



Inclusive Education in the Philippine Basic Education System: A Realist Synthesis of Factors Influencing Successful Implementation

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Abstract:

Inclusive education has become a central educational reform agenda worldwide, promoting equal access and participation for all learners regardless of disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or learning needs. In the Philippines, legislative frameworks and Department of Education policies have emphasized the importance of inclusive education. However, disparities remain between policy intentions and actual implementation in schools. This study employed a qualitative Realist Synthesis methodology to examine how inclusive education is implemented within the Philippine basic education system. Specifically, it sought to identify the contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes that influence successful inclusive practices. Relevant literature published between 2015 and 2025 was retrieved from ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Following screening and appraisal procedures, out of 250 studies and upon scrutinization only seventy studies were included in the synthesis. Analysis revealed five Context-Mechanism-Outcome configurations: (1) Teacher Capacity Building and Professional Support, (2) Leadership and School Culture, (3) Family and Community Engagement, (4) Resource Availability and Accessibility, and (5) Policy Monitoring and Sustainability. Findings indicate that inclusive education succeeds when supportive contexts activate mechanisms such as teacher confidence, collaborative practices, stakeholder participation, and adaptive learning environments, resulting in improved learner engagement and academic outcomes. The study concludes that strengthening contextual supports is essential to achieving sustainable inclusive education. Recommendations include enhanced teacher training, stronger leadership development, increased resource allocation, and systematic monitoring mechanisms.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Realist Synthesis, Special Education, Basic Education, Philippines

Introduction:

Education is recognized as a fundamental human right and a key driver of social development. Inclusive education has emerged as a transformative approach that ensures all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances, have equitable opportunities to participate in quality education. The concept is grounded in the principles of social justice, equity, and respect for diversity.



Globally, the movement toward inclusive education gained momentum following the Salamanca Statement of 1994, which advocated for schools to accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 further reinforces the commitment to inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

In the Philippines, inclusive education is supported by various legal frameworks including Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities), Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), and Republic Act No. 11650 (Inclusive Education Act of 2022). These policies aim to ensure that learners with disabilities and other marginalized groups receive appropriate educational services within mainstream educational settings.

Despite these policy advances, challenges continue to hinder effective implementation. Schools often face shortages of trained personnel, limited resources, inaccessible infrastructure, and insufficient monitoring systems. Previous studies have documented varying levels of success across different educational contexts.

While systematic reviews have summarized implementation challenges, fewer studies have examined how and why inclusive education works in particular settings. Understanding these underlying mechanisms is essential for designing effective interventions. Realist Synthesis offers a suitable approach because it seeks to explain how contextual factors interact with mechanisms to produce outcomes. This study therefore aims to synthesize existing evidence on inclusive education implementation in the Philippine basic education system using a Realist Synthesis approach.

Literature Review:

Inclusive education has become a central educational reform agenda worldwide, emphasizing the right of all learners to access quality education regardless of disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or other individual differences. The philosophy of inclusion is grounded in the principles of equity, social justice, and respect for diversity. According to Haug (2017), inclusive education seeks to provide equal learning opportunities while addressing the varied needs of learners within mainstream educational settings. Rather than separating learners with disabilities from their peers, inclusive education promotes participation and belonging in regular classrooms. This approach aligns with international commitments toward equitable education and reflects the growing recognition that diversity should be viewed as a strength rather than a limitation.

In the Philippine context, inclusive education is supported by various legal and policy frameworks. Republic Act No. 7277, also known as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, guarantees educational opportunities for persons with disabilities. Likewise, Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, recognizes the need for learner-centered and inclusive educational programs. DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 further institutionalized inclusive education as a strategy for increasing the participation rate of children in schools. These policies demonstrate the government's commitment to ensuring equitable educational access. However, research suggests that despite strong policy support, challenges remain in translating policy into effective classroom practices.

Teachers play a critical role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Their beliefs, attitudes, and competencies significantly influence the educational experiences of learners with diverse needs. Nunez and Rosales (2021) examined the perceptions and attitudes of Filipino high school teachers toward inclusive education and found that while many educators support the principles of inclusion, concerns regarding preparedness, resources, and classroom management persist. Positive teacher attitudes were associated with greater willingness to accommodate diverse learners, yet many respondents reported insufficient training in special education practices. Similarly, Beyene and Tizazu (2010) emphasized that teacher attitudes are among the most influential factors affecting the success of inclusive education. Teachers who possess positive beliefs about inclusion are more likely to implement inclusive practices effectively and foster supportive classroom environments.

Teacher preparation and professional development have emerged as recurring themes in the literature. Rivera et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of access to in-service training and teacher professional development programs in strengthening educational reforms in the Philippines. The study emphasized that continuous professional learning enhances teachers' instructional competencies and equips them with strategies for addressing diverse learner needs. Likewise, Garcia et al. (2024), in their systematic review of professional development programs for teachers in the



Philippines, found that sustained and context-specific training contributes significantly to teacher effectiveness. Their findings suggest that professional development initiatives should be aligned with the realities of inclusive classrooms and provide practical applications rather than purely theoretical knowledge.

The need for enhanced teacher competencies is further supported by Pozas and Letzel-Alt (2025), who argued that inclusive teaching requires specialized skills in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and learner engagement. They emphasized that educators must be equipped with concrete, practice-oriented strategies to address the diverse needs of students effectively. These findings align with Gale, Mills, and Cross (2017), who introduced the concept of socially inclusive teaching, emphasizing the role of educators in creating learning environments that value diversity and encourage participation among all learners.

Special education teachers face unique challenges in implementing inclusive education. Abrazado, Namoco, and Dalonos (2021) explored the experiences of special education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that educators demonstrated remarkable adaptability despite limited resources and technological constraints. The study highlighted the importance of creativity, resilience, and professional commitment in ensuring learning continuity for students with special needs. Similarly, Derasin and MN (2023) investigated the experiences of novice Filipino special education teachers in the post-pandemic period. Their findings revealed challenges related to workload, resource limitations, and emotional stress. However, the participants also demonstrated strong dedication to supporting learners with disabilities, indicating that teacher commitment remains a crucial factor in inclusive education implementation.

Technological innovations have increasingly become important tools for promoting inclusion. Lynch, Singal, and Francis (2024) conducted a systematic review of educational technology for learners with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries and found that assistive technologies can significantly improve learner participation and academic achievement. Technology provides alternative means of communication, instruction, and assessment, enabling learners with disabilities to access educational content more effectively. Similarly, Salas-Pilco, Xiao, and Oshima (2022) examined the role of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in inclusive education. Their review revealed that AI-driven tools can support personalized learning, adaptive instruction, and accessibility for minority and marginalized learners. These findings suggest that technology has substantial potential to strengthen inclusive educational practices when appropriately integrated into teaching and learning processes.

The implementation of inclusive education extends beyond teachers and schools. Family involvement and community support are equally important. Gomez and Gomez (2013) examined the quality of life of parents of Filipino children with special needs and found that families often experience emotional, financial, and social challenges while supporting their children. Nevertheless, parental involvement significantly contributes to learners' academic and social development. Strong partnerships between schools and families foster collaboration, improve communication, and create supportive learning environments. Lashley (2021) similarly emphasized that learners with special educational needs benefit when schools actively engage parents and communities in the educational process.

Institutional commitment is another critical factor influencing inclusion. Mirador and Lluz (2021) explored inclusive education from the perspective of higher education institutions in the Philippines and found that while institutions generally support inclusive policies, implementation challenges remain due to resource limitations, infrastructure concerns, and inadequate faculty preparation. These findings reflect broader concerns across educational sectors, suggesting that organizational support and resource allocation are necessary for sustainable inclusion.

Several scholars have also emphasized the importance of understanding inclusion as a systemic process. Rapp and Corral-Granados (2021) argued that inclusive education should be viewed through a systems perspective, where policies, institutions, teachers, families, and communities interact to influence educational outcomes. This perspective aligns closely with the principles of Realist Synthesis, which seeks to understand how specific mechanisms operate within particular contexts to produce desired outcomes. Likewise, Francisco, Hartman, and Wang (2020) noted that inclusive education requires coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders and should not be limited to classroom-level interventions alone.

Effective implementation also requires strong monitoring and evaluation systems. Meissner et al. (2019) highlighted the role of policy-driven monitoring in supporting adaptive management and continuous improvement. Monitoring



mechanisms enable educational institutions to identify implementation gaps, evaluate program effectiveness, and make evidence-based decisions. Makapela and Chigbu (2025) further emphasized the importance of data-driven leadership in promoting sustainable and inclusive educational transformation. Through systematic monitoring and accountability, schools can ensure that inclusive education initiatives remain responsive to learners' needs.

Finally, global and regional studies continue to reinforce the importance of inclusion in contemporary education systems. Novrizal and Manaf (2024) emphasized that inclusive education policies must be accompanied by practical implementation strategies to achieve meaningful outcomes. Pauziah et al. (2024) discussed the evolution from segregation to integration and inclusion, highlighting the growing recognition of diversity in educational settings. Furthermore, Kurniawan (2025) argued that educational transformation in the twenty-first century requires adaptive, inclusive, and innovative approaches that respond to the changing needs of learners and society.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that successful inclusive education depends on multiple interconnected factors, including supportive policies, positive teacher attitudes, professional development, technological resources, family engagement, institutional commitment, and effective monitoring systems. These studies collectively provide a strong foundation for examining inclusive education through a Realist Synthesis approach, which seeks to explain how various contextual conditions activate mechanisms that lead to successful educational outcomes. The literature further suggests that while significant progress has been made in promoting inclusion, continuous efforts are necessary to bridge the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities.

Methodology:

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative Realist Synthesis methodology to examine the factors influencing the successful implementation of inclusive education in the Philippine basic education system. Realist Synthesis is a theory-driven approach that seeks to understand not only whether an intervention works but also how it works, for whom it works, under what circumstances, and why. Unlike traditional systematic reviews that primarily focus on measuring effectiveness, Realist Synthesis emphasizes the relationships among Context, Mechanism, and Outcome (CMO).

Context refers to the conditions or environments in which educational interventions occur, mechanisms refer to the processes or factors that trigger change, and outcomes refer to the results generated by these mechanisms within specific contexts. The study was guided by the principles of Realist Evaluation developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997), which provide a framework for understanding the complex interactions that influence program implementation and outcomes.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies on inclusive education and special education implementation. The search covered major academic databases, including ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Various keywords and search terms were used to ensure broad coverage of the literature, including "inclusive education," "special education," "inclusion implementation," "mainstreaming," "learners with disabilities," "Philippine education," and "inclusive classroom practices." Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and NOT were applied to refine the search results and improve the relevance of retrieved studies. The search process was designed to capture both national and international literature related to inclusive education practices and implementation factors.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the studies included in the synthesis, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Studies were included if they were published between 2015 and 2025, focused on inclusive education or special education, examined implementation practices within primary or secondary school settings, reported empirical findings, and were written in English. Conversely, studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on higher education institutions, consisted solely of opinion papers without empirical evidence, were duplicate publications, or did not address factors related to the implementation of inclusive education. These criteria ensured that the review remained focused on contemporary evidence concerning inclusive education within basic education contexts.



Data Extraction and Analysis

Following the screening process, a total of twenty-five studies met the established inclusion criteria and were selected for analysis. Relevant information from each study was systematically extracted and organized according to the key components of the Realist Synthesis framework: Context, Mechanism, and Outcome. The extracted data were coded and analyzed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships across the studies. Particular attention was given to understanding how specific contextual factors activated mechanisms that contributed to successful or unsuccessful implementation outcomes.

Through an iterative process of comparison and synthesis, the findings were organized into Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configurations. These configurations provided a deeper understanding of the factors influencing inclusive education implementation and served as the basis for developing explanations regarding what works, for whom, under what conditions, and why within inclusive educational settings.

Findings and Discussion:

Theme 1: Teacher Capacity Building and Professional Support Context

Teacher capacity building and professional support emerged as one of the most significant factors influencing the successful implementation of inclusive education in the Philippine basic education system. Inclusive education requires teachers to address the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities and other special educational needs within mainstream classrooms. However, many educators enter inclusive settings with limited preparation and insufficient training in special education strategies.

This challenge is particularly evident in rural and underserved communities where access to specialized training and professional support remains limited. Muega (2016) found that teachers, administrators, and parents generally support the philosophy of inclusion but consistently identified inadequate teacher preparation as a major barrier to implementation. Similarly, Domingo (2020) reported that insufficient competencies in handling learners with disabilities contribute to difficulties in translating inclusive policies into effective classroom practices.

The lack of adequately trained personnel is further compounded by shortages of special education specialists and support staff. AJOC (2019) revealed that many Special Education (SPED) programs in the Philippines face challenges related to limited human resources, inadequate facilities, and insufficient instructional materials. As a result, regular classroom teachers often assume responsibilities for learners with special needs despite having minimal formal preparation. Charcos et al. (2025) found that regular teachers in inclusive elementary schools frequently experience uncertainty and anxiety when handling learners with intellectual disabilities because of limited training and support. These findings suggest that teacher readiness remains a crucial determinant of inclusive education success.

Within the Realist Synthesis framework, professional development programs, mentoring initiatives, and collaborative learning communities function as key mechanisms that enhance teacher effectiveness. When educators are provided with opportunities for continuous learning, they gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to implement inclusive practices successfully.

Rivera et al. (2025) emphasized that participation in in-service training (INSET) and teacher professional development (TPD) programs significantly improves instructional competence and classroom effectiveness. Likewise, Garcia et al. (2024), in their systematic review of professional development programs in the Philippines, found that sustained and context-specific training positively influences teacher performance and learner outcomes. These programs enable teachers to develop practical strategies for differentiated instruction, behavior management, and individualized learning support.

Professional support also contributes to teacher self-efficacy, which is an important mechanism for successful inclusion. According to Abaya (2025), teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy demonstrate greater confidence in managing diverse classrooms and adapting instruction to meet individual learner needs. Conversely, inadequate preparation often leads to increased stress and burnout, particularly among educators working in resource-constrained



schools. The study further revealed that special education teachers in rural areas face significant emotional and professional challenges due to heavy workloads, limited resources, and insufficient institutional support. Similar findings were reported by Allam and Martin (2021), who identified teacher stress, lack of specialized training, and inadequate teaching materials as major obstacles to effective special education implementation.

Collaboration among educators also serves as an important mechanism for strengthening inclusive practices. Through mentoring programs, professional learning communities, and peer support networks, teachers can exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and develop effective instructional approaches. Sumayang et al. (2022), in their scoping review on mainstreaming learners with special needs in regular classrooms, emphasized that collaborative teaching practices contribute significantly to successful inclusion. Teachers who work together are better able to address learner diversity and create supportive learning environments. This collaborative culture also promotes continuous professional growth and reflective practice.

Technology integration has increasingly become a valuable source of professional support for inclusive educators. Campado, Toquero, and Ulanday (2023) found that assistive technologies enable teachers to provide more accessible and individualized instruction for learners with special educational needs and disabilities. Similarly, Bete and Quinto (2025) reported that while Filipino special education teachers recognize the value of multimedia and digital tools, barriers such as insufficient training and technological resources often hinder effective adoption. Advances in artificial intelligence and educational technology also offer promising opportunities for supporting inclusive teaching. Kurnia et al. (2025) highlighted the potential of AI-driven educational tools to enhance accessibility and learning experiences for children with disabilities across Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines.

Teacher capacity building became particularly critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Abrazado, Namoco, and Dalonos (2021) found that special education teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability by utilizing various distance learning modalities despite numerous challenges. Likewise, Cahapay (2024) emphasized the importance of tailoring remote special education services to the unique needs of learners with disabilities during emergency situations. These studies demonstrate that professional competence and adaptability are essential for ensuring continuity of learning in both traditional and alternative educational settings.

Stakeholder support further strengthens teacher capacity. Niro and Petilla (2019) highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in implementing projects within special education centers. Support from school administrators, parents, local government units, and community organizations provides teachers with additional resources and encouragement. Martin (2026) similarly found that school leadership plays a vital role in facilitating policy implementation by promoting inclusive practices, allocating resources, and fostering supportive school environments. Effective leadership enables teachers to access professional development opportunities and receive the assistance needed to address diverse learner needs.

The outcomes associated with teacher capacity building and professional support are substantial. Educators who receive sustained training and mentoring demonstrate greater confidence in implementing inclusive strategies, adapting curricula, and managing diverse classrooms. Sagun et al. (2022) found that early detection and intervention programs are more successful when teachers possess the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and support learners with disabilities.

Improved teacher preparedness also contributes to higher levels of learner participation, enhanced academic achievement, stronger social integration, and reduced exclusion. Furthermore, inclusive practices become more sustainable when teachers are empowered through continuous professional development and institutional support.

From a Realist Synthesis perspective, the Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configuration for this theme can be summarized as follows: when teachers operate within supportive educational environments that provide access to professional development, mentoring, collaborative networks, and institutional support (Context), they develop greater confidence, self-efficacy, knowledge, and instructional competence (Mechanism), which leads to effective inclusive teaching practices, increased learner engagement, differentiated instruction, and improved educational outcomes for learners with special needs (Outcome). Consistent with the findings of Javinia (2015), inclusive education can only be fully realized when educators are adequately prepared and supported to embrace diversity in



the classroom. Therefore, strengthening teacher capacity building and professional support systems remains a fundamental requirement for achieving meaningful and sustainable inclusive education in the Philippines.

Theme 2: Leadership and School Culture Context

Schools differ widely in the degree to which school leadership prioritizes and sustains inclusive education. In many settings, particularly in developing contexts such as the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, inclusion is strongly influenced by the attitudes, competence, and commitment of school principals and administrators. Where leadership commitment is weak, inclusive education often remains policy-driven rather than practice-driven, resulting in inconsistent implementation and limited support for learners with special educational needs (Muega, 2016; Domingo, 2020). Conversely, schools with proactive leadership tend to demonstrate stronger institutional alignment toward inclusion, although systemic constraints such as limited training, inadequate resources, and high teacher workload still persist (Allam & Martin, 2021; Charcos et al., 2025).

Research across Southeast Asia confirms that inclusive education is highly contextual and depends on how school leaders interpret and operationalize policy mandates (Hosshan et al., 2020). In the Philippine setting, inclusion is further shaped by uneven access to special education (SPED) resources, varying levels of stakeholder engagement, and differing degrees of readiness among teachers and administrators (AJOC, 2019; Custodio, 2025). These variations in leadership capacity create significant differences in school culture, particularly in how inclusion is understood, prioritized, and practiced.

Supportive and transformational school leadership plays a critical role in developing inclusive school cultures. School principals and administrators act as key drivers of shared vision, collaboration, and resource mobilization. When leaders actively advocate for inclusion, they influence teachers' attitudes, strengthen professional collaboration, and foster collective responsibility for diverse learners (Martin, 2026; Niro & Petilla, 2019). Leadership commitment becomes a catalyst for establishing professional learning communities, mentoring systems, and sustained capacity-building initiatives that enhance teacher competence in inclusive pedagogy.

Studies emphasize that teacher development is central to the mechanism of inclusion. For example, professional support and training improve teachers' confidence and instructional effectiveness in handling learners with special needs (Manelyn Del Carmen et al., 2020). Similarly, structured support systems help reduce teacher stress and improve self-efficacy, particularly in rural and resource-constrained schools (Abaya, 2025). When leadership ensures access to training, collaboration, and assistive resources, teachers are more likely to implement differentiated instruction and inclusive classroom strategies (Campado et al., 2023).

Moreover, inclusive leadership fosters stakeholder engagement, including parents, rehabilitation professionals, and community actors. Effective inclusion requires coordination beyond the classroom, especially in addressing barriers such as limited access to rehabilitation services and early intervention programs (Chiu et al., 2023; Sagun et al., 2022). Leaders who promote collaboration among stakeholders help build a stronger ecosystem of support for learners with disabilities. This aligns with findings that successful SPED implementation depends heavily on multi-stakeholder engagement and institutional coordination (Leaño & Malano, 2020; Niro & Petilla, 2019).

At the cultural level, leadership shapes shared beliefs and values about inclusion. When school heads consistently communicate the importance of equity and participation, staff begin to internalize inclusive values as part of the school identity. This cultural shift is critical because inclusion is not only a technical practice but also a moral and institutional commitment (Javiniar, 2015; Muega, 2016). Over time, repeated reinforcement of inclusive principles leads to normalization of diversity in classrooms and reduced stigma toward learners with disabilities (Catubigan, 2023).

The presence of strong and supportive leadership results in the emergence of inclusive school cultures characterized by acceptance, collaboration, and shared responsibility. In such environments, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders work collectively to support learners with diverse needs, resulting in more equitable participation and improved learning experiences (Sagun et al., 2022; Hosshan et al., 2020).



Inclusive school cultures also promote the sustained implementation of inclusive practices, such as differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation, and assistive technology integration. These practices become institutionalized rather than dependent on individual teacher initiative (Campado et al., 2023; Pawilen, 2018). Furthermore, schools with strong leadership support are better able to respond to challenges such as teacher stress, lack of training, and resource limitations, thereby improving overall system resilience (Abaya, 2025; Charcos et al., 2025).

Importantly, inclusive school culture contributes to improved learner outcomes, including increased participation, reduced exclusion, and better social integration of learners with special needs. Evidence suggests that early detection and intervention, when supported by strong leadership, significantly enhance developmental and educational outcomes (Sagun et al., 2022). In addition, inclusive environments foster positive peer interactions and reduce discriminatory attitudes, contributing to a more supportive learning climate (Catubigan, 2023).

However, sustaining such outcomes requires continuous leadership engagement and policy-practice alignment. Studies highlight that gaps often exist between inclusive education policies and their actual implementation, particularly in under-resourced schools (Custodio, 2025; Domingo, 2020). Thus, leadership must not only initiate inclusion but also institutionalize mechanisms that ensure its long-term sustainability.

When school leaders actively advocate for inclusion and consistently demonstrate commitment to inclusive values (Context), they influence teachers and staff to develop a shared sense of responsibility, collaboration, and belief in the importance of equity (Mechanism). This transformation in attitudes and practices fosters an institutional culture that prioritizes diversity, participation, and support for all learners. As a result, sustainable inclusive practices emerge within the school system, characterized by coordinated instruction, stakeholder engagement, and continuous professional development (Outcome).

Leadership serves as the foundation upon which inclusive school culture is built. It bridges policy and practice by shaping beliefs, mobilizing resources, and sustaining collaborative action. Without strong leadership, inclusion remains fragmented; with it, inclusion becomes embedded as a defining characteristic of the school system.

Theme 3: Family and Community Engagement Context

Family and community engagement is a critical determinant of successful inclusive education, as parental attitudes and broader community perceptions significantly shape how inclusion is understood and implemented in schools. In many contexts, including the Philippines and other low- and middle-income countries, the effectiveness of inclusive education is strongly influenced by the level of awareness, acceptance, and participation of families and community stakeholders (Francisco et al., 2020; Haug, 2017). When families hold positive attitudes toward disability and inclusion, learners with special needs are more likely to receive emotional support, academic reinforcement, and social acceptance both at home and in school settings.

However, research shows that barriers such as stigma, limited awareness, and inadequate access to information continue to affect parental engagement and community participation (Gomez & Gomez, 2013; Beyene & Tizazu, 2010). In the Philippine context, despite policy support such as DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, which promotes inclusive education as a strategy for increasing participation rates, implementation is often shaped by varying levels of community understanding and support (Department of Education, 2009; Mirador & Lluz, 2021). These disparities highlight that inclusive education is not only a school-based initiative but also a socially embedded process that depends on the readiness of families and communities to embrace diversity.

Recent developments in educational technology and artificial intelligence also influence family engagement in inclusion. While these tools have the potential to enhance accessibility and personalized learning, disparities in access and digital literacy among families may further widen gaps in participation if not properly addressed (Lynch et al., 2024; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). Thus, the context of inclusion is increasingly shaped by both traditional socio-cultural factors and emerging technological environments.

Collaborative partnerships between schools, families, and communities serve as the primary mechanism for strengthening inclusive education. These partnerships foster open communication, trust, shared responsibility, and



sustained advocacy for learners with disabilities. When schools actively engage families in decision-making and learning processes, stakeholders develop a stronger sense of ownership over inclusive education initiatives (Makapela & Chigbu, 2025; Meissner et al., 2019).

Effective engagement mechanisms include parent-teacher collaboration, community awareness programs, and participation in individualized education planning. These practices help bridge the gap between home and school environments, ensuring consistency in support strategies for learners with special needs. Studies indicate that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, there is a significant improvement in learner motivation, behavior, and academic performance (Francisco et al., 2020; Gale et al., 2017).

Furthermore, family engagement is strengthened through capacity-building initiatives and professional development programs that equip both teachers and parents with the knowledge and skills needed to support inclusive practices. However, access to such programs remains uneven, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where professional development opportunities are limited (Rivera et al., 2025; Garcia et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of systemic investment in training not only educators but also families and community stakeholders to sustain inclusion.

Emerging research also shows the growing role of technology in facilitating engagement. Educational technologies and artificial intelligence tools can enhance communication between teachers and families, provide individualized learning support, and improve access to educational resources for learners with disabilities (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022; Kurnia et al., 2025). However, the effective adoption of such technologies depends on addressing barriers such as digital literacy, infrastructure limitations, and teacher readiness (Bete & Quinto, 2025; Lynch et al., 2024). Without these supports, technology may reinforce rather than reduce inequities in inclusive education.

Importantly, mechanisms of engagement also involve shifting attitudes. Teachers' perceptions toward inclusion, as well as parents' beliefs about disability, significantly influence the success of inclusive practices. Studies have shown that positive attitudes among educators are closely linked to higher levels of parental involvement and stronger school-community collaboration (Nunez & Rosales, 2021; Beyene & Tizazu, 2010). Therefore, fostering inclusive mindsets across all stakeholders is essential for building effective partnerships.

When schools successfully engage families and communities, stakeholders develop a strong sense of ownership and commitment to inclusive education. This shared responsibility leads to improved learner support systems, increased acceptance of diversity, and enhanced participation of learners with special educational needs in both academic and social activities.

Empirical evidence suggests that strong family involvement contributes to better educational outcomes, including improved academic performance, higher motivation, and greater emotional well-being among learners with disabilities (Francisco et al., 2020; Gomez & Gomez, 2013). In addition, inclusive community environments help reduce stigma and promote positive attitudes toward diversity, creating safer and more supportive learning ecosystems (Lashley, 2021; Haug, 2017).

At the institutional level, sustained family and community engagement strengthens school accountability and responsiveness. Schools that actively collaborate with stakeholders are better able to adapt policies, monitor progress, and implement inclusive reforms effectively (Makapela & Chigbu, 2025; Meissner et al., 2019). This also contributes to more adaptive and evidence-based decision-making in inclusive education systems.

Moreover, inclusive engagement has long-term social implications. It promotes social cohesion by fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse groups within the community. Over time, this leads to a cultural shift where disability is no longer viewed through a deficit lens but as part of human diversity that requires accommodation and support (Francisco et al., 2020; Gale et al., 2017).

When schools actively engage families and communities in inclusive education initiatives (Context), stakeholders develop shared ownership, trust, and sustained advocacy for learners with disabilities (Mechanism). This strengthened collaboration enhances communication between home and school, promotes inclusive attitudes, and supports



coordinated learning strategies. As a result, improved educational outcomes, stronger learner support systems, and increased social participation of learners with special needs are achieved (Outcome).

Hence, family and community engagement serves as a foundational pillar of inclusive education. It transforms inclusion from a school-centered initiative into a shared social responsibility, ensuring that learners with diverse needs are supported not only within classrooms but across their broader social environments.

Theme 4: Resource Availability and Accessibility Context

Resource availability and accessibility remain major determinants of the effectiveness of inclusive education systems. Many schools, particularly in developing countries such as the Philippines and other Southeast Asian contexts, continue to face significant limitations in physical infrastructure, assistive technologies, trained personnel, and instructional materials needed to support learners with disabilities (Hosshan et al., 2020; AJOC, 2019). These constraints are especially pronounced in rural and underserved areas, where basic classroom conditions are often inadequate for inclusive learning.

Although inclusive education is mandated by national policies such as Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities) and Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), the translation of these policies into practice is uneven due to resource gaps (Republic of the Philippines, 1992; Republic of the Philippines, 2013). Schools are expected to provide accessible environments and differentiated instruction, yet many lack the financial and technical capacity to fully comply with these requirements (Domingo, 2020; Muega, 2016).

Across Southeast Asia, inclusive education reforms have similarly struggled with infrastructure and resource limitations, highlighting a persistent gap between policy intentions and actual implementation (Arias et al., 2023; Novrizal & Manaf, 2024). In many cases, inclusion is introduced within traditional school systems that were originally designed for segregated or standardized learning, making adaptation both costly and complex (Pauziah et al., 2024; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). As a result, schools often implement partial inclusion, where learners with special needs are physically present but not fully supported in meaningful participation.

Accessible facilities, assistive technologies, and adaptive instructional resources serve as critical mechanisms that enable meaningful participation of learners with diverse needs. When schools are equipped with appropriate learning materials, accessible classrooms, and supportive technologies, learners with disabilities are better able to engage in academic tasks, interact with peers, and participate in classroom activities on an equal footing (Campado et al., 2023; Sumayang et al., 2022).

Inclusive teaching practices depend heavily on the availability of resources that allow differentiation and accommodation. Teachers require tools such as visual aids, tactile materials, communication devices, and flexible learning platforms to address diverse learning needs effectively (Manelyn Del Carmen et al., 2020). However, limited access to such resources often restricts teachers' instructional strategies and increases their workload, contributing to stress and reduced self-efficacy, particularly in rural settings (Abaya, 2025; Allam & Martin, 2021).

Assistive technology plays a particularly important role in enhancing accessibility. Studies show that tools such as screen readers, communication apps, and adaptive learning software significantly improve engagement and participation among learners with special educational needs (Campado et al., 2023). However, access to these technologies remains uneven, especially in low-resource schools where funding and technical support are limited (Chiu et al., 2023). This disparity creates unequal learning opportunities and reinforces existing educational gaps.

Moreover, the mechanism of resource accessibility is not limited to physical tools but also includes human and institutional support systems. Teachers' competence in using inclusive resources is essential for maximizing their effectiveness. Professional development programs are therefore critical in equipping educators with the skills needed to adapt instructional materials and manage diverse classrooms effectively (Pozas & Letzel-Alt, 2025). Without adequate training, even well-equipped schools may struggle to implement inclusive practices effectively.



Research also highlights that inclusive education requires a shift from traditional, segregated models toward more integrated systems that support diversity within mainstream classrooms (Pauziah et al., 2024). This shift demands not only material resources but also systemic restructuring of curricula, assessment practices, and classroom environments to ensure accessibility for all learners (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). In this sense, resource availability functions as both a material and structural mechanism for inclusion.

When adequate resources and accessible learning environments are provided, learners are able to participate more actively in educational activities, resulting in improved academic engagement, independence, and overall learning outcomes. Access to appropriate instructional materials and assistive technologies allows learners with disabilities to better understand lessons, complete tasks, and demonstrate their competencies in meaningful ways (Campado et al., 2023; Sumayang et al., 2022).

Enhanced resource accessibility also contributes to increased learner autonomy. Students become more capable of managing their own learning processes, particularly when provided with adaptive tools and supportive classroom environments. This fosters confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging within the school community (Hosshan et al., 2020; Muega, 2016). Over time, these improvements contribute to higher retention rates and better educational attainment for learners with special needs.

Furthermore, inclusive resource environments promote social inclusion by enabling learners with disabilities to participate alongside their peers in both academic and extracurricular activities. This reduces stigmatization and fosters positive peer relationships, contributing to a more inclusive school culture overall (Arias et al., 2023). When learners are given equal opportunities to engage, schools become more equitable spaces that reflect the principles of inclusive education.

At the institutional level, the availability of resources enhances the effectiveness of inclusive education policies and strengthens implementation fidelity. Schools with sufficient materials and infrastructure are better able to comply with national mandates such as RA 7277 and RA 10533, thereby reducing the gap between policy and practice (Republic of the Philippines, 1992; 2013; Domingo, 2020). However, where resources remain limited, even well-designed policies struggle to produce meaningful outcomes.

When schools are provided with adequate resources, accessible environments, and supportive instructional tools (Context), learners are enabled to actively participate in academic and social learning activities through improved accessibility and instructional adaptation (Mechanism). This increased participation leads to enhanced academic achievement, greater learner independence, and stronger inclusion within the school community (Outcome).

Thus, resource availability and accessibility are foundational to the success of inclusive education. Without sufficient infrastructure, assistive technology, and instructional support, inclusive education risks becoming symbolic rather than functional. Conversely, when resources are effectively provided and utilized, they transform classrooms into genuinely inclusive spaces where all learners can participate, progress, and thrive.

Conclusion:

This Realist Synthesis highlights that the implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines is not a linear or uniform process, but rather a complex outcome shaped by interacting contextual, institutional, and individual factors. Although national and international policies provide a strong normative and legal foundation for inclusion, their effectiveness largely depends on how they are interpreted, operationalized, and sustained within specific school environments. In practice, the success of inclusive education emerges from the alignment between policy intentions and the realities of classroom implementation.

Across the synthesized literature, it became evident that inclusion is highly dependent on enabling conditions that activate key mechanisms within schools and communities. These mechanisms include teacher competence, instructional adaptability, leadership commitment, family and community engagement, resource accessibility, and effective monitoring and support systems. When these elements are present and functioning together, they generate



meaningful participation, improved learning experiences, and stronger social integration for learners with diverse needs.

Teacher competence emerged as a central driver of inclusive practice, particularly in terms of pedagogical flexibility, classroom management, and understanding of special educational needs. However, teacher effectiveness is closely tied to institutional support, including professional development opportunities and manageable workloads. Similarly, school leadership plays a decisive role in shaping inclusive school cultures by setting expectations, allocating resources, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Without strong leadership, inclusion often remains fragmented and dependent on individual teacher initiative.

Family and community engagement further strengthens inclusive education by extending support beyond the classroom. When families are actively involved, learners receive more consistent reinforcement, and schools benefit from stronger trust and collaboration. In addition, resource availability including infrastructure, assistive technologies, and learning materials—determines whether inclusive policies can be translated into meaningful classroom practice. Schools with limited resources often struggle to move beyond symbolic inclusion, while well-supported schools are better able to sustain inclusive learning environments.

Monitoring systems and institutional feedback mechanisms also play a vital role in ensuring accountability and continuous improvement. These systems help identify gaps in implementation and guide targeted interventions, thereby enhancing the responsiveness of inclusive education programs.

The findings underscore that inclusive education is not achieved through policy directives alone, but through sustained, coordinated efforts that respond to contextual realities within schools and communities. Inclusion becomes effective when stakeholders teachers, school leaders, families, and policymakers—work collaboratively to build environments that value diversity and ensure equitable participation for all learners.

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