strengthens a sense of belonging and loyalty to the institution. Drawing from these insights, the researcher recommends that school leaders foster collaboration and teacher commitment through regular professional development, collaborative platforms, and incentive programs. Policies should support these efforts by creating structures that promote collaboration and provide resources for teacher growth. Future research should explore the impact of such collaboration on student outcomes, teacher satisfaction, and overall school culture.

The narratives shared by ALS Teacher Ted emphasize the profound value and impact of dedicated teaching, underscoring its role in not just transmitting knowledge but in empowering students and shaping the future. Dedicated teaching, as discussed by Teacher Ted, extends beyond academic instruction—it fosters meaningful connections, cultivates a supportive learning environment, and motivates students to reach their fullest potential. This theme stands out for its focus on the lasting impact of teachers' commitment and passion for their profession. Nurjanah et al. (2020) found that transformational leadership and organizational commitment, particularly through internalization, are essential in fostering teacher dedication, which, in turn, maximizes resource utilization and enhances student outcomes. Liu (2024) also highlighted that positive teacher-student relationships are key to boosting student engagement, with students showing greater participation and improved academic performance when these relationships are nurtured.

Additionally, Van Wingerden and Poell (2019) argue that the rapidly changing landscape of education, driven by digitalization and globalization, demands that teachers possess new skills such as problem-solving, technology proficiency, and effective communication. In this dynamic context, teacher commitment remains a critical motivator, as Altun (2017) noted, driving educators to invest time and energy into fostering student success. To further enhance the impact of dedicated teaching, it is recommended that educational institutions create environments that support and recognize dedicated educators. Policies should include resources for professional development, mentorship programs, and incentives for excellence in teaching. Future research should focus on exploring interventions that strengthen teacher commitment and examine its long-term effects on student achievement.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This narrative research study on inclusive education employed a bottom-up theoretical framework, focusing on the experiences of teachers and recognizing the importance of contextual nuances, co-constructing knowledge, and promoting diversity and intersectionality. By centering teachers' narratives, the study aimed to inform policy and practice, with grassroots data influencing top management decisions for potential policy revisions and practice improvements. This approach deepened the understanding of how teachers' insights can bring transformative effects on diverse learners in inclusive settings. It also paved the way for developing more effective strategies and interventions to foster inclusive educational environments that meet the needs of all individuals involved.

Several avenues for future research can further enrich this topic. These include exploring factors that influence personal commitment in SPED programs, the role of tailored instructional materials in enhancing student engagement, and investigating the impact of teacher preparation programs and professional development. Additionally, research may focus on the role of indigenous education, the effectiveness of inclusive education for student outcomes, and the impact of collaboration and teacher commitment on school culture and student success. Studies may also examine the long-term effects of teacher dedication on student achievement and explore practical strategies to strengthen teacher commitment and foster collaboration in inclusive education settings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author sincerely extends her deepest gratitude to all individuals and institutions whose support made the completion of this manuscript possible. Special appreciation is given to the Department of Education, Region XI, under the leadership of Regional Director Allan Farnazo, and to the Panabo City Division for their unwavering support and for fostering a research-oriented culture among educators. The author also wishes to thank the school administrators and teachers whose cooperation, insights, and active participation greatly enriched the research process. Heartfelt thanks are extended to her mentors and peers for their invaluable guidance and constructive feedback, which significantly contributed to the refinement and quality of this work. Finally, the author expresses profound love and gratitude to her family—Julius H. Valentos and Keinht Juls P. Valentos—for their unwavering support, patience, and encouragement, which served as a constant source of strength throughout this academic journey.

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