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# Inclusive Education: Lived Experiences of 21st century Teachers in the Philippines

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**Abstract:** *This study provided a meta-synthesis of Filipino teachers' experiences with inclusive education. It used 15 of the 214 preliminary researches and was filtered using a set of selection and exclusion criteria. Furthermore, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) flow diagram was used to arrange the chosen research papers. In six steps by Clark and Braune, constant comparison and thematic analysis yielded eight (8) themes and two (2) meta-themes. According to the findings, 21st-century teachers are progressing in adhering to continuing professional education, adopting inclusion policies, and incorporating instructional innovations and activities to promote inclusivity. Teachers experienced recurring obstacles such as insufficient preparedness and expertise for special education, a lack of educational services, and general social contexts that substantially impact teacher teaching. However, professionalism and perseverance in adjusting inclusion justify the teacher's responsibility to sustain resilience and inventiveness for their students in a challenging educational environment. It concludes that inclusive education necessitates progressive teacher education and ongoing provision of instructional aids and services. It suggests that schools incorporate a variety of training modules and seminars for general education instructors to achieve the criteria for conducting inclusive education programs. In order to resolve the concerns about inclusive education, the local community education committee, parents, teachers, and school personnel should work together.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusive education, lived experiences, teacher, Philippines, meta-synthesis.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Socially imposed or perceived differences, such as those based on gender, ethnic group or social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic circumstance, and abilities of an individual, were prohibited by the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and international human rights law (Sestier, 2019). The Department of Education provides inclusive education as part of its purpose to enhance every Filipino citizen's right to such educational services, allowing it to meet its promise to deliver complete, high-quality, equitable, and culturally-based primary education. It enables students with special needs to engage in typical school environments.

There are centers in the country within schools that have been used as examples and can develop an inclusive framework. On the other hand, teacher education, policies, and teachings aided in the inclusion endeavor and problems (Inciong & Quijano, 2013). Dilemmas in and out of the classroom increased instructors' responsibilities and hampered their ability to offer students a high-quality education. Despite the support of multiple rules, legislation, and initiatives to assist and accelerate the benefits of all efforts in this direction, ordinary schools with an inclusive orientation encounter several problems (Allam & Martin, 2021). To address the lived experiences of 21st-century instructors in the system of inclusive education, it is feasible to discover gaps between the challenges and issues encountered by the instructors and prospective ways to overcome such hurdles. Teaching is perceived as a calling rather than a job.

The responsibility is to encourage learning and holistically develop learners. Teaching is one of the top five most stressful job options, with the highest incidence of career change (Lewis et al., 2011). Implementing inclusive education has been one of the most challenging difficulties any educational institution has encountered in recent years (Sharma & Desai, 2002). Parent-teacher interactions, student behavioral issues, coworker interpersonal difficulties, and school and parent demands contribute to stress and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). According to Alghazo and Gaad (2004), there needs to be more support for inclusion. Worldwide, inclusive education has become the norm in special education. Most countries throughout the world are following this trend in schooling. According to one researcher, the Philippines is one of the countries that has implemented this curricular innovation. However, instructors found it challenging to implement inclusive education in public and private schools across the country (Sanchez et al., 2021).

According to Agbenyaga (2007), many public and private schools in Cebu City and around the Philippines provide inclusive education. Teachers in inclusive classrooms may become frustrated due to a lack of skills and professional competence to assist learning for students with special needs.

On the other hand, teachers in an inclusive classroom benefit significantly from having a degree and training in special education (SPED).

According to the research, instructors had positive and bad experiences in the inclusive context (Boitumelo et., al 2020). These encounters have a profound impact on their attitudes and views regarding inclusiveness. According to Mangope (2013), providing help to general and special education teachers who work with kids with disabilities in an inclusive setting can create positive social change and increase inclusion's overall performance.

Furthermore, keeping a positive self-image and attitude and always believing in and pushing oneself may aid inclusive education instructors in dealing with pressures (Nketsia et al., 2016). However, a strategy or model can only address a subset of inclusion's difficulties. In promoting inclusivity, more research should be done on developing and implementing successful inclusive practices and teacher support (Boitumelo et., al 2020). Research on inclusive education teachers' lived experiences in the Philippines has been undertaken. Most are concerned with instructors' support, problems, solutions, benefits and drawbacks, and future possibilities. However, research on the meta-synthesis of teachers' lived experiences with inclusive education in the Philippines is still needed. As a result, this research aims to meta-synthesis research works on teachers' lived experiences of inclusive education throughout the country.

#### A. *Research Questions*

This study aims to meta-synthesize research articles on teachers' lived experiences of inclusive education in the Philippines.

Specifically, this study aims to:

- 1) Determine the teachers' positive experiences in inclusive education.
- 2) Determine the teachers' challenges in inclusive education.
- 3) Determine how teachers overcome/resolve the challenges.

## II. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Research Design*

The researchers use the meta-synthesis approach to rebuild and revise previous qualitative study findings (McClean & Shaw, 2005). Meta-synthesis is a research approach used to objectively assess qualitative findings (rather than raw data), resulting in re-conceptualizations of earlier conclusions (Finfgeld, 2003). Because meta-synthesis can only look at qualitative data, this study had no quantitative findings.

#### B. *Search Strategy*

The identification of published papers published in English language journals related to the Inclusive Education: Lived Experiences of 21st-century Teachers in the Philippines was scanned and examined through Publish or Perish Software via the Google Scholar database. All relevant studies regarding inclusive education in the Philippines published from 2015 to 2022 were then downloaded and analyzed.

Keywords used in the Publish or Perish Software in the Google Scholar database are lived experiences, inclusive education, teacher, and the Philippines.

The keyword "Inclusive Education" was encoded in the title section to delineate the search. These keywords were purposefully specified to gather information from Google Scholar to compile the necessary variables for the meta-synthesis. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram was used to organize the gathered data.

#### C. *Inclusion and Exclusion criteria*

Inclusion criteria determine which research articles will be selected; to understand the review's focus and limitations, the reviewers need to be precise in outlining the inclusion criteria (Jordan et al., 2014). Included studies were selected based on the inclusion criteria protocol which includes that the : (1) paper published from 2015 - 2022 studies in google scholar, (2) must include studies related to inclusive education, (3) lived experiences of the teachers and (4) found in the Philippine setting.

Selected papers were screened with the set inclusion criteria.

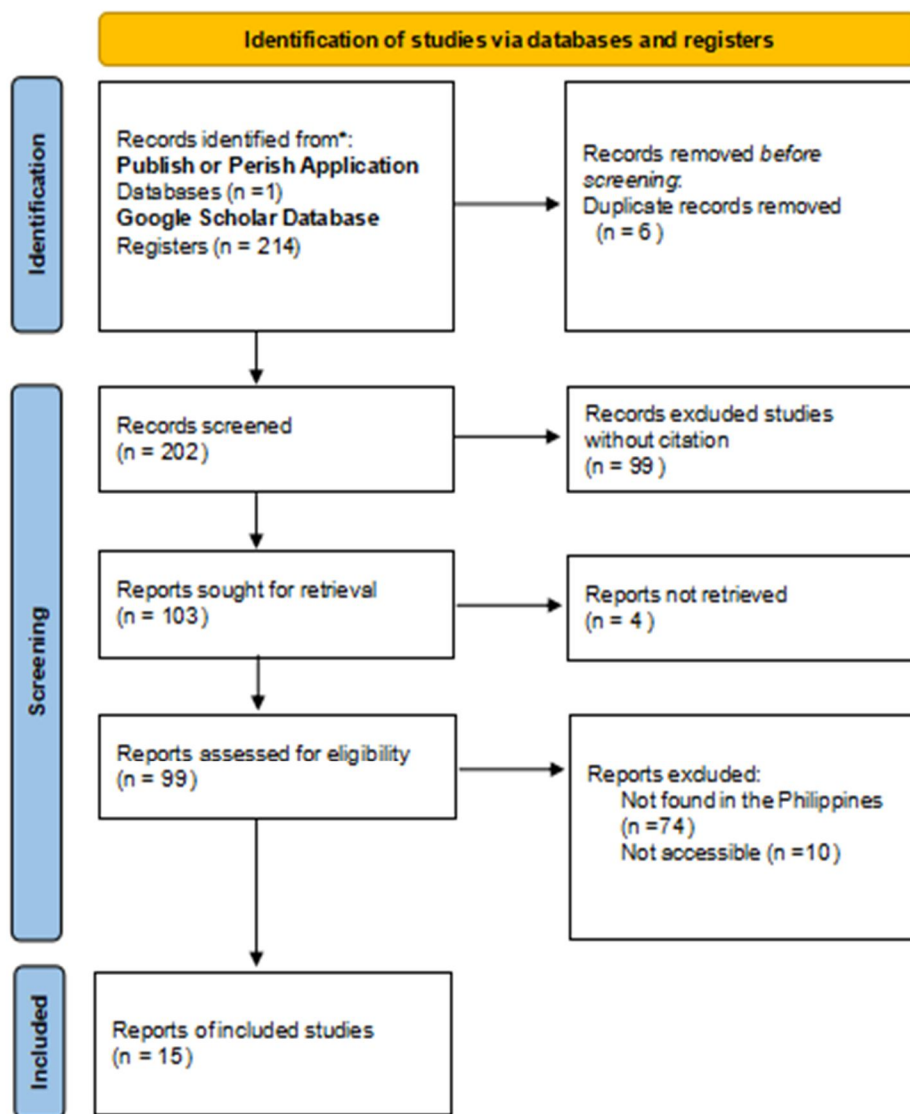


Figure 1. Search strategy utilizing PRISMA

#### D. Data Analysis

*Thematic analysis* is primarily defined as "a strategy for detecting, analyzing, and access to better information (themes) in data" as a stand-alone descriptive qualitative method (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The six-step theme analysis guideline was used in the study procedure of Clarke and Braun (2017). It includes 1. familiarizing with the research articles or studies where the initial codes were made; 2. creating the initial codes by compiling data relevant to each code; 3. looking for themes by gathering pertinent data for each theme; 4. reviewing themes by creating a thematic map; 5—defining and naming themes that specify the emerging themes and; 6. producing the report through discussion of analysis and implications of the findings.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The final collection comprises fifteen (15) studies published as journal articles. All studies' authors are exclusively affiliated with institutes located in the Philippines. The fifteen (15) publications utilized in the study resulted in eight (8) themes and two (2) meta-themes.

Table 1 below provides the overview and characterization of the final collection of 15 studies included in the meta-synthesis.

No.	Title	Year	Codes
1	Inclusive Education Program for persons with disabilities: Insights and Lived Experiences of Stakeholders	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inadequate teacher preparation in handling students with hearing impairment</li> <li>● Inadequate teacher preparation in handling students with visual impairment</li> <li>● Inadequate teacher preparation in handling students with developmental disabilities</li> <li>● Enhancement of teachers' assessment and pedagogical practices</li> </ul>
2	Inclusive education in the Philippines: Through the eyes of teachers, administrators, and parents of children with special needs	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inadequate teacher preparation in inclusive pedagogical practices</li> <li>● Need support for professional growth</li> <li>● Inadequate skills in employing inclusive teaching-learning experiences</li> <li>● Upheaval in the Philippine educational system</li> <li>● Lack of educational stakeholder interdependence.</li> </ul>
3	'Sana all'inclusive education amid COVID-19: Challenges, strategies, and prospects of special education teachers	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Content Knowledge Shortcomings</li> <li>● Lack of teacher guidance</li> <li>● Mental and emotional health instability</li> <li>● Physical, mental, and emotional support</li> <li>● Adjust teaching practices in the new normal</li> <li>● Demands for inclusive policies in schools</li> </ul>
4	Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education: Basis on the Development of Inclusion Guide	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inadequate teacher preparation in inclusive pedagogical practices</li> <li>● Additional training for teaching skills and knowledge</li> <li>● Poor response to present problems</li> <li>● Curriculum adjustments</li> </ul>
5	Estimating vulnerability in promoting inclusive education in the Philippines	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rigorous need for teaching adjustments</li> <li>● Poor collaboration</li> <li>● School organization indecisiveness</li> <li>● Institutional issues in curriculum implementation in teacher education programs</li> <li>● Failed implementation of school policies related to inclusive education</li> </ul>
6	Gender diversity and inclusive education among women school stakeholders in selected schools of Cavite: A grounded theory study	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interrelated gender diversity to inclusive education</li> <li>● Successful implementation of gender and development program</li> <li>● Awareness of societal roles.</li> </ul>
7	Inclusive Education for Ethnic	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhancement of teachers' pedagogical practices</li> </ul>

	Minorities in the Developing World: The Case of Alternative Learning System for Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effect of collaboration on inclusivity</li> <li>● Local government units in compliance with the demands of the educational sector</li> </ul>
8	Working Towards a More Progressive and Inclusive Education: A Look Into Philippine Gender Studies in Basic Education	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender and development policy innovations</li> <li>● Instructional policies separating religion from gender and development</li> </ul>
9	Knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers on inclusive education and academic performance of children with special needs	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Responsiveness to the shortage of fully prepared personnel</li> <li>● Interdependence of internal and external stakeholders</li> </ul>
10	Case Study of Inclusive Education Programme: Basis for Proactive and Life Skills Inclusive Education.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Production of high-caliber professionals in high-accreditation institutions</li> <li>● Efficient delivery of theoretical courses across teacher education programs</li> <li>● Increasing the educational performance of learners with special needs through inclusive programs</li> </ul>
11	Inclusive education in Asia: Insights from some country case studies	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inclusivity</li> <li>● Enhancement of teachers' pedagogical practices</li> <li>● Additional training for teaching skills and knowledge</li> </ul>
12	Use and Knowledge of ICTs in Inclusive Education at Educational Levels.	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Additional training for teaching skills and knowledge</li> <li>● Valuing ICT development</li> <li>● Inclusivity</li> <li>● Enhancement of teachers' pedagogical practices</li> </ul>
13	Inequalities in income, labor, and education: The challenge of inclusive growth	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Poverty and education alignment</li> <li>● Economic opportunities and education.</li> </ul>
14	Investing in human capital for inclusive growth: focus on higher education	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Economic opportunities and education</li> <li>● Employment and education</li> <li>● Need support for professional growth</li> <li>● Returns and investment in education</li> </ul>
15	Promoting inclusive growth through higher education	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Employment and education</li> <li>● Employment opportunities and education</li> <li>● Economic opportunities and education</li> <li>● Government scholarships in higher education</li> <li>● Returns and investment in education</li> <li>● Teaching support</li> <li>● Poor collaboration</li> </ul>

Inclusive education continues to implement and improve its potential in developing and less developed countries. Its purpose is to create an equitable learning environment to develop positive experiences in both teaching instruction and innovation. However, teachers also encountered challenges in inclusive education regarding teacher training, educational services, and delivery of instruction due to economic and student-related problems. The fifteen (15) publications used in the study resulted in eight (8) themes and two (2) meta-themes. The first three (1-3) themes were categorized as positive experiences in inclusive education, the fourth to seventh (4-7) themes were categorized as challenges, and the remaining theme (8) addressed the challenges in inclusive education.

#### A. *Positive Experiences in Inclusive Education*

This category describes the teachers' positive experiences in the delivery of inclusive education that emerged in the thematic analysis. Nine (9) out of the fifteen (15) studies in the Philippines cited that teachers have gained perspective in enhancing their teaching capabilities through adopting an inclusive curriculum.

- *Theme 1: Adherence to continuing professional education*

Initial teacher education will improve instructors' ability to become competent classroom practitioners. Teachers, like other professionals, require continual professional development opportunities to continue developing their expertise (Faragher, 2021). Teachers continually seek specific strategies about the condition affecting the learning process to better cater to their students' needs. It is vital in supporting students with special needs since teachers benefit from professional learning opportunities to adapt and modify needed instruction for their students. (Faragher & Clarke, 2016). Upon establishing their classroom dynamics, teachers turn to the availability of a "mentor" from whom they can seek advice in enhancing their skills. In the Philippines, continuing professional development for inclusive education remains limited by training costs, particularly for public school teachers. One example is the Teacher's Gallery, which started in 2014 and is partnered with various national and global organizations. Additionally, the increasing availability of online, asynchronous training, such as through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), may provide an opportunity for education systems to train their teachers for specialist support roles in an accessible and cost-effective way.

- *Theme 2: Establishment of policies for inclusion*

Learners must demonstrate competence to comprehend and accept individuals with various values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. To adjust to these differences, they must be knowledgeable enough to effectively apply skills and attitudes that work best in interacting with a broad diverse community. To achieve this goal, the State and the Ayta collaborated to alter the curriculum to implement opinions, themes, issues, and concepts necessary to and relevant to the Ayta into the educational system. (Cucio & Roldan, 2020). On the other hand, school leaders should also be introduced to gender diversity and inclusive education to foster a more intensive, existential, pluralistic, and multicultural discourse and awareness of stakeholders, the school setting, and the environment (Flores, 2018).

- *Theme 3: Instructional innovations and initiatives*

The Department of Education conducts seminars for Health teachers and encourages them to teach SOGIE to students, as is the scope of inclusivity. They should also make changes and improvements to educational resources used to assist instructors and students in learning about SOGIE and conduct classes with an unbiased mentality to reduce stigma and stereotypes (Luxa, 2020). On the other hand, the SEN program's administrators have plans to enhance and sustain the well-being of the programs and to be highly competitive with other universities that also offer the same program in the Philippines and neighboring Asian countries (Pilao & Relojo, 2018). There is also a need for physical aspects such as workouts and sports activities to be incorporated to preserve the program's well-being and improve the curriculum for students who excel in physical activities. They also plan to train the students in clerical jobs like sorting, filing, library management, and even photocopying and prepare them for independent living.

#### B. *Challenges in Inclusive Education*

This category describes the teachers' difficulties and challenging experiences in the delivery of inclusive education that emerged in the thematic analysis. Six (6) out of the fifteen (15) studies in the Philippine setting cited teachers lacking educational assurance and readiness to implement inclusive education in a developing country.

- *Theme 4: Limited readiness and skills of teachers*

Teachers know that varied learning is required for successful inclusive teaching, but they are also aware of their incapacity to secure it (Muega, 2016). The difficulties they encountered included instructional techniques and teaching tactics, parental support for their child's academic demands, how ordinary instructors deal with educational changes in teaching children with special needs, and coping mechanisms for prejudice (Rosales & Rosales, 2019). According to P. Galleto, N. Bureros (2017), these pre-service curriculum inadequacies are due to the dependency of in-service teacher education for inclusive education. Thus, creating a significant gap between knowing when to address the need for special needs education from inclusive education.

- *Theme 5: Shortage of educational services*

The Philippines' educational system is a mess, especially compared to other countries, as most classrooms here are typically overcrowded (Muega, 2019). Concerns have been raised about a shortage of teaching and learning resources, teacher recruiting, retention, training, and collaboration among government organizations dealing with indigenous peoples (Cucio & Roldan, 2020). Teachers' lack of training, bullying, infrastructural issues, student learning, curriculum, class size, resources, and other pupil-related issues are all challenges in inclusive classrooms for children with disabilities (Paguiran, 2020). Communication and collaboration with many members of the school community, particularly experts whose findings are critical for building a successful personalized education program are in need of addressing (Muega, 2019).

- *Theme 6: Problems affecting teacher instruction*

There are educational, social, and psychological issues, such as educational apprehensions, intermittent virtual socialization, and even psychological crises, resulting from the emergence of covid-19, which causes difficulties in instructors' pedagogical instruction via emergency remote teaching (Toquero, 2021). Teachers in the Philippines are unfamiliar with emergency e-learning environments, which provide enormous obstacles for special education teachers in instructing students (Talidong & Toquero, 2020). According to Burros, N., and Gallego, P. (2017), a corresponding reform of the materials used in teacher education programs is required. An inclusive teaching style should be organically related to and mutually supportive of an inclusive curriculum.

- *Theme 7: Interrelation of economic growth and education*

The numerous economic and social policy reforms implemented since 1986 are paying off for the Philippines. The current high real GDP growth rate indicates that the economy is experiencing this change. The average return on college education surpassed the average cost of capital and is one of the realities in economics. Thus, investing in higher education is worthwhile. However, because households pay for college out of their own pockets, only those with initial wealth inheritances could afford it without a higher education finance system. Families then must seize the opportunities that are emerging in the development of human capital. (Canlas, 2016).

### C. Addressing the challenges in teaching

Ten (10) out of the fifteen (15) studies conducted in the Philippines demonstrated the critical impact that economic and educational collaborations play in strengthening teachers' professional and personal attributes to meet the demands of inclusive education.

- *Theme 8: Addressing essential external support*

Despite having access to all ICT, the quality of teacher expertise on inclusive education at the Covid-19 educational levels has to be enhanced. Because there is no spending or investment item for children with special needs in educational institutions, instructors must be able to obtain training on specialized inclusion subjects and acquire all of the required tools to reach students with exceptional abilities. With two years of continuous employment and ongoing training in ICT-related topics, the teacher can exhibit a mastery of ICT at all levels (deficient, low, regular, high, and very high). Regression in this improvement for the inclusion of technology can be because some teachers continue to promote conventional education. In improving inclusive education, educators must receive training in inclusion issues and look for new technology aids to assist children with special needs so that their academic performance can be improved year after year for the benefit of the student (Romani, 2022).

### D. Meta-Themes

Synthesizing the eight (8) themes and their implications emerged two (2) meta-themes: teacher training and instructional aids and services, which are vital factors in improving inclusive teaching and learning in the Philippines.

### E. Inclusive Institutional Policies

Taking into account the policies that uphold inclusion and child-friendliness, like incorporating then-taboo topics into the instruction, school rules that protect the students from all forms of stereotypes and discrimination, and that open a space for every student with and without disability to be safe and included. In the context of teacher preparation in inclusive education, teachers need to attend seminars and training on special and inclusive education (Landasan, 2017). In addition, the Department of Education must include all the teachers handling special education classes in their action plan (Baguisa, R. K., & Ang-Manaig, K., 2019). Inclusive institutional policies hold a vital role in the current educational system in the Philippines. Whatever is being crafted and disseminated for implementation at the institutional level affects everyone around the landscape of inclusive education. Therefore, policies and programs developed at the institutional level must favor the benefits of all stakeholders of inclusive education.

### F. Continuum of Support and Services

Inclusive education involves internal and external stakeholders (e.g., parents and government units). Thus, every stakeholder needs to be part of the process and contribute in whatever forms it can provide (Toquero, 2021). To fully execute the strategies for students with disabilities, they must be well backed with the support and services of professionals who can provide and recommend the appropriate interventions concerning their limitations in a particular area. A continuum of support and services is one of the trends and issues affecting special education in the Philippines. As one of the meta themes of this study, a synthesized statement is that schools must cultivate support from the school leaders, other support professionals or personnel, and the local government units to shift the continuum from being a limited one to becoming an adequate one continuum support and services.

## IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines shows excellent potential in enhancing teacher efficiency to meet every learner's need for quality education. Application of the 21st-century skills in constructing pedagogy, delivering instruction, and managing proper assessments are vital and need reestablishment to teacher training to well-suit both general and special learners in their teaching service. Challenges that revolve around the lack of continuous provision of instructional aids and services still need attention to effectively address the right services for every learner's needs. It is recommended that schools integrate numerous training and seminars for the general education teachers to meet the standards in implementing inclusive education programs. Providing collaboration should be achieved by the local community education committee, parents, teachers, and school staff in addressing the concerns for inclusive education.

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