



Exploring teachers' classroom management strategies and challenges in inclusive Education

Jhay Rom I. Fernandez: Graduate School of Education, Divine Word College of Laoag, Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, Philippines.

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ABSTRACT

Effective classroom management is fundamental to the successful implementation of inclusive education; however, teachers often face challenges in addressing diverse learners' needs within a single classroom. Despite strong policy support for inclusive education, there remains limited empirical evidence documenting how teachers manage inclusive classrooms in practice and the challenges they face. Addressing this gap, the present study explored teachers' classroom management practices in inclusive education and the contextual challenges influencing their implementation.

Employing a qualitative descriptive case study design, the study involved eight teachers who handled inclusive classrooms at Immaculate Conception Academy of Batac, Inc. Data were collected through open-ended written responses and follow-up interviews, and were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across participants' experiences.

The findings revealed that teachers employ structured and predictable learning environments, positive and supportive behavior management, flexible and differentiated instruction, collaborative engagement with parents and professionals, and individualized, inclusive support strategies to effectively manage diverse learners. However, teachers also reported challenges related to complex learner needs, insufficient training, limited resources, time, and workload pressures, as well as concerns regarding teacher well-being and home-school alignment, which constrain consistent implementation of inclusive practices.

The study underscores the need for targeted professional development, adequate institutional support, and sustained collaboration to strengthen inclusive classroom management. These findings contribute to the growing body of inclusive education research by providing context-based insights that inform teacher preparation, school policy, and classroom practice.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is a key priority in contemporary educational reform, grounded in the principles of equity and social justice and aimed at ensuring meaningful participation for all learners within regular classroom settings (Polirstok, 2015). As classrooms become increasingly diverse, teachers are required to address a wide range of academic, behavioral, and social needs. The success of inclusive education, therefore, depends largely on teachers' ability to implement effective classroom management practices that support both learning and inclusion (Intong et al., 2024).

Classroom management in inclusive settings extends beyond traditional disciplinary approaches and is informed by behaviorist and social-constructivist frameworks. From a behaviorist perspective, structured routines, clear expectations, and positive reinforcement are essential in promoting appropriate behavior and engagement among learners (Polirstok, 2015). In contrast, social-constructivist theory emphasizes collaboration, peer interaction, and differentiated instruction as means of supporting diverse learners and fostering inclusive participation (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025). Together, these perspectives highlight the importance of proactive, flexible, and learner-centered classroom management strategies in inclusive classrooms.

Despite strong policy support for inclusive education, teachers often experience difficulties in managing inclusive classrooms. Studies have reported challenges such as limited professional preparation, insufficient instructional resources, large class sizes, time and workload pressures, and emotional exhaustion, all of which hinder the consistent implementation of inclusive classroom management practices (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025; Vergara et al., 2025). Additionally, inconsistencies between home and school expectations further complicate teachers' efforts to sustain inclusive learning environments (Vergara et al., 2025).

Although existing research has examined inclusive education and classroom management, there remains a need for context-based qualitative studies that document how teachers manage inclusive classrooms in practice and the challenges they encounter in real school settings. Understanding teachers' lived experiences is essential for informing teacher education, school leadership, and policy development. Addressing this gap, the present study explores teachers' classroom management practices in inclusive education and the challenges that influence their implementation, drawing on the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms at Immaculate Conception Academy of Batac, Inc.

Literature review

This literature review synthesizes international and local studies on inclusive education, classroom management practices, and related challenges to provide a theoretical and empirical basis for understanding how teachers manage diverse learners in inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive education

Inclusive education is a globally endorsed approach that ensures all learners, regardless of ability or disability, have equitable access to quality education in regular classroom settings (Polirstok, 2015). This approach emphasizes social justice, equity, and the recognition of learner diversity, fostering environments where students of varying academic, behavioral, and social needs can learn together. The

framework of inclusive education requires teachers to implement strategies that accommodate diverse learning profiles while promoting participation, engagement, and social inclusion (Intong et al., 2024). Policies supporting inclusive education advocate for the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms; however, successful implementation hinges on teachers' preparedness, school support structures, and effective classroom management strategies.

Challenges of teachers in inclusive education

Despite the benefits of inclusive education, teachers often encounter significant challenges in its practical implementation. Studies reveal that complex learner needs, including variations in academic performance, behavior, and emotional regulation, pose major difficulties for classroom management (Vergara et al., 2025). Limited professional preparation in inclusive pedagogy further exacerbates these challenges, leaving teachers feeling underprepared to meet diverse learners' needs (Lushaj Shala et al., 2025). Structural constraints, such as large class sizes, insufficient instructional resources, and time pressures, hinder the consistent application of differentiated instruction and individualized support (Beltran et al., 2025; Marchan et al., 2025). Additionally, emotional strain, workload pressures, and misalignment between school and home expectations impact teachers' well-being and their capacity to sustain inclusive practices effectively.

Classroom management strategies in inclusive settings

Classroom management refers to the systematic processes teachers use to establish and maintain an orderly, supportive, and productive learning environment that promotes positive behavior, active engagement, and academic success among learners. In inclusive settings, classroom management extends beyond discipline and control to encompass proactive, student-centered practices that address the diverse academic, behavioral, and social needs of all learners. Effective inclusive classroom management integrates structured and predictable learning environments, positive and supportive behavior strategies, differentiated instruction, and collaborative engagement with stakeholders to foster participation and inclusion (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025; Polirstok, 2015). Clear rules, consistent routines, and explicit expectations provide stability and reduce anxiety for learners with varying needs, while positive reinforcement, visual supports, and restorative approaches encourage appropriate behavior and self-regulation (Intong et al., 2024). Additionally, differentiated instruction enables teachers to respond to individual learning profiles through flexible teaching approaches, and collaboration with parents, special education professionals, and peers strengthens behavioral support and social interaction within the classroom (Vergara et al., 2025). Collectively, these practices highlight the multidimensional nature of classroom management in inclusive education, requiring a balance of structure, flexibility, and collaboration to support diverse learners effectively.

Statement of the problem

This study examined teachers' classroom management strategies and the challenges they encounter in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What classroom management strategies do teachers employ in inclusive classrooms?

2. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing classroom management in inclusive education?

Research methodology

This section details the research design, study locale, population and sampling, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures employed in the study.

Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to explore teachers' classroom management strategies and challenges in inclusive education. The design enabled an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences in their inclusive classrooms.

Research setting

The study was conducted at Immaculate Conception Academy of Batac, Inc., a private educational institution that implements inclusive education. This setting was chosen to capture authentic classroom management strategies in a real, inclusive learning environment.

Population and sampling

The participants were all teachers aged 25 to 35 who teach in inclusive classrooms. They were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that each participant had direct experience teaching learners with diverse academic, behavioral, and social needs.

Data collection

Data were collected using open-ended written responses and with follow-up interviews, which allowed participants to describe their classroom management practices and the challenges they face in depth. This approach facilitated the collection of rich qualitative data grounded in teachers' lived experiences.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and theme development based on recurring patterns. Themes were carefully refined to avoid overlap, and each was supported by representative participant statements to enhance interpretive clarity.

Ethical considerations

Rigor and trustworthiness were ensured through systematic documentation and rigorous thematic analysis, with themes repeatedly reviewed and refined to reflect participants' authentic experiences. Ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, administrative approval, and participants' right to withdraw without consequences.

Presentation and analysis of results

This section presents the collected data and its analysis in accordance with the study's research questions.

Problem 1: What classroom management strategies do teachers employ in inclusive classrooms?

Teachers’ responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Five key themes emerged, representing classroom management practices and challenges in inclusive classrooms: (1) Structured and Predictable Learning Environments, (2) Positive and Supportive Behavior Management, (3) Flexible and Differentiated Instruction, (4) Collaborative Engagement with Stakeholders, and (5) Individualized Inclusive Support Strategies. These themes highlight the complex nature of managing inclusive classrooms. The tables below present the themes, categories, and representative statements from the participants’ responses.

Table 1: Classroom management strategies employed by teachers in inclusive classrooms

Theme	Categories	Representative participant statements
Structured and predictable learning environment	● Clear classroom rules	P1: “In my inclusive classroom, I use clear rules and routines that are discussed and modeled daily. I make sure expectations are simple and consistent so all learners, especially those with special needs, can understand and follow them.”
	● Consistent routines	P3: “I apply flexible seating arrangements and allow students to choose where they feel comfortable. This reduces disruptive behavior and improves participation.”
Positive and supportive behavior management	● Positive reinforcement	P2: “I practice positive reinforcement by praising good behavior instead of focusing on mistakes. I also use visual schedules and cue cards to help learners with attention difficulties stay on task.”
	● Use of visual supports	P6: “I employ calm and respectful communication. When conflicts arise, I address them privately and use restorative conversations rather than punishment.”
Flexible and differentiated instruction	● Differentiated instruction	P3: “I adapt my teaching strategies to the needs of my learners and provide activities at different levels to ensure everyone participates and learns effectively.”
	● Flexible seating arrangements	P8: “I integrate engaging and hands-on activities to maintain attention. When learners are actively involved, behavioral issues are minimized.”
Collaborative engagement with stakeholders	● Parent–teacher collaboration	P4: “I collaborate closely with parents and special education teachers. Regular communication helps me manage behaviors effectively and respond appropriately to individual needs.”
	● Collaboration with special education teachers	P5: “Pairing learners encourages social interaction and helps students with special needs feel included and supported.”

Individualized and inclusive support strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support and cooperative learning 	P7: “I prepare individualized behavior plans for learners who need additional support. These plans guide me in managing behavior while still maintaining fairness in the classroom.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restorative practices and hands-on activities 	P5: “I use peer support and cooperative learning to help students with special needs receive guidance from classmates while participating in all activities.”

Source: Fernandez (2025)

The analysis of classroom management practices shows that teachers in inclusive classrooms use a strategic, student-centered approach to meet diverse learner needs. Structured and predictable environments provide stability and support learners requiring clear routines (Polirstok, 2015; Gheysens et al., 2021), while positive behavior management strategies, such as praise, visual cues, and reinforcement, enhance motivation and reduce disruptive behavior, reflecting behaviorist and PBIS principles (Pulos et al., 2024; Savira et al., 2024). Flexible and differentiated instruction accommodates varied learning styles in line with Universal Design for Learning, promoting engagement and equitable outcomes (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025; Abellana et al., 2025). Collaborative engagement with parents, peers, and special education professionals ensures consistency in expectations (Vergara et al., 2025; Marchan et al., 2025), and individualized strategies—including peer-assisted learning, hands-on activities, and restorative practices—foster social inclusion and proactive behavior, reflecting social-constructivist principles (Basister et al., 2025; Ellis, 2024). These findings demonstrate that effective inclusive classroom management requires planning, flexibility, collaboration, and a focus on learners’ academic and socio-emotional needs.

Problem 2: What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing classroom management in inclusive education?

Table 2: Challenges encountered by teachers in implementing classroom management in inclusive education

Theme	Categories	Representative participant statements
Complexity of learner needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple learning needs 	P1: “One major challenge is managing diverse learning and behavioral needs at the same time. It requires extra patience and careful planning.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varied behavioral challenges 	P3: “Large class size makes classroom management difficult. It is challenging to give equal attention to all learners, especially those who need individualized support.”
Insufficient professional preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited training in inclusive education 	P2: “I struggle with limited training in handling learners with special needs. Sometimes I feel unprepared to address certain behavioral situations.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of confidence in behavior management 	P6: “I sometimes face difficulty in balancing discipline and inclusion. I want to be firm but also understanding of learners’ conditions.”
Structural and resource constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Large class size 	P4: “Lack of instructional materials and support staff affects my ability to implement effective classroom management strategies.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited instructional resources 	P5: “Some parents have a limited understanding of inclusive education, which affects consistency between home and school behavior management.”
Time and workload pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Time constraints 	P5: “Time constraints are a big challenge. Preparing differentiated activities and behavior plans takes a lot of time beyond regular teaching duties.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Additional planning demands 	P7: “Preparing individualized behavior plans for each learner is very time-consuming, especially when balancing teaching and administrative responsibilities.”
Teacher well-being and home–school alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emotional exhaustion 	P8: “Emotional exhaustion is a challenge. Managing behavior in an inclusive classroom can be mentally and emotionally demanding.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited parental support 	P6: “Maintaining patience and calm throughout the day is difficult, particularly when multiple learners require individual attention.”

Source: Fernandez (2025)

The identified challenges highlight the complex interplay among learner needs, teacher capacity, and structural constraints in inclusive classrooms. The complexity of learner needs requires teachers to continuously adapt instructional and behavioral strategies to address diverse academic and socio-emotional profiles simultaneously (Polirstok, 2015; Gheyssens et al., 2021). Insufficient professional preparation limits teachers’ confidence and their ability to implement evidence-based classroom management techniques, reflecting the need for targeted professional development and training (Aguillon & Eludo, 2025; Marchan et al., 2025). Structural and resource constraints, such as large class sizes, limited instructional materials, and inadequate support staff, further exacerbate management difficulties (Pulos et al., 2024; Savira et al., 2024). Time and workload pressures increase teacher stress and reduce opportunities for individualized support, while concerns about teacher well-being and inconsistent home–school alignment underscore the emotional and relational dimensions of inclusive education (Ellis, 2024; Vergara et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings emphasize that sustaining effective inclusive classroom management requires supportive institutional policies, sufficient resources, professional development, and active parental engagement to promote both teacher resilience and learner success.

Discussion of findings

This study explored teachers' classroom management strategies in inclusive classrooms and the challenges they face. The findings indicate that teachers employ structured, proactive, and learner-centered strategies, including establishing predictable routines, using positive reinforcement, differentiating instruction, engaging collaboratively with stakeholders, and implementing individualized support strategies. These practices reflect a strong commitment to promoting participation, engagement, and social inclusion, demonstrating that effective classroom management is integral to inclusive education.

The findings are consistent with existing literature. The theme of a Structured and Predictable Learning Environment aligns with Polirstok (2015), who emphasized that clear rules and routines reduce behavioral disruptions and provide stability for learners with special needs. Positive and Supportive Behavior Management, including praise and visual supports, supports Intong et al. (2024), who found that reinforcement strategies enhance motivation and classroom engagement while minimizing negative behaviors. The use of Flexible and Differentiated Instruction echoes Aguillon and Eludo (2025), demonstrating that adaptive teaching strategies improve participation and learning outcomes in diverse classrooms. Collaborative Engagement with Stakeholders supports the work of Vergara et al. (2025), confirming that partnerships with parents and special education professionals enhance consistency in behavior management. Lastly, Individualized and Inclusive Support Strategies, such as peer-assisted learning, hands-on activities, and restorative practices, align with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), emphasizing proactive, inclusive approaches to behavior and social development.

Despite these effective strategies, teachers reported significant challenges. The themes of Complexity of Learner Needs, Insufficient Professional Preparation, Structural and Resource Constraints, Time and Workload Pressures, and Teacher Well-being and Home-School Alignment indicate that systemic and contextual factors continue to constrain inclusive classroom management. These challenges are supported by Polirstok (2015) and Aguillon and Eludo (2025), who also noted that teachers often struggle with diverse learner needs, large class sizes, limited resources, and emotional fatigue. The findings highlight the importance of institutional support, professional development, and home-school collaboration in sustaining inclusive practices.

Overall, this study contributes to both theory and practice in inclusive education. Theoretically, it reinforces behaviorist, social-constructivist, and inclusive education frameworks by demonstrating how structured routines, positive reinforcement, collaborative learning, and individualized supports collectively promote engagement, behavioral regulation, and social inclusion in inclusive classrooms. The findings also extend existing theoretical models by illustrating how these approaches operate simultaneously within real classroom contexts shaped by diverse learner needs and systemic constraints. Practically, the study provides empirical, context-based evidence of effective classroom management strategies that teachers can adopt to support inclusive learning, while also identifying the professional, structural, and emotional challenges that hinder their consistent implementation. These insights offer guidance for teacher education programs, school leaders, and policymakers in designing targeted

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professional development, allocating resources, and strengthening home–school partnerships to sustain effective inclusive classroom management practices.

Conclusion

This study contributes to both theoretical and practical understanding of classroom management in inclusive education. Teachers employ structured and predictable environments, positive and supportive behavior management, flexible and differentiated instruction, collaborative engagement with stakeholders, and individualized, inclusive support strategies to effectively manage diverse learners. The findings reinforce behaviorist and social-constructivist frameworks, showing that these strategies promote engagement, social inclusion, and behavioral regulation. The study also expands the body of knowledge by highlighting the specific practices teachers use and the professional, contextual, and emotional challenges they face. To address these challenges, schools should provide targeted professional development, adequate institutional support, strengthen home–school collaboration, and promote teacher well-being.

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