

A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Teachers Handling Learners with Behavioral Challenges in Inclusive Classrooms

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Publication Date: 2026/06/12

Abstract: This study explored the classroom realities faced by Key Stage 1 teachers when handling learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms within the Compostela East District. Specifically, it examined the teachers' experiences, coping strategies, and insights for improving the management of learners with behavioral challenges in inclusive educational settings. Anchored in Inclusive Pedagogy Theory by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) and Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1986), the study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design to understand the informants' lived experiences. Purposive sampling was used to select nine Key Stage 1 teachers from three different schools. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis with environmental triangulation to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. The findings revealed that teachers commonly experienced challenges in balancing instruction and behavior management, as well as emotional and physical exhaustion stemming from persistent behavioral disruptions. To cope with these challenges, teachers established structured, consistent classroom management practices and used emotional regulation and calming strategies. The study further highlighted the importance of strengthening proactive classroom structures and supporting teacher well-being and emotional resilience. It is recommended that schools and educational leaders provide continuous professional development, collaborative support systems, and wellness programs to better equip teachers in managing inclusive classrooms effectively.

Keywords: Classroom Realities, Phenomenological Narratives, Teachers Handling Learners with Behavioral Challenges, Inclusive Classrooms.

How to Cite: Kristela Jane C. Darunday (2026) A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Teachers Handling Learners with Behavioral Challenges in Inclusive Classrooms. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(6), 102-109. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jun092>

I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers handling learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms play a crucial role in ensuring that all learners receive equitable opportunities for participation and learning despite behavioral difficulties. As inclusive education continues to integrate learners with diverse behavioral needs into regular classroom settings, teachers are increasingly challenged to balance effective instruction, classroom management, and emotional support while maintaining a positive and conducive learning environment. The present study explores the lived experiences of teachers in handling learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms, particularly the challenges they encounter and the coping mechanisms they employ. The study further aims to provide insights that may support the development of responsive

interventions that promote classroom harmony, teacher well-being, and meaningful learning outcomes.

Globally, inclusive education has been strongly promoted in both national and international contexts, placing greater emphasis on integrating learners with behavioral challenges into regular classrooms. While this approach aims to foster equity and access, it also places significant demands on teachers who often regard behavioral management as one of their most pressing concerns, particularly when such behaviors disrupt not only the individual learner's progress but also that of their peers. For instance, in Norway, Aas et al. (2024) highlighted how teachers, through collaborative lesson study, shifted from relying on punitive control measures to adopting more supportive and contextual strategies that better addressed behavioral issues.

Similarly, research in Ghana, Mensah et al. (2021) emphasized that behavioral problems among learners, ranging from noncompliance and aggression to habitual lateness and teasing, cannot be attributed solely to the learners themselves but are also shaped by teacher attitudes, family background, teaching methods, and the overall classroom environment. In Australia, teachers' perceptions of student behavior are strongly linked to stress, classroom climate, and overall teaching effectiveness, with effective behavioral support systems contributing significantly to both student inclusion and teacher well-being (Graham et al., 2020).

In the Philippine educational setting, the Department of Education continues to advance the mandate of inclusive education. Yet, teachers in regular classrooms often grapple with the realities of managing learners who display behavioral challenges. While many Filipino teachers value the principle of inclusion, they also report feeling inadequately prepared to address disruptive behaviors alongside the heavy academic expectations of their roles. This situation highlights the pressing need for more comprehensive professional development and systemic support. As Espinosa (2023) explains, the recurring struggles of Filipino teachers often stem from overwhelming workloads, insufficient training, and the difficulty of balancing academic responsibilities with behavioral management.

Further, Ogena (2024) observed that even when teachers in Cebu employ constructivist and student-centered approaches, managing behavior remains a central challenge, intensified by large class sizes and limited resources. These insights reflect the layered and complex realities of inclusive education in the Philippines and reinforce the importance of listening to teachers' narratives to better understand their needs in supporting learners with behavioral difficulties in regular classrooms. Also, in Zambales, Elbancol and Marquez (2023) underscored that implementing structured classroom management approaches significantly improved learning experiences and positive behavior among students with emotional and behavioral needs, even as teachers grappled with inadequate training, limited resources, and limited parental involvement.

In the Compostela East District, teachers continue to grapple with the increasing demands of managing learners with diverse behavioral challenges in inclusive classroom settings. The implementation of inclusive education becomes even more difficult as teachers face heavy workloads, growing learner diversity, and limited training in addressing targeted behavioral concerns, making classroom management more complex and overwhelming. These realities underscore the urgent need to explore teachers' lived experiences to better understand the challenges they face, identify the specific support they require, and propose responsive interventions to enhance their capacity to handle behavioral challenges effectively in inclusive classrooms.

As a teacher who also handles learners with behavioral problems in an inclusive classroom, the researcher personally experienced the complex realities and demands of managing diverse learner behaviors while maintaining effective instruction. The researcher encountered situations in which disruptive behaviors, emotional outbursts, and difficulties maintaining classroom focus affected both the teaching-learning process and classroom management. At the same time, balancing the needs of learners with behavioral challenges with those of the rest of the class became emotionally and physically demanding, especially amid heavy workloads, increasing learner diversity, and limited specialized training in behavior management. These firsthand experiences allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the struggles, pressures, and coping mechanisms of teachers in inclusive settings, which served as a strong motivation to conduct the present study, which explores the lived experiences of teachers and identifies meaningful interventions and support systems that may strengthen inclusive classroom practices.

Despite the growing body of literature on inclusive education and classroom management, no research specifically explores the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of teachers handling learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms within the local context of the Compostela East District. While studies on inclusive education, classroom management, and teacher preparedness have been conducted, there are not many studies that focus on the actual experiences of teachers directly managing behavioral challenges in mainstream inclusive settings. This gap highlights the need for a more in-depth phenomenological investigation of teachers' experiences to generate meaningful insights that may guide the development of responsive policies, intervention programs, support systems, and inclusive educational practices aimed at strengthening teachers' capacity to effectively support learners with behavioral problems.

Moreover, this study is urgent, as an increasing number of learners with behavioral problems are being mainstreamed into regular classrooms as part of the implementation of inclusive education, significantly intensifying the instructional, emotional, and classroom management demands placed on teachers. Through mainstreaming, teachers are expected to address diverse behavioral needs within the same classroom while ensuring that all learners continue to receive meaningful and equitable learning opportunities. However, many educators continue to navigate these complex realities with limited specialized training, inadequate behavioral management resources, and insufficient institutional support, making their lived experiences critical to understand. Capturing the narratives of teachers who handle mainstreamed learners with behavioral problems is essential for developing timely and responsive interventions, strengthening teacher preparation programs, and establishing more effective support systems to enhance the successful implementation of inclusive education.

II. METHOD

This study involved nine (9) Key Stage 1 teachers from the Compostela East District and employed a phenomenological research design to explore their lived experiences in handling learners with behavioral challenges within inclusive classrooms. Phenomenology focuses on understanding how individuals interpret and ascribe meaning to their experiences in relation to a particular phenomenon (Hennink et al., 2020). In this study, the phenomenon centers on the everyday classroom realities of teachers working in inclusive educational settings. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that those chosen had rich, experience-based insights relevant to the research problem.

In addition, the study utilized environmental triangulation by including teacher-informants from various integrated school contexts within the Compostela East District, specifically from small, medium, and large schools. This approach enhanced the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings by ensuring that the emerging themes were grounded in diverse yet comparable school environments. It also strengthened the study's capacity to reflect the shared experiences of teachers managing learners with behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms.

Furthermore, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather rich qualitative data from the nine Key Stage 1 teachers. These interviews allowed participants to articulate their lived experiences, particularly the strategies they employed, the challenges they encountered, and the coping mechanisms they used to sustain a supportive and effective learning environment. To further enrich and validate the data, documentary analysis and field notes were also employed as supplementary sources of evidence.

Finally, the data were analyzed using a systematic phenomenological process aimed at uncovering the essence of teachers' "classroom realities." Interview transcripts were carefully examined, with significant statements extracted and aligned with the study's research questions. Guided by thematic content analysis, responses were coded and organized into recurring themes, considering both manifest meanings and latent interpretations. Through iterative coding and synthesis, as outlined by King (2004) cited in Dawadi (2020), overarching themes were generated that authentically represent the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of teachers in managing diverse learner behaviors.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Teachers handling learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms must strike a delicate balance between managing disruptive behavior and ensuring continuous learning for all students. In this study, the following are the main themes, sub-themes that emerged from the experiences of teachers in

handling learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms.

➤ *Balancing Instruction and Behavior Management*

This theme reflects teachers' experiences of managing learners with behavioral challenges while ensuring that classroom instruction continues effectively. Teachers often face persistent disruptions, divided attention, and interruptions to lesson flow, making it difficult to maintain engagement and meet the needs of all learners. Despite these challenges, they strive to adapt their strategies, demonstrating flexibility and commitment to sustaining both learning and classroom order in an inclusive environment. The following are the sub-themes for this study.

• *Persistent Classroom Disruptions*

On this sub-theme, participants narrated how behavioral concerns directly affect instructional continuity and classroom management. Field notes gathered during classroom observations further supported these findings, as the researcher observed teachers repeatedly pausing instruction to redirect disruptive learners, calm behavioral outbursts, and regain the class's attention before continuing the lesson. The documentary analysis of classroom management plans and anecdotal records also revealed recurring behavioral incidents requiring teacher intervention during instructional time. These findings conform with Macapaz et al. (2022), who emphasized that managing behavioral challenges in inclusive settings significantly affects teaching effectiveness and contributes to increased workload and stress among teachers.

• *Struggling to Balance Attention Between Learners*

The sub-theme highlights the difficulty teachers face in dividing their focus between learners with behavioral problems and the rest of the class. Participant's narrations illustrate the tension teachers experience between managing individual behavioral concerns and ensuring that all learners continue to receive quality instruction. Field notes further revealed that teachers frequently moved between redirecting disruptive learners and assisting the rest of the class with academic tasks, reflecting the constant multitasking required in inclusive settings. The documentary analysis of lesson plans also showed adjustments in instructional pacing and classroom activities to accommodate behavioral interventions during class discussions. These findings conform with Culajara and Culajara (2023), who found that teachers often feel unprepared to manage simultaneous instructional and behavioral demands due to insufficient training.

• *Disruptions to Instructional Time*

The sub-theme reveals how behavioral challenges affect lesson pacing and structure. Informants reported that behavioral incidents often force them to stop teaching temporarily in order to restore classroom order. These experiences reveal that teachers must constantly adjust instructional pacing and redirect learners' focus, often at the expense of instructional efficiency.

Field notes reinforced these findings, as the researcher observed interruptions during class discussions in which teachers needed to calm learners, resolve conflicts, or redirect behavior before resuming instruction. Documentary analysis of daily lesson logs and anecdotal reports likewise revealed instances in which teachers modified or shortened activities due to behavioral interruptions.

➤ *Emotional and Physical Exhaustion*

Another main theme is Emotional and Physical Exhaustion. Stress, fatigue, and burnout resulting from repeatedly managing learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms had been experienced by the informants. Continuous disruptions, the need for constant vigilance, and the pressure to maintain both classroom order and effective instruction contribute to their emotional strain and physical tiredness. Despite these challenges, teachers strive to remain patient and composed, demonstrating resilience as they fulfill their responsibilities in a demanding classroom environment. Below are sub-themes of the theme Emotional and Physical Exhaustion.

• *Emotional Stress and Burnout*

In this sub-theme informants expressed intense emotional strain brought about by repeated behavioral challenges. The participants' accounts demonstrate that the emotional demands of maintaining classroom order and supporting learners with behavioral challenges can accumulate over time, eventually leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion. The field notes further supported these findings, as the researcher observed signs of emotional strain among teachers during classroom disruptions, including visible frustration, exhaustion, and prolonged efforts to regain classroom order after behavioral incidents. Documentary analysis of anecdotal records and classroom incident reports likewise reflected recurring behavioral concerns that required frequent teacher intervention, contributing to emotional pressure and stress. These findings strongly conform to Macapaz et al. (2022), who found that teachers in inclusive classrooms often experience high levels of emotional exhaustion due to persistent behavioral disruptions.

• *Physical and Mental Fatigue*

In this sub-theme, the findings highlight the draining nature of repeatedly managing behavioral incidents in the classroom. The narratives of participants illustrate how teachers expend continuous emotional, mental, and physical energy to sustain instruction while simultaneously responding to learners' behavioral needs, gradually contributes to fatigue and exhaustion. The field notes reinforced these findings by documenting instances where teachers continuously moved around the classroom to redirect learners, manage behavioral outbursts, and restore focus among other pupils, resulting in visible physical and mental strain. Also, the documentary analysis of classroom observation reports and teachers' anecdotal logs also revealed frequent references to exhaustion and instructional difficulties stemming from repeated

behavioral incidents. These findings conform with Beltran et al. (2024), who emphasized that contextual challenges such as large class sizes and limited resources intensify teachers' workload and fatigue.

• *Maintaining Patience and Control*

This sub-theme reveals that despite these challenges, teachers persist in maintaining professionalism through emotional regulation and commitment to their teaching roles. Teachers consciously regulate their emotions to prevent escalation and maintain a positive learning environment despite ongoing stress and exhaustion. Field notes validated these findings by showing teachers calmly redirecting learners, lowering their voices during disruptions, and patiently assisting them despite repeated behavioral incidents. Documentary analysis of behavior intervention plans and classroom management records also reflected the teachers' consistent use of positive and controlled approaches rather than punitive responses. These findings strongly conform to Casungcad et al. (2024), who found that teachers cope with inclusive classroom stress through emotional regulation and consistent classroom management practices.

➤ *Maintaining Patience and Emotional Control*

These third main theme reflects the teachers' lived experiences of managing their emotions while responding to the behavioral challenges of learners in inclusive classrooms. The informants revealed that handling repeated disruptions, emotional outbursts, and classroom distractions required them to remain patient, calm, and emotionally composed despite experiencing stress and exhaustion. This theme highlights that teachers not only performed instructional responsibilities but also continuously regulated their emotions and reactions to maintain fairness, classroom order, and a supportive learning environment for all learners.

• *Patience Amid Repeated Behavioral Incidents*

This sub-theme reveal that teachers experience emotional strain, physical exhaustion, and burnout when faced with recurring disruptive behaviors. Yet, they continue to exercise patience and emotional control to maintain classroom stability. Informants emphasized that repeated behavioral incidents require sustained self-regulation despite increasing stress levels. Narratives of participants demonstrate how teachers persevere emotionally despite the ongoing demands of managing disruptive behavior in inclusive classrooms. The field notes further supported these findings, as the researcher observed teachers repeatedly redirecting disruptive learners while attempting to remain calm and composed despite visible signs of fatigue and stress. Documentary analysis of classroom incident reports and anecdotal records also revealed recurring behavioral episodes requiring ongoing teacher intervention, patience, and emotional restraint. These findings strongly align with Chang (2020), who found that teachers frequently experience emotional exhaustion due to persistent student misbehavior, which requires continuous emotional regulation

to sustain effective teaching.

- *Balancing Fairness and Classroom Order*

This sub-theme shows that teachers experience emotional tension as they attempt to support learners with behavioral challenges while ensuring fairness and maintaining order for the rest of the class. Informants described the difficulty of balancing attention, discipline, and emotional support without disrupting the learning environment. Participants' responses reveal that teachers constantly regulate their emotions and instructional decisions to ensure that all learners receive equal opportunities to learn. Field notes corroborated these narratives by documenting that teachers simultaneously assisted disruptive learners while monitoring the participation and engagement of the rest of the class. Documentary analysis of lesson plans and classroom management records also showed adjustments in activities and pacing to maintain classroom fairness and instructional continuity. These findings align closely with Sutton and Harper (2021), who noted that teachers must continually regulate their emotions to balance empathy and classroom control in inclusive settings.

- *Managing Classroom Focus During Disruptions*

This sub-theme highlights that teachers struggle to maintain instructional continuity when behavioral problems interrupt lessons and affect learners' concentration. Despite these disruptions, informants demonstrated efforts to remain calm and redirect attention back to learning activities. These findings indicate that teachers exert conscious emotional control in order to preserve classroom focus and minimize the negative effects of disruptions on instruction. Field notes reinforced these findings, as the researcher observed teachers pausing lessons, calming disruptive learners, and using redirection strategies to restore learners' attention and continue classroom discussions. Similarly, documentary analysis of classroom observation notes and anecdotal reports similarly revealed repeated interruptions that affected lesson pacing and learner engagement. These findings strongly conform with Sutton (2020), who stressed that effective emotion regulation enables teachers to maintain instructional focus despite classroom disruptions.

Meanwhile, the second research question this study focuses on the teachers' coping mechanisms on the behavioral challenges of learners integrated in inclusive classroom settings. Below are the main themes and their respective sub-themes on the coping mechanisms of participants:

- *Establishing Structured and Consistent Classroom Management*

The main theme highlights how teachers' efforts to create clear rules, routines, and expectations to effectively manage learners with behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms. Through consistency and structure, teachers are able to minimize disruptions, provide predictability, and guide learners toward appropriate behavior. This theme emphasizes the

importance of organized and predictable classroom practices in inclusive settings.

- *Use of Clear Rules*

In this sub-theme, informants emphasized that clearly defined rules helped learners understand boundaries and regulate their behavior. Field notes showed that teachers consistently posted classroom rules on walls, used verbal reminders during transitions, and reinforced routines before activities began. Documentary analysis of classroom management plans, behavior monitoring sheets, and learner anecdotal records further confirmed that teachers regularly implemented structured behavioral expectations to guide learners' conduct. These findings conform with Petersson-Bloom and Holmqvist (2022), who emphasized that clear expectations and structured environments minimize behavioral disruptions. Likewise, the documentary evidence and classroom observations strongly support the informants' narratives, revealing no contradiction between interview responses and observed classroom practices.

- *Establish Classroom Routines*

This sub-theme highlights how predictable daily practices contribute to a stable and supportive learning environment. Field notes revealed that teachers followed consistent schedules for classroom activities, transitions, and learner participation, while documentary analysis of lesson plans and classroom schedules showed evidence of structured routines integrated into daily instruction. Informants emphasized that routines reduced uncertainty and helped learners adjust to classroom expectations more effectively. These findings align with Moscato and Pedone (2024), who argued that structured instructional routines reduce behavioral triggers, and with Aas et al. (2023), who highlighted that organized classroom practices support both learning and behavior management.

- *Consistency in Classroom Management*

This sub-theme underscores the importance of continuous reinforcement of rules and routines in sustaining positive learner behavior. Field notes documented that teachers repeatedly redirected learners using the same behavioral expectations and consistently applied classroom consequences and rewards. Documentary analysis of behavior monitoring records and reinforcement charts also reflected repeated implementation of classroom management strategies over time. These findings support Mendoza (2023), who found that predictable and consistently implemented routines reduce behavioral issues, as well as Yburan and Tantiado (2025), who emphasized that teachers who consistently apply classroom management strategies are more effective in handling behavioral challenges.

- *Building Supportive and Collaborative Relationships*

This theme highlights how teachers build supportive and collaborative relationships as a coping mechanism in addressing behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms. It

reflects the teachers' efforts to establish positive teacher–learner relationships, maintain open communication with parents and families, and collaborate with colleagues and school support systems to effectively manage learners' behavioral difficulties. The theme underscores that fostering empathy, trust, teamwork, and shared responsibility is essential not only in improving learners' behavior but also in creating a supportive, inclusive, and conducive learning environment for both teachers and learners.

- *Teacher–Learner Relationship and Emotional Support*

This sub-theme emphasized empathy, understanding, and trust-building as central strategies. Participants' accounts align with field observations showing teachers deliberately de-escalating situations through calm interaction and individualized attention. This finding is consistent with Ansari, Hofkens, and Pianta (2020) and Zee and Koomen (2021), reinforcing that supportive teacher–learner relationships enhance behavioral regulation and engagement. No contradiction was observed between interview data, field notes, and documentary records, indicating strong convergence and credibility of the finding.

- *Parent and Family Collaboration*

The findings showed that parent and family collaboration played a significant role in helping teachers cope with learners' behavioral challenges. Field notes revealed frequent instances where teachers-initiated phone calls, sent communication notebooks home, or scheduled parent meetings following behavioral incidents, indicating active engagement with families. Documentary analysis of parent-teacher conference logs and communication records also confirmed consistent efforts to involve parents in behavioral intervention planning, although in some cases documentation showed delayed parental responses, indicating partial participation. These findings align with Garbacz, Swanger-Gagné, and Sheridan (2020) and Kim and Sheridan (2021), highlighting the importance of family–school partnerships in behavior management.

- *Coordination with Colleagues and School Support System*

This sub-theme was another essential coping mechanism among teachers managing behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms. Field notes showed teachers frequently engaging in informal consultations during breaks and referring learners to guidance counselors or school heads when behavioral concerns escalated. Documentary analysis of referral forms, meeting minutes, and intervention records further confirmed structured collaboration among teachers and support personnel in addressing learner behavior. These findings support Collie (2021) and Harding, Morris, and Gunnell (2022), reinforcing the importance of collegial and institutional support in sustaining teacher well-being and classroom management effectiveness.

- *Emotional Regulation and Calm Strategies*

This theme highlights how teachers consciously manage their emotions and maintain composure while addressing behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms. It reflects their use of patience, positive mindset, and non-punitive approaches to respond effectively to disruptive behaviors without escalating classroom tension. This theme underscores that sustaining emotional control is essential not only for managing learners' behavior but also for preserving a supportive and conducive learning environment.

- *Maintaining Patience and Calmness*

The sub-theme reveals that teachers cope with behavioral challenges in inclusive classrooms through Maintaining Patience and Calmness. Informants consistently highlighted the importance of staying composed when managing learners with disruptive behaviors. These narrations suggest that remaining calm and patient enables teachers to manage challenging situations without escalating conflict, thereby preserving a positive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. This aligns with Macapaz et al. (2022), who noted that persistent behavioral disruptions in inclusive classrooms contribute to emotional exhaustion, suggesting that teachers' ability to maintain calmness is a critical coping mechanism for managing stress while sustaining instructional flow.

- *Positive Mindset and Emotional Control*

In this sub-theme Informants described using reflection, self-encouragement, and focusing on learners' progress to regulate their emotions and remain motivated despite classroom difficulties." These findings indicate that teachers cope with behavioral difficulties by reframing challenges as opportunities for learner growth and by focusing on positive outcomes rather than setbacks. These findings resonate with Casungcad et al. (2024), who highlighted that emotional regulation, mindfulness, and maintaining a positive outlook are essential strategies for teachers coping with the stress associated with inclusive teaching demands, including persistent behavioral issues.

- *Reflective Practice and Seeking Support*

This sub-theme involves collaboration and professional consultation. Informants emphasized that reflecting on their teaching practices and seeking guidance from colleagues, administrators, and parents strengthened their confidence in handling behavioral concerns. These findings suggest that collaboration and reflective practice allow teachers to share experiences, gain new insights, and improve their classroom management approaches. The findings are supported by Aas et al. (2023) and Yburan and Tantiado (2025), who reported that collaborative professional practices and proactive preparation significantly enhance teachers' coping capacity, enabling them to respond to behavioral challenges with well-informed and effective strategies.

Subsequently, on the third research question provided important bases for the formulation of policy recommendations aimed at improving the management of learners with behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms. The following are the policy recommendations to strengthening inclusive classroom management for learners with behavioral problems: 1. Strengthen Continuous Professional Development on Behavioral Management and Inclusive Education; 2. Establish Comprehensive School-Based Support Systems for Inclusive Classrooms. These policy recommendations aim to enhance teachers' competence, emotional well-being, and classroom management capacity while promoting a more supportive and effective inclusive education environment for all learners.

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