

Adaptations Among Social Studies Teachers Handling Mainstream Classes in a Public High School

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Abstract

This phenomenological study examined how Social Studies teachers adapted their instruction in public high school mainstream classrooms. Guided by Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction, and Teacher Self-Efficacy, the study explored the experiences that emerged as teachers adapted instructional practices for learners in mainstream classrooms, the adaptive mechanisms they employed, and the support mechanisms that could be provided to Social Studies teachers handling mainstream classes. Six Social Studies teachers experienced in handling learners with diverse learning needs were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide and analyzed using Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological procedures. Findings were organized into three thematic areas: *Experiences in Instructional Adaptation*, *Inclusive Adaptive Mechanisms*, and *Support Mechanisms Needed by Social Studies Teachers*. Results showed that teachers made Social Studies lessons more accessible through localized examples, visual aids, simplified materials, peer support, flexible outputs, and modified assessment conditions. However, participants emphasized that inclusive education becomes difficult when mainstream placement is not supported by training, instructional materials, manageable classroom conditions, and specialist assistance. The study concludes instructional adaptation in Social Studies is a continuous, reflective, and context-based situated process.

Keywords: inclusive education; instructional adaptation; mainstream classrooms; phenomenology; Social Studies teachers

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a major direction of Philippine basic education because it affirms the right of learners with disabilities and diverse needs to participate in regular school life. However, inclusion is not achieved through physical placement alone. Learners may be present in mainstream classrooms but still excluded when instruction relies mainly on long texts, fast-paced discussions, abstract vocabulary, or one-way assessments. This concern is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.5, which calls for eliminating educational disparities and ensuring equal access for learners with disabilities and other vulnerable groups (United Nations, 2015). In the Philippines, DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021 and Republic Act No. 11650 strengthen the mandate for inclusive education through access, support services, and learner participation (Department of Education, 2021; Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). Yet implementation remains challenging, especially at the secondary level where lessons involve abstract concepts, heavier readings, and subject-specific vocabulary. In Social Studies, learners are expected to understand history, social issues, culture, politics, values, and civic responsibilities. For learners with communication, literacy, behavioral, or learning challenges, these demands require visual aids, simplified language, structured routines, peer support, modified tasks, and flexible participation. Thus, the Social Studies teacher becomes not only a content specialist but also a designer of access in the mainstream classroom.

Existing literature shows that teachers in inclusive settings experience both challenges and professional growth. Malabuyoc et al. (2025) described inclusive teaching as marked by both strain and fulfilment, while Lopres et al. (2024) noted that general education teachers often become mentors, advocates, and facilitators of equity. These studies suggest that inclusion reshapes teacher identity by requiring empathy, creativity, and reflection. However, barriers remain. Beltran et al. (2025), Javier (2023), Giger et al. (2025), and Espeño et al. (2024) identified problems such as inadequate resources, limited training, weak parental involvement, facility constraints, curriculum modification difficulties, uncertainty in assessment, underfunding, and lack of instructional tools. These findings show that inclusive education is often implemented faster than classroom systems can support. Despite these limitations, teachers continue to develop adaptive practices. Omoso and Villarente (2024), Abellana et al. (2023), and Ancheta and Gallego (2025) emphasized that teachers use practical, localized, and creative strategies to support learners in resource-constrained classrooms. Overall, the literature shows that teachers are not passive implementers of inclusion; they make daily decisions on content simplification, examples, grouping, assessment, and support-seeking. Still, there is a need for local and subject-specific studies on how these practices appear in mainstream Social Studies classrooms.

The present study was anchored on Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction, and Teacher Self-Efficacy. Universal Design for Learning emphasizes planning accessible lessons through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, which is relevant in Social Studies because lessons are often abstract, text-heavy, and discussion-based. Differentiated Instruction, based on Tomlinson's (2001) framework, explains how teachers adjust content, process, product, and learning environment according to learners' needs. Teacher Self-Efficacy, as explained by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), highlights teachers' belief in their ability to support learning despite classroom challenges. Together, these theories frame instructional adaptation as a reflective practice that maintains learning objectives while providing flexible and accessible pathways for diverse learners. The study also addresses the limited local literature on how high school Social Studies teachers experience instructional adaptation in mainstream classes, especially since the subject requires reading, interpretation, explanation, opinion-sharing, and connection to social realities.

Hence, this study explored the adaptations among Social Studies teachers handling mainstream classes in one public high school in Tacloban City. Specifically, it explored the experiences that emerged as teachers adapted instructional practices for learners in a mainstream classroom; the instructional and classroom management challenges they faced when adapting Social Studies lessons; the adaptive mechanisms they employed to respond to these challenges; and the support mechanisms that could strengthen their work.

The significance of the study is both practical and scholarly. For Social Studies teachers, it provides a structured account of strategies that may help make lessons more accessible without weakening academic standards. For students with disabilities and other diverse needs, it points to conditions that can support meaningful participation in regular classrooms. For school leaders, it identifies the kinds of training, materials, and collaboration that teachers need. For DepEd and teacher-training institutions, it offers evidence that inclusive education must be translated into subject-specific professional development. For future researchers, it contributes to the limited local literature on inclusive Social Studies teaching and highlights areas for further inquiry, including learner perspectives, classroom observation, and comparative studies across schools.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design. This design was appropriate because the study explored the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers as they adapted instruction in mainstream classrooms. Rather than measuring variables, it sought to describe the meaning and essence of instructional adaptation from the teachers' perspectives. Guided by Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology, the study used bracketing, horizontalization, clustering of significant

statements, textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis of essence. This approach allowed the researcher to understand what teachers experienced and how they experienced adaptation within a public high school setting. Following Creswell and Poth (2023), participants' narratives served as the main source of evidence for understanding the phenomenon.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in one public high school in Tacloban City, Leyte. The locale was purposively selected because it implemented mainstream inclusive education and provided an appropriate setting for examining how Social Studies teachers adapted instruction for learners with disabilities or diverse learning needs. Tacloban City was also relevant because it represented a local public school context where national policies on inclusive education are translated into classroom practice. To protect confidentiality, identifying classroom details, learner information, and unnecessary school-specific markers were not disclosed.

Research Participants

The study involved six Social Studies teachers with direct experience in mainstream classes, coded as SST1 to SST6 to protect their identities. Using purposive sampling, the participants were selected based on their current or recent experience handling learners with disabilities or diverse learning needs. The sample was considered sufficient because transcendental phenomenology prioritizes depth, rich descriptions, and shared meanings over statistical representation. Following Morse (2000), sample adequacy depends on data quality, study scope, participant information, and research design. SNED teachers, administrators, parents, learners, and teachers without relevant mainstream experience were excluded. Data saturation was reached when no new meanings, categories, or themes emerged, making the six participants adequate for capturing the essence of instructional adaptation.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide aligned with the four research questions. It contained open-ended questions and probes on teachers' experiences, challenges, adaptive strategies, and needed support in mainstream Social Studies classrooms. The guide ensured consistency while allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences. It underwent expert validation for clarity, neutrality, sequencing, relevance, and adequacy of probes. Validators with expertise in inclusive education, Social Studies pedagogy, or qualitative research reviewed the guide, and their suggestions were incorporated before data gathering. When necessary, questions were restated in Filipino or Waray to help participants express their experiences more fully.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews, the researcher explained the study's purpose, scope, voluntary nature, confidentiality measures, and possible use of findings. Informed consent was secured, and participants were informed of their right to refuse questions, pause, or withdraw without penalty. Interviews were conducted at convenient and private settings, audio-recorded with consent, and supported by field notes. Recordings were transcribed, and participants were coded as SST1 to SST6 to protect their identities. Member checking was also conducted when clarification was needed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method. The process began with epoché or bracketing, where the researcher set aside personal assumptions as a Social Studies educator and used reflexive notes to monitor possible biases. The transcripts were then read carefully through horizontalization, in which significant statements related to instructional adaptation, challenges,

strategies, and support needs were identified and initially treated with equal value. Repetitive or overlapping statements were reduced and organized into invariant meaning units, which were later clustered into themes. These themes were examined in relation to the four research questions. Textural descriptions were developed to explain what the participants experienced, while structural descriptions explained how these experiences occurred within the classroom and institutional context. Finally, both descriptions were synthesized to present the essence of instructional adaptation in mainstream Social Studies classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to refuse or withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality was protected through participant codes, and no identifying learner information was collected. All recordings, transcripts, consent forms, and notes were securely stored for academic purposes only. The study involved minimal risk, and participants could skip questions or stop the interview if discomfort occurred. The expected benefit was professional reflection and findings that could support inclusive Social Studies teaching.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the study observed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through careful transcription, member checking, and the use of significant participant responses. Transferability was supported by clear descriptions of the locale, participants, and classroom context. Dependability was established through systematic documentation of the research process, including the interview guide, transcripts, coding notes, meaning units, and theme development. Confirmability was maintained through bracketing, reflexive notes, and data-based interpretations to minimize researcher bias.

Reflexivity

The researcher also maintained reflexivity to avoid imposing personal views on the participants' accounts. Ethical attention was especially important because the study dealt with teachers' experiences of inclusive education and indirectly touched on learner needs that required privacy and sensitivity.

Results and Discussion

The findings present the experiences of Social Studies teachers in adapting instruction, the adaptive mechanisms they employed, and the support mechanisms they needed in handling mainstream classrooms. Together, these themes show how instructional adaptation is experienced as a continuous process shaped by learner diversity, classroom realities, teacher creativity, and institutional support.

1. Experiences in Instructional Adaptation

Theme 1: Responsive Instruction

One experience that emerged was the need to make instruction responsive to varied learner needs in mainstream classrooms. The teachers explained that adapted instruction means making the same Social Studies objective more accessible through clearer directions, structured routines, flexible pacing, and varied learning pathways. This shows that inclusion goes beyond physical placement because adaptation helps learners participate meaningfully while maintaining academic expectations and dignity. Priyadharsini and Mary (2024) support this through Universal Design for Learning, which promotes multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. Lopres et al. (2024) likewise emphasized that teachers in inclusive settings become facilitators of equity, belonging, and learner support. Thus, adapted instruction is not a lowering of standards but a responsive process that makes participation possible. Below are the participants' significant responses:

Significant response 1: "...true inclusion is not just about sameness, but about responsiveness to

individual needs.” (SST₃, L₃)

Significant response 2: “Through these adjustments, I learned that adaptation is not about lowering the lesson standard, but about making the lesson more accessible to all learners.” (SST₄, L₄)

Significant response 3: “Inclusive teaching requires continuous adjustment, creativity, and sensitivity to learners' situations.” (SST₆, L₆)

Theme 2: Communication Barriers

Another experience that emerged was the teachers' effort to address communication differences in mainstream Social Studies classrooms. Since the subject requires questioning, discussion, reflection, and explanation, learners with hearing impairments, language limitations, shyness, or difficulty expressing ideas may struggle to participate. These barriers also affect assessment because learners may understand the lesson but have difficulty showing it through oral or written tasks. Thus, teachers needed alternative ways for learners to express understanding. Giger et al. (2025) and Dioso et al. (2022) support this by emphasizing the need for teacher preparation, appropriate support, and varied ways of responding to learner needs. Below are the participants' significant responses:

Significant response 1: “The main challenge was more on delivering the lessons because I did not really know how to do the sign language.” (SST₁, L₁₃)

Significant response 2: “I have a student who struggles to construct sentences, which makes it challenging for her to participate in discussions and complete written tasks.” (SST₃, L₁₅)

Significant response 3: “Some students understand the lesson but struggle to express it in written or oral form.” (SST₅, L₁₇)

Theme 3: Literacy Disparity

Instructional adaptation also involved addressing the literacy and comprehension demands of Social Studies. Since the subject requires reading, vocabulary understanding, analysis, and reflection, learners with different abilities and pacing may struggle. To support them, teachers simplified terms, repeated instructions, divided lessons into smaller parts, used familiar examples, gave guide questions, and added visual support. These adjustments made abstract concepts easier to understand and encouraged participation. Javier (2023) and Beltran et al. (2025) support the need for curriculum modification, teacher preparation, resources, and responsive strategies in inclusive education. Below are the participants' significant responses:

Significant response 1: “Social Studies involves complex theories and heavy reading, many students struggle with comprehension, especially when the vocabulary is too academic.” (SST₂, L₁₄)

Significant response 2: “Some topics require reading, analysis, and explanation, so students who have difficulty with comprehension often need more support.” (SST₄, L₁₆)

Significant response 3: “Some students can easily follow the discussion, while others need more time and guidance.” (SST₆, L₁₈)

Theme 4: Classroom Condition

Instructional adaptation also involved managing classroom conditions while responding to diverse learner needs. The participants noted that adaptation becomes harder in large mainstream classes where learners differ in pace, literacy level, participation style, and support needs. Teachers had to balance lesson coverage with individual assistance by repeating explanations, monitoring students, adjusting activities, giving additional guidance, and sustaining engagement despite limited time and materials. This shows that adaptation is both an instructional and classroom management concern. Espeño et al. (2024) and Javier (2023) support this finding by emphasizing that large classes, limited resources, inadequate facilities, and lack of

support affect inclusive education. Below are the participants' significant responses:

- Significant response 1: "My most common challenge is managing a wide range of literacy levels and learning speeds within a single class of 50 or more students." (SST₂, L₁₄)*
- Significant response 2: "Balancing the pace of the lesson... can be demanding." (SST₃, L₁₅)*
- Significant response 3: "In a large mainstream class, it is difficult to monitor everyone, especially during group activities or written tasks." (SST₆, L₁₈)*

2. Inclusive Adaptive Mechanisms

Theme 1: Lesson Contextualization

Another inclusive adaptive mechanism was contextualization, where teachers made Social Studies lessons more accessible by connecting abstract theories, historical events, civic concepts, and social issues to learners' strands, community experiences, current events, family situations, and daily realities. This made lessons easier to understand and relate to. Adaptation, in this theme, was not only simplification but the translation of Social Studies ideas into familiar examples. Tomlinson (2001) and Malabuyoc et al. (2025) support this by emphasizing differentiated, practical, and learner-responsive strategies. Below are the participants' significant responses:

- Significant response 1: "I contextualize my lessons based on the students' strands." (SST₂, L₂)*
- Significant response 2: "I try to simplify the lesson by using familiar examples from the community, current events, and real-life situations." (SST₄, L₄)*
- Significant response 3: "I usually break down the lesson into smaller parts and give examples that are connected to the students' daily experiences." (SST₅, L₅)*

Theme 2: Peer-Supported Participation

Peer support emerged as a practical adaptive mechanism in large mainstream classes where teachers could not assist all learners at once. Participants used mixed-ability grouping, paired support, and responsible classmates to clarify instructions, support communication, and encourage participation. This shows that inclusion can become a shared classroom practice, if peer assistance is guided respectfully and does not label or isolate learners. Omoso and Villarente (2024) and Pantia (2025) support this finding by emphasizing collaborative, creative, and supportive classroom strategies for addressing diverse learner needs. Below are the participants' significant responses:

- Significant response 1: "I made sure that my SNED students belong to a group where there is a regular student who knows how to do the sign language." (SST₁, L₁₉)*
- Significant response 2: "I also implement Peer-Mediated Instruction, where I pair advanced learners with those who need more support." (SST₂, L₂₀)*
- Significant response 3: "I group students carefully so that learners who need help are placed with classmates who are patient and responsible." (SST₅, L₂₃)*

Theme 3: Differentiated and Choice-Based Learning

The teachers addressed learner diversity through differentiated and choice-based tasks. Instead of requiring one common output, they allowed learners to show understanding through vlogs, poems, infographics, drawings, oral sharing, written answers, role play, simple projects, or group presentations. These options made participation more inclusive by allowing students to use their strengths, communication abilities, confidence, and available resources. The same Social Studies objective was maintained, but learners were given varied and fair pathways to achieve it. Tomlinson (2001) supports this through differentiated content, process, and product, while Damyanov (2024) emphasized differentiated instruction and individualized support for learners with special educational needs. Below are the participants' significant responses:

- Significant response 1: "I primarily use Differentiated Instruction through the use of Choice*

Boards.” (SST₂, L₂₀)

Significant response 2: “I allow some flexibility, such as written answers, drawings, short reports, or simple presentations, as long as they meet the lesson objective.” (SST₄, L₂₂)

Significant response 3: “Some can write well, while others can explain better through drawing, reporting, or simple creative outputs.” (SST₆, L₃₀)

Theme 4: Multimodal and Material Modification

Another adaptive mechanism was the use of multimodal scaffolds and modified materials. Teachers used visual aids, keywords, short notes, guide questions, timelines, charts, examples, guided outlines, simplified readings, and bite-sized summaries to make text-heavy and abstract Social Studies lessons more accessible. These supports helped learners with reading, comprehension, or language-expression difficulties while preserving the main concept. Priyadharsini and Mary (2024) support this through Universal Design for Learning, which promotes multiple ways of presenting information, while Ancheta and Gallego (2025) emphasized creative and practical adaptation in resource-constrained Social Studies classrooms. Below are the participants’ significant responses:

Significant response 1: “I make use of visual aids, examples, and guided discussions to make concepts more understandable.” (SST₃, L₂₁)

Significant response 2: “I use pictures, keywords, timelines, and simple guide questions instead of giving long reading texts immediately.” (SST₄, L₂₈)

Significant response 3: “I use visual aids, keywords, short notes, and guided activities so that students who struggle with reading or comprehension can still follow the lesson.” (SST₆, L₂₄)

Theme 5: Flexible Assessment

Another inclusive adaptive mechanism was flexible assessment, which allowed learners to show understanding in different ways. Participants recognized that fairness does not always mean identical outputs, especially when learners differ in communication ability, confidence, technology access, and learning strengths. In Social Studies, this helped teachers assess actual understanding beyond long written answers or oral recitation. Tomlinson (2001) supports this through product differentiation, while Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) emphasize how teacher self-efficacy shapes instructional decisions in challenging settings. Below are the participants’ significant responses:

Significant response 1: “For assessment, I have begun to consider flexibility by allowing students to demonstrate their understanding in different ways.” (SST₃, L₉)

Significant response 2: “Fairness does not always mean giving the same task but giving students a way to participate meaningfully.” (SST₄, L₁₀)

Significant response 3: “I give small adjustments such as extra time, simplified directions, or flexible output formats.” (SST₆, L₁₂)

3. Support Mechanisms Needed by Social Studies Teachers

Theme 1: Targeted Inclusive Education Training

The participants emphasized the need for more specific and continuous training. Although some support was available, teachers noted that seminars were often too general or not aligned with actual classroom needs. They needed disability-specific, subject-specific, and practice-based training, especially in adapting Social Studies tasks, discussions, and assessments. Giger et al. (2025) and Dioso et al. (2022) support this finding by stressing the importance of structured mentoring, institutional support, and appropriate teacher skills for inclusive education. Below are the participants’ significant responses:

Significant response 1: “More trainings for teachers.” (SST₁, L₃₇)

Significant response 2: “I would benefit from more targeted training and seminars specifically

focused on handling learners with Autism and other diverse needs.” (SST₃, L₃₈)

Significant response 3: “General seminars are helpful, but teachers also need hands-on workshops on differentiated instruction, classroom management, and inclusive assessment.” (SST₆, L₄₂)

Theme 2: Mentoring and Collaborative Planning

The second support mechanism focused on specialist guidance, mentoring, and collaboration. Participants valued co-teacher advice, LAC sessions, guidance office support, and shared strategies, but they also needed more consistent assistance from experienced teachers and SNED specialists. This support can help general education teachers validate their adaptations, reduce trial-and-error practices, and ensure that modifications remain appropriate for learners. Ng’andu (2023) and Damyanov (2024) support this by emphasizing collaboration, continuing professional development, individualized planning, assistive strategies, and professional guidance in inclusive education. Below are the participants’ significant responses:

Significant response 1: “Mentoring or coaching from experienced teachers or specialists in inclusive education would greatly help me develop more effective strategies.” (SST₃, L₃₉)

Significant response 2: “Teachers need more guidance from SNED specialists so that we will know if our adjustments are appropriate.” (SST₄, L₄₀)

Significant response 3: “More time for collaboration with co-teachers would also improve how we plan and implement adaptations.” (SST₅, L₄₁)

Theme 3: Accessible Instructional Support

The third support mechanism focused on resources and working conditions. Participants emphasized the need for digital tools, multimedia resources, ready-made instructional materials, sample modified lesson plans, assessment tools, assistive devices, better facilities, reduced administrative load, and protected planning time. These needs show that inclusive adaptation requires more than teacher effort; it also depends on concrete materials and conditions that allow teachers to plan, modify, and evaluate instruction effectively. Abuda et al. (2025) and Espeño et al. (2024) support this finding by stressing that administrative support, resources, facilities, and planning time are necessary for effective inclusive education. Below are the participants’ significant responses:

Significant response 1: “Access to more advanced digital tools and high-quality multimedia resources would also allow me to create more engaging and varied learning materials.” (SST₂, L₃₈)

Significant response 2: “I would also benefit from access to ready-made instructional materials, sample modified lesson plans, and assessment tools.” (SST₃, L₄₅)

Significant response 3: “It would also help if the school provides more learning resources, visual materials, and assistive tools that can be used in Social Studies classes.” (SST₅, L₄₃)

The three thematic areas show that instructional adaptation in Social Studies is pedagogical, relational, and institutional. Teachers adjust lessons, materials, activities, and assessments while seeking support from peers, co-teachers, parents, and school personnel. However, adaptation becomes sustainable only with training, resources, manageable class conditions, and specialist support to make learning meaningful, fair, and inclusive.

Conclusion

The study concludes that instructional adaptation among Social Studies teachers in mainstream classes is a continuous, reflective, and context-bound practice. Universal Design for Learning is reflected in how teachers make lessons accessible through visuals, simplified materials, guide questions, and varied ways of participation. Differentiated Instruction is shown in their use of contextualized examples, flexible outputs, peer support, and modified tasks that respond to learners' readiness, pace, and communication needs. Teacher Self-Efficacy is evident in the teachers' patience, creativity, and persistence in adjusting instruction despite limited training, resources, and specialist support. Overall, adaptation does not lower standards; it preserves Social Studies learning objectives while creating fairer pathways for participation, understanding, and inclusion.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Social Studies teachers strengthen adapted instruction by clearly identifying adaptation points in lesson plans, such as simplified keywords, guide questions, visuals, localized examples, structured routines, flexible outputs, and alternative response options. Since Social Studies is often abstract and text-heavy, teachers should use contextualized and multimodal strategies, including current events, timelines, pictures, charts, videos, graphic organizers, and guided discussions. Schools should also develop a shared bank of inclusive Social Studies materials and make LAC sessions more case-based and classroom-focused. Regular collaboration with SNED specialists, guidance personnel, and experienced colleagues should be strengthened, while DepEd, division offices, and school administrators should provide hands-on training, adequate resources, assistive tools, manageable workload, and protected planning time to sustain inclusive instruction.

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