

# Inclusive Practices: A Mixed Methods Inquiry into Junior High School Teachers' Experiences with Learners with Disabilities

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## ABSTRACT

Learners with disabilities (LWDs) continue to experience barriers to equitable education in mainstream classrooms due to teachers' limited training, insufficient resources, and persistent social stigma. These conditions challenge the realization of inclusive education policies such as Republic Act 11650 in the Philippines. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences and inclusive practices of selected Junior High School teachers in shaping just, equitable, and democratic classrooms for learners with disabilities. Using a sequential exploratory mixed methods design, the study first employed qualitative interviews with eight purposively selected teachers, followed by the development and pilot testing of a quantitative instrument grounded in the qualitative themes. Thematic analysis and reliability testing (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.731$ ) were conducted to ensure validity and internal consistency. Findings revealed that teachers foster inclusivity through collaboration, differentiated instruction, peer support, and reflective practice despite lacking formal training in special needs education. They encountered emotional and behavioral challenges but demonstrated patience, adaptability, and empathy in managing diversity. Dialogical learning and praxis emerged as central to cultivating students' critical consciousness, while advocacy practices reinforced empathy, respect, and social responsibility among learners. The study confirmed that inclusive teaching is a transformative process shaped by teachers' continuous reflection and emotional engagement. The study concludes that critical pedagogy effectively informs inclusive classroom practices by integrating reflection, dialogue, and action. Its implications emphasize the need for sustained professional development in inclusive education and stronger institutional support for teachers. Future research is recommended to expand the model across diverse school settings and to further validate the developed instrument through confirmatory factor analysis and large-scale implementation.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Learners with Disabilities, Sequential Exploratory Design, Purposive Sampling, Professional Development

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers, essentially as beacons of light to every learner, face obstacles in mixed-ability classrooms: lack of knowledge and awareness about inclusion, insufficient training, inadequate selection of teaching aids, and learning and psychological issues among students (Siddiqui et al., 2021). With these, unfair conditions in mainstream classrooms among learners with disabilities (LWDs), non-disabled peers, and untrained special needs educators continue to challenge the implementation of Special Needs Education nowadays. LWDs still

encounter social barriers, such as stigma, discrimination or lack of understanding from their peers and teachers (Inclusive Perspectives in Primary Education, 2021).

Studies done in Zimbabwe, Africa, and Kenya reveal that there are impending issues restraining functional implementation of inclusive education as emphasized that educators lack of deeper understanding of the ideals of inclusive education along with their negative attitudes to LWDs, the shortage of critical resources, and disability friendly institutional environments (Oats & Oats, 2022; Mantey, 2017; and Zinahwa, 2020).

In the Philippines, a study by Cayabyab (2023) found out and further emphasized that generally in Region 1 inclusive education was 'moderately implemented'. This hints that there are implementation gaps in this area. This jeopardizes the implementation of Republic Act 11650 instituting a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities in support of inclusive education. Furthermore, according to Sumayang, et al, (2022) teachers continue to have negative attitudes towards mainstreaming and still experience various challenges in handling a mainstream classroom.

Unfair conditions in an inclusive classroom hamper learning (Atmaca, 2021). Furthermore, there was a gap on researches on inclusive education implementation and conducting this research may address its current pressing issue at the basic level which is in the classroom. As Special Needs Education teachers and advocates of holistic learning, the researchers had a strong urge to make mainstream classrooms inclusive.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lied in its potential to inform both global and local educational practices by examining the strategies employed by mainstream junior high school teachers in integrating learners with disabilities into general education classrooms. At the global level, inclusive education continues to be recognized as a fundamental human right, supported by initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes equitable and inclusive education for all (United Nations, 2015). The findings of this study contributed to policy development and curriculum design by providing insights into teachers' experiences and practices in working with LWDs.

At the local level, the study provided valuable perspectives on the realities of Philippine classrooms, where the inclusion of LWDs is a growing priority despite limited resources and varying levels of teacher preparedness. By exploring teachers' lived experiences, the study informed the design of more effective training programs, guide resource allocation, and promote the creation of supportive, democratic, and inclusive educational environments for learners with disabilities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This research explored the lived experiences of selected JHS teachers in their pursuit of inclusivity as they handle learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the practices of selected JHS teachers in shaping a just, equitable, and democratic inclusive classroom in terms of; Critical consciousness; Dialogical learning; Praxis; and Advocacy;
2. To develop a tool for the practices of selected JHS teachers in shaping a just, equitable, and democratic inclusive classroom;
3. To determine the validity result of the developed tool on the practices of selected JHS teachers in shaping a just, equitable, and democratic inclusive classroom; and,
4. To determine the level of the critical consciousness, dialogical learning, praxis and advocacy.

### **Assumptions**

This study assumed that the lived experiences of JHS teachers in their journey toward inclusivity as they handle LWDs will be influenced by their teaching practices, the diverse needs of learners, and the broader social and

educational contexts in which they will operate. It also assumed that teachers' experiences in promoting democratic inclusive classrooms will be shaped by their critical consciousness of diversity, their engagement in dialogical learning processes, and their application of praxis, which integrates theory and action to promote transformative learning. Furthermore, the study assumed that JHS teachers will play a central role in fostering learners' advocacy for inclusive education and influencing their attitudes toward equity and social justice.

### Theoretical Construct

This study was anchored in Critical Pedagogy, a theory of education introduced by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). Critical Pedagogy emphasizes the importance of fostering critical consciousness, dialogical learning, praxis, and empowerment within educational contexts. It asserts that education should not only deliver knowledge but also empower learners to critically analyze and challenge oppressive social structures and systems of inequity. The present study was aligned with Freire's framework by emphasizing the role of teachers in nurturing critical consciousness, practicing dialogical methods, and applying praxis to create democratic and inclusive classrooms.

### Theoretical Paradigm

This study was drawn upon Critical Pedagogy as its theoretical paradigm. The variables within this framework include critical consciousness, which involves understanding power dynamics and inequities; dialogical learning, which emphasizes knowledge construction through dialogue and reflection; praxis, which integrates theory and action for transformative change; and empowerment, which enables learners to advocate for equity and justice. Through these variables, critical pedagogy aimed to transform learners into active agents of change, thereby contributing to the creation of equitable and democratic educational environments (Budnyk, 2023).

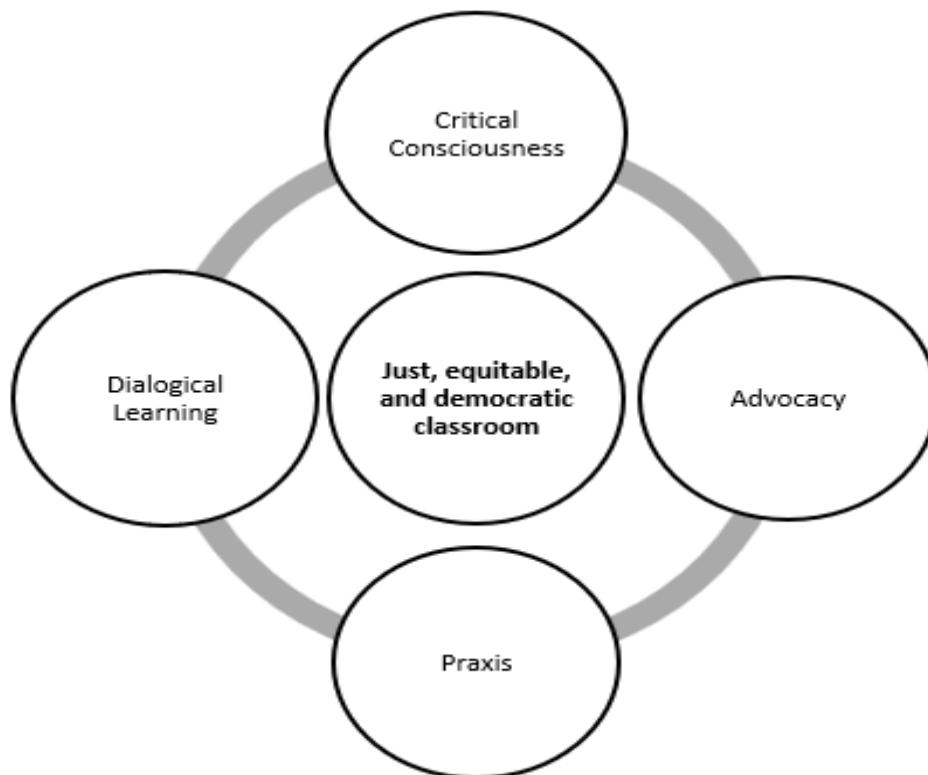


Figure 1.0 The Conceptual Paradigm

Cause-and-effect connections within critical pedagogy theory are complex and multifaceted. However, the overarching goal is to create learning environments that foster critical consciousness, dialogue, and action, leading to individual and collective empowerment and the pursuit of social justice. By engaging learners in critical inquiry, reflection, and activism, critical pedagogy seeks to address the root causes of social inequalities and promote more equitable and democratic societies.

Critical Pedagogy support the current study by offering a theoretical framework that emphasizes critical consciousness, dialogical learning, praxis, and empowerment, all of which were central to shaping a just, equitable, and democratic inclusive classroom. By fostering critical consciousness, teachers were encouraged to reflect on and challenge the power dynamics and inequalities within their classroom, helping them create a more inclusive learning environment for all students, including those with disabilities. Dialogical learning promotes an interactive and collaborative approach, where both teachers and students engage in meaningful discussions that value diverse perspectives. Praxis, the integration of reflection and action, guides teachers in not only theorizing about inclusive education but also taking concrete steps to implement it. Finally, the focus on empowerment aligns with the study's goal of developing students' advocacy for inclusivity, encouraging teachers to help learners critically engage with social issues and actively participate in the construction of a democratic classroom. Through these principles, Critical Pedagogy provides both a lens and a set of strategies for understanding and promoting inclusive, participatory education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the Research Design, Locale of the Study, Sample and Sampling Techniques, Data Gathering Procedures, Data Analysis and Interpretation, Research Instrument, Trustworthiness of the Study, and Ethical Considerations.

### **Research Design**

This study employed a sequential exploratory design, a type of mixed methods approach that begins with a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase. The qualitative phase was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, while the quantitative phase was designed to extend and validate these findings across a broader group of respondents (Agyeiwaah, 2022; Munce, Guetterman, & Jaglal, 2021).

In this design, qualitative data were first collected and analyzed to generate key themes and constructs. These themes then informed the development of the quantitative instrument, ensuring that the survey items were grounded in participants' actual experiences. This approach enhances the rigor of the study by linking rich, contextual insights with measurable patterns, thereby strengthening both the validity and explanatory power of the research (Munce et al., 2021; Agyeiwaah, 2022).

### **Locale of the Study**

The study was conducted in a public secondary school located in the municipality of Kiamba, Sarangani Province. The school serves approximately 2,500 to 3,300 learners from eight (8) barangays. It also functions as a receiving institution for learners with disabilities (LWDs) coming from a nearby elementary SPED Center.

Notably, all LWDs transitioning from the SPED Center are integrated into mainstream classrooms. Despite this inclusive setup, none of the faculty members have formal training in Special Needs Education (SNED), making the context particularly relevant for examining teachers' experiences in inclusive education.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

This study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are deliberately selected based on criteria aligned with the research objectives (Stewart, 2024). This approach ensured that only individuals with direct and relevant experience in handling learners with disabilities were included.

### **Qualitative Phase**

A total of eight (8) Junior High School teachers participated in the in-depth interviews. The inclusion criteria required participants to be: (1) Junior High School teachers in a public secondary school, and (2) currently handling learners with disabilities (LWDs) in mainstream classrooms.

Teachers who did not meet these criteria, including those from other grade levels or those without experience teaching LWDs, were excluded.

The sample size of eight participants is considered appropriate for qualitative inquiry, particularly in phenomenological and exploratory studies, where the goal is depth rather than breadth. More importantly, data saturation was achieved during the analysis. Saturation was reached when no new themes, patterns, or significant insights emerged from subsequent interviews, indicating that the collected data were sufficient to comprehensively capture the participants' experiences. This strengthens the credibility and adequacy of the qualitative findings.

### **Quantitative Phase**

For the quantitative phase, thirty (200) respondents were selected to answer the researcher-developed questionnaire. The sample size was deemed sufficient for preliminary quantitative validation, as it allowed for the identification of patterns and trends related to the themes generated in the qualitative phase.

The integration of qualitative depth and quantitative support aligns with the principles of mixed methods research, ensuring that findings are both contextually grounded and empirically supported.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

In the conceptualization phase, the researchers defined the research questions, objectives, and scope of the study. This process helped them in shaping the overall direction of the study and ensured that the data collection aligned with the research goals. Following this, the ethics review and approval was a crucial step to ensure that the study adhered to ethical guidelines. This involved submitting a detailed research plan to the Holy Cross of Davao College (HCDC) Ethics Review Committee, which reviewed the study for any potential risks to participants and ensured that informed consent, confidentiality, and other ethical considerations were properly addressed. Obtaining ethics approval was vital to protecting participants' rights and ensuring the study's integrity.

The endorsement of the Graduate School Dean and Research Adviser will be an essential part of the research process, providing academic validation and support for the study. Subsequently, a permission letter approved by the Schools Division Superintendent of Sarangani Province was obtained to conduct the research within the school under their jurisdiction. This permission granted formal approval to access the school, collect data from JHS teachers, and ensured that the study complied with local educational policies and regulations. Both endorsements and permissions was crucial for the ethical and logistical execution of the research.

Initially, informed consent was given to the participants of the study. Selected JHS teachers gave their schedules on their vacant time for us to interview them. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable, respectful environment, with each teacher given the opportunity to share their thoughts on key topics such as critical consciousness, dialogical learning, praxis, empowerment, and inclusive practices. The researchers recorded the whole interview using my mobile phone with their consent. Token of appreciation was given to the respective interviewees for their effort on putting their hearts to answer the questions thrown. The data gathered from these interviews provided rich, qualitative insights into the teachers' lived experiences in shaping a just and democratic classroom. It was retrieved accordingly.

The gathered responses from the participants of the study were subjected to transcription and translation. From the organized data, coding was be undertaken and themes should be generated.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

To analyzed the gathered data using thematic analysis, this six-step process should be followed to also helped avoid confirmation bias when formulating my analysis (Caulfield, 2023; Creswell, 2014): (1) Begun by thoroughly reading the data to become familiar with it and note initial impressions. (2) Generated initial codes by identifying key features relevant to my research questions. (3) Group the codes into broader themes, looking for patterns across the data. (4) After reviewing these themes for accuracy and coherence, the researchers refined and defined them clearly. (5) Finally, the researchers wrote the report, (6) presented the themes and supported

them with direct quotes from the data and relevant literature from distinguished authors. This process helped us uncover meaningful insights from the data. The survey questionnaire was tested for its validity and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha.

### **Research Instrument**

The researchers utilized semi-structured interview guide as research instrument to gather the relevant data and responses of the participants for the in-depth interview. A semi-structured interview guide is commonly used in qualitative research to allow for flexibility while maintaining focus on key topics (Kallio et al., 2016). To establish the validity, the researchers submitted the interview guide questionnaire to expert validators. Revisions were made based on their feedback. A survey questionnaire was developed based on the results of the qualitative phase and was tested for its validity and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study was strictly adhered to ethical principles to ensure the well-being of participants and maintain the integrity of the research process. Prior to participation, all individuals were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the study. Clear details about their rights will be provided, emphasizing that they will be free to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Participation was entirely voluntary, based on the participants' informed decision without coercion.

Confidentiality and anonymity was prioritized. Personal identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms were used in place of real names to maintain privacy. The collected data were securely stored, with access restricted to the researcher alone. Participants were assured that their responses will remain anonymous and untraceable in reports or publications. Interviews were conducted in a respectful and comfortable environment, allowing participants to share their perspectives freely.

Before data collection, the study was submitted to the Ethics Review Committee of the Holy Cross of Davao College (HCDC) for review and approval. The study was designed with the principle of non-maleficence, ensuring that no harm or distress will be caused to participants, while also upholding beneficence by seeking to generate valuable insights to improve inclusive education practices. Cultural sensitivity was observed by respecting the local social and educational context of the Philippines throughout the research process.

## **RESULTS**

This chapter presents the findings of the study, including a modified paradigm of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy, integrating emergent themes derived from the lived experiences of Junior High School (JHS) teachers. The modification highlights how Freire's core elements—dialogue, critical consciousness, praxis, and transformation—manifest in inclusive classroom contexts. Parallel themes emerged, reflecting how teachers operationalize democratic and inclusive principles in practice.

### **Themes and Subthemes**

Analysis revealed that teachers' practices in fostering just, equitable, democratic, and inclusive classrooms were grounded in adaptive pedagogy, relational teaching, and reflective practice. Teachers consistently emphasized the importance of supportive strategies to address both behavioral and emotional challenges, highlighting patience and flexibility as essential to effective classroom management.

A recurring pattern across narratives was the integration of inclusion through peer relationships and collaborative engagement, enabling learners—particularly those with disabilities—to feel valued and supported. Teachers also demonstrated strong reflective awareness, continuously evaluating their emotional responses and pedagogical decisions. This aligns with Freirean notions of teaching as a reflective and transformative act rather than a purely technical process.

Furthermore, teachers actively promoted critical consciousness by embedding values education, encouraging respect for diversity, and addressing social issues such as bullying and discrimination. Their role extended beyond content delivery toward shaping learners' social and ethical development.

Dialogical learning emerged as a central pedagogical approach, characterized by collaboration, shared meaning-making, and real-life application of knowledge. Teachers functioned as facilitators, guiding discussions while ensuring inclusive participation. Through this process, students developed not only academic understanding but also empathy, self-expression, and social responsibility.

The application of praxis—the integration of reflection and action—was evident in teachers' efforts to connect lessons to students' lived experiences. This resulted in observable behavioral transformations, including increased cooperation, respect, and advocacy for inclusive values. A positive classroom climate, reinforced through peer support and constructive feedback, further strengthened students' engagement and sense of belonging.

### **Viewpoints and Standpoints**

The research process required sustained engagement with participants' narratives, revealing the complexity of implementing inclusive and democratic pedagogy. Teachers' experiences underscored that fostering such environments involves not only instructional strategies but also emotional labor, ethical commitment, and contextual responsiveness.

Through careful interpretation, the study highlights that inclusive teaching is inherently multidimensional, involving cognitive, social, and affective domains. The findings reinforce the idea that education serves as a transformative space where learners develop not only academic competencies but also critical awareness and social responsibility.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

This chapter interprets the findings in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy, focusing on the themes of (1) just, equitable, and democratic classrooms, (2) critical consciousness, (3) dialogical learning, (4) praxis, and (5) advocacy.

### **Just, Equitable, and Democratic Classroom**

The findings affirm that inclusive classrooms are shaped by differentiated instruction, emotional responsiveness, and reflective teaching practices. Teachers' use of individualized and differentiated strategies aligns with recent studies emphasizing adaptive pedagogy as essential in addressing learner diversity (e.g., Priyanka, 2024; Saif et al., 2024). These practices reflect Freire's principle of humanizing education, where learners are treated as unique individuals rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

However, the study also reveals tensions in balancing diverse learner needs, particularly in managing behavioral and emotional challenges. Consistent with literature on teacher burnout and inclusive education (e.g., Bettine et al., 2019), participants reported emotional strain and the need for sustained patience. This highlights that inclusion is not merely a pedagogical issue but also an institutional and professional support concern.

Peer relationships emerged as a critical mechanism for inclusion, supporting findings that collaborative environments reduce bullying and enhance social integration (Hughes & Greenhough, 2020). These practices embody Freire's vision of education as a collective and relational process, where learning occurs through shared experiences.

Teacher reflection further reinforces the concept of praxis, as educators continuously evaluate and adapt their practices. This aligns with studies (Moreno & Pinto, 2020) emphasizing reflective teaching as central to effective inclusive education.

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## Critical Consciousness

The development of critical consciousness was evident in teachers' efforts to integrate values education, diversity awareness, and anti-bullying practices. These findings strongly align with Freire's notion of *conscientization*, where learners become aware of social inequalities and develop the capacity to challenge them.

Collaborative strategies such as peer tutoring and group work facilitated inclusive participation and mirrored democratic classroom ideals (Hernandez & Pena, 2020; Robinson & Wright, 2022). However, persistent instances of discrimination indicate that fostering critical consciousness is an ongoing process requiring deliberate and sustained effort (Lopez et al., 2024).

Importantly, teachers extended learning beyond academic content by embedding ethical and social values. This supports contemporary perspectives that education must address both cognitive and moral development (Martins, 2024), reinforcing Freire's argument that education is inherently political and value-laden.

## Dialogical Learning

The prominence of dialogical learning in the findings directly reflects Freire's assertion that dialogue is the foundation of meaningful education. Teachers facilitated interactive, collaborative, and reflective learning environments, enabling students to co-construct knowledge.

Consistent with existing literature (Alexander, 2021; Gergen et al., 2021), dialogical practices enhanced engagement and critical thinking. The integration of real-life contexts further strengthened learning relevance, supporting the idea that knowledge must be grounded in learners' lived experiences.

Nevertheless, challenges in student participation—particularly among learners with disabilities—highlight structural barriers to full inclusion. While strategies such as guided questioning and peer support were effective, the findings suggest the need for more targeted scaffolding mechanisms to ensure equitable participation.

Overall, dialogical learning contributed to the development of belonging, equality, and mutual respect, key elements of democratic education.

## Praxis

The study provides strong evidence of praxis through the integration of reflection, action, and real-world application. Teachers connected lessons to students' lived experiences, fostering deeper engagement and critical reflection (Malureanu & Enachi-Vasluianu, 2021).

This alignment between theory and practice resulted in observable behavioral transformation, including increased empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility. These outcomes support literature emphasizing praxis as a driver of both cognitive and social development (Kolber, 2024).

Collaborative learning further reinforced praxis by promoting shared responsibility and collective growth (Mahoney & Hall, 2020). The resulting positive classroom climate demonstrates how inclusive practices can transform not only individual learners but also the broader classroom culture.

## Advocacy

Advocacy emerged as a culminating outcome of inclusive and democratic practices. Teachers fostered advocacy through positive reinforcement, peer support, and awareness-building, enabling students to internalize values of respect and inclusion.

Consistent with recent studies (Lavanga & Sulla, 2024; Ferguson-Patrick, 2020), positive feedback and collaborative engagement strengthened students' self-worth and empathy. These practices align with Freire's vision of education as a means of empowering individuals to become active agents of social change.

Despite challenges in behavior management and persistent instances of bullying, teachers’ consistent efforts to model respect and inclusivity contributed to a supportive learning environment. This highlights that advocacy is not a one-time outcome but a continuous, practice-based process embedded in daily classroom interactions.

### Pilot Test Results and Reliability Analysis

To determine the internal consistency and reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted among thirty (30) respondents who were not part of the main study. The research instrument comprised twenty-one (21) items categorized under four constructs: *Critical Consciousness*, *Dialogical Learning*, *Praxis*, and *Advocacy*. The gathered data were analyzed using **Cronbach’s Alpha**, a widely recognized reliability coefficient that measures the internal consistency of scale items (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

**Table 1. Reliability Statistics of the Pilot-Tested Instrument**

Category	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items	Interpretation
Overall Instrument	0.731	21	Acceptable Reliability

As shown in Table 1, the overall Cronbach’s Alpha value of **0.731** indicates that the instrument demonstrates **acceptable internal consistency**. According to George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach’s Alpha values above 0.70 are considered acceptable for research instruments in the social sciences. This result implies that the scale items are sufficiently reliable and consistent in measuring the intended constructs.

**Table 2. Item-Total Statistics of the Pilot Test**

Construct	Corrected Item-Total Correlation Range	Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted	Decision
Critical Consciousness	-0.043 to 0.358	0.716–0.750	Accepted
Dialogical Learning	0.069 to 0.560	0.701–0.738	Accepted
Praxis	0.177 to 0.730	0.701–0.772	Accepted
Advocacy	0.043 to 0.667	0.708–0.742	Accepted

Table 2 presents the reliability coefficients for each construct. The corrected item-total correlations ranged from **-0.043 to 0.730**, indicating that most items were positively correlated with the overall scale, while a few items showed weaker correlations. Despite minor variations, the “Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted” values revealed that no item’s removal would substantially improve reliability. Therefore, all twenty-one (21) items were **retained** for the main study due to their theoretical and conceptual alignment with the research framework.

### Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Results

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was conducted to identify the underlying factor structure of the 19-item instrument measuring Critical Consciousness (CC), Dialogical Learning (DL), Praxis (P), and Advocacy (A). Prior to analysis, sampling adequacy and data suitability were confirmed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy yielded a value of .739, indicating that the sample was adequate for factor analysis. Moreover, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant,  $\chi^2(210) = 936.261$ ,  $p < .001$ , signifying that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and therefore suitable for factor extraction.

Initial results revealed that four components had eigenvalues greater than 1, collectively accounting for 54.328% of the total variance, which meets the acceptable level for social science research. The Rotated Component Matrix initially showed that most items loaded strongly on their intended components, ranging from .546 to .899. However, three items—CC6, P5, and A2—did not load adequately or formed isolated components, suggesting weak relationships with their respective constructs. Therefore, these items were deleted from the instrument.

The authors repeated the EFA without the deleted items to obtain a more refined and stable factor structure. The reanalysis confirmed a clean four-factor solution corresponding to the theoretical framework of the study. The first factor, Dialogical Learning (DL), consisted of five items (DL1–DL5) with high loadings ranging from .869 to .899. The second factor, Praxis (P), included four items (P1–P4) with loadings from .808 to .899. The third factor, Critical Consciousness (CC), was represented by five items (CC1–CC5) with loadings between .568 and .769. Finally, the fourth factor, Advocacy (A), contained four items (A1, A3, A4, and A5) with loadings ranging from .708 to .804.

All retained items exceeded the minimum acceptable loading of .50, demonstrating strong relationships between the indicators and their respective constructs. The four-factor model was theoretically sound and empirically supported, validating the internal structure of the instrument. This refined version is thus considered reliable for subsequent confirmatory analysis or further application in related studies.

**Table 1. EFA Results**

Items	1	2	3	4
<b>Critical Consciousness</b>				
CC1	.745			
CC2	.568			
CC3	.725			
CC4	.675			
CC5	.769			
<b>Dialogical Learning</b>				
DL1		.881		
DL2		.899		
DL3		.871		
DL4		.878		
DL5		.869		
<b>Praxis</b>				
P1			.828	
P2			.808	
P3			.899	
P4			.882	
<b>Advocacy</b>				
A1				.777
A3				.765
A4				.708
A5				.804

**Descriptive Analysis**

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of the four measured variables—Critical Consciousness, Dialogical Learning, Praxis, and Advocacy. Results revealed that the respondents exhibited an overall high to very high level across all dimensions, indicating that the participants strongly demonstrated the intended competencies and behaviors represented by each construct.

**Table 2. Descriptive Table**

Variables	N 400	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Critical Consciousness		0.609	4.37	Very High
Dialogical Learning		0.783	4.14	High
Praxis		0.660	4.35	Very High
Advocacy		1.236	3.75	High

Among the four variables, Critical Consciousness obtained the highest mean score of 4.37 (SD = 0.609), interpreted as Very High. This suggests that participants consistently reflect on social realities, recognize injustices, and display awareness of transformative action. Close to this result, Praxis also achieved a Very High descriptive level with a mean of 4.35 (SD = 0.660), implying that respondents effectively integrate reflection and action in their educational practices, aligning theory with application.

Meanwhile, Dialogical Learning yielded a mean of 4.14 (SD = 0.783), rated as High, which means that participants actively engage in meaningful discussions, value mutual respect, and promote shared learning experiences, though with slightly less intensity compared to critical awareness and praxis. Lastly, Advocacy received the lowest mean score of 3.75 (SD = 1.236), yet still within the High descriptive level. This indicates that while respondents demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting equity and positive social change, advocacy initiatives may be expressed less consistently than reflective or dialogical practices.

Overall, the findings denote that respondents possess strong levels of critical awareness, reflective action, dialogical engagement, and advocacy, all of which contribute to the holistic realization of transformative education. The very high means in Critical Consciousness and Praxis particularly highlight the participants' readiness to translate awareness into meaningful educational practice.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The pilot test results demonstrate that the overall instrument achieved an **acceptable reliability level ( $\alpha = 0.731$ )**, validating its internal consistency and suitability for formal data collection. The *Praxis* construct yielded the strongest internal consistency among all categories, suggesting that respondents perceived this dimension most cohesively. Although some items under *Critical Consciousness* exhibited lower correlations, they remained theoretically significant for measuring the construct. Overall, the instrument was deemed reliable for capturing the multidimensional aspects of *Critical Consciousness*, *Dialogical Learning*, *Praxis*, and *Advocacy* within the study's conceptual model.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

This study sought to explore the lived experiences and inclusive practices of Junior High School (JHS) teachers in shaping just, equitable, and democratic classrooms for learners with disabilities (LWDs), guided by Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy. Using a sequential exploratory mixed methods design, the study integrated qualitative insights and quantitative validation to construct a framework that reflects teachers' real-world experiences and their commitment to inclusive education.

The findings revealed that inclusive teaching in mainstream classrooms is both a pedagogical and moral endeavor. Teachers demonstrated a deep sense of responsibility and compassion, employing differentiated instruction, peer collaboration, positive reinforcement, and reflective practice to address the diverse needs of LWDs. Despite the absence of formal training in Special Needs Education (SNED), teachers continuously adapted, learned, and innovated to create learning environments where all students could participate and succeed. Their narratives embodied the key principles of critical pedagogy—critical consciousness, dialogical learning, praxis, and advocacy—which collectively promoted mutual respect, empathy, and social justice in the classroom.

From these experiences, it became evident that inclusive education transcends policy implementation; it requires transformation in teachers' perspectives, emotional intelligence, and instructional approaches. Teachers' reflective practices and dialogical interactions were instrumental in developing students' awareness of diversity, fostering empathy, and building a sense of belonging among LWDs. Furthermore, the integration of Freirean concepts of critical pedagogy redefined inclusion not merely as a structural arrangement but as a transformative process of consciousness and action—a process that challenges inequities and empowers both teachers and learners to become agents of change.

The pilot test of the developed quantitative instrument yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.731, signifying acceptable reliability and internal consistency. This confirms that the constructs derived from the qualitative

phase—Critical Consciousness, Dialogical Learning, Praxis, and Advocacy—are conceptually cohesive and measurable. The result validates the instrument’s utility for future studies assessing inclusive pedagogical practices across various educational settings.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the findings extend Freire’s Critical Pedagogy by demonstrating its applicability to contemporary inclusive education, particularly in developing countries where systemic inequities persist. It reinforces the idea that teachers’ consciousness, reflective dialogue, and praxis are central to democratizing education and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized learners.

Practically, the study underscores the urgent need for continuous professional development focused on inclusive education, differentiated instruction, and behavioral management strategies. Educational institutions and policymakers must recognize that inclusion requires collaborative effort—from teacher training programs that integrate inclusive pedagogical models to school systems that provide sufficient resources, support staff, and learning accommodations. Furthermore, promoting emotional resilience and reflective teaching among educators can strengthen their capacity to manage diverse classrooms with empathy and efficacy.

In essence, this study concludes that inclusive education is a living expression of social justice, realized through teachers who embody critical awareness, compassion, and commitment to equity. The findings call for sustained advocacy and institutional reinforcement to transform schools into truly democratic spaces where every learner, regardless of ability, is valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that this study be replicated in different educational contexts such as public and private institutions, rural and urban school environments, and across other educational levels, to either fortify or expose the assertions of Paulo Freire’s Critical Pedagogy in inclusive education. Conducting replication studies in diverse settings will help verify the consistency and applicability of the theory’s core elements (critical consciousness, dialogical learning, praxis, and advocacy) in promoting just, equitable, and democratic classrooms. Through such replications, future researchers can determine whether Freire’s concepts remain valid and effective in various teaching environments or whether contextual factors, such as culture and institutional support, influence their manifestation. This process will strengthen the empirical foundation of Critical Pedagogy and contribute to its theoretical refinement within the Philippine educational landscape.

Furthermore, it is recommended that future researchers replicate the study by integrating other variables not covered in the present investigation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education practices. Variables such as teacher emotional intelligence, institutional support, leadership style, student engagement, and school climate may reveal additional dimensions that influence teachers’ inclusive behaviors and attitudes. Likewise, exploring teacher burnout, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward inclusion as mediating or moderating factors can deepen the understanding of how internal and external elements shape inclusive teaching practices. These extended investigations would not only broaden the theoretical scope of Critical Pedagogy but also enhance the development of practical frameworks that guide inclusive education policy, teacher training, and classroom implementation in diverse educational settings.

### **Conflict Of Interest**

The authors declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the conduct, authorship, and publication of this study. The research was conducted independently and was not funded or sponsored by any organization or institution that could have influenced the research process, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of the findings. The results presented in this study reflect the objective analysis and interpretation of the data gathered during the research.

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