Inclusive Education: Practices, Challenges and Prospects of Selected Public Elementary School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the current practices, challenges, and prospects of inclusive education among selected public elementary school teachers in Marawi City, Philippines. Using a qualitative approach, following thorough validation, in-depth interviews with ten teachers at various schools to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, and perspectives on inclusive education. Findings revealed that while teachers generally support inclusive education, they encounter significant challenges, such as lack of adequate training, resources, and support. However, despite these obstacles, teachers have implemented various strategies to accommodate diverse learners, including differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and the use of assistive technology. Additionally, the study explored the potential of inclusive education to enhance the learning experiences of all students, including those with disabilities. The study highlights the need for increased investment in teacher training, the development of inclusive learning environments, and the provision of adequate resources to support the implementation of inclusive education in the City. Recommendations include the development of inclusive education policies, the establishment of specialized support services, and the fostering of a culture of inclusivity thereby contributes to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive education in the Philippines. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to develop effective strategies for promoting inclusive education and ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to learn and thrive.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Inclusion Practices, Inclusive Education, Challenges, Practices, Prospects, Enrichment Program*

INTRODUCTION

Despite strong international and national commitments to inclusive education, its effective implementation remains a significant challenge in some public schools in Marawi City, Philippines. While policies and frameworks are often in place, gaps persist between the ideals of inclusivity and the daily realities of diverse learners within classrooms. In fact, public schools in Marawi City often struggle with budget constraints, limiting their ability to acquire specialized equipment, materials, and assistive technologies for students with disabilities. As affirmed by some of the participants, many teachers lack adequate training and resources to effectively cater to diverse learning needs within a single classroom. However, this is not an isolated case, there are some challenges to implementing inclusive education in some regions in the Philippines, DepEd (2015). One of these challenges is the lack of awareness and understanding of inclusive practices among teachers. This is why negative attitudes toward inclusive practices can exist among some teachers, creating barriers to successful implementation.

Inclusion in education is the practice of including all students in regular classrooms, regardless of their individual differences or needs. This approach to education ensures that all students can learn and succeed alongside their peers in a general education setting. The Philippines has a commitment to inclusive education, as enshrined in the Education Act of 1982 and the Republic Act No. 11650 (Philippines Laws and Jurisprudence Databank, 2022). These laws mandate the inclusion of all students with disabilities in the regular education system. Inclusive education is a pedagogical approach that aims to provide all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, with the opportunity to learn and thrive in the general education classroom. It is a critical component of a quality education system, as it ensures that all students have access to the same educational opportunities and resources. Public school teachers are on the front lines of inclusive education, responsible for creating learning environments that meet the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or experiences.

According to a study by Mokaleng and Mowes (2020) on "Issues Affecting the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices in Selected Secondary Schools in the Omaheke Region of Namibia" published in the Journal of Inclusive Education, there are number of challenges that teachers face when implementing inclusive practices in the Philippines. These challenges include lack of resources, lack of training, and lack of support from administrators. The study also found that there are number of factors that can contribute to successful inclusion, such as having a clear understanding of inclusive education, having a positive attitude towards inclusion, and being willing to adapt teaching methods to accommodate students with disabilities.

Another study by Allam and Martin (2021), published in the Philippine Journal of Special Education, found that the perceptions of elementary grade teachers towards inclusion are generally positive. However, the study also found that teachers have a few concerns about inclusion, such as the impact on other students and the lack of resources. The study concluded that there is a need for more training and support for teachers to effectively implement inclusive practices.

Based on these studies, there are number of challenges and opportunities associated with inclusive education in the Philippines. It is important for teachers to be aware of these challenges and opportunities

so that they can effectively implement inclusive practices in their classrooms. Thus, this study aims to investigate the inclusion practices, challenges and prospects of elementary grade teachers around Marawi City, Lanao del Sur, Philippines. The findings of this study will be used to develop an Inclusion Enrichment Program for elementary grade teachers in Marawi City.

Related Literature Review

The reviews on related literature tackled about inclusive education in other countries and in Philippine context, teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, the challenges and the benefits of inclusive education.

A. Inclusion and Education for All

According to Hardin and Hardin (2013), thousands of educators teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms daily at all career stages, but many do not feel competent or confident in that role. Additionally, Sharma, Chunawala, and Chari (2017) discovered that teachers with experience working with students who have special needs expressed a serious concern about the under-preparedness of educators to handle inclusive classrooms. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) suggested that for inclusive education to be implemented successfully, teachers must feel confident in their ability to teach all students, believe that all students have a right to belong in regular classrooms, and possess the necessary knowledge and skills to teach in an inclusive classroom.

From these, we can infer that the application of the concept of special educational needs is problematic for the development of inclusive practice in some countries. In contexts where there is no mass education, and there are low rates of literacy and vast exclusionary pressures on the education of groups such as girls, the deflection from the task of providing community-based education for all can have particularly damaging consequences. In many countries of the South, there are basic education policies, special needs education policies and inclusive education policies often supported by a wide range of different government and non-government organizations (Khan, 1998).

B. Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

Certain studies contend that it is critical to investigate teachers' attitudes, given that this component of the teacher significantly affects how well they perform in inclusive conditions. Considering this from a global standpoint, numerous studies have revealed that educators' opinions on inclusion are not all the same. Takeda et al. (2018), for example, investigated the attitudes of educators in Serbia and Norway regarding integration. They disclosed that teachers and other education professionals expressed positive attitudes regarding the inclusion process. Likewise, Das and Bhatnagar (2014) discovered that educators in New Delhi, India likewise presented positive opinions regarding the inclusive procedure. Additionally, Bhatnagar and Das (2014) emphasized that the men who were brand-new teachers demonstrated the most affirming opinions regarding the inclusion in that region.

Although Opoku (2016) found that educators in Ghana had very negative attitudes toward having students with special educational needs in their classrooms, this very positive outlook on inclusion is undoubtedly not seen everywhere in the world. Dev and Kumar (2015) carried out further study in Dubai and Abu Dhabi that supports that point of view. They also disclosed that educators in the area display a similar level of hostility toward the inclusion process.

Finally, these divergent opinions regarding inclusive education show that just because global leaders support inclusive education, it does not guarantee that the approach will only be embraced by those who are directly involved in it (the Educators). Furthermore, a child's education may face additional challenges because of certain teachers' negative attitudes toward inclusion. This point is aptly made in a study by Tiwari et al. (2015), which discovered that instructors who had unfavorable opinions of the inclusive process tended to ignore special needs students and often excused them from assignments.

C. Factors Influencing Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education Practices

Teachers' perspectives on inclusion can be influenced by a variety of factors. These variables may be entirely related to the teacher or the student, or they may be connected to the overall educational environment (Sibagariang, 2017). One common student-related factor has to do with how severe the children's disabilities are; if the children's disabilities are mild, teachers tend to be more affirming of them (Sibagariang, 2017). Conversely, though, the instructor related factors include educators' confidence in working with children with disabilities (Song et al., 2019) and their level of expertise and experience with special needs children (Salovita, 2018). The likelihood of an inclusive education being successful is significantly reduced when teachers lack the necessary training, experience, and confidence (Suc et al., 2016).

Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education could be formed and developed in the context of an educational system which can provide some specific conditions to have good practice in this field. Those conditions refer to a restructuring of the curricula, more help from support teachers, more time for preparing the educational activities, decreasing the number of students in one class, creating and developing opportunities for interactive partnerships between teachers, students, support teachers and parents and so on. The reform of the curriculum should be made in parallel with proper training for teachers regarding their knowledge of inclusion and its principles. The difficulties are inherent to any change or reform, but it is necessary to develop an educational system which can properly respond to all the needs, characteristics and individual differences of all children in school (Menon, 2014).

D. Impact of Inclusive Education

Focusing on policy, meeting quality and equity and addressing the diversity within an inclusive education system achieves a benefit for every learner. Children will not only make progress academically but also regarding their whole development, for example socio-emotional or cognitive (UNESCO, 2020). Full participation of everyone is the aim, in terms of attendance and involvement, socially and academically. Social acceptance is a benefit too, helping the children to develop a sense of belonging (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017).

The child's personality will be strengthened and grows, and participation will increase by giving the child a voice and by acknowledging every child's individuality and looking at the child's strengths. Democratization shall be ensured that children can advocate for themselves and shape their education (Haug, 2010). Inclusive education can protect the child against different risk factors and facilitates coping abilities, the child's inclusion in society, and dealing with different factors faced in adult life. Thus, there is a benefit in the short and long term (Ebersold et al., 2011).

E. Inclusive Education in the Philippine Context

Policies are aimed at including students with special needs in the educational system. Republic Act 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, implements programs aimed at diverse learners, including those with disabilities. In fact, implementing IE is a fundamental principle of K-12 basic education programs. The ordinance requires schools to provide inclusive, quality, relevant, and accessible education to over 22 million Filipino students (Albert 2016). Of these students, 308,321 have special needs, which are met by 448 recognized Special Education (SpEd) centers and 173 regular schools that offer SpEd classes. However, government-funded schools in the country, where the majority of Filipino children are enrolled, face challenges such as poor outcome quality, large class sizes, teacher shortages, a lack of resources, an unsustainable curriculum, and lawmakers' contradictory perspectives (Alegado, 2018). The country then struggles with IE implementation due to compounded misconceptions about what IE entails, insufficient resources, knowledge, and teacher self-preparation (Muega, 2016).

Although the Philippines is a signatory to international inclusive education policies, Mori (2015) argued that a significant number of Filipino learners were unable to attend school due to either a lack of access to educational facilities or financial challenges faced by households. In general, the Philippines' school buildings, roadways, and transportation systems are not accessible to people with disabilities (PWDs), particularly those who are mobility-impaired (Reyes, 2014). About 10,000 people with varying degrees of disability were identified as disabled nationally in the National Disability Prevalence Survey (NDPS) carried out by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in 2016 (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority [TESDA], 2020).

Compared to men with impairments, women and children with disabilities were shown to have lower rates of reading, school engagement, and overall educational attainment (Reyes, 2014). Based on these findings, it may be assumed that the nation needs to do better at establishing conditions that are less restrictive for those who have disabilities.

F. Teachers' Knowledge and Attitudes towards Diversity

Teacher preparation has emerged as a key component in determining the caliber of students' educational responses as well as the development of inclusive attitudes and dispositions. Suriá, notes that compared to instructors of higher stages, those teaching in the Early Childhood Education and Primary Education stages have received more specialized training. This fact indicates that higher stage teachers are less trained and have worse attitudes toward including students with special needs. It also indicates that

their knowledge of educational needs and intervention procedures with students with disabilities is either better or worse.

Negative attitudes can be attributed to ignorance about how to proceed, work with, and intervene with these students (Solís, Pedrosa, Mateos-Fernández, Pérez-Jorge, Pérez-Martín, 2017). Negative attitudes are related to a lack of training and knowledge of students, and that training in the field of disability improves them (Pegalajar, Colmenero).

G. An Inclusive Environment for the Diverse Learners

Values and cultures that aim to exclude can be the reason behind school communities' inability to support inclusive practices and advance inclusive ideologies (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). One of the most difficult aspects of accomplishing inclusive goals is dealing with the behavioral, social, and emotional patterns that emerge in the inclusive classroom (Raguindin, 2020). A revolutionary concept of inclusion needs to be implemented in order to overcome this difficulty (De Silva, 2013).

Creating a shared environment where all students can succeed is a hallmark of transformative inclusive practices. These could be classroom settings that encourage cooperation, communication, healthy peer relationships, and support for academic achievement, for instance. It is necessary to question established cultures, get rid of prejudices, and replace any obstacles that might stand in the way of participation and a sense of belonging. IE makes a compelling case for each student's active participation in an inclusive classroom. It suggests several degrees of participation in an educational setting, including receiving information, offering advice, participating, and generating work. A context that values, embraces, and celebrates belonging, participation, and engagement of diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and abilities is what defines a quintessential inclusion (De Silva, 2013).

This literature supports the crucial role that educators play as the primary carriers of the inclusive agenda. It highlights the significance of the pedagogical choices educators must make and the actions they must take to create a more inclusive learning environment. Teachers must adopt inclusive philosophies and pedagogies because of their multifaceted and intricate roles in the inclusive agenda (Raguindin et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2018).

METHODS

This qualitative study used a phenomenological research design to explore the perceptions and experiences of public elementary school teachers in Marawi City regarding inclusive education practices, challenges, and prospects. The research was conducted in selected schools around Marawi City, Lanao del Sur, Philippines, all catering to diverse learners. Participants were purposefully selected based on criteria such as experience teaching learners with special needs, at least two years in an inclusive classroom, and recommendations by school principals. The study utilized semi-structured interviews and classroom observations as research instruments to gather in-depth insights into inclusion practices. Data collection followed a structured timeline, starting with obtaining permission from relevant authorities, distributing consent forms, and conducting interviews at participants' preferred times. The interview guide was validated

by an expert in inclusive education to ensure its relevance. Data was collected with a focus on personal narratives, challenges, and opportunities for improving inclusive education in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Background and Perceptions on Inclusive Education

This section discusses how the participants understand inclusive education based on what they have encountered and how important their role is in implementing inclusivity in classrooms.

Question 1: How do you describe an inclusive education?

In terms of the participants' own understanding and description of what inclusive education means, two (2) unfolding themes were identified: (1) No Child Left Behind, and (2) Equality among Diversity.

Theme 1: No Child Should Be Left Behind

All children, regardless of ability or disability, should have the opportunity to learn and succeed in a traditional classroom setting. Schools should provide appropriate accommodation and support to meet each student's unique needs, ensuring that no child falls behind due to insufficient resources or instruction. One participant described inclusion as *"all children in the same classroom and same school so they are just one"* (P1), while another emphasized that education becomes meaningful when *"children from different minorities and groups meet for the essence of education"* (P10). These insights reinforce the idea that inclusion promotes both equity and unity within the learning environment. All children, regardless of background or circumstance, should be held to the same high academic standards. Schools and educators should be held accountable for ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, meet these high expectations.

Theme 2: Fostering Equality in Education

Based on the information or data provided by the participants, it can be concluded that inclusive education entails accepting different types of learners in regular classes, embracing the philosophy that children, regardless of their age, size, shape, color, ability, or disability. For the participants, every child has the right to be included and have equal access to education. Some participants argue that inclusive education is a method of treating all students equally, regardless of whether they have special needs or disabilities, in order for them to be considered members of a class. Furthermore, participants reveal that they encourage both students and parents to understand and accept the concept that education has no boundaries. No child should be left behind in the midst of diversity. This view is clearly reflected in one participant's statement: *"For me the inclusive education is accepting different types of learners in regular classes giving equal opportunity, don't forget that, equal opportunity. Even the gifted who are in SPED or special education can be considered a person with special needs because they are intellectually high, but even in regular classes they are not average; they are actually advanced"* (P7).

This supports the study titled "Level of Teachers' Training in Inclusive Education and Their Sense of Efficacy" adapting the Department of Education's Order No. 72 on 2009 which states that inclusive education embraces the philosophy of accepting all children regardless of their race, size, shape, color,

ability, or disability. Inclusive education highlights the right of the kids to receive a suitable education in a regular or inclusive classroom setting (Masongsong, Lopres, Aguirre, Enriquez, Bautista, Niadas, & Virtusio, 2023).

Question 2: What inclusivity issue do you encounter in your classroom?

In terms of sharing and expressing what inclusive issues the participants encounter in their classrooms, two (2) unfolding themes were identified: (1) Acceptance, and (2) Heterogeneity.

Theme 1: The Power of Cultural and Religious Acceptance

Inclusive education, a concept that promotes learning environments in which all students, regardless of ability, background, or identity, feel welcomed, valued, and supported, has gained popularity in recent years. However, its implementation has proven difficult, particularly when confronted with cultural and religious traditions that hold opposing views on education, disability, and social roles. One of the issues identified by the participants is acceptance, which is strongly influenced by cultural norms. As one participant shared, *"Among the issues here is the acceptance. Culturally speaking that is interplayed, that is our norm as a Maranao… inclusive education is being practiced now because it's in the law… DepEd Order 46, s. 2021" (P7).* This response shows that while inclusive education is mandated through policy, cultural beliefs still affect how learners with disabilities, such as those who are deaf and mute, are accepted in regular classrooms.

Furthermore, economic inequality was also identified as a barrier to inclusive education. One participant stated, *"I have an economic inequality. Because we are a public school, we have lower classes like that" (P8).* This indicates that limited financial resources in public schools can hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices, particularly in addressing the diverse needs of learners.

Many cultures have historically assigned specific roles to individuals based on their gender, caste, or disability. These traditional roles restrict access to education or establish expectations that are contrary to inclusive values. Furthermore, cultural values can influence the priorities assigned to various subjects or learning styles. Some cultures, for example, may place a higher value on traditional skills or knowledge than on academic subjects considered more modern or Western. On the other hand, certain religious beliefs may justify the separation of students based on gender, faith, or social status. This may impede the development of inclusive classrooms in which students from various backgrounds interact and learn together.

Accordingly, when the values and teachings from various religions are integrated into an inclusive education approach, the result is a learning environment that respects differences, builds a deep understanding of diversity, and encourages students' holistic growth. However, in implementing this concept, it is important to maintain a balance between correct interpretation and contextual understanding of religious teachings. It is also important to recognize that there are variations in religious views and interpretations among different believers. Therefore, efforts to integrate religious values into inclusive education must be based on careful research and open interfaith dialogue (Pradana, Mahfud, & Priyanto, 2023).

Theme 2: Nurturing Heterogeneity in the Classroom

The participants' responses revealed that there are numerous issues with inclusivity in classrooms. Among these issues are unique learners with special needs and disabilities. The participants argued that in today's educational setting, teachers encounter a wide range of learners, including those from broken families, those suspected of being LGBTQI+, those traumatized by conflict or war, and learners from low-income families. According to the participants, acceptance is the most significant issue in implementing inclusive education in public schools. Many teachers, students, and even parents tend to overlook the primary goal of inclusion, which is to recognize and respect each child's right to belong and participate in regular classes.

This reality is evident in the experiences shared by the participants. One participant described the challenge of handling heterogeneous learning environments, stating, *"Based on my experience here in public school, there is a mix of different types of children. This is what we call heterogeneous learning. You really have a hard time because there is only one section, so the slow learners and fast learners are mixed together"* (P1). This response highlights the difficulty teachers face in addressing diverse learning needs within a single classroom setting. Similarly, another participant shared a personal experience of teaching learners with special needs, explaining, *"Way back in 2019, as a Grade 1 teacher, I had students who were siblings, all boys, and they had autism and ADHD. It was really hard to cater to the students, especially when there is something different. Until now, this school year, I also have a student whom I call a special child because he is really unique"* (P3). These narratives emphasize the complexity of inclusion and the need for adequate support for teachers handling learners with diverse conditions.

The best facilitator of school success is the recognition of the potential of each learner. An exemplary affirming environment is one in which everyone is equally valued. A related study implies that learners with special and diverse needs are provided opportunities for both expressive and receptive learning, where the dignity and uniqueness of each class member are respected, and diversity is actively embraced and celebrated. Thus, prioritizing the well-being of all learners in a pluralistic school community and responding to their needs is essential in creating a nurturing learning environment. An inclusive community can be engaging and affirming; however, it is the consistent nurturing and caring practices within the classroom that sustain these values (Raguindin, 2021).

Question 3: What is your role as a teacher in inclusive education?

Regarding the role of the participants as teachers implementing inclusive education. Three (3) themes were identified: (1) Role Model and Advocate, (2) Implement and Facilitate, and (3) Teacher as Parent.

Theme 1: Teachers Leading the Way to Inclusion

Teachers play a pivotal role in creating inclusive educational environments. They are more than just educators; they are role models, facilitators, guides, and advocates for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or challenges. Teachers establish a classroom atmosphere that values diversity and respects individual differences. This involves creating inclusive spaces, using inclusive language, and promoting a culture of acceptance and belonging. Teachers can tailor their teaching methods and materials

to meet the needs of all students. This may involve providing accommodation, modifications, or alternative assessments to ensure that all learners have equal access to education.

This perspective is supported by the participants' views on their roles in inclusive education. One participant emphasized the importance of behavior and safety in inclusive classrooms, stating, *"My role as a teacher in inclusive education is to promote positive behavior and create a safe and supportive learning environment"* (P8). This highlights the teacher's responsibility in fostering a classroom climate where all learners feel secure and valued. Another participant stressed the importance of teachers as role models, explaining, *"We are the model inside the classroom. They need to see that the teacher should not do something that will damage the character of teachers"* (P6). This response underscores the influence of teachers' actions and attitudes in shaping students' understanding of respect, inclusion, and professionalism.

As leaders in the classroom, teachers also advocate for policies and practices that support inclusive education. This may involve collaborating with school administrators, policymakers, and community organizations to promote equity and access. By leading the way toward inclusive education, teachers help create a more just, equitable, and fulfilling learning experience for all students.

Accordingly, teachers are fundamental to the achievement of inclusive schooling, which ensures that all students are recognized, respected, and supported in their learning. Their responsibilities extend beyond instruction, as they are expected to create inclusive classrooms, adapt teaching strategies, provide individualized support, collaborate with specialists, and facilitate the implementation of inclusive practices. When teachers fulfill their roles as advocates, they are more likely to break down barriers to learning, encourage diversity, and promote equity so that no student is left behind. As emphasized by Rashmi Shekh (2024), teachers' advocacy and commitment to inclusive education contribute significantly to building a more socially just and inclusive society.

Theme 2: Implementing and Facilitating Inclusive Education

Teachers play an important role in developing inclusive learning environments that meet the diverse needs of all students. Their responsibilities include understanding and addressing individual needs, creating inclusive classroom environments, collaborating with stakeholders, and promoting professional development. By actively embracing these roles, teachers can create inclusive classrooms in which all students can learn, grow, and reach their full potential.

This central role of teachers is strongly emphasized by the participants. One participant highlighted that teachers are the primary implementers of inclusive education, stating, *"It is very big because we as teachers are the implementers of the curriculum. If the teacher is not there, how can we apply education? How can we apply the lesson plan? All the trends in education, the teacher is the number one factor that should cater. They must protect the rights of children included in inclusive education. The teacher is also number one in promoting inclusive education no matter which division or community they belong to"* (P5). This response underscores the responsibility of teachers not only as instructors but also as protectors and advocates of children's rights within inclusive settings. Another participant reinforced the importance of equity in inclusive education by emphasizing that *"equal opportunity should be given to all types of learners, both in regular and special schools"* (P7), highlighting fairness as a fundamental principle of inclusion.

For Schuelka's (2018) report on implementing inclusive education, it requires school transformation and systems change. However, much of this reform is design-focused rather than resource-intensive. Inclusive education emphasizes that all children learn together in mainstream classrooms for most of the school day. This approach has shown positive effects on both academic achievement and social well-being for all learners and is more efficient and effective than segregated special schools or classrooms. Moreover, measuring the success of inclusive education should go beyond access and enrollment figures to include indicators of educational quality, learner outcomes, and lived experiences. Evaluating teaching practices is therefore a critical component of assessing inclusive education initiatives (Schuelka, 2018).

Theme 3: Teachers as Parental Figures

According to the participants' responses, teachers play multiple roles in implementing inclusive education. They are more than just mentors; they serve as role models, advocates, and motivators who guide students to become dedicated learners. Some participants emphasized the critical role of teachers as curriculum implementers and classroom facilitators, noting that they are among the most important pillars of education, particularly for learners in inclusive settings. Others described the teacher's role in more personal terms, highlighting the parental aspect of teaching. One participant explained, *"Well, role as a teacher here in school, you are not only a teacher, you really treat the student as your children with different needs. I'm handling 83 pupils now… it's hard sometimes, you just want to give up because 83 students—you can really encounter different habits there"* (P10). Another participant stressed the importance of understanding students' backgrounds and social interactions, stating, *"My role is to know my students' background and perceptions to each other's minority groups"* (P10). These experiences demonstrate that teachers in inclusive classrooms must balance instructional responsibilities with emotional support and cultural awareness, ensuring that all learners feel accepted, respected, and valued.

Question 4: What is the importance of inclusive education for learners in Marawi City?

As for the participants' view on the importance of inclusive education for learners in Marawi City, two (2) themes were identified: (1) Substantial and Essential, and (2) Awareness of Equal Opportunities.

Theme 1: Every Learner Matters

Inclusive education recognizes that students have unique learning styles and needs. It values and celebrates diversity in all its forms, including cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity. It promotes a culture of respect and tolerance, ensuring that all students feel safe, valued, and included. Inclusive education requires collaboration among teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. By working together, they can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students. This aligns with UNESCO's dialogue stating that *"Every learner matters and matters equally; this is what inclusion is about."* It is not an easy task. Inclusion calls for transformation, a paradigm shift in the philosophy and practice of education, moving away from a "one-size-fits-all" approach (UNESCO, 2024).

The participants highlighted the local context of inclusive education in BARMM. One participant emphasized the need for all learners to acquire foundational skills, stating, *"Is in BARMM, okay dapat lahat ng learners in BARMM kailangan dapat matuto, yung kailangan marunong magsulat at saka magbasa yun ang focus naming, yan ang project ng BARMM"* (P6). Another participant noted that while government

policies and advocacy initiatives promote inclusion, full implementation remains a challenge, explaining, *"It's very important, very substantial and essential because it's one that I like. When the word inclusive means so broad… we cannot say that Marawi City is a hundred percent inclusive education even though it is in the policies of the government, even it is in the advocates of BARMM that all children could not be left behind"* (P4). These insights illustrate both the importance of inclusive education in the region and the challenges of translating policy into practice.

Theme 2: Cultivating Awareness of Equal Opportunities in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is vital for fostering a more equitable and just society. It offers numerous benefits, both for individual students and for society as a whole. Inclusive classrooms provide students with opportunities to learn at their own pace and in ways that best suit their learning styles. This leads to improvement in academic outcomes, even for students with disabilities or from marginalized backgrounds. Participants pointed out that the importance of inclusive education for learners in Marawi City is substantial and essential. One participant emphasized that *"the importance of inclusive education here is no discrimination. That's the good thing because it's like here in elementary school, one section, so you don't have a choice, you have to mix the students"* (P1). Another participant noted that *"Inclusive education is very important because here in Marawi there are many children who are involved in inclusive education"* (P2). This is for the fact that inclusion means for everybody, which makes it a platform for uniting learners regardless of what they are, who they are, and where they come from. This aligns with the article promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in the classroom, which helps to ensure that each student is able to learn in an environment where all aspects of their identities are recognized and respected, and where they feel safe and secure (Watts, 2022).

2. Challenges encountered towards implementing Inclusive Education

This section discusses the challenges encountered by the participants while implementing inclusive education in their classrooms based on personal experience.

Question 1: In your experience, what are the biggest challenges you face in implementing an inclusive learning environment for all learners in your classroom?

Based on the participants' own experience, the biggest challenges they face in implementing an inclusive learning environment for all learners in a classroom, two (2) unfolding themes were identified: (1) Challenges of Coping Up, and (2) Limited Time and Resources.

Theme 1: Challenges of Inclusive Classrooms

Inclusive classrooms, while beneficial, present significant challenges. Teachers do not have enough training or experience to effectively support students with diverse needs. This leads to inadequate instruction, limited engagement, and a feeling of isolation for some students. Implementing inclusive education practices can be time-consuming and demanding, adding to teachers' already heavy workloads. Ensuring that all students feel included and supported while maintaining a positive classroom dynamic is difficult. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from schools, educators, policymakers, and concerned communities. This is in support of Cox's article on the challenges of inclusive education for students with disabilities, which states that implementing inclusive education has its challenges, including

lack of resources, lack of teacher preparation and training, attitudinal barriers, social stigma, and peer acceptance (Jordan Cox, 2023).

These challenges were echoed by the participants. One participant shared, *"In my experience in 32 years in teaching, the biggest challenges I've been facing—it's the same thing. That's why I teach in Grade 4 now, but even in Grade 4 there are still many children who don't know how to read. So now what I'm doing is I'm going back like Grade 1; I teach them to write because even in Grade 4 now, even in our Grade 6, there are children who can't read, can't write, their handwriting is like Grade 1"* (P6). Another participant highlighted additional challenges faced by learners, noting, *"Some of the learners are those who have trauma, some because of the war. Some of the learners also have burdens helping their families, so we have children who have become child laborers or who have become a watchman at home. That is one of the challenges that I have experienced"* (P4). These narratives illustrate the real-life difficulties teachers encounter in inclusive classrooms, including both academic and socio-emotional barriers, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support for both teachers and learners.

Theme 2: Implementing Inclusive Education with Limited Time and Resources

The participants claim that they have faced numerous remarkable challenges in implementing an inclusive environment for all learners in Marawi City. One teacher stated that in her 32 years of teaching, she has been challenged by students who struggle with reading even as they progress from one grade level to the next. Some teachers were challenged to encourage and keep their students in class due to the trauma they had experienced because of a complicated situation. Furthermore, some participants stated that the greatest challenge they face in implementing inclusive education is a lack of time and resources. One participant shared, *"I think my biggest challenge is the student's time consumption, which is strange because it takes time in giving instruction as you have to repeat it to him. I think he is like that, and then his learning style is different from most. The others can understand Maranao language, Filipino, but one student of mine can only understand English; she preferred English as the medium of instruction"* (P3). Another participant emphasized the challenge of insufficient materials, stating, *"The biggest challenge I faced in implementing an inclusive learning environment in my classroom is the lack of resources. Inclusive education requires appropriate resources, including specialized materials, cheap writing services, and assistive technologies"* (P8). These experiences illustrate that teachers in inclusive classrooms must navigate diverse learning styles, language barriers, and material limitations, often requiring additional time, effort, and creative strategies.

From Irumva's article, creating an inclusive classroom is a challenging yet essential goal. While limited resources and training can pose significant obstacles, small actions and collaborative efforts can make a substantial difference. By fostering a supportive culture, leveraging existing resources, investing in professional development, and engaging with the community, educators and stakeholders can work together to promote and implement inclusion, ensuring that all students can succeed and thrive (Irumva, 2024).

Question 2: Are there specific learning needs or disabilities that you find more challenging to address in your classroom? What are these?

Regarding the specific learning needs or disabilities that the participants find more challenging to address in their classroom, one (1) unfolding theme was identified: (1) Diversity among Disabled Learners.

Theme 1: The Diversity of Disabled Learners

Inclusive education aims to provide a quality education for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. However, it's important to recognize that "disabled learners" encompass a wide range of individuals with diverse needs and experiences. This diversity necessitates a multifaceted approach to inclusive education. The identified types of disabilities include physical disability, sensory disability, and autism spectrum disorders. It's essential to acknowledge this diversity and tailor educational approaches to meet the specific needs of each individual student. Inclusive education should be based on principles of equity, respect, and individualization to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

According to the participants, students with special needs or disabilities are more difficult to accommodate in the classroom. Some participants have met learners who were unable to walk normally, while others encountered students who were blind or nearsighted. Teachers cited these challenges as primary obstacles to implementing inclusion. Some participants also encountered autistic children, who require additional care and support, and noted that inattentive students are a common challenge in many public schools in Marawi. One participant shared a specific example, stating, *"There is one of our Grade 2 who was capable of walking but his foot is different. His foot also needed to stay on this… what is this? In the chair, so we are the one who will reach out just to cope up, participate, and then we can address what he needs to learn and to be participated in the activities for the learnings in the subject that needs to be taught to him"* (P4). Another participant recalled a past experience, noting, *"I don't have anything yet, the most challenging experience, but I can say maybe I think previous, many years in Grade 5 or Grade 3, I'm not sure of the specific, another teacher had experience with the child with special needs. Can't walk? It's like he has Polio, so the child is laughed at"* (P5). These narratives highlight the practical challenges teachers face in supporting students with physical disabilities, ensuring their participation, and addressing both academic and social barriers in the classroom.

In summary, an inclusive education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more inclusive. In other words, if they become better at educating all children in their communities. Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth, and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (Imaniah & Fitria, 2017).

Question 3: What resources or support do you feel are lacking in your school to effectively implement inclusive practices?

On the resources and support needed by the participants to effectively implement inclusive practices, one (1) unfolding theme was identified: (1), Government and School Supported Resources.

Theme 1: Investing in Inclusion through Government and School Support

When asked what resources or support their school lacks to effectively implement inclusive practices, some participants stated that most public schools in Marawi City require more resources, such as

digital TV screens, to enhance teaching and learning sessions. Another participant stated that teacher and parent trainings are necessary to brighten and motivate students. These statements conclude that the government should make an effort to promote inclusivity by providing adequate learning technologies and training for teachers and parents. Relating to the responses, this responsibility is enshrined in various policies and laws, including the Right to Education Act, 2009, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The government establishes special schools, integrated schools, and resource centers equipped with trained professionals to cater to the diverse needs of children with disabilities. Additionally, the government allocates funds for infrastructure, teacher training, and the development of inclusive education programs (Panjgotra, 2024).

The participants also shared personal experiences regarding resource support. One participant explained, *"In my own experience, the resource or support that I did for the children… we once gave to those who didn't have a ballpoint pen, we gave to those who didn't have a notebook. But now we can't implement that because there is MOE"* (P6). Another participant highlighted government interventions, noting, *"So, here mostly it is provided by the government. For example, the war that happened, so there is a lot of project intervention that helped even by the government and other linkages too. So, the government actually has resolutions for possibilities"* (P4). These experiences demonstrate both the challenges of resource provision at the school level and the ways government initiatives support inclusive education in Marawi City.

3. Practices in implementing Inclusive Education

This section discusses the current practices being implemented by the participants to cater classrooms with diverse types of learners.

Question 1: Can you describe some specific strategies or techniques you use to ensure all learners participate and learn in your classroom?

On the participants' description of some strategies or techniques they use to ensure all their learners participate in class, three (3) unfolding themes were identified: (1) Collaboration, and (3) Differentiated Instruction.

Theme 1: The Power of Collaboration in Inclusive Classrooms

Collaboration is a cornerstone of inclusive classrooms, fostering a sense of belonging, mutual support, and shared learning experiences. When students work together, they develop strong bonds and support systems. This can be particularly beneficial for students who may feel isolated or marginalized. Collaborative activities can accommodate students with diverse learning styles and abilities. When students work together, they feel empowered to contribute their ideas and perspectives, regardless of their background or abilities. By fostering collaboration in the classroom, teachers can create a more inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment for all students. In relation to this, collaborative learning, as noted by Sabrina Gates, has been shown to not only develop higher-level thinking skills in students but also boost their confidence and self-esteem. Group projects can maximize the educational experience by demonstrating the material while improving social and interpersonal skills. Students learn how to work with various types of learners and develop their leadership skills (Gates, 2018).

The participants emphasized the importance of collaboration in their own teaching practices. One participant stated, *"So, for me, collaboration, yes, collaboration is necessary because in collaboration there is to build respect and community within the classroom. So, there are activities that the children must collaborate with in the classroom or with the community, so you will give an activity that is not only in the four corners of your classroom but includes the community as well"* (P1). Another participant described specific collaborative strategies used in the classroom, sharing, *"Some specific strategies or techniques I do: the open-ended question so they can somehow answer, and then I also do… collaboration, collaborative learning, and then I also do peer tutors. I ask the weak ones to be partners, and then what else? I also do games because we all know that kids love playing, so they are playing while learning"* (P3). These examples illustrate how teachers actively implement collaborative strategies to enhance engagement, social development, and learning outcomes in inclusive classrooms.

Theme 2: Differentiated Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms

Regarding the specific strategies or techniques that participants use to ensure that all of their students participate and learn in their class, some stated that collaboration among concerned stakeholders is encouraged and used. Another participant stated that throughout her teaching career, she has used differentiated instruction in her classroom to keep students engaged and participating. Participants also believe that collaboration and differentiated instruction result in communication, which leads to smooth implementation. One participant explained, *"Differentiated the teaching strategies because that the difference between public school and private school. The public school, because the children are hetero, so there are children who are smart, there are children who are lacking, and even though we have sectioning— let's say Section 1, Section 2, and Section 3—even if he is placed in Section 1, there are still recommended ones because he is the principal's son, the supervisor's son, the superintendent's relative"* (P5). Another participant highlighted practical classroom strategies, stating, *"By catching their attention, by communicating before correcting them, by giving them interesting activities fitted to the topics, and by giving them time to discuss by group"* (P10).

This aligns with research done by Bushie, claiming that differentiated instruction is not a recipe for great teaching, but a process that integrates several core principles in instruction and learning. There is no single way to teach, and to differentiate means to offer a multitude of ways for students to learn. By providing students with choice, offering assignments that reflect the variance of learning styles, and assessing students regularly, decisive approaches to the delivery of a quality education can be nurtured. Differentiated instruction requires teachers to use their professional expertise and common sense to build upon their teaching methods, while continuously reflecting upon their practices as they develop self-efficacy (Bushie, 2015).

Question 2: How do you collaborate with parents, guardians, or other professionals to support learners with diverse needs?

Regarding how the participants collaborate with parents, guardians, or other professionals to support diverse needs of the learners, one (1) unfolding theme was identified: (1) Feedbacking.

Theme 1: Effective Feedback for Parents and Learners

In collaborating with parents, guardians, or other professionals to support learners with diverse needs, most of the participants noted feedback as their main response. For teachers, they provide feedback with concerned stakeholders to maintain transparency in communication. Participants stated that through feedback, they get to know more about their learners' backgrounds. This suggests that through constant communication with parents or guardians, teachers are able to improve and develop their knowledge and skills in promoting and implementing a healthy environment for all types of learners. One participant explained, *"So, that's by PTCA, all your concerned—as an adviser, as a teacher, say it, plan all the needs, what might be the problem being encountered, then you list, then after that call a PTCA meeting. Then not just only by the first day but quarterly to address the needs of the children"* (P4). Another participant highlighted the importance of building personal relationships with parents, stating, *"Maybe the contact with, who belongs here are the parents, right? You have a relationship with the parents because, like for example, if it's just a text, you can call, but when it's a PTA, you can also have them one on one. Okay, special mention first, then let parents come to me. Then aside from the child, you also have one on one with the parents. The growth of the child with specific needs will have a better process"* (P5).

Accordingly, studies in other countries suggest that teacher-parent collaboration is essential for teachers and parents to consult, undertake joint efforts, and share information in providing efficient and meaningful education for students with special needs. Teachers and parents need to collaborate to identify what areas of students' development need attention and determine together appropriate goals and objectives to achieve (Adams, Harris, & Jones, 2016).

Question 3: In your opinion, what are some successful practices currently being implemented in your school to promote inclusivity?

For the participants' own opinion, some successful practices currently being implemented in their designated school to promote inclusivity, one (1) theme was identified: (1) School Initiatives.

Theme 1: School-Wide Inclusive Practices

School initiatives are some of the most effective practices currently being implemented in public schools to promote inclusivity. According to the participants, the government is gradually but steadily moving toward promoting and implementing equality among students, granting them the right to attend regular classes regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the participants revealed their school's initiatives, such as child mapping or tracking of learners, constant communication with parents or guardians via personal meetings, and their commitment to keeping students enrolled in their schools. One participant highlighted the school's open-enrollment policy, stating, *"We don't reject enrollees, even non-readers, even if there are others, even if there are problematic people who don't want to be accepted, as if kicked out of a school. We accept balance from private school. Even though we have a student who is the daughter of his boss's maid, we still accept them"* (P5). Another participant shared a successful reading program, noting, *"One of our successful programs is the reading program. It started after the pandemic because during the pandemic, the child was not able to go to the school, so our non-readers increased. The principal said that every Thursday he gave us tens of children each so that we could really focus on reading as well as numeracy"* (P2).

For Mia Finch, a customer success manager, inclusive teaching and classrooms integrate special needs students with their peers to prepare them for adult life in an inclusive society where everyone is valued. Teachers strive to provide equal attention to every student using adaptation tools like accommodations and modifications, so disability doesn't cause disruptions in the class. Creating an inclusive classroom where every student is valued regardless of differences is an ongoing commitment. It entails offering equal opportunities, embracing differences, and empowering students to soar. To truly make this happen, teachers need support and resources (Finch, 2024).

4. Prospects and Enrichment Program aligned with Inclusive Education

This section discusses how the participants perceive inclusive education being implemented and their suggestions on how to enrich programs on inclusive education.

Question 1: What are some things you think would be helpful in making inclusive education more effective in Marawi City schools?

For the participants, some things they think would be helpful in making inclusive education more effective in schools around Marawi, one (1) theme was identified: (1) Awareness, Initiative, and Collaboration of Stakeholders.

Theme 1: Awareness, Initiative, and Collaboration of Stakeholders

In order to make inclusive education more effective in Marawi schools, participants emphasized the importance of raising stakeholders' awareness of the issue, taking small but significant steps to promote inclusivity, and collaborating to maintain support in implementing a healthy and inclusive environment for all types of learners. This leads to the conclusion that, through awareness, initiatives, and collaboration, no child will be denied an education, and that every unique learner has the right to be in classrooms regardless of what or who they are. In line with these, teachers create teaching-learning environments where all their learners can accomplish their best despite their capabilities, learning styles, and modes of interacting with their social and physical environments. Awareness of inclusivity in education must be very diverse and understand its significance towards making a good individual out of every learner, so that learners can diverge significantly in their abilities to pay attention, respond, and focus. Teachers are expected to be confident, innovative, skillful, competent, and career-oriented to handle any situation in an inclusive set-up. School management helps improve the functions of schools where children are ultimately learning. The school management also helps to plan, organize, lead, and implement performance-based teaching-learning processes in a school. For a collaborative and supportive school, parental involvement also plays a vital role when it comes to their children (Rendon, Gutierrez, Dangcalan, Eriman, Caabas, Villar, & Mohammad, 2023).

The participants highlighted the importance of continuous awareness and structured programs in schools. One participant noted, *"This is helpful, this is one (research study). This is one of the tools that make inclusivity, this is one way of helping us to be awaken, that all our children who are enrolled here in Matampay are inclusive in everything. So sometimes we forgot that, so remind, remind, remind is always should be"* (P4). Another participant emphasized program implementation and training, stating, *"Maybe it's better for the other teachers to have an idea with a program given by the division itself that maybe*

needs training. It's either the school heads or teachers that they can identify the programs about inclusive education, who should be to cater, who should be put in the SPED class" (P5). These experiences underscore the necessity of awareness campaigns, professional development, and clear program guidance to support the effective implementation of inclusive education in Marawi schools.

Question 2: If we were to develop an enrichment program for inclusive education in Marawi City, what are some key aspects you would like to see included?

If the participants were to develop an enrichment program for inclusive education in Marawi City, some key aspects they would like to include was identified by one (1) unfolding theme: (1) Building Bridges for Development.

Theme 1: Working Together for Inclusive Learning

When asked what key aspects they would like to see included in an enrichment program for inclusive education, the majority of participants said that all types of learners should be highlighted as the main target or purpose. They should all be included in the program and thus not overlooked or ignored. Participants also emphasized the importance of providing adequate training for both teachers and learners' parents, as this can help develop and implement inclusion in public schools. One participant highlighted the need to address sensitive issues such as sexual orientation and diversity, stating, *"Everything that you have given here should be included. Mostly, this LGBTQI+ should be emphasized and more emphasized to the like us, not only us, but also the parents and the people of Marawi because this is very sensitive, right? So as a human, we are all equal, so this is what I like to emphasize. This cannot be left behind; they are also human, they have rights, they have feelings, they should belong"* (P4). Another participant emphasized the need for training and structured support, stating, *"I think that's what I said earlier, that there should be training for everybody. It's like awareness, and after awareness, maybe for all the teachers they give, perhaps by school, there are elected teachers who can cater to the children who enroll with special needs"* (P5).

Inclusive education is a pedagogical philosophy that goes beyond simply providing access to education for all students. It encompasses a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning that prioritizes equity and celebrates diversity in all its forms. At its core, inclusive education recognizes that every student is unique and brings their own set of strengths, challenges, and perspectives to the learning environment (Kavita Roy, 2023). Ultimately, the goal of inclusive education is to ensure that every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential and participate fully in society. By embracing diversity, promoting equity, and fostering inclusion, inclusive education not only benefits individual students, but also contributes to a more just and equitable society as a whole.

Question 3: What specific areas of knowledge or skills do you think would be most beneficial for you to learn through an enrichment program?

As for the participants' prospects on what specific areas of knowledge or skills they think would be most beneficial for them to learn through enrichment program, one (1) unfolding theme was identified: (1) Action and Participation.

Theme 1: Action and Participation

Participants believe that action and participation are the most effective ways to learn specific knowledge or skills through an enrichment program. According to the participants, studies on inclusive education can help the government and schools determine what is required to make inclusion a success. Participants also stated that engagement and participation help teachers learn how to be more effective and promote inclusivity in their classrooms. One participant emphasized the importance of enrichment programs for marginalized groups, stating, *"So, like this what you did, making studies about it, so this is one of the enrichment programs. Also, some orientations, especially to emphasize the bullet word like this LGBTQI+, with special needs, with disabilities—they belong. So it is really necessary at that moment to have enrichment programs so that they will feel that they are valued, they belong, and also they have rights to be included in schools"* (P4). Another participant noted the need for teacher awareness, stating, *"Not all teachers are aware of inclusive education because there are even teachers who, when you ask, what exactly is inclusive education? So if the teachers were aware of all these areas, the flow of the Marawi City Division program would be better"* (P5).

Accordingly, a culture of inclusion in education requires a shared set of assumptions and beliefs among policymakers and senior staff at the national, district, and school level that value differences, believe in collaboration, and are committed to offering educational opportunities to all students (Ainscow, Chapman, & Hadfield, 2020). There is also evidence that school-to-school collaboration can strengthen the capacity of individual organizations to respond to learner diversity (Muijs, Ainscow, Chapman, & West, 2011). Specifically, collaboration between schools can help to reduce the polarization of schools, to the particular benefit of those students who are marginalized at the edges of the system. In addition, there is evidence that when schools seek to develop more collaborative ways of working, this can have an impact on how teachers perceive themselves and their work.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that inclusive education in Marawi City public elementary schools revealed a complex landscape of practices, challenges, and prospects. While teachers demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity, several challenges impeded their efforts. Public elementary school teachers in Marawi City face significant obstacles in implementing inclusive education. These challenges include lack of training and awareness, as well as negative attitudes or biases toward learners from various backgrounds and characteristics. In addition, public school teachers revealed that societal, religious, and cultural barriers among students contribute to the difficulty of implementing inclusion in classrooms. Despite these obstacles, teachers are working to implement inclusive practices by providing differentiated instruction or accommodations, collaborating with parents, guardians, and colleagues, and creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment for all types of learners. By addressing these challenges, Marawi City can build a more inclusive and equitable educational system that benefits all concerned stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The finding of the study recommends promoting inclusive education, policymakers should allocate sufficient resources for instructional materials, assistive technology, and teacher training to support diverse

learners effectively. Collaboration among educators, parents, and stakeholders is essential to fostering shared responsibility and ensuring the sustainability of inclusive practices. Implementing an inclusive curriculum that respects cultural and linguistic diversity can create equitable learning opportunities for all students. Additionally, investing in teacher training enhances educators' capacity to implement inclusive strategies confidently. Schools should adopt inclusive classroom practices to encourage diverse perspectives, critical thinking, and social cohesion while fostering an inclusive school culture that values and respects all students. Raising community awareness and advocating for systemic changes can help address challenges such as inadequate resources and negative perceptions of inclusiveness. By strengthening these key areas, education systems can become more equitable, supportive, and empowering for all learners.

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