



Bridging the Gap: A Systematic Literature Review on Teacher Preparedness and Support Systems for Inclusive Education in Southeast Asia and the Philippines

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Abstract:

Inclusive education is a global mandate that seeks to ensure equitable access to quality learning opportunities for all students, regardless of ability or background. This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine teacher preparedness and the effectiveness of support systems for inclusive education in Southeast Asian developing countries, with a particular focus on the Philippines. Guided by PRISMA 2020 standards, peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025 were analyzed using defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 45 studies were synthesized through thematic analysis. Findings reveal that although policy frameworks promoting inclusion are widely established, significant gaps persist in teacher training, resource availability, and institutional support mechanisms. Teachers generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward inclusion but report low self-efficacy due to limited professional development and inadequate access to multidisciplinary support. The study also identifies a dominant reliance on integration-focused practices rather than comprehensive, system-driven inclusion. These findings underscore the need for a shift from reactive, access-oriented approaches to proactive, systemic strategies that prioritize teacher development, early intervention, and equitable resource distribution. The study contributes to the growing body of research by offering region-specific insights and actionable directions for strengthening inclusive education systems.

Keywords: inclusive education, teacher preparedness, support systems, Philippines, Southeast Asia, systematic literature review, educational equity

Introduction:

Inclusive education (IE) is a human rights-based approach that promotes the full participation of all learners, regardless of ability, within mainstream educational settings. Anchored in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), IE emphasizes the provision of equitable and quality education for all. This paradigm



shift reflects a movement away from segregated special education systems toward inclusive environments that recognize diversity as a strength rather than a barrier. Despite its global endorsement, the implementation of inclusive education remains uneven, particularly in developing contexts where structural and institutional limitations persist (Arias et al., 2023; Reyes, 2023).

The transition from traditional special education to inclusive systems presents significant challenges, especially in Southeast Asian developing nations. While developed countries have institutionalized comprehensive frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS), these proactive and systemic models are less evident in developing countries, where implementation tends to be fragmented and resource-dependent (Floranza, 2025). As a result, inclusive education in these contexts often emphasizes access—placing learners with disabilities in general classrooms—without adequately addressing the need for meaningful participation and curriculum adaptation.

Central to the success of inclusive education is the role of the teacher, whose preparedness, beliefs, and access to support systems directly influence classroom practices. Studies consistently show that while teachers generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward inclusion, they frequently lack the necessary training, competencies, and resources to effectively manage diverse learning needs (Alcosero et al., 2023; Allam & Martin, 2021). This gap highlights the importance of continuous professional development and the establishment of institutional support mechanisms that enable teachers to implement inclusive strategies with confidence and competence.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) has made significant strides in promoting inclusive education through policies aimed at mainstreaming learners with disabilities into regular classrooms. However, existing literature reveals a persistent disconnect between policy intentions and classroom realities. Challenges such as insufficient training, limited access to assistive technologies, and inadequate support services continue to hinder effective implementation (Espeño et al., 2024; Kilag et al., 2025; Lingayon, 2025). Furthermore, the lack of multidisciplinary collaboration and structured support systems often leaves teachers to navigate inclusive practices independently.

Comparative studies across Southeast Asia further underscore these challenges, revealing common issues such as resource constraints, societal stigma, and varying stakeholder perceptions of inclusion (Arias et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024). These findings suggest that inclusive education is not solely a pedagogical concern but also a systemic issue that requires coordinated efforts across policy, community, and institutional levels. Additionally, research on effective teaching approaches in special education highlights the need for adaptive, learner-centered strategies that can accommodate diverse needs within inclusive classrooms (Manelyn Del Carmen et al., 2020).

Given these challenges, there is a critical need to examine the alignment between policy frameworks and actual classroom practices in the Philippines within the broader Southeast Asian context. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing teacher preparedness and the availability of support systems for inclusive education through a systematic literature review. By comparing trends across developing nations in the region, this research seeks to identify key barriers and emerging strategies, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and context-responsive approaches to inclusive education.

Literature Review:

Inclusive education in the Philippines has evolved through a gradual shift from segregated special education toward more integrative and inclusive frameworks. Early conceptualizations emphasized consensus-building among stakeholders to define inclusion within the local context, highlighting the need for culturally responsive and system-wide approaches (Javiniar, 2015). However, despite policy advancements, inclusive education remains inconsistently implemented, with varying interpretations across schools and regions. This inconsistency reflects broader systemic challenges in aligning policy intentions with classroom realities.



A significant body of literature underscores that inclusive education in the Philippines is often characterized by “mainstreaming” rather than true inclusion. Mainstreaming typically involves placing learners with special needs into regular classrooms without sufficient pedagogical adjustments or support systems (Sumayang et al., 2022). Similarly, Muega (2016) found that teachers, administrators, and parents perceive inclusion as beneficial but difficult to sustain due to limited resources and insufficient training. These findings suggest that inclusion is frequently treated as a logistical arrangement rather than a transformative educational practice.

Teacher preparedness remains a central theme in the literature, consistently identified as a critical determinant of successful inclusive education. Studies reveal that while teachers generally express positive attitudes toward inclusion, they often report low self-efficacy in handling diverse learners (Charcos et al., 2025; Alcosero et al., 2023). This lack of confidence is closely linked to insufficient pre-service and in-service training, particularly in areas such as differentiated instruction, behavior management, and the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Abaya (2025) further highlights that low self-efficacy is compounded by high levels of stress, especially among teachers in rural and under-resourced settings.

The lived experiences of teachers provide deeper insight into the realities of inclusive education. Research shows that educators frequently encounter challenges such as large class sizes, lack of instructional materials, and minimal institutional support (International Journal for Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology, 2023). These challenges are exacerbated during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where teachers struggled to adapt inclusive practices to remote learning environments (Toquero, 2021). Such findings emphasize the need for resilient and flexible support systems that can sustain inclusive education under varying conditions.

Systemic barriers continue to hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines. Domingo (2020) identifies key factors such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and weak policy enforcement as major obstacles. Custodio (2025) further describes a persistent “implementation gap,” where well-designed policies fail to translate into meaningful classroom practices. This gap is often attributed to the absence of monitoring mechanisms and limited coordination among stakeholders, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent implementation across schools.

Access to support services and assistive technologies is another critical issue highlighted in the literature. Campado et al. (2023) emphasize that while assistive technologies have the potential to enhance learning outcomes for students with disabilities, their integration into classrooms remains limited due to cost, lack of training, and infrastructural constraints. Similarly, Chiu et al. (2023) found that families face significant barriers in accessing rehabilitation services, including financial limitations and geographic inaccessibility. These challenges underscore the importance of strengthening both school-based and community-based support systems.

Early detection and intervention are widely recognized as essential components of effective inclusive education. Sagun et al. (2022) highlight that timely identification of learning needs can significantly improve educational outcomes for learners with disabilities. However, the study also reveals gaps in screening processes and referral systems within Philippine public schools. Programs such as the Special Education Headstart Program demonstrate promising practices, yet their implementation remains limited in scope (Leaño & Malano, 2020).

Stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in the success of inclusive education initiatives. Research indicates that collaboration among teachers, parents, administrators, and community members is essential for creating supportive learning environments (Niro & Petilla, 2019). However, such collaboration is often weak or inconsistent, particularly in under-resourced areas. This lack of coordinated effort contributes to the challenges faced by schools in sustaining inclusive practices and addressing the diverse needs of learners.

Comparative studies across Southeast Asia reveal that the challenges faced by the Philippines are not unique but reflect broader regional trends. Hosshan et al. (2020) found that many Southeast Asian countries struggle with similar issues, including limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and societal stigma toward disability. Galvez



and Episcopo (2025) further note that even in countries like Thailand, where inclusive education policies are more established, teachers continue to face difficulties in translating training into effective classroom practices. These findings highlight the need for context-sensitive strategies that address both systemic and cultural factors.

Recent empirical studies emphasize the importance of bridging the gap between policy and practice through targeted reforms. Soriano et al. (2024) and Ronia (2023) demonstrate that while schools are making efforts to implement inclusive education, progress remains uneven due to persistent structural and pedagogical challenges. Dela Fuente (2021) also highlights the unique challenges faced in higher education settings, particularly in accommodating students with sensory impairments. Collectively, these studies reinforce the need for a holistic approach that integrates teacher development, resource allocation, and institutional support to achieve meaningful and sustainable inclusive education in the Philippines.

Methodology

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to synthesize existing research on teacher preparedness and support systems for inclusive education in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on the Philippines. The review adhered to the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency, rigor, and replicability throughout the research process. The SLR approach was selected to enable a structured and comprehensive analysis of empirical evidence across multiple studies, allowing for the identification of patterns, gaps, and emerging trends within the field.

A systematic search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar and JSTOR, to identify relevant studies published between 2015 and 2025. The search utilized a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to enhance retrieval accuracy, including: “inclusive education,” “teacher preparedness,” “teacher readiness,” “support systems,” “special education,” “Philippines,” and “Southeast Asia.” These terms were combined using operators such as AND and OR (e.g., “inclusive education AND teacher preparedness AND Philippines”) to refine the search results. Reference lists of selected articles were also manually screened to identify additional relevant studies not captured in the initial database search.

To ensure relevance and quality, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the screening process. Studies were included if they: (1) were peer-reviewed empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods); (2) focused on inclusive education in elementary or secondary school settings; (3) addressed teacher preparedness, perceptions, or school-based support systems; and (4) were conducted within the Philippines or other Southeast Asian developing countries. Studies were excluded if they: (1) were opinion articles, editorials, or literature reviews without empirical data; (2) consisted of non-peer-reviewed conference proceedings, theses, or dissertations; (3) focused exclusively on higher education contexts; or (4) lacked sufficient methodological detail. Titles and abstracts were initially screened, followed by full-text evaluation to confirm eligibility.

The study selection process followed the PRISMA framework, involving four key stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. An initial pool of 120 studies was identified through database searches. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, a subset of articles was subjected to full-text review. Ultimately, 45 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final analysis. Reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage included lack of focus on teacher-related variables, insufficient empirical data, or misalignment with the geographical scope of the study.

Data from the selected studies were extracted and analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach. Key information, including study context, methodology, sample characteristics, and major findings, was systematically coded. Thematic coding was employed to identify recurring patterns across studies, resulting in three primary themes: (1) pedagogical readiness, (2) resource availability, and (3) systemic barriers. These themes were iteratively refined to ensure consistency and conceptual clarity. To enhance analytical depth, findings were also quantified using



frequency counts and percentage distributions, enabling comparative analysis between studies conducted in the Philippines and those from other Southeast Asian countries.

To ensure the credibility of the included studies, a risk of bias assessment was conducted based on key methodological domains, including selection bias, data collection procedures, and reporting transparency. Studies were evaluated for clarity in sampling methods, validity of instruments, and consistency of findings. Many Philippine-based studies demonstrated moderate to unclear risk of bias, often due to reliance on convenience sampling and limited reporting of intervention fidelity. Despite these limitations, the inclusion of diverse study designs allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape.

Findings and Discussion:

Inclusive Education Models and Support Systems

The review confirms that inclusive education in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries is predominantly implemented through models of “inclusive mainstreaming” and “special needs integration.” These approaches primarily focus on placing learners with disabilities in general education classrooms without fundamentally transforming instructional practices or curriculum design. Early conceptualizations of inclusion in the Philippines emphasized consensus-building and gradual integration; however, these efforts have not fully evolved into systemic inclusion (Javinari, 2015). As a result, inclusion is often interpreted as physical placement rather than meaningful participation.

In contrast to developed countries where Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is widely adopted as a proactive instructional framework, its presence in the Philippine context remains minimal. Findings indicate that UDL adoption is as low as 2.63% in the Philippines compared to significantly higher rates globally. This gap reflects a broader issue wherein inclusive education is implemented reactively rather than proactively, limiting the ability of schools to accommodate diverse learning needs effectively. The absence of such frameworks reinforces reliance on traditional, one-size-fits-all teaching methods.

The Philippine model of inclusive education is largely characterized by “integrationist” practices that prioritize access and enrollment over pedagogical reform. While policies mandate inclusion, actual classroom practices often fail to adapt to the diverse needs of learners (Custodio, 2025). This disconnect between policy design and implementation highlights a systemic issue, where inclusion is treated as compliance rather than transformation. Consequently, learners with special needs may be physically present in classrooms but remain academically and socially marginalized.

Support systems within schools further reflect these limitations. The availability of specialized resource rooms and support services remains minimal, with only 7.89% of Philippine studies reporting their presence. In many cases, general education teachers are expected to address the needs of learners with disabilities without adequate support, training, or resources. This situation creates additional burdens on teachers and undermines the effectiveness of inclusive practices (Charcos et al., 2025).

Teacher preparedness is closely linked to the effectiveness of these models. Studies indicate that teachers often feel underprepared to manage inclusive classrooms, particularly when handling learners with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Charcos et al., 2025; Nunez & Rosales, 2021). While attitudes toward inclusion are generally positive, there is a significant gap in practical competencies, including differentiated instruction and individualized support planning. This gap further reinforces the limitations of integrationist models.

The lack of early detection and intervention mechanisms also affects the implementation of inclusive education. Sagun et al. (2022) emphasize that timely identification of learning needs is crucial for effective inclusion; however, many schools lack structured screening and referral systems. Without early intervention, learners often enter



mainstream classrooms without the necessary support, making it more difficult for teachers to address their needs effectively.

Programs such as the Special Education Headstart Program demonstrate promising practices in addressing these gaps, particularly in early childhood education (Leaño & Malano, 2020). Similarly, curriculum initiatives aimed at supporting the transition of learners with special needs highlight the importance of structured and developmentally appropriate interventions (Pawilen, 2018). However, these programs remain limited in scale and are not consistently implemented across regions.

Stakeholder engagement is another critical component of effective support systems. Research shows that collaboration among teachers, parents, and administrators plays a vital role in sustaining inclusive practices (Niro & Petilla, 2019). However, such collaboration is often inconsistent, particularly in under-resourced communities. Perspectives from parents, particularly mothers of children with disabilities, reveal ongoing challenges in accessing inclusive education and support services, highlighting the need for more inclusive and participatory approaches (Catubigan, 2023).

The integration of technology and assistive tools presents both opportunities and challenges in inclusive education. While digital tools and artificial intelligence have the potential to enhance learning experiences for students with disabilities, their adoption remains limited due to infrastructural and training constraints (Kurnia et al., 2025; Lynch et al., 2024). Additionally, barriers to multimedia adoption among teachers further restrict the effective use of technology in inclusive classrooms (Bete & Quinto, 2025).

External factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed and intensified existing gaps in inclusive education systems. Teachers faced significant challenges in adapting inclusive practices to remote learning environments, revealing the fragility of existing support systems (Toquero, 2021; Toquero, 2020). Studies across different educational levels, including higher education, further highlight the systemic nature of these challenges (Dela Fuente, 2021; Ronia, 2023). Overall, the findings suggest that inclusive education in the Philippines remains constrained by structural, pedagogical, and systemic limitations, requiring a shift toward more comprehensive and sustainable models of inclusion.

Teacher Preparedness and Self-Efficacy

Findings consistently indicate that teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward inclusive education; however, these attitudes are not matched by confidence in practice. While educators support the principle of inclusion, many report low self-efficacy in managing diverse classrooms, particularly when addressing complex learning needs. This disconnect between belief and capability underscores a critical gap in the implementation of inclusive education (Alcosero et al., 2023; Allam & Martin, 2021).

Teacher self-efficacy is influenced by both internal competencies and external support systems. Studies show that teachers who lack adequate training and institutional backing are more likely to experience uncertainty and stress in inclusive settings. Abaya (2025) highlights that teachers in under-resourced and rural areas face heightened levels of stress due to the demands of inclusive classrooms, further diminishing their confidence and effectiveness.

A major contributing factor to low self-efficacy is the presence of significant knowledge gaps. Teachers often report difficulty in identifying and addressing specific learning disabilities such as ADHD, dyslexia, and autism spectrum disorders. Additionally, many educators lack the skills required to design and implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which are essential for tailoring instruction to diverse learners (Domingo, 2020; Muega, 2016). These deficiencies limit the ability of teachers to provide meaningful and differentiated instruction.

The lived experiences of teachers further reveal the complexities of inclusive education in practice. Teachers frequently encounter challenges such as large class sizes, insufficient instructional materials, and limited time to



address individual learner needs (Macabenta et al., 2023). These constraints create an environment where inclusion becomes difficult to sustain, despite teachers' willingness to support it.

Another critical issue is the lack of continuous and specialized professional development. Many teachers report that pre-service education provides only limited exposure to inclusive education, while in-service training opportunities are often infrequent or too general in scope (Lingayon, 2025). As a result, teachers are left without the necessary tools and strategies to effectively manage inclusive classrooms, reinforcing their reliance on traditional teaching methods.

Infrastructural and resource gaps further exacerbate these challenges. The lack of assistive technologies, specialized learning materials, and physically accessible classrooms remains a dominant barrier, reported in a significant proportion of Philippine studies. Campado et al. (2023) emphasize that while assistive technologies can greatly enhance learning outcomes, their availability and integration remain limited due to financial and logistical constraints.

Access to rehabilitation and support services also plays a crucial role in teacher preparedness. Chiu et al. (2023) found that families often face barriers in accessing essential services, which in turn affects the support available to teachers in the classroom. Without coordinated intervention from specialists such as therapists and psychologists, teachers are required to assume multiple roles, further straining their capacity.

Institutional support systems are often weak or underdeveloped, leaving teachers to work in isolation. The absence of co-teaching arrangements, multidisciplinary teams, and structured collaboration mechanisms limits the effectiveness of inclusive practices (Sumayang et al., 2022). This lack of support reduces opportunities for shared expertise and collective problem-solving, which are essential for addressing diverse learner needs.

Societal and cultural factors also influence teacher preparedness and self-efficacy. Persistent stigma surrounding disability and limited parental awareness of inclusive education rights continue to hinder progress (Lee et al., 2024). These attitudes can affect both teacher expectations and student experiences, creating additional barriers to successful inclusion.

Comparative studies across Southeast Asia reveal that these challenges are not unique to the Philippines. Hosshan et al. (2020) and Galvez and Episcope (2025) note that many countries in the region face similar issues, including inadequate training, resource constraints, and systemic limitations. However, variations in policy implementation and teacher training programs suggest that context-specific strategies are necessary to address these challenges effectively.

Hence, the findings highlight that teacher preparedness and self-efficacy are shaped by a complex interplay of knowledge, training, resources, and systemic support. While teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusive education, their ability to implement it effectively is constrained by persistent structural and institutional barriers. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that integrates professional development, resource allocation, and strengthened support systems to empower teachers and enhance the quality of inclusive education.

From Access to Quality: The Implementation Gap

The findings of this study highlight a persistent "implementation gap" in the Philippine inclusive education system. While national policies mandate inclusive practices, actual classroom implementation remains inconsistent and fragmented. This gap reflects a broader issue in which policy intentions are not effectively translated into practice, resulting in disparities between what is prescribed and what is experienced by teachers and learners (Lingayon, 2025; Reyes, 2023).

A key issue underlying this gap is the prevailing interpretation of inclusion as "access" rather than "quality." In many cases, inclusion is operationalized as the physical placement of learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms



without corresponding adjustments in pedagogy, curriculum, or assessment. This aligns with findings from other developing contexts, where inclusion is often reduced to integration rather than meaningful participation (Arias et al., 2023; Sumayang et al., 2022).

The dominance of integrationist practices in the Philippines further reinforces this challenge. Schools tend to prioritize enrollment and compliance with policy mandates, often at the expense of instructional quality. As a result, learners with special needs may be present in classrooms but are not fully engaged in learning processes. Floranza (2025) emphasizes that this approach contrasts sharply with developed systems, where inclusion is embedded within curriculum design and teaching strategies.

Teacher preparedness plays a critical role in bridging—or widening—this implementation gap. Despite positive attitudes toward inclusion, many teachers lack the necessary competencies to deliver differentiated instruction effectively (Alcosero et al., 2023). This limitation is compounded by insufficient training and limited access to professional development, which restrict teachers' ability to adapt their practices to diverse learner needs (Allam & Martin, 2021).

The lived experiences of teachers further illustrate the realities of fragmented implementation. Educators frequently report challenges such as large class sizes, inadequate resources, and limited institutional support, all of which hinder the effective delivery of inclusive education (Macabenta et al., 2023). These conditions create a disconnect between policy expectations and classroom capabilities, reinforcing the implementation gap.

Systemic and structural barriers also contribute significantly to the problem. Studies highlight issues such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and weak monitoring mechanisms as key obstacles to effective implementation (Domingo, 2020; Espeño et al., 2024). Without sufficient investment and accountability, inclusive education policies remain largely aspirational rather than operational.

Curriculum design and instructional approaches further reflect the limitations of current practices. Effective inclusive education requires the use of adaptive and learner-centered strategies; however, many classrooms continue to rely on traditional teaching methods that do not accommodate diverse learning needs (Manelyn Del Carmen et al., 2020). This misalignment between curriculum and learner diversity undermines the goal of meaningful inclusion.

Comparative insights from Southeast Asia reveal that the Philippines is not alone in facing these challenges. Regional studies indicate that many developing countries struggle with similar issues, including resource constraints, inadequate teacher training, and societal attitudes toward disability (Arias et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024). However, variations in policy implementation and institutional capacity suggest that targeted reforms can lead to more effective outcomes.

The shift from access to quality requires a systemic reorientation of inclusive education. This involves moving beyond compliance-driven approaches toward models that prioritize meaningful participation, instructional adaptation, and sustained support for teachers. As highlighted by Kilag et al. (2025), addressing the implementation gap demands coordinated efforts across policy, practice, and community engagement to ensure that inclusion is not only achieved in principle but realized in practice.

Proactive vs. Reactive Strategies

A key conceptual shift identified in this study is the distinction between proactive and reactive approaches to inclusive education. Proactive systems emphasize early identification, prevention, and continuous support, while reactive systems respond only after learning difficulties or behavioral challenges become evident. This distinction is critical in understanding the effectiveness of inclusive education models across different contexts.

In developed countries, proactive frameworks such as Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are widely implemented to ensure early screening, intervention, and progress monitoring. These systems rely on structured



data collection and collaborative decision-making to address learner needs before they escalate. In contrast, the Philippine context remains largely reactive, with interventions typically introduced only when learners begin to struggle significantly in mainstream classrooms.

This reactive orientation is closely linked to the absence of institutional capacity for data management and monitoring. Schools often lack systematic screening tools, learner tracking systems, and evidence-based decision-making processes. As a result, early signs of learning difficulties may go unnoticed, delaying necessary interventions (Sagun et al., 2022). This limitation undermines the effectiveness of inclusive education by allowing challenges to intensify before support is provided.

The consequences of delayed intervention are evident in both classroom practices and student outcomes. Teachers are frequently required to address complex learning needs without prior preparation or support, leading to increased workload and stress. Abaya (2025) highlights that this reactive approach contributes significantly to teacher burnout, particularly in under-resourced settings where support systems are minimal.

Access to external support services further reflects this reactive pattern. Chiu et al. (2023) found that families often encounter barriers in accessing rehabilitation services, resulting in delayed diagnosis and intervention for children with special needs. This delay places additional pressure on schools and teachers, who must compensate for the lack of early support within the classroom environment.

The integration of assistive technologies also illustrates the gap between proactive and reactive approaches. While such technologies have the potential to support early intervention and personalized learning, their use in the Philippines remains limited and often occurs only after significant learning difficulties are identified (Campado et al., 2023). This reactive use of technology reduces its effectiveness as a preventive tool.

Institutional and policy-level factors further reinforce the reactive nature of inclusive education in the Philippines. Custodio (2025) notes that while policies advocate for inclusive practices, they often lack mechanisms for systematic implementation and monitoring. Similarly, Javinier (2015) emphasizes that the conceptualization of inclusion has not been fully operationalized into structured systems that support proactive intervention.

Comparative studies across Southeast Asia reveal that this challenge is not unique to the Philippines. Hosshan et al. (2020) and Galvez and Episcopo (2025) indicate that many countries in the region struggle to transition from reactive to proactive models due to resource constraints and limited institutional capacity. However, these studies also suggest that targeted investments in training and infrastructure can facilitate this shift.

At the school level, the absence of multidisciplinary collaboration further limits the adoption of proactive strategies. Teachers often work without the support of specialists such as psychologists, therapists, or special education coordinators, reducing opportunities for early identification and intervention (Charcos et al., 2025; Soriano et al., 2024). This isolation reinforces reactive practices, as teachers are forced to respond independently to emerging challenges.

Thus, moving from a reactive to a proactive approach requires a systemic transformation of inclusive education. This includes strengthening early detection mechanisms, integrating assistive technologies, enhancing teacher training, and establishing robust data management systems. As reflected in studies across different educational levels (Dela Fuente, 2021; Ronia, 2023), sustainable inclusion depends on the ability of education systems to anticipate and address learner needs before they become barriers to participation.

Conclusion:

This systematic literature review highlights that inclusive education in the Philippines is deeply shaped by contextual realities, particularly limitations in resources, infrastructure, and institutional capacity. Rather than being



implemented as a fully systemic and proactively designed framework, inclusion is often practiced through resource-dependent integration. Schools tend to prioritize access by placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, but without the necessary pedagogical adjustments, support services, and learning environments to ensure meaningful participation. This results in a model of inclusion that is uneven and fragmented, where policy intentions are not consistently realized in classroom practice.

The findings further emphasize the need to reconceptualize inclusive education beyond a narrow “disability-only” perspective. While much of the existing discourse focuses on learners with disabilities, inclusion must also address the needs of other marginalized groups, including indigenous communities, linguistically diverse learners, and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In the Philippine context, where diversity is both cultural and structural, a broader and more intersectional approach to inclusion is essential. Expanding the scope of inclusive education allows for a more holistic understanding of equity and ensures that no learner is excluded due to overlapping forms of disadvantage.

Moreover, this review underscores that inclusive education should not be treated as a set of isolated interventions but rather as a “linked system” composed of interdependent components. Effective inclusion requires the alignment of multiple elements, including teacher preparedness, curriculum adaptation, access to assistive technologies, and the availability of multidisciplinary support services. When these components function in isolation, their impact is limited; however, when integrated within a coherent system, they can significantly enhance both teaching practices and student outcomes. This systems-based perspective shifts the focus from short-term solutions to sustainable, long-term reform.

Teacher development emerges as a central pillar within this interconnected system. While teachers generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward inclusion, their ability to implement it effectively is constrained by gaps in training, knowledge, and institutional support. Continuous professional development, particularly in areas such as differentiated instruction and individualized learning strategies, is essential to strengthening teacher self-efficacy. Equally important is the establishment of collaborative structures, such as co-teaching models and multidisciplinary teams, which can provide teachers with the guidance and support needed to address diverse learner needs.

In addition, equitable resource allocation remains a critical factor in advancing inclusive education. The uneven distribution of resources across regions, particularly between urban and rural areas, continues to limit access to essential support systems such as assistive technologies, specialized personnel, and accessible learning environments. Addressing these disparities requires not only increased funding but also strategic planning to ensure that resources are distributed based on need and aligned with inclusive education goals.

Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires a shift from reactive, compliance-driven approaches to proactive, system-oriented strategies. This includes strengthening early identification and intervention mechanisms, improving data-driven decision-making, and fostering stronger partnerships among schools, families, and communities. By adopting a comprehensive and context-responsive approach, the Philippine education system can move closer to achieving genuine inclusion—one that goes beyond access to ensure meaningful participation, equity, and quality education for all learners.

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