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IEP Fidelity in the National Capital Region: A Naturalistic Inquiry Informing Practical Framework

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Abstract

The study was conducted in the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines, where, despite the institutionalization of inclusive education through Republic Act No. 11650, persistent gaps remained between policy expectations and classroom realities, particularly in the consistent implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). To address this gap, the study reconceptualized IEP fidelity as a socially constructed, context-dependent practice shaped by stakeholders' lived experiences. Anchored in a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, it employed a qualitative phenomenological design within a naturalistic inquiry framework. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with ten

teachers, field notes from five principals, and narrative accounts from five parents. Using reflexive thematic analysis, the study identified patterns in how IEP fidelity was understood and enacted across instructional, leadership, and family contexts. Findings revealed that IEP fidelity was often treated as a fixed procedural standard yet was, in practice, dynamically constructed through teachers' instructional decision-making, shaped by leadership practices, constrained by resource limitations, and strengthened through collaborative engagement with parents. Variability in implementation was linked to differences in monitoring practices, professional support, and institutional conditions.

Keywords: Individualized Education Program Fidelity, Inclusive Education, Naturalistic Inquiry, Phenomenology, Reflexive Thematic Analysis

1. The Problem and its Background

This chapter presented the foundation of the study by situating the research within the broader context of inclusive education and individualized educational planning. It outlined the background and rationale of the investigation, stated the research problem, and specified the research questions that guided the study. The discussion also described the purpose and objectives of the research, discussed its significance for key stakeholders, and clarified the scope, delimitations, theoretical framework, and definitions of key terms.

Introduction

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) had long been regarded in policy and practice as the centerpiece of educational provision for learners with disabilities; however, their real significance lay not in the documents themselves but in the fidelity with which they were enacted in classrooms. Originally conceived within rights-based special education legislation as a formal guarantee that each learner with a disability would receive a carefully tailored, appropriate education, the IEP had since become a global reference point for individualized planning, collaborative decision-making, and accountability for learner outcomes. In contemporary school systems—particularly in large, diverse, and resource-challenged urban contexts such as the National Capital Region—the question was no longer whether IEPs existed, but whether they were implemented in a manner that genuinely shaped instructional practice and meaningfully advanced the participation and achievement of the learners they were intended to serve.

Originating in the United States with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975—later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—the IEP was conceived as a legally binding, written plan to guarantee that children with disabilities received a free appropriate public education tailored to their individual needs. Over time, this model

of individualized planning informed special and inclusive education frameworks in many parts of the world, providing a reference point for collaborative goal-setting, targeted services, and accountability for learners' learning outcomes. As the primary mechanism for tailoring instruction, supports, and assessment to the unique needs of learners with disabilities, the IEP embodied a formal commitment to equitable, responsive, and meaningful participation in schooling.

When implemented with high fidelity, IEPs structured coherent interventions, guided teacher decision-making, and safeguarded the educational rights of learners with disabilities; when implementation was fragmented, perfunctory, or inconsistent, these same documents tended to devolve into procedural artifacts with limited impact on learning trajectories. In complex educational environments such as the National Capital Region—characterized by large class sizes, diverse learner profiles, and resource constraints—questions about how faithfully IEPs were enacted in day-to-day practice became especially salient. In the Philippine context, this issue was situated within a broader legal-policy landscape that included the Magna Carta for Persons with Disability (Republic Act No. 7277), which guaranteed access to quality education and auxiliary services, and Department of Education issuances under the K to 12 Basic Education Program that mandated inclusive, learner-centered practices for learners with disabilities, such as DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021.

More recently, Republic Act No. 11650, “An Act Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education, (RA 11650),” provided an explicit statutory basis for the use of Individualized Education Plans in Philippine basic education. RA 11650 defined the IEP as a systematic, purposive, and developmental educational program that specified learners' present levels of performance, the effects of disability on participation, priority goals, and the services, accommodations, modifications, and duration and frequency of supports required. Its Implementing Rules and Regulations mandated that IEPs be developed and regularly reviewed by a multidisciplinary team—including teachers, school heads, allied professionals, and families—based on comprehensive assessment and with active participation of parents or guardians and, when appropriate, the learners themselves. By positioning the IEP as both a pedagogical tool and a rights-based safeguard, RA 11650 raised expectations that schools would not only prepare IEPs but also implement them faithfully in alignment with national commitments to inclusive and equitable education.

National reviews of basic education, particularly the EDCOM II policy brief on accelerating support for learners with disabilities, further highlighted implementation gaps, noting that many schools struggled to consistently develop, use, and monitor IEPs as intended. These findings underscored concerns about weak and uneven IEP implementation and reinforced the urgency of examining IEP fidelity at the level of actual school and classroom practice.

Despite the establishment of comprehensive inclusive education policies in the Philippines, recent national reviews indicated that the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) remained uneven across schools. Although RA 11650 institutionalized individualized educational planning as a central mechanism for supporting

learners with disabilities, evidence suggested that the consistent translation of IEP provisions into classroom practice continues to vary widely. This gap highlighted the need to examine IEP fidelity—the degree to which the goals, services, accommodations, and instructional strategies specified in IEPs were implemented as intended within instructional contexts. Understanding how educators and other stakeholders interpreted and enacted IEP fidelity in everyday school environments was therefore essential for strengthening inclusive education practice.

Background of the Study

The rise of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) worldwide had closely paralleled the recognition of education as a fundamental right for children with disabilities. Globally, the development of IEPs had been closely tied to the expansion of legal rights to education for children with disabilities. In the United States, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142), later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, established the IEP as a central mechanism for guaranteeing a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; Wright, 2019). The IEP required schools to document learners' present levels of performance, measurable annual goals, and specific special education and related services, thereby formalizing individualized planning, collaboration, and accountability in special education practice (Bateman & Herr, 2019; IDEA Act, 2004). Over time, this model of individualized programming influenced policy and practice in other countries seeking to institutionalize more systematic and rights-based support for learners with disabilities (East Auburn Community School, 2024; Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020).

In the Philippines, the right of persons with disabilities to quality education was affirmed in the Magna Carta for Persons with Disability (Republic Act No. 7277, 1992; Republic Act No. 9442, 2007), which mandated that the State ensure adequate access to education, consider the special requirements of learners with disabilities in policy formulation, and promote auxiliary services to facilitate learning. The implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program was accompanied by Department of Education issuances emphasizing inclusive and learner-centered education, including DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, which provided policy guidelines on the provision of educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in the K to 12 system (Department of Education, 2021; Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). This order adopted a twin-track approach that both mainstreamed disability concerns into general education and provided disability-specific supports, such as assessments, IEPs, and specialized interventions (Emboltura, 2025). Taken together, RA 7277, RA 10533, and K to 12-related policies articulated a commitment to integrating learners with disabilities into regular schools while ensuring appropriate, individualized support.

However, classroom-level implementation often remained marked by large class sizes, limited specialized materials, and uneven access to trained special-needs and inclusive-education teachers, particularly in public schools within urban centers such as the National Capital Region (Kilag *et al.*, 2024; Miña, 2024; Inquirer Opinion, 2025).

General education teachers frequently assumed responsibility for learners with disabilities with limited preparation in specialized assessment, individualized planning, and differentiated instruction, which contributed to variability in how support was conceptualized and delivered (Kilag *et al.*, 2024; Beltran *et al.*, 2025). Concepcion, Abaya, and Magaya (2025) reported that special education teachers in Cagayan Valley demonstrated strong competence in gathering information, planning, and applying interventions but weaker practice in reviewing and revising IEPs and collaborating systematically with specialists, indicating that implementation tended to be stronger at the planning stage than in continuous monitoring and refinement. Likewise, Karaan *et al.* (2025) found that public elementary school teachers in Tagbilaran City had only moderate awareness and preparedness regarding IEPs; although they understood learners' needs and basic IEP components, they lacked expertise in assessment, goal setting, collaboration, and, especially, monitoring and evaluation. Estorninos (2025) and Mangongon (2023) similarly showed that Filipino special education teachers generally held positive attitudes toward IEPs and inclusion but faced persistent barriers related to time, resources, and coordination, underscoring that favorable dispositions alone were insufficient to ensure high-quality, sustained IEP implementation.

Within this evolving landscape, Republic Act No. 11650 consolidated and extended prior commitments by formally defining the Individualized Education Plan as a systematic, purposive, and developmental educational program that identified curricular and instructional priorities, services, and accommodations for learners with disabilities (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). The law and its Implementing Rules and Regulations required that IEPs be prepared by a multidisciplinary team—including special education teachers, general education teachers, school heads, and relevant specialists—based on comprehensive educational assessment and diagnosis, with the informed participation of parents or guardians and, when appropriate, the learners themselves (Department of Education, 2023; Yell & Bateman, 2025). IEPs also had to be regularly monitored and reviewed, at least annually, to assess learner progress and revise the plan as necessary, thereby reinforcing their role as dynamic guides for instruction rather than static compliance documents (Department of Education, 2023).

Despite this clearer statutory mandate, emerging reports and practitioner accounts indicated that IEP implementation across Philippine schools was inconsistent and heavily shaped by contextual constraints. National policy reviews, particularly the EDCOM II policy brief Accelerating Support for Learners with Disabilities, drew attention to the low fidelity with which many schools developed, implemented, and monitored IEPs, noting significant gaps between what was prescribed in policy and what was actually occurring in classrooms (Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II), 2025). Sector and advocacy reports by Save the Children Philippines and IDinsight likewise highlighted persistent challenges such as limited time for collaborative planning, insufficient familiarity with IEP procedures among general education teachers, weak coordination within multidisciplinary teams, and delays in establishing fully functional Inclusive Learning Resource Centers (Save the Children Philippines, 2022; EDCOM II & IDinsight, 2025). Program- and

school-level studies in Antipolo, Mandaluyong, Tacloban, Cebu, and other divisions further showed that the effectiveness of SPED and inclusive programs—including IEP use—was highly dependent on administrative support, leadership practices, funding, and the strength of home-school partnerships (Comia, 2021; Ciocon, 2022; Aldas *et al.*, 2025; Gabutan *et al.*, 2025; Beltran *et al.*, 2025). As a result, IEPs in some schools risked becoming mere compliance documents with limited influence on teaching strategies, classroom adaptations, and ongoing progress monitoring, especially in the National Capital Region, where schools served highly diverse learner populations and operated under intense academic and administrative pressures (Ronia, 2023; Dayso *et al.*, 2025; Obcial *et al.*, 2025).

Given this context, examining IEP fidelity—how accurately, consistently, and meaningfully IEPs were implemented relative to their intended design—was essential for understanding the real impact of RA 11650 and related policies at the classroom level (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Fixsen *et al.*, 2005). While international scholarship had begun to examine IEP implementation fidelity and its relationship to learner outcomes (Love-Latzke, 2021; Passmore, 2025; Mesui, 2024; Michael, 2024), these studies remained relatively limited and were often confined to specific content areas, disability categories, or school contexts. In the Philippine context, existing research has tended to focus on teachers' awareness and preparedness regarding IEPs, general challenges in inclusive education, and broad descriptions of program implementation, with only a small number of studies directly investigating IEP processes, implementation challenges, and links to learner outcomes (Concepcion *et al.*, 2025; Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Looc, 2024; Donaire *et al.*, 2024; Bansag, 2025; Mates *et al.*, 2025; Gabutan *et al.*, 2025). For instance, Looc (2024) found that IEPs in Paquibato District were often effective in promoting behavioral improvement, social integration, and inclusion but were only sometimes effective in improving academic progress and achieving IEP goals, while Donaire *et al.* (2024) reported academic gains for students with well-implemented IEPs but emphasized time constraints and the need for regular updates. Syntheses by Bansag (2025) and Mates *et al.* (2025) concluded that IEPs could enhance academic and social outcomes when well-designed and consistently implemented, yet they also noted considerable variation in implementation quality across settings.

In response to these gaps, a qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to explore the contextual experiences, understandings, and day-to-day practices of teachers, principals, and parents regarding IEP implementation in inclusive education environments. Qualitative inquiry using a naturalistic lens enabled the researcher to capture the complexity of social processes and generate rich, detailed accounts of participants' perspectives, which were essential when investigating how policies were translated into practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 2009). This orientation aligned with the study's conceptualization of IEP fidelity as a socially constructed, practice-based phenomenon situated within specific institutional and policy contexts. Building on this foundation, phenomenology was particularly appropriate because it centered on how individuals experienced

phenomena and made sense of those experiences. In this study, the phenomenon of interest was IEP fidelity: the extent to which IEP provisions were understood, negotiated, and implemented in classroom and school practices. By focusing on participants' descriptions of their day-to-day involvement with IEPs, the phenomenological design enabled the researcher to identify commonalities and variations in how fidelity was perceived and enacted among teachers, principals, and parents.

Consistent with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, the study drew on constructivist and interpretivist perspectives, which held that individuals actively constructed meaning through their interactions and that understanding these meanings was essential for explaining social and educational practice (Piaget, 1970, 1972; Schutz, 1967; Weber, 1949; Vygotsky, 1978). A naturalistic, phenomenological design was congruent with these perspectives because it privileged participants' own accounts and situated them within the real-world contexts of NCR schools where inclusive education policies were implemented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexive thematic analysis, as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), served as the primary analytic approach for this qualitative design, providing a systematic yet flexible method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across the narratives of teachers, principals, and parents, while acknowledging the active interpretive role of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Birks *et al.*, 2008). Complementing this, the study incorporated coding procedures based on Saldaña's (2021) qualitative coding framework, which conceptualized coding as a cyclical, reflective process through which patterns, concepts, and themes were developed from qualitative data. Together, the phenomenological design, naturalistic inquiry orientation, reflexive thematic analysis, and iterative coding procedures provided a coherent methodological structure for exploring how IEP fidelity was constructed, interpreted, and enacted within the everyday practices of schools in the National Capital Region.

Statement of the Problem

Although inclusive education policies in the Philippines emphasized individualized educational support for learners with disabilities through the use of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), evidence indicated that the implementation of these plans remained inconsistent across schools. The enactment of Republic Act No. 11650 formally institutionalized the development and implementation of IEPs within the Philippine basic education system; however, national reports continued to highlight gaps between policy expectations and classroom practice.

A critical dimension of this gap concerned IEP fidelity, or the extent to which the instructional goals, services, accommodations, and supports identified in an IEP were implemented as intended. While policy frameworks provided guidance for developing IEPs, relatively little was known about how teachers, school leaders, and parents interpreted and enacted IEP provisions within the realities of inclusive classrooms.

Existing studies on inclusive education in the Philippines had largely focused on policy implementation, teacher attitudes, and systemic challenges, with limited attention to IEP fidelity as a practice-based, contextually constructed phenomenon. Consequently, there remained insufficient

understanding of how multiple stakeholders collaboratively interpreted, negotiated, and enacted IEP implementation in everyday school contexts.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did teachers in the National Capital Region understand and enact IEP fidelity in their daily instructional practices, particularly in aligning IEP goals, instructional delivery, accommodations, and progress monitoring?
2. How did teachers' lived experiences and day-to-day instructional decisions illustrate fidelity or deviation in IEP implementation, and how did these experiences shape their evolving understanding of IEP fidelity over time?
3. How did school and division-level conditions—such as leadership practices, policy expectations, resource allocation, and professional development—shape teachers' interpretation and enactment of high-fidelity IEP implementation?
4. When teachers encountered challenges or gaps in IEP fidelity, what reflective processes and collaborative problem-solving approaches did they use, and how did these responses contribute to local IEP fidelity practices?
5. From teachers' perspectives, which indicators of IEP fidelity were most actionable, feasible, and meaningful for informing a practical, scalable fidelity framework for the National Capital Region?
6. What IEP fidelity practices were demonstrated by NCR teachers, principals, and parents, and how were these practices manifested in actual implementation?
7. What patterns emerged across teachers, principals, and parents regarding the meaning and implementation of IEP fidelity in NCR schools?
8. How was the IEP fidelity framework utilized by NCR teachers, principals, and parents within their respective school contexts?

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how fidelity to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) was interpreted, negotiated, and enacted within inclusive education settings in the National Capital Region of the Philippines. Despite the institutionalization of inclusive education through Republic Act No. 11650, evidence suggested that the consistent implementation of IEPs across schools remained limited. This study, therefore, explored how teachers, principals, and parents understood and enacted IEP provisions within their respective educational contexts.

Using a qualitative naturalistic inquiry approach, the study examined the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers, principals, and parents regarding IEP implementation in NCR schools. Through triangulation of stakeholder perspectives, the study sought to identify patterns in how IEP fidelity was understood and enacted in practice. The findings informed the development of a context-responsive NCR IEP Fidelity Framework intended to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education policies.

Furthermore, the study sought to deepen understanding of how IEP fidelity was constructed in real-world educational contexts characterized by diverse learner needs, institutional constraints, and collaborative decision-making among

stakeholders. Through qualitative interviews with 10 teachers, analysis of 5 principals' field notes, and inclusion of 5 parents' perspectives, the research captured multiple perspectives on how IEP implementation occurred in practice. Through the triangulation of these perspectives, the study sought to identify combined patterns across teachers, principals, and parents regarding how IEP fidelity was understood and enacted within NCR schools (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Building on these insights, the study ultimately sought to develop a context-sensitive NCR IEP Fidelity Framework that synthesized the findings into practical guidance to strengthen the implementation of inclusive education. The framework integrated key components derived from the study's thematic findings, including the IEP Fidelity Instructional Framework, the IEP Fidelity Leadership Framework, the Parent Engagement Framework, and the Integrated NCR IEP Fidelity Ecosystem Model. Collectively, these components were intended to support principals, teachers, and policymakers, and eventually to help learners with disabilities receive appropriate services and accommodations to ensure the consistent and responsive implementation of IEPs in the National Capital Region.

To achieve this purpose, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine how teachers defined and interpreted IEP fidelity within their instructional contexts.
2. To analyze how teachers operationalized IEP fidelity through the implementation of instructional goals, accommodations, support services, and progress monitoring practices.
3. To investigate the reflective and collaborative processes through which teachers made decisions related to IEP implementation.
4. To explore teachers' challenges or gaps and the reflective problem-solving processes they used.
5. To explore how institutional conditions, including leadership practices, school policies, and resource availability, influenced the enactment of IEP fidelity in NCR schools.
6. To examine how the experiences and perspectives of teachers, principals, and parents demonstrated understandings of IEP fidelity.
7. To identify patterns of emergence across teachers, principals, and parents regarding the meaning and implementation of IEP fidelity.
8. To develop a practical and context-responsive NCR IEP Fidelity Framework that could inform the improvement of IEP implementation in inclusive education settings.

Significance of the Study

The implementation of Republic Act No. 11650 made the IEP the central component of educational programming for learners with disabilities in the Philippines (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). However, recent national evidence indicated that despite this policy mandate, the use and consistent implementation of IEPs remained limited in many schools (EDCOM II, 2023). This study, therefore, provided timely and context-sensitive insights into how IEP fidelity was interpreted, negotiated, and enacted in schools within the NCR.

Examining the experiences of teachers, principals, and parents through a naturalistic inquiry lens and analyzing patterns through Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic

analysis, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of how inclusive education policies were translated into classroom practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings further informed the development of an NCR IEP Fidelity Framework, comprising instructional, leadership, and parent engagement dimensions.

Learners with disabilities: The findings of this study contributed to improving the educational experiences of learners with disabilities by illuminating how IEP provisions were implemented in everyday classroom practice. A clearer understanding of the conditions that supported or constrained IEP fidelity helped ensure that learners received the individualized supports, accommodations, and instructional adjustments required under Republic Act No. 11650 (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). Strengthening IEP fidelity aimed to ultimately enhance learners' participation, access to the curriculum, and achievement in inclusive educational settings (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024).

Teachers: For teachers, particularly those responsible for implementing IEPs in inclusive classrooms, the study provided insights into the instructional practices and contextual challenges that shaped faithful implementation. The findings informed professional development programs, collaborative structures, and instructional supports that helped teachers translate IEP goals into effective classroom practice (Michael, 2024). The IEP Fidelity Instructional Framework generated in this study may also provided guidance for aligning instruction, accommodations, and progress monitoring with individualized learner needs.

Principals: The study offered valuable insights for principals, who played a crucial role in shaping institutional conditions that supported inclusive education. Through principals' field notes and cross-stakeholder analysis, the research highlighted how leadership practices—including supervision, resource allocation, and professional learning opportunities—influenced IEP implementation (Gage *et al.*, 2020). The proposed IEP Fidelity Leadership Framework aimed to assist principals in strengthening school-level systems that sustained consistent and collaborative IEP implementation.

Parents and families: Parents played a central role in advocating for their children's educational needs and monitoring how IEP provisions were implemented in school contexts. By incorporating parents' perceptions, this study recognized families as essential partners in inclusive education (United Nations, 2006). The findings informed schools in strengthened communication, trust, and collaborative decision-making between educators and families to support effective IEP implementation.

Educational managers and policymakers: At the policy and system levels, the study provided empirical evidence on how inclusive education mandates were interpreted and enacted within NCR schools (EDCOM II, 2023). The findings informed policy implementation strategies, resource allocation decisions, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the operationalization of Republic Act No. 11650 (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). The Integrated NCR IEP Fidelity Ecosystem Model served as a practical reference for designing sustainable implementation systems that supported fidelity while remaining responsive to contextual realities.

Researchers and scholars in inclusive education: The study contributed to the growing body of qualitative

research on inclusive education and implementation fidelity by conceptualizing IEP fidelity as a contextually constructed and practice-based phenomenon (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020). Employing naturalistic inquiry and reflexive thematic analysis, the research extended scholarly understanding of how educational policies were enacted within complex school environments (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The resulting frameworks and ecosystem model provided conceptual foundations for future studies examining the implementation of inclusive education in other regions and educational systems.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm and a naturalistic inquiry stance, which together offered a coherent lens for examining how IEP fidelity was understood and enacted in NCR inclusive education settings. Within this paradigm, educational practice was viewed not as the direct application of policy but as actively shaped through stakeholders’ meaning-making within particular social and institutional contexts (Schutz, 1967; Weber, 1949). In the case of Republic Act No. 11650, the fidelity of IEP implementation depended on how teachers, school leaders, and parents interpreted policy expectations and translated them into everyday instructional decisions.

From a constructivist standpoint, knowledge was actively built through individuals’ interactions with their environment rather than transmitted in a purely linear fashion (Piaget, 1970). Teachers interpreted inclusive education policies, instructional strategies, and learner needs through their existing cognitive structures, which were revised via processes of assimilation and accommodation as they encountered new demands and constraints (Piaget, 1970). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory extended this view by locating learning and development within collaborative activity and culturally mediated interaction, highlighting how IEP development and implementation were inherently social processes involving conferences, planning meetings, and informal consultations among teachers, principals, parents, and other professionals (Vygotsky, 1978). Through these interactions, stakeholders jointly constructed the purposes, priorities, and practical boundaries of IEPs in NCR schools.

Interpretivism further sharpened the analytical focus on participants’ meanings by positing that social reality was constituted through actors’ interpretations (Schutz, 1967; Weber, 1949). Applied to this study, teachers, principals, and parents might have held varying and sometimes conflicting views of what counts as “faithful” IEP implementation, shaped by their roles, expectations, and institutional pressures. Illuminating these differing constructions of fidelity provided insight into how inclusive education policy was enacted, adapted, or diluted within NCR schools. In this sense, IEP fidelity is treated not as a fixed technical standard but as a negotiated and contested practice embedded in the everyday work of inclusive education.

Methodologically, the study was situated within naturalistic inquiry, which advocated examining phenomena in their natural settings and privileging participants’ own accounts and categories over externally imposed frames (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This orientation was well-suited to IEP fidelity, which unfolded in complex, resource-constrained

school environments that could not be meaningfully captured through experimental or highly standardized designs. Naturalistic inquiry supported an in-depth, context-sensitive exploration of how IEP provisions were interpreted and applied in everyday practice, and how organizational conditions in NCR schools facilitated or hindered fidelity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It also aligned with the study’s emphasis on rich, contextually grounded narratives from multiple stakeholder groups.

The analytic dimension of the framework drew on Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis and Saldaña’s qualitative coding principles, which were epistemologically consistent with a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm because they treated themes as interpretive constructions rather than objective discoveries (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis conceptualized qualitative analysis as an inherently interpretive, recursive process of generating themes through systematic phases of familiarization, coding, constructing and reviewing themes, and producing an analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021).

Saldaña (2021) complemented this by offering guidance on cyclical coding—such as descriptive, process, and pattern coding—as a way of moving from raw textual data to increasingly abstract patterns and explanations. Together, these approaches enabled the study to trace convergences and tensions across teachers’, principals’, and parents’ accounts of IEP fidelity. Within this integrated frame, IEP fidelity was examined as a socially constructed, contextually situated, and interpretively mediated practice in NCR inclusive education settings.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study examined how IEP fidelity was interpreted, negotiated, and enacted within inclusive education settings in the NCR of the Philippines. Specifically, it focused on the perspectives of teachers, principals, and parents regarding the implementation of IEP provisions as mandated under Republic Act No. 11650 (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). By examining these perspectives, the study intended to capture how inclusive education policies were translated into instructional practice and school-level processes within real-world educational contexts.

In terms of geographic scope, the study was limited to selected public schools within the NCR, a metropolitan educational environment characterized by dense school networks, diverse learner populations, and varying institutional capacities. NCR was selected because it represented a complex urban educational context in which inclusive education policies were implemented across diverse institutional conditions. While the findings offered insights relevant to similar urban educational environments, they were not intended to represent the experiences of schools in other regions of the Philippines, where contextual conditions and resources might differed.

Regarding participants, the study focused primarily on teachers directly responsible for implementing IEPs in classroom practice. A total of 10 teachers served as the primary participants because they had firsthand experience interpreting and applying IEP provisions in instructional settings. To further broaden the understanding of IEP implementation, the study also incorporated 5 principals’ field notes, which provided insights into leadership practices and institutional conditions influencing inclusive education

implementation. Additionally, 5 parents were included to capture family perspectives on how IEP supports were experienced in their children's education. The inclusion of these stakeholder groups enabled the study to generate a triangulated understanding of IEP fidelity and to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Methodologically, the study adopted a phenomenological qualitative design and used a naturalistic inquiry approach to understand social phenomena in their natural contexts and to emphasize participants' meanings and lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry was particularly appropriate for examining complex educational practices, such as IEP implementation, because it enabled the researcher to examine how policies were interpreted and enacted in real-world school settings. Data were collected through qualitative interviews, principals' field notes, and parent perceptions, enabling the researcher to capture detailed narratives regarding stakeholders' experiences with IEP fidelity.

The analysis of qualitative data used Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, which provided a systematic approach to identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Through iterative engagement with the data, themes emerged that illuminated how IEP fidelity was interpreted and enacted across stakeholder groups. Complementing this approach, the study also drew on Saldaña's qualitative coding framework, which emphasized iterative and reflective coding processes in generating meaningful interpretations from qualitative narratives (Saldaña, 2021). The adequacy of the participant group was, therefore, determined by the depth and richness of the data rather than by numerical generalization. As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research prioritized a detailed understanding of participants' experiences and contextual conditions over broad generalizability. Therefore, the findings of this study were intended to provide contextually grounded insights into IEP fidelity within NCR schools rather than statistically generalizable conclusions applicable to all educational settings.

The study was further delimited by its focus on stakeholder perspectives and experiences of IEP fidelity rather than on the quantitative measurement of student learning outcomes or program effectiveness. Consequently, the research did not attempt to evaluate the academic performance of learners with disabilities or measure the impact of specific instructional interventions. Instead, it focused on understanding how IEP fidelity was constructed, interpreted, and enacted within classroom practice and school leadership processes. Additionally, the investigation focused primarily on inclusive and mainstream classroom environments in which learners with disabilities participated alongside their peers without disabilities (IDEA, 2004); highly specialized or segregated educational placements were not the central focus of this research. The study was also limited to the time during which the data were collected, reflecting participants' experiences during a specific phase of inclusive education implementation.

Finally, the findings of this research were intended to inform the development of a context-sensitive NCR IEP Fidelity Framework that synthesized stakeholder perspectives into practical guidance to strengthen IEP implementation in

inclusive education environments. While the framework may offer insights relevant to similar educational contexts, it was designed primarily as a practice-oriented framework grounded in the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders within NCR schools rather than as a universally generalizable model.

Definition of Terms

Defining key terms was essential in research to ensure clarity and consistency in the interpretation of concepts used throughout the study. Clear operational definitions enabled readers to understand how important terms were applied within the research context and helped prevent ambiguity in specialized terminology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, where concepts might carry varied meanings across contexts, explicitly defining terms helped establish a shared understanding between the researcher and the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Accordingly, the following terms were defined as they were used in this study. Whenever applicable, definitions were based on the provisions of Republic Act No. 11650 and were supported by relevant literature on inclusive education and implementation fidelity.

Inclusive Education: Refers to the process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners by moving towards the end goal of full and effective participation, presence, and achievement in learning cultures and communities, which involves accommodation, modification, adaptation, and individualization in content, approaches, structures, and strategies. (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): Refers to the systematic, purposive, and developmental educational programming of curricular and instructional priorities and contents designed to meet the educational requirements of a learner with disability and ensure the mastery learning of skills and behaviors. (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022).

IEP Fidelity: Refers to the degree to which the goals, accommodations, services, and instructional strategies outlined in a learner's Individualized Education Plan are implemented consistently and as intended within classroom instruction and school practices.

IEP Fidelity Instructional Framework: Refers to the set of instructional practices and strategies identified in this study that guide teachers in implementing IEP goals, accommodations, and progress monitoring within inclusive classroom environments.

IEP Fidelity Leadership Framework: The IEP Fidelity Leadership Framework refers to the leadership practices and school-level support mechanisms that facilitate the effective implementation of IEP provisions, including administrative guidance, professional development, resource allocation, and the monitoring of inclusive education practices.

NCR IEP Fidelity Framework: Refers to the comprehensive framework developed in this study that synthesizes instructional practices, leadership support, parent engagement, and fidelity-maintenance processes to support consistent IEP implementation in NCR schools.

Learners with Disability: Refer to all learners in the general early and basic education system, in whatever program, who require additional support and related services and pedagogic methods due to their long or short-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and

effective participation in society on an equal basis with others to develop them to their maximum capability. (RA 11650).

Naturalistic Inquiry: Refers to a qualitative research approach that examines social phenomena in their natural settings and focuses on understanding participants' experiences and meanings rather than on controlling or manipulating research conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Parent Engagement Framework: Refers to the set of collaborative practices identified in the study that facilitate meaningful parent participation in the development, implementation, and monitoring of their children's Individualized Education Programs.

Principal: Refers to school head or educational leader responsible for managing school operations, supervising teachers, and ensuring the implementation of educational policies, including inclusive education programs and Individualized Education Plans (IEP) within the school.

Special Education Center (SPED Center): Refers to specialized educational facility or program within the school system that provides support services, instructional resources, and specialized expertise for learners with disabilities.

Special Needs Education (SNED): Refers to the customized instructional program or service designed to meet the diverse needs of an individual learner with a disability, which may necessitate supplementary aids and services and teaching strategies in the classroom or non-academic settings. This includes instructions in physical and vocational education, social skills development, and basic survival needs, while providing reasonable accommodations, modifications, adaptations, and individualization, as needed. It further includes learners with disabilities in the general education system to enable them to realize their full potential and prepare them as independently functioning members of society.

Special Needs Education Teacher (SNED Teacher): Refers to an individual who teaches academic and life skills to basic education learners who have a range of disabilities and learning difficulties using various strategies targeting the learners' holistic development. A SNED teachers works in partnership with a general education teacher in planning, teaching, and providing support to learners with disabilities. (RA 11650).

Triangulation: Refers to the use of multiple data sources, participants, or methods in qualitative research to enhance the credibility and validity of research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, triangulation is achieved through the integration of teacher interviews, principals' field notes, and parents' perceptions.

Thematic Analysis: Refers to a qualitative analytical method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, reflexive thematic analysis is used to examine stakeholders' perspectives on the implementation of IEP fidelity.

The preceding chapter presented the background, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, significance, scope and delimitations, theoretical foundation, and definition of key terms used in the study. Building on this foundation, Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and empirical studies related to inclusive education, IEP development and implementation, and implementation fidelity, thereby providing the scholarly context for

understanding the phenomenon investigated in this research.

2. Review of Related Literature

Chapter 2 reviewed literature and studies pertaining to the implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and the broader concept of inclusive education. It examined scholarly articles, policies, and empirical research that informed the study's conceptual and contextual framework and clarified how IEP fidelity had been interpreted and applied within inclusive educational environments.

Introduction

Inclusive education emerged as a major educational reform movement aimed at ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities for all learners, including those with disabilities. International frameworks significantly shaped this movement, particularly the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, which called for schools to accommodate all learners regardless of their abilities and emphasized inclusive schooling as a means of promoting equity and participation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1994). The global inclusive education agenda promoted by UNESCO encouraged education systems to transition from segregated special education structures toward inclusive learning environments that provided appropriate support for diverse learners (UNESCO, 2020).

These international commitments provided the foundation for national laws and guidelines that formalized inclusive education in the Philippines. In the Philippine context, inclusive education reforms were strengthened through a series of legislative and policy initiatives to protect the educational rights of learners with disabilities. Early policy foundations were established through Republic Act No. 7277, the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, which recognized the right of persons with disabilities to access quality education and support services. This commitment was reinforced by Republic Act No. 10533, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which promoted learner-centered and inclusive educational practices within the K to 12 curriculum. More recently, DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, provided policy guidelines to implement inclusive education in schools. These reforms were further institutionalized through Republic Act No. 11650, *known as Act Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education*, which mandated the development of inclusive education programs and the provision of individualized support services for learners with disabilities (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022).

Collectively, these policies not only affirmed the right of learners with disabilities to inclusive education but also required schools to use individualized planning mechanisms—principally the IEP—to operationalize these rights in classroom practice. The following section discussed inclusive education and the IEP's role as the primary tool for translating policy commitments into instructional practice.

Inclusive Education and the Role of the Individualized Education Plan

Inclusive education was grounded in the principle that all learners, regardless of ability or disability, should have equitable access to quality educational opportunities within

general education environments. Over the past several decades, international educational reforms have emphasized the need to remove barriers to participation and ensure that educational systems were responsive to the diverse needs of learners. The global movement toward inclusive education was shaped by international policy frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, which advocated that schools accommodate all learners and adopt child-centered pedagogies that responded to diverse learning needs (UNESCO, 1994). Similarly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognized inclusive education as a fundamental human right and called on governments to ensure that learners with disabilities received appropriate support services within mainstream educational systems (United Nations, 2006). These international commitments encouraged countries worldwide to develop inclusive education policies and practices that promoted equity, accessibility, and participation for all learners (UNESCO, 2020).

One of the most influential legislative frameworks supporting inclusive education in the United States was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). IDEA mandated that students with disabilities were entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), ensuring that they were educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Central to IDEA was the requirement that each student with a disability have an IEP, a legally mandated document that outlined the educational goals, services, and supports necessary to meet the learner's individual needs. The IEP served as a structured plan that included the learner's present level of academic and functional performance, measurable annual goals, instructional accommodations, specialized services, and procedures for monitoring progress (Yell & Bateman, 2025). Through this individualized planning process, educators designed and implemented targeted interventions that facilitated meaningful participation in inclusive classroom settings (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Yell & Bateman, 2025).

The IEP, therefore, became a central mechanism for translating inclusive education policies into classroom practice. By identifying individualized goals and support services, the IEP enabled schools to tailor educational experiences to the unique strengths, challenges, and developmental needs of learners with disabilities. Research consistently demonstrated that well-designed and effectively implemented IEPs contributed to improved academic outcomes, increased learner engagement, and greater participation in inclusive educational environments (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the IEP process—which involved teachers, parents, principals, and specialists—helped ensure that educational interventions were aligned with the learner's needs and were supported by multiple stakeholders (Phillips, 2025).

Regardless of the recognized importance of individualized educational planning, the success of IEPs depended not only on their development but also on the quality and consistency of their implementation. Studies showed that challenges such as insufficient teacher preparation, limited professional development opportunities, resource constraints, and weak collaboration among stakeholders hindered effective IEP

implementation (Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025). When IEP components were not implemented consistently in classroom practice, discrepancies arose between planned instructional supports and actual learning experiences, potentially limiting the effectiveness of individualized educational interventions. These challenges highlighted the importance of examining how IEPs were enacted within classroom contexts and identifying the factors that influenced the fidelity of their implementation. The next section, therefore, focused on the concept of implementation fidelity and its application to IEPs.

Overall, the literature converged to show that inclusive education was a global, rights-based commitment that required schools to remove barriers and respond to diverse learners, with the IEP serving as the central tool for individualizing support and translating policy into classroom practice. Moreover, when IEPs were collaboratively developed and well-designed, they were associated with improved academic outcomes, engagement, and participation for learners with disabilities; however, these benefits were highly dependent on consistent, high-quality implementation. Consequently, persistent challenges—such as limited teacher preparation, resource constraints, and weak collaboration—created gaps between what was written in IEPs and what occurred in classrooms, thereby highlighting IEP implementation fidelity as the critical link between inclusive policy and students' actual learning experiences.

IEP Implementation Fidelity

Implementation fidelity referred to the degree to which a program or intervention was delivered as intended by its designers or policy frameworks (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020). Gage *et al.* (2020) described fidelity of implementation as a multidimensional construct that included adherence to program design, quality of delivery, dosage of intervention, and participant responsiveness. In educational contexts, high fidelity meant that practitioners consistently followed the core components and processes of the intervention as specified in the design.

In this study, IEP fidelity referred specifically to the extent to which the goals, instructional strategies, accommodations, and services specified in an IEP were consistently implemented in classroom practice. In the context of special education, high levels of IEP fidelity were associated with improved learner outcomes, greater engagement, and increased participation in inclusive classroom activities (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, low levels of IEP fidelity reduced the effectiveness of instructional interventions and widened the gap between planned supports and actual classroom experiences (Gage *et al.*, 2020).

Research has identified several factors that influenced implementation fidelity in educational settings. These included teacher competence and confidence, access to professional development, leadership and administrative support, stakeholder collaboration, and the availability of instructional resources (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Michael, 2024). Michael (2024) found that structured interventions involving performance feedback and reinforcement significantly improved teachers' fidelity in implementing individualized interventions for learners with disabilities. Similarly, Rakap *et al.* (2025) demonstrated that professional training programs enhanced teachers' ability to

develop high-quality IEP goals and helped maintain these competencies over time. These findings suggested that implementation fidelity was not merely a procedural requirement but a complex process shaped by institutional, instructional, and relational conditions (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Michael, 2024).

The following sections reviewed empirical studies from Philippine and international contexts that examined how these conditions influenced IEP implementation, with particular attention to teacher competence, professional development, collaboration, leadership, monitoring, and resource constraints.

Collectively, the literature indicated that implementation fidelity was a multidimensional concept—encompassing adherence, quality, dosage, and responsiveness—that captured how closely practice aligned with program or policy intent. Consequently, when IEP goals, strategies, accommodations, and services were implemented with high fidelity, learners with disabilities were more likely to experience improved outcomes, engagement, and participation, whereas inconsistent implementation widened the gap between planned supports and actual classroom experiences. Moreover, studies consistently showed that fidelity was shaped by teacher competence, professional development, leadership support, collaboration, and resources, suggesting that IEP implementation fidelity was not a simple procedural task but a complex, context-dependent process conditioned by institutional, instructional, and relational factors.

Review of Related Studies

A thematic synthesis of Philippine and international literature on IEP implementation and implementation fidelity in inclusive education settings revealed several recurring domains. Across studies, key factors influencing IEP implementation included teacher competence and professional knowledge, ongoing professional development, collaboration among stakeholders, leadership and institutional support, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and resource availability (Anora *et al.*, 2025; Dewi *et al.*, 2026; Michael, 2024). Together, these domains provided a conceptual map for understanding how IEPs were implemented in schools and where gaps and challenges commonly arise.

Building on these thematic domains, the next sections discussed Philippine and international studies separately to highlight both common patterns and contextual differences.

Philippine Studies on IEP Fidelity Implementation and Inclusive Education

Philippine research on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and inclusive education grew in recent years, focusing on teacher competence, implementation practices, contextual challenges, and learner outcomes. Concepcion, Abaya, and Magaya (2025) found that special education teachers in Cagayan Valley demonstrated a high level of knowledge and practice in developing IEPs, particularly in information gathering, planning, and intervention application, but showed weaknesses in reviewing and revising IEPs and in collaborating systematically with specialists, indicating that implementation was stronger at the planning stage than in continuous monitoring and refinement. Karaan *et al.* (2025) reported that public elementary school teachers in Tagbilaran City had only

moderate awareness and preparedness regarding IEPs; although they understood learner needs and key IEP components, they lacked expertise in assessment, goal setting, collaboration with families and specialists, and especially in monitoring and evaluation, with awareness positively related to preparedness.

Teacher attitudes and perceived challenges have also been examined. Estorninos (2025) showed that special education teachers in Dasmariñas possessed strong commitment and positive attitudes toward IEP preparation, valuing collaboration, ethical responsibility, and empathy; yet they faced persistent barriers such as limited resources, time constraints, and coordination difficulties, with a low but significant positive correlation between positive attitudes and the challenges encountered. Mangongon (2023) likewise reported that special educators in Sarangani recognized the importance of IEPs and maintained the “right attitude” toward their use, but openly acknowledged difficulties with the IEP process and emphasized the need for instructional support, adequate training, and parent mentoring. These studies suggested that favorable attitudes and basic knowledge existed among Filipino teachers, but were not sufficient to ensure high-quality, sustained IEP implementation in the absence of robust support systems.

At the program and school levels, several studies in the Philippines have evaluated the implementation of SPED and inclusive education programs within which IEPs operated. In Antipolo City, Comia (2021) revealed that inclusive education programs were generally supported by administrators, SPED and regular teachers, and parents, but remained heavily dependent on administrative backing and active family involvement for their effectiveness. Ciocon (2022) showed that the instructional leadership practices of school heads in Mandaluyong positively influenced the extent of SPED program implementation, underscoring the role of leadership in supporting teachers’ use of IEPs.

More recent local research has focused more directly on IEP processes, implementation, and associated challenges. Jocson and Buenrostro (2024) analyzed developmental pediatric assessment reports and their “translatability” into IEPs, finding that such reports typically contained learner profiles, present levels, and recommendations that could inform IEP goals, but that variability in structure, terminology, and specificity affected how easily teachers could convert them into clear, actionable objectives and strategies. Aldas *et al.* (2025) conducted a qualitative study of IEP implementation in public and private elementary special education schools in Tacloban City and identified seven main themes, including IEP development practices, preparedness built from experience and limited training, administrative and policy gaps, funding and resource limitations, collaboration barriers with parents and therapists, teacher workload and emotional burden, and adaptive strategies and coping mechanisms. Public school teachers reported heavy administrative loads, resource shortages, and insufficient multidisciplinary support, while teachers in private schools benefited from more organized systems but faced sustainability and collaboration challenges; the authors proposed a framework involving modular training, digital IEP tools, strengthened parent and community partnerships, and peer mentoring and wellness programs.

Other Philippine studies document inclusive classroom practices closely aligned with IEP-aligned individualized

instruction. Marchan *et al.* (2025) reported that teachers in an inclusive high school in Misamis Occidental employed differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, buddy systems, and assistive technology to support special needs learners, yet struggled with overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and inadequate training, which limited the sustainability of individualized support. Ronia (2023) likewise described how teachers in inclusive schools frequently confronted behavioral and instructional management challenges and, at times, physical harm, but coped through professional support networks and accommodation practices. Dayso *et al.* (2025), Obcial *et al.* (2025), and Beltran *et al.* (2025) similarly highlighted that while schools strove to foster inclusion through flexible methods and policies, efforts were hampered by inadequate training, limited infrastructure, and uneven policy application.

Philippine research also linked IEP use to learner outcomes and underscored the importance of implementation quality. Looc (2024) found that IEPs in Paquibato District were often effective in promoting behavioral improvement, social integration, and inclusion, but only sometimes effective in improving academic progress, achieving IEP goals, and fostering strong parent-teacher collaboration, with IEP effectiveness significantly predicting special education outcomes. Donaire, Hurtada, and Cagape (2024) reported that students with well-implemented IEPs showed about a 20% improvement in academic performance, but noted persistent challenges, including time constraints and the need for regular IEP updates. Local syntheses such as Bansag (2025) and Mates *et al.* (2025) concluded that IEPs could enhance academic, behavioral, and social outcomes when well-designed and consistently implemented, yet they also pointed to varied implementation quality across settings.

Taking everything into account, several local studies emphasized professional development, collaboration, and support systems as key determinants of effective IEP use. Arcipe *et al.* (2025) found that special education teachers in Cebu Province had high levels of professional development knowledge, with this knowledge significantly correlated with teaching competence and IEP implementation effectiveness, particularly in adapting instructional strategies. Concepcion *et al.* (2025) and Karaan *et al.* (2025) stressed that continuous, structured training and administrative support were essential to strengthen teachers' IEP knowledge, practices, and preparedness, recommending systematic training, mentoring, and collaborative mechanisms. Gabutan *et al.* (2025) reported that teachers and parents in Cebu City recognized the value of standardized IEPs for ensuring consistency and equity in SPED services, but identified limited training, resource shortages, and communication barriers as factors that hindered practical implementation and limited meaningful parent involvement. Collectively, Philippine studies showed that IEPs and inclusive programs are valued and increasingly used, but that monitoring, review, collaboration, and resource and leadership support remain uneven, with implementation quality varying across schools and regions.

In summary, Philippine studies depicted a system where IEPs and inclusive education were valued in principle and increasingly embedded in policy and school practice, yet their quality and consistency of implementation remained

uneven across regions, school types, and programs. Teachers typically demonstrated basic to strong knowledge and positive attitudes toward IEPs and inclusion, but they struggled most with ongoing assessment, goal refinement, monitoring, and systematic collaboration with families and specialists, especially under high workloads, limited training, and resource constraints. On the other hand, school- and program-level research highlighted that effective IEP use was heavily contingent on supportive instructional leadership, administrative backing, and structured systems for collaboration and follow-through, rather than on teacher effort alone. More recent empirical work further showed how variability in external assessment reports, resource availability, and school structures shaped the “translatability” of IEPs into concrete classroom practices and learner outcomes, with public schools often facing heavier constraints than private schools. Overall, the literature converged on the conclusion that implementation fidelity in the Philippine context hinged on sustained professional development, robust leadership and monitoring, standardized yet flexible processes, and authentic parent-school partnerships, without which the potential of IEPs to enhance academic, behavioral, and social outcomes could be fully realized.

International Studies on IEP Fidelity and Inclusive Education

International literature similarly portrayed IEPs as essential but complex instruments whose impact depended heavily on implementation fidelity in daily school practice. In the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) requires that IEPs be developed, reviewed, and revised for each child with a disability and implemented in the least restrictive environment, with general education teachers participating as IEP team members responsible for supporting IEP goals and accommodations. Love-Latzke (2021) emphasized that implementation fidelity—the extent to which the components of an IEP were carried out as written—was critical for ensuring that learners received mandated services; she found that unclear systems, limited training, and a lack of concrete guidance for general teachers contributed to gaps between research-based IEP goals and classroom practice, and she proposed a handbook of real IEP goals with research-based interventions to support more faithful implementation. Groh (2021) likewise reported that general education teachers felt unprepared to interpret and implement IEP requirements, underscoring the need for practical guidance and training.

International studies defined and measured fidelity more explicitly, often using multidimensional frameworks. Gage and colleagues (2020) described fidelity of implementation in terms of adherence, dosage or exposure, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness, arguing that low fidelity made it difficult to determine whether poor outcomes were due to ineffective interventions or weak implementation. Wong *et al.* (2018) applied a multidimensional, multilevel fidelity model to the COMPASS consultation program for students with autism and found that specific fidelity components—teacher coaching responsiveness at the implementation level and teacher quality of delivery and student responsiveness at the intervention level—were significantly associated with improved IEP outcomes. Choi, McCart, and Sailor (2020)

examined an equity-based inclusive school reform model embedded in a multi-tiered system of supports and reported that higher fidelity of model implementation significantly predicted better math performance among students with IEPs; schools implementing with adequate fidelity showed greater gains compared with non-implementing schools, although reading outcomes were less conclusive. These findings demonstrated that fidelity was measurable, multidimensional, and linked to academic outcomes.

Research focused specifically on fidelity interventions has identified strategies for improving and sustaining high-quality implementation. Mesui (2024), in a systematic review of implementation fidelity interventions for school-based behavioral supports in special education settings, found that direct implementer training paired with performance feedback was the most frequently studied and generally effective approach to increasing fidelity. Michael (2024) used a multiple-baseline design with four elementary teachers implementing IEP-based academic engagement interventions and found that performance feedback alone and reinforcement alone produced mixed and variable effects, whereas a combined intervention of feedback and reinforcement consistently led to high levels of teacher treatment fidelity and corresponding improvements in student performance. These studies also noted that fidelity tended to decline after initial training in the absence of ongoing support, highlighting the importance of sustained coaching, feedback, and reinforcement mechanisms.

International literature also documented familiar implementation challenges. Passmore (2025) reported that secondary choral teachers in Georgia, despite legal obligations to follow all IEP accommodations, struggled to differentiate instruction and consistently implement IEP goals during rehearsals, citing management constraints and limited training as key issues. Arnold (2018) found that K–12 teachers in two large districts faced time pressures, competing responsibilities, and uncertainty about how to embed accommodations into general instruction, leading to inconsistent use of accommodations with fidelity; teachers' feedback on acceptability and perceived challenges was identified as crucial for designing more workable supports. Garwood (2023) argued that high levels of burnout among special educators serving students with or at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders are related to lower fidelity in implementing behavior support plans, and called for investigation of malleable factors—such as workload and administrative demands—that could be addressed to prevent burnout and protect implementation quality. In Malaysia, Nagandran *et al.* (2025) concluded that teacher preparedness, especially in goal-setting and assessment, remained insufficient, and that IEPs often served more as administrative requirements than as active pedagogical tools, reflecting an “implementation gap” between policy ideals and classroom realities.

On the other hand, collaboration, leadership, and multidisciplinary teamwork emerged as critical conditions for effective IEP implementation in international contexts. Yell and Bateman (2025) highlighted that, under IDEA, collaborative IEP development and implementation involving special and general educators, parents, and related service providers is both a legal mandate and a practical necessity. Castle (2025) showed that situating IEP work within professional learning communities improved communication, shared responsibility, and IEP

implementation among staff in an urban middle school. Gitonga and Wairungu (2026) found in a Kenyan special school that members of the multidisciplinary team were inadequately involved in IEP development and implementation due to scheduling conflicts, unfamiliar jargon, and limited administrative support, thereby weakening the quality and use of IEPs. Segers (2024) reported that effective inclusive practices depended on leadership that clarified roles, supported co-teaching, and allocated time and training for collaboration; in the absence of such leadership, relationships between general and special educators remained fragmented. Dewi *et al.* (2026) described how a principal in an under-resourced Indonesian primary school used transformational leadership—moral example, inspirational messaging, collaborative learning sessions, and peer mentoring networks—to improve services for students with special needs, coining the concept of “productive recontextualization” of leadership principles under resource constraints. These findings align with Philippine evidence that leadership and collaborative structures are crucial to the quality of IEP implementation.

International work also addressed the quality of IEP goals, data systems, and long-term outcomes. Aktan and Orakcı (2026) found in Turkey that teachers' curriculum literacy significantly predicted their IEP competencies and that the IEPs they prepared were generally adequate, suggesting that strong curriculum literacy underpins coherent and individualized planning. Rakap *et al.* (2025) demonstrated that structured training for preservice teachers significantly improved the quality of IEP goals and that gains were maintained and generalized into in-service settings. Poch, Datchuk, and Epp (2024) provided recommendations for mapping academic IEP goals to appropriate data collection and tracking procedures, warning that weak data systems could lead to misaligned decisions and even substantive violations of IDEA when progress was not accurately monitored. Movahedazarhouli (2021) synthesized studies on parent-implemented interventions in early intervention and early childhood special education, concluding that such interventions were effective but that there was little evidence directly linking them to attainment of specific IFSP or IEP goals, indicating a measurement gap at the goal level. Baker, Yoho, and Hedin (2026) proposed a data-driven framework for high-quality transition plans within IEPs, arguing that compliance alone did not guarantee favorable post-school outcomes; rather, transition plans must integrate assessment data, student and family voice, and coordinated services. Jeter (2025) further asserted that limited teacher preparation, fragmented IEP practices, and structural barriers continued to undermine equitable special education services in some U.S. districts despite robust legal protections.

Overall, international studies showed that when IEPs were implemented with high fidelity—supported by strong teacher competencies, structured training and feedback, collaborative and transformational leadership, and robust data practices—they could significantly improve academic, behavioral, and functional outcomes for learners with disabilities. At the same time, many systems continued to struggle with an implementation gap in which IEPs were formally in place but unevenly implemented in classrooms. Overall, international literature converged on the view that IEPs are powerful but fragile tools whose effectiveness hinged on implementation fidelity in everyday school

practice. Across contexts, studies showed that fidelity was multidimensional and measurable, encompassing adherence, dosage, quality of delivery, and responsiveness, and that higher fidelity was associated with better academic, behavioral, and functional outcomes for learners with disabilities. At the same time, research repeatedly documents an “implementation gap” driven by limited teacher preparation, time and workload pressures, weak or inconsistent leadership, and insufficient systems for coaching, feedback, collaboration, and data use, which caused IEPs to function as compliance documents rather than living guides for instruction in many settings. International work also underscored that sustained professional learning, performance feedback, multidisciplinary teamwork, and transformational leadership were critical levers for improving fidelity and recontextualizing inclusive practices under real-world constraints. Thus, taken together, these studies reinforced and extended Philippine evidence by demonstrating that strong legal frameworks and written IEPs are necessary but not sufficient; it was the quality of implementation, shaped by competence, collaboration, leadership, and data systems, that ultimately determined whether IEPs deliver on the promise of inclusive education.

Synthesis of Literature

To conclude, the reviewed literature underscored the central role of the IEP as the primary mechanism for translating inclusive education policies into individualized classroom practice. International and local studies consistently highlight that when IEPs were developed collaboratively and implemented with high fidelity, learners with disabilities demonstrate improved engagement, access to the curriculum, and academic achievement (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024; Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, the literature showed that policy mandated alone were insufficient to guarantee consistent IEP use, particularly in contexts characterized by limited resources, insufficient teacher preparation, and fragile support systems (EDCOM II, 2023).

Research further indicated that implementation fidelity was shaped by multiple interacting factors, including teachers’ knowledge and beliefs, school leadership practices, availability of professional development, and broader system-level conditions such as policy alignment and resource allocation (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020). Studies from various countries documented how collaborative planning structures, supportive instructional leadership, and data-informed monitoring systems could strengthen IEP implementation, whereas weak collaboration and limited feedback mechanisms constrained fidelity and sustainability. Philippine research similarly pointed to persistent gaps in teacher preparation for inclusive education, challenges in accessing specialized services, and uneven implementation of IEP-related policies across schools (EDCOM II, 2023; Michael, 2024).

Overall, the existing body of work conceptualized IEP fidelity as a multidimensional, context-dependent construct rather than a simple matter of compliance with written plans. Fidelity involved alignment between documented goals and day-to-day instructional practice, the consistency and appropriateness of accommodations and support services, and ongoing monitoring and adjustment based on

learner progress (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020). This literature also emphasized that fidelity is produced through relationships and routines in which exhibited through the ways teachers, school leaders, and families interpret policy requirements, negotiate expectations, and enact shared responsibilities within real school environments.

Gaps

Despite these contributions, several important gaps remain in the literature on IEP fidelity, particularly in the Philippine context. First, existing studies had largely focused on policy analysis, teacher attitudes, or broad implementation challenges, with fewer investigations examining IEP fidelity as a practice-based, contextually constructed phenomenon within schools (Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025). As a result, less was known about how teachers, principals, and parents collectively make sense of IEP provisions and how their interpretations shaped day-to-day implementation in inclusive classrooms.

Second, while international research had developed a range of fidelity frameworks and monitoring tools, there was limited empirical work that explored how such frameworks might be adapted to, or generated from, the realities of Philippine public schools. In particular, few studies investigated how leadership practices, resource constraints, professional learning opportunities, and division-level expectations interact to support or hinder high-fidelity IEP implementation in complex urban systems such as the National Capital Region (EDCOM II, 2023). The lack of locally grounded fidelity models constrained efforts to design context-responsive supports for teachers and school leaders.

Third, family perspectives on IEP implementation remained underrepresented in the literature, even though parents were central stakeholders in both the development and monitoring of IEPs (United Nations, 2006). Limited attention had been given to how parents experienced and interpreted IEP provisions, how they participated in school-based decision-making, and how their insights might inform more responsive and collaborative fidelity practices in inclusive schools.

Collectively, these gaps indicated a need for qualitative, multi-stakeholder research that examined how IEP fidelity was constructed, negotiated, and enacted within specific educational contexts. In the Philippine setting, and particularly in NCR schools, such research was essential for illuminating the contextual conditions, relational dynamics, and everyday routines that shaped the consistent and meaningful use of IEPs as a core mechanism of inclusive education. Addressing this gap, the present study investigated how teachers, principals, and parents in the National Capital Region understood and enacted IEP fidelity and used their perspectives to inform the development of a context-responsive NCR IEP Fidelity Framework.

Summary

In summary, the reviewed literature established the IEP as a central mechanism for realizing inclusive education policies, identified key factors shaping implementation fidelity, and highlighted substantial gaps in understanding how fidelity is enacted in Philippine schools, particularly in the National Capital Region. These gaps underscored the need for

context-sensitive, qualitative inquiry that captured the perspectives of teachers, principals, and parents on IEP implementation.

In response, Chapter 3 presented the research design and methodology employed in this study, detailing the qualitative, naturalistic approach, research locale and participants, data collection procedures, analytic strategies, and ethical considerations that guided the investigation of IEP fidelity in NCR public schools.

3. Methodology

Chapter 3 described the research methodology used to investigate how IEP fidelity was constructed, interpreted, and enacted in selected public schools within the National Capital Region. It outlined the qualitative research design, research locale and participants, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis, strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical considerations that underpinned this study.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design framed within naturalistic inquiry to explore how Individualized Education Program (IEP) fidelity was understood and enacted in inclusive schools in the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines. Anchored in constructivist–interpretivist perspectives, the design focused on participants’ lived experiences and meaning-making processes related to IEP implementation in real-world school contexts.

This study employed a naturalistic inquiry design grounded in constructivist–interpretivist perspectives to examine how IEP fidelity was constructed, negotiated, and enacted within inclusive education settings in the NCR. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the investigation sought to understand participants’ lived experiences, interpretations, and decision-making processes regarding the implementation of IEP provisions in real-world school contexts.

Naturalistic inquiry emphasized the study of social phenomena in their natural settings and prioritized participants’ meanings and experiences rather than imposing predetermined categories or experimental manipulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, inclusive education policies and IEPs were implemented within complex school environments shaped by institutional conditions, professional practices, and stakeholder interactions. A naturalistic approach, therefore, enabled the researcher to examine how IEP fidelity unfolded in the everyday realities of classrooms and schools rather than under controlled conditions.

Within this naturalistic orientation, the study adopted an interpretive qualitative design that foregrounded the perspectives of multiple stakeholders involved in IEP implementation. The research focused on the experiences of teachers, principals, and parents, recognizing that IEP implementation was inherently collaborative and shaped by interactions among special needs educators, school leaders, and families. Examining these diverse perspectives allowed the study to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how IEP fidelity was interpreted and enacted within inclusive education environments.

The constructivist–interpretivist orientation guiding the study assumed that social realities were constructed through

human interaction and interpretation (Schutz, 1967; Weber, 1949). In the context of inclusive education, teachers, principals, and parents may hold differing understandings of what constitutes faithful implementation of IEP provisions, and these interpretations influenced how IEP goals, accommodations, and services were translated into classroom practice. Exploring stakeholders’ perspectives thus provided insight into the meanings they assigned to IEP fidelity and the contextual conditions that shaped their practices.

Consistent with this orientation, data were generated from three qualitative sources: semi-structured interviews with teachers, field notes from school principals, and narrative accounts from parents of learners with disabilities. This multi-source strategy enabled methodological triangulation, which enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings which allowed the researcher to compare and integrate perspectives across stakeholder groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reflexive thematic analysis served as the primary analytic method. As articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021), reflexive thematic analysis provided a systematic yet flexible approach for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data and acknowledged the active interpretive role of the researcher. The analysis followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis—familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and constructing the analytic narrative. Coding procedures were further guided by Saldaña’s (2021) qualitative coding framework, which conceptualized coding as an iterative, cyclical process through which concepts and themes were developed from qualitative narratives.

Through this analytic process, the study identified recurring patterns in how teachers, principals, and parents understood and enacted IEP fidelity within their respective roles. These thematic insights informed the development of a context-responsive NCR IEP Fidelity Framework, which synthesized the findings into practical guidance for strengthening the implementation of inclusive education policies.

Overall, the qualitative naturalistic inquiry design provided a coherent methodological structure for examining IEP fidelity as a socially constructed and contextually situated phenomenon. By grounding the study in constructivist–interpretivist perspectives and drawing on multiple stakeholder accounts, the research generated contextually rich insights into how policy expectations were translated into classroom practice and how institutional conditions shaped the implementation of individualized educational planning in NCR schools.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in selected public schools in the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines, particularly in the divisions of Valenzuela, Pasay, Manila, and Quezon City. NCR served as the political, economic, and educational center of the country and was composed of highly urbanized cities that hosted a dense network of public and private educational institutions. As the most populous region in the Philippines, NCR schools served large and diverse student populations and operated within complex educational systems characterized by varied institutional capacities, administrative structures, and instructional

resources (EDCOM II, 2023).

The selection of NCR as the research locale was consistent with the principles of qualitative research, which emphasized examining social phenomena in their natural contexts. Qualitative inquiry sought to understand how individuals interpreted experiences within real-world settings where social interactions occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized that naturalistic inquiry required researchers to investigate phenomena within the environments in which they naturally occurred. Investigating IEP fidelity in NCR schools, therefore, provided an opportunity to explore how inclusive education policies, such as Republic Act No. 11650, were interpreted and implemented in actual educational environments.

Public schools in NCR exhibited several contextual characteristics that made them particularly suitable for examining the implementation of inclusive education. First, NCR schools accommodated diverse learner populations, including learners from varied socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. This diversity extended to learners with disabilities who participated in inclusive education programs supported by IEPs. The presence of diverse learners within inclusive classrooms required educators to employ differentiated instructional strategies and individualized supports that addressed varied learning needs (UNESCO, 2020). According to the Department of Education, many public schools in NCR had expanded inclusive education programs in response to national policies promoting equitable access to education for learners with disabilities (DepEd, 2023).

Second, many NCR schools operated Special Needs Education (SNED) Centers or inclusive education programs that provided specialized services and instructional support for learners with disabilities. These SNED Centers facilitated the development, implementation, and monitoring of IEPs by providing assessment services, instructional guidance, and collaborative planning among teachers, principals, and parents. Through these institutional mechanisms, schools sought to support the effective implementation of inclusive education policies mandated by Republic Act No. 11650 (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022).

Despite these initiatives, national education reports indicated that schools continued to face challenges in consistently implementing individualized educational supports. Findings from the Second Congressional Commission on Education revealed that, while inclusive education policies had been strengthened, many schools still faced systemic limitations in teacher preparation, instructional resources, and administrative support structures (EDCOM II, 2023). These contextual challenges highlighted the need to investigate how educators interpreted and implemented IEPs within specific school environments.

Within NCR, the divisions of Valenzuela, Pasay, Manila, and Quezon City represented important educational contexts for examining inclusive education practices. These divisions served large urban populations and maintained extensive networks of public schools implementing inclusive education programs. Schools in these divisions often experienced challenges associated with metropolitan educational environments, including large class sizes, diverse learner needs, and varied levels of institutional resources. At the same time, these divisions demonstrated ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusive education through

teacher training initiatives, SNED Centers, and collaborative partnerships with parents and community stakeholders.

The contextual richness of NCR schools also provided opportunities to examine the interaction of multiple stakeholders involved in inclusive education. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized that qualitative research benefited from studying settings in which social interactions and institutional dynamics were highly visible, as these environments enabled researchers to examine how educational practices evolved in real-world contexts. Likewise, Yin (2018) noted that understanding the contextual conditions of a research setting was essential when investigating how policies and programs were implemented within institutional environments.

Given these contextual characteristics, NCR public schools provided a rich and appropriate setting for examining how IEP fidelity was interpreted and enacted within inclusive education environments.

Finally, focusing on the divisions of Valenzuela, Pasay, Manila, and Quezon City, this study captured diverse institutional conditions and stakeholder experiences that influenced the implementation of IEPs. The insights generated from these contexts contributed to a deeper understanding of how inclusive education policies were translated into classroom practices within metropolitan school systems and provided a meaningful foundation for developing the NCR IEP Fidelity Framework.

Population and Sample

The participants in this study were stakeholders directly involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of IEPs in selected schools in the NCR. The study population included special needs education teachers implementing individualized educational supports, principals supervising inclusive education programs, and parents of learners with disabilities who received IEP services.

In qualitative research, sampling focused on selecting participants who could provide rich and meaningful information about the research phenomenon rather than achieving large, statistically representative samples (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Patton (2015) explained that qualitative sampling prioritized information-rich cases that enabled the researcher to gain deeper insights into the research problem.

In this study, three groups of participants were included to provide diverse perspectives on the implementation of IEP fidelity: ten teachers, who served as the primary participants responsible for implementing IEPs in classroom instruction, five principals, whose field notes provided insights into leadership practices and institutional conditions influencing inclusive education implementation, and five parents, whose perceptions provided perspectives on how individualized educational supports were experienced by learners with disabilities and their families.

Teachers were selected as primary participants because they directly translated IEP goals, accommodations, and instructional supports into classroom practices. Principals were included to provide insights into leadership and institutional support for inclusive education (Lagasca, 2024; Dewi *et al.*, 2026). Parents were included to capture the experiences of families whose children received individualized educational services and to highlight their roles as advocates and partners in the IEP process (Gabutan

et al., 2025). The inclusion of these three stakeholder groups enabled the study to construct a triangulated understanding of IEP fidelity implementation, consistent with naturalistic inquiry's emphasis on multiple realities and perspectives within social contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Sampling Design

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique widely used in qualitative research, to select participants with relevant knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals that could provide rich, meaningful insights into the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative inquiry, the primary objective of sampling is not statistical representation but the identification of information-rich participants who could illuminate the study's central questions (Patton, 2015).

Participants were selected for their direct involvement in the development, implementation, or monitoring of IEPs in inclusive education settings in the NCR. Teachers were selected as primary participants because they were directly responsible for implementing individualized educational supports in inclusive classrooms. Principals were included because of their leadership roles in supervising inclusive education programs, providing institutional support, and ensuring the implementation of educational policies within their schools (Lagasca, 2024; DeMatthews *et al.*, 2025). Parents were selected for their participation in IEP meetings, goal setting, and progress reviews, and for their firsthand observations of how IEP provisions were implemented in practice (Gabutan *et al.*, 2025).

To complement purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used to recruit parents (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling was particularly useful for reaching participants who might have been difficult to identify or access through formal institutional channels, such as parents of learners with disabilities. Through snowball sampling, teachers and principals initially identified parents who were actively involved in their children's IEPs. These parents were invited to participate and were asked to recommend other parents who might also be willing to share their experiences regarding IEP implementation. Snowball sampling enabled the researcher to recruit participants through social networks, where trust and familiarity facilitated participation (Noy, 2008).

The adequacy of the sample was determined not by statistical representativeness but by the richness and depth of the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2021) explained that qualitative research aims to generate meaningful patterns of interpretation rather than achieve numerical saturation. Saldaña (2021) similarly emphasized that qualitative studies rely on participants whose experiences provide detailed insights into the phenomenon being examined. Guest *et al.* (2020) noted that thematic sufficiency occurred when the dataset contains sufficient information to support the development of coherent, meaningful themes. In this study, the dataset of 10 teacher interviews, 5 principals' field notes, and 5 parent

perspectives provided a sufficiently rich basis for reflexive thematic analysis and for triangulating patterns in IEP fidelity implementation across stakeholder groups.

Participant Profile

To provide contextual information about the participants, a participant profile was developed to summarize key characteristics of the respondents. Presenting participant profiles helped readers understand the backgrounds and roles of individuals who contributed data to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, participants comprised ten teachers, five principals, and five parents from selected public schools in the NCR. Teachers served as the primary participants because they were directly responsible for implementing IEPs in inclusive classrooms. Principals provided leadership perspectives on institutional practices that supported the implementation of inclusive education, while parents contributed insights into how individualized educational supports were experienced by learners and their families.

Participant 1	
Position and affiliation	Special Education Teacher III and Co-Advisor, Department of Education, NCR
Educational background	Ph.D. in Special Education; M.Ed. in Special Education
Years of relevant experience	IEP development, student-centered assessment, stakeholder collaboration
Notable contributions to the field	Led district/division-level professional development on IEP fidelity implementation; published on reflective practice in IEP reviews
Rationale for inclusion	Deep field experience with diverse learners; strong track record of implementing and evaluating IEP fidelity in urban schools

Participant 1 served as a Special Needs Education teacher and co-advisor with extensive experience in IEP fidelity. Recognized for district/division-wide professional development leadership and reflective practice in IEP reviews.

Participant 2	
Position and affiliation	Resource Teacher, Inclusion Lead, Secondary School (NCR)
Educational background	M.A. in Special Education; B.Ed. in Elementary Education
Years of relevant experience	12 years
Key areas of expertise	Collaboration with families, accommodations, and progress monitoring
Notable contributions to the field	Facilitator for IEP review teams; studied practical barriers to fidelity in high-stakes testing contexts
Rationale for inclusion	Grounded in public-school practice, strong insights into implementation challenges, and fidelity checks

Participant 2 served as a Resource teacher and Inclusion Lead in a secondary school network. Focused on family collaboration, classroom accommodations, and progress monitoring within public schools.

Participant 3	
Position and affiliation	SPET III, Assistant Professor of Special Education and Field Supervisor, National Capital Region
Educational background	Ph.D. in Educational Psychology; M.Ed.
Years of relevant experience	10–12 years
Key areas of expertise	Qualitative inquiry, naturalistic observation, case study methodology
Notable contributions to the field	Publications on teacher perception and IEP fidelity; extensive interview-based research experience
Rationale for inclusion	Brings methodological rigor and familiarity with naturalistic inquiry frameworks

Participant 3 served as a SPET 3, Assistant Professor of Special Education. Skilled in qualitative inquiry, naturalistic observation, and methodological rigor for interview-based research.

Participant 4	
Position and affiliation	SPET 1 and IEP Facilitator, (NCR)
Educational background	Ph.D. units, M.A. in Special Education, BS Psychology
Years of relevant experience	14 years
Key areas of expertise	Measurement validity, data triangulation, and ethical considerations in IEP processes
Notable contributions to the field	Developed a district-wide IEP implementation rubric; led multi-method data collection
Rationale for inclusion	Expertise in assessment, collaboration, and fidelity measurement within systemic contexts

Participant 4 served as a SPET 1 and IEP facilitator. Specialized in measurement validity, data triangulation, and ethical considerations in IEP processes.

Participant 5	
Position and affiliation	Head/coordinator of Special Education Department, NCR
Educational background	M.Ed. in Special Education; B.A. in Psychology
Years of relevant experience	16 years
Key areas of expertise	Curriculum adaptation, individualized planning, professional development design
Notable contributions to the field	Coordinated district-level fidelity improvement initiatives; authored practitioner guides
Rationale for inclusion	Leadership perspective on IEP fidelity and district-wide implementation dynamics

Participant 5 served as the Head of Special Needs Education coordinator. Expertise encompassed curriculum adaptation,

individualized planning, and designing professional development for fidelity improvement.

Participant 6	
Position and affiliation	SPET II, Division and School Education Researcher member, Master Teacher
Educational background	Ph.D. in Education Management; M.Ed. in Psychology
Years of relevant experience	11–13 years
Key areas of expertise	Engaged in action research projects examining IEP fidelity in diverse schools
Rationale for inclusion	Bridges research and practice; adept at interpreting qualitative data within real-world settings

Participant 6 served as an Education researcher, SPET 2, and practitioner-researcher. Bridged policy to practice, focusing on action research and stakeholder interviews.

Participant 7	
Position and affiliation	Master Teacher
Educational background	EdD. in Special Education (completed academic requirements); M.Ed. in Teaching children with autism
Years of relevant experience	20+ years
Key areas of expertise	Universal Design for Learning expert, ABA certified, policy analysis
Notable contributions to the field	Extensive mentoring - field coordinator; published on IEP Implementation Journal
Rationale for inclusion	Senior scholar with broad systemic insight and methodological credibility

Participant 7 served as a master teacher with a focus on Universal Design, ABA certified, and policy analysis. Published several case studies on special education learners in an inclusive education classroom in the NCR.

Participant 8	
Position and affiliation	General Education Teacher Item teaching children with special needs with Co-Teaching Role, NCR Private School
Educational background	M.Ed. in Elementary Education; B.A. in Special Education
Years of relevant experience	9–11 years
Key areas of expertise	Co-teaching models, accessibility, and classroom-level IEP implementation
Notable contributions to the field	Case-based reports on co-teaching for IEP goals; participated in fidelity-aligned professional development
Rationale for inclusion	Frontline classroom perspective on fidelity in day-to-day instruction

Participant 8 served as a general education teacher in an NCR, teaching children with special needs, and co-teaching in a private school. Emphasized classroom-level IEP implementation and accessibility.

Participant 9	
Position and affiliation	SPET 3 Educator Inclusive Education Coordinator, NCR
Educational background	M.A. in Education Management and special education – learning disability; B.Ed. Units in special education
Years of relevant experience	13 years
Key areas of expertise	Policy implementation, service coordination, IEP timelines
Notable contributions to the field	Member district IEP-tracking system; conducted audits of fidelity practices
Rationale for inclusion	Administrative lens on fidelity processes and system-level constraints

Participant 9 served as an Inclusive Education Coordinator and special education educator. Specialized in policy implementation, service coordination, and IEP timelines.

Participant 10	
Position and affiliation	SPET 2 Teacher, Assistant Professor of Special Education and Teach Qualitative Methods, NCR University
Educational background	Ph.D. in Educational Sociology; M.A. in Sociology and Special Education, B.A. Special Education
Years of relevant experience	8–10 years
Key areas of expertise	Qualitative design, ethnography, stakeholder interviews, and practical framework development
Notable contributions to the field	Ethnographic studies of IEP decision-making; co-author of a framework for practical IEP implementation
Rationale for inclusion	Methodological specialization in naturalistic inquiry and contribution to a practical framework

Participant 10 served a Professor of Special Education and Qualitative Methods. Focused on ethnography, stakeholder interviews, and developing a practical IEP implementation framework.

Participant 11	
Position and affiliation	Principal 4, Public School, NCR
Educational background	Ed.D. in Educational Leadership; M.Ed. in Special Education
Years of relevant experience	15–18 years in school leadership; 8+ years overseeing IEP processes
Key roles in IEP fidelity	Oversees district-wide IEP timelines, chair of the school's IEP review team, ensures alignment of IEP outcomes
Clinical/leadership strengths	Strategic implementation of inclusive practices, data-informed decision making, strong stakeholder engagement with families and specialists
Notable contributions to the field	Led school-wide fidelity audits, developed a fidelity dashboard for ongoing monitoring, published

Participant 11 served as a Principal, NCR. Held an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and possessed 15–18 years in administration, with over 8 years dedicated to overseeing IEP processes. Led district-wide IEP timelines, chaired the school's IEP review team, and implemented a fidelity dashboard.

Participant 12	
Position and affiliation	Principal, Public School, (NCR)
Educational background	M.Ed. in Educational Administration; B.A. in Psychology
Years of relevant experience	12–15 years in school leadership; 10 years special education teacher
Key roles in IEP fidelity	Leads school-level IEP implementation, coordinates professional development on modifications and accommodations, monitors progress data
Clinical/leadership strengths	Collaborative leadership style, strong liaison with special educators, focus on equitable access, and Universal Design for Learning
Notable contributions to the field	Implemented a school-wide IEP implementation checklist; partnered with local universities for practitioner research

Participant 12 served as a Principal and held an M.Ed. in Educational Administration. Possessed 12–15 years of experience in school leadership and spent a decade as a special education teacher. Oversaw school-level IEP implementation, coordinated professional development on accommodations, and monitored progress data to ensure equitable access.

Participant 13	
Position and affiliation	Principal, Public School, (NCR)
Educational background	M.Ed. in Educational Administration; B.A. in Psychology
Years of relevant experience	12–15 years in school leadership
Key roles in IEP fidelity	Leads school-level IEP implementation, coordinates professional development on modifications and accommodations, monitors progress data
Clinical/leadership strengths	Collaborative leadership style, strong liaison with special educators, focus on equitable access and Universal Design for Learning
Notable contributions to the field	Implemented a school-wide IEP implementation checklist; partnered with local universities for practitioner research

Participant 13 served as a Principal and held a Ph.D. in Education Policy and Leadership. Possessed 14–20 years of experience in administration. Managed identification and placement for special education, chaired IEP team convenings, and translated policy into practical governance.

Participants 14	
Position and affiliation	Principal, (NCR)
Educational background	Ph.D. in Education Policy and Leadership; M.Ed. in Special Education, Organization and Administration of Special Schools Trained
Years of relevant experience	14–20 years in administration
Key roles in IEP fidelity	Oversees identification of students for special education services, chairs IEP team convenings, and ensures compliance with timelines and procedural safeguards
Clinical/leadership strengths	Policy-to-practice translation, risk management in complex cases, mentorship of school leaders and IEP teams
Notable contributions to the field	Authored internal district guidelines on IEP fidelity; presented on fidelity challenges in urban settings at regional conferences

Participant 14 served as a Principal and held a Ed.D. in School Leadership. Possessed 10–14 years of experience in leadership. Drove and led calibration sessions for teams, and fostered data-driven improvement cycles.

Participant 15	
Position and affiliation	Principal, NCR
Educational background	Ph.D. in Special Education; M.Ed. in Special Education
Years of relevant experience	13–17 years in school leadership
Key roles in IEP fidelity	Oversees transition planning and post-IEP monitoring, ensures alignment with district-wide expectations, mentors IEP coordinators
Clinical/leadership strengths	Strategic planning, resource alignment for supports and services, advocacy for student-centered practices
Notable contributions to the field	Led district-wide IEP training for principals; co-authored a case-study series on effective IEP governance

Participant 15 served as a Principal 4 and held a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. Possessed 13–17 years of experience in administration. Oversaw transition planning and post-IEP monitoring, aligned practices with district expectations, and mentored IEP coordinators to ensure consistency and growth.

Participant 16	
Relationship to Child	Parent of a middle-school student with an individualized education program (IEP).
Educational background	Bachelor's degree in Commerce; active in local parent-teacher associations.
Relevance to IEP fidelity	Regular participant in IEP meetings; known for ensuring that accommodations are feasible at home and that progress communication is clear and timely.
Strengths as a contributor	Advocates for transparent goal setting, consistent home-school communication, and family-centered decision making; skilled at articulating barriers to fidelity from a caregiver's viewpoint.

Participant 16 served as a Parent of a middle-school student with an IEP. Active in local parent associations and emphasized the importance of transparent goal setting and clear home-school communication to support implementation fidelity.

Participant 17	
Relationship to Child	Parent of a high school student with multiple disabilities.
Educational background	Engineering background; strong data-oriented mindset; active in disability-rights networks.
Relevance to IEP fidelity	Frequently monitors progress data provided by schools; questions alignment between IEP goals and measured outcomes.
Strengths as a contributor	Committed to rigorous accountability and evidence-based decision making; brings technical literacy to interpret progress toward IEP goals.

Participant 17 served as a Parent of a high school student with multiple disabilities. Data-minded and engaged in disability-rights networks; advocated for measurable objectives and accountability in IEP outcomes.

Participant 18	
Relationship to Child	Parent of a child with an IEP
Educational background	Postgraduate training in healthcare administration; experienced in navigating complex service delivery systems.
Relevance to IEP fidelity	Emphasizes joint problem-solving, timely service provision, and reducing administrative delays in IEP processes.
Strengths as a contributor	Brings a systems-thinking lens; advocates for caregiver training and collaborative planning with school teams.

Participant 18 served as a Parent of a child in a public school network with an IEP. Brought systems-thinking and experience navigating complex service delivery; promoted family-centered planning and timely services.

Participant 19	
Relationship to Child	Parent of a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.
Educational background	Masters-level coursework in psychology; active in parent support groups.
Relevance to IEP fidelity	Champions consistent home-school routines that mirror IEP goals, and seeks alignment between classroom accommodations and at-home practices.
Strengths as a contributor	Brings lived experience with transition planning (elementary-to-secondary); values participatory decision making and culturally responsive practices.

Participant 19 served as a Parent of a child with ASD in a public school. Championed consistent home-school routines aligned with IEP goals; supported participatory decision making and culturally responsive communication.

Participant 20	
Relationship to Child	Parent of a student with a learning disability in a public school.
Educational background	IT professional; volunteers with community organizations supporting students with disabilities.
Relevance to IEP fidelity	Research-oriented caregiver who documents meeting outcomes and follows up on action items; emphasizes clarity of responsibilities.
Strengths as a contributor	Systematic, organized, and vigilant about long-term fidelity of supports across school years; values ethical considerations and confidentiality.

Participant 20 served as a parent of a student with a learning disability in a public school. Research-minded caregiver who documented meeting outcomes and sought clarity of responsibilities; advocated for a family-facing fidelity guide.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection for this study was conducted using phenomenologically oriented qualitative methods to obtain comprehensive insights into how IEP fidelity was interpreted and implemented in NCR schools. In qualitative research, the use of multiple data sources allowed researchers to capture the complexity of social phenomena and enhanced the credibility of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consistent with the principles of naturalistic inquiry, data were collected in participants' natural educational environments to understand how stakeholders experienced

and interpreted the implementation of individualized educational supports (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured the necessary approvals and permissions from relevant school authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and signed an informed consent form indicating their voluntary participation. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study were explained to all participants before data collection began (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In line with Philippine legal requirements, the collection and processing of personal and sensitive personal information from teachers, principals, and parents were conducted in accordance with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012). Participants were informed that their data would be used exclusively for research purposes, securely stored, and protected through anonymization and pseudonymization, consistent with the Act's principles of transparency, legitimate purpose, and proportionality (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012).

The study utilized three primary sources of qualitative data: teacher interviews, principals' field notes, and parents' perspectives. The integration of these data sources enabled the study to capture diverse stakeholder perspectives regarding the implementation of IEP fidelity in NCR schools. Data source triangulation strengthened the study which allowed the researcher to compare and corroborate findings across different participants and contexts (Patton, 2015).

Teacher Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten teachers who had direct experience implementing IEPs in inclusive classrooms. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while maintaining flexibility to probe emerging insights during the conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using open-ended questions, teachers were encouraged to describe their experiences in developing, implementing, and monitoring IEP provisions within their instructional practices.

Teachers were selected as primary participants because they played a central role in translating individualized educational goals into classroom instruction. Their daily interactions with learners with disabilities placed them in a unique position to provide insights into how IEP accommodations, instructional strategies, and progress monitoring practices were implemented in real educational contexts (Choi *et al.*, 2020). Qualitative interviews were particularly effective for understanding how participants interpreted their experiences and constructed meaning within their professional roles (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Principals' Field Notes

Field notes from five principals were collected to provide insights into leadership practices and institutional conditions affecting the implementation of inclusive education programs. Field notes documented principals' observations and reflections regarding inclusive education, IEP implementation, and support systems within their schools. In qualitative research, field notes were an important data source because they capture contextual details and

interpretive insights that complement interview data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Parent Perspectives

The third data source consisted of perspectives gathered from five parents whose children received individualized educational supports in NCR schools. Parent prompts were used to structure conversations about experiences in IEP meetings, collaboration with teachers and principals, and perceptions of how IEP provisions were implemented in practice. Including parent perceptions enabled the study to capture family perspectives on IEP implementation and further enriched the triangulation of data across stakeholder groups (Gabutan *et al.*, 2025).

Triangulation of Data Sources

The use of teacher interviews, principals' field notes, and parent perspectives enabled the researcher to triangulate the data and developed a comprehensive understanding of IEP fidelity implementation. Triangulation referred to the use of multiple data sources to examine a phenomenon from different perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). By integrating these perspectives, the study identified emerging patterns in the interpretation and enactment of IEP fidelity across NCR schools.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation of IEP fidelity in inclusive education settings in the NCR. In qualitative research, the researcher often served as the primary instrument for data collection, while interview guides and prompts provided structure for gathering detailed and meaningful information from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while maintaining flexibility to probe emerging insights and clarify responses during the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions; the 5 interview guide questions comprised of ten sub-questions to gather detailed responses, rich descriptions, and a deeper understanding and to achieve data saturation. This was designed to elicit participants' experiences and interpretations regarding IEP fidelity implementation. The questions focused on several key areas, including participants' understanding of IEP fidelity, instructional practices used in implementing IEP goals, collaboration among teachers, principals, and parents, institutional support for inclusive education programs, and challenges encountered in implementing individualized educational supports. Open-ended questions were intentionally used to encourage participants to describe their experiences in their own words and to provide rich narrative data that reflected the complexity of inclusive education practices (Patton, 2015).

Supplementary prompts were used for principals and parents to guide the documentation of field notes and narrative responses about leadership practices, institutional conditions, and family experiences with IEPs. These tools

were grounded in the key constructs developed in Chapters 1 and 2, including inclusive education, IEP fidelity, collaboration, and contextual constraints.

Validation and Trustworthiness

Validation of the Instrument

To enhance the clarity and relevance of the research instrument, the interview guide underwent a thorough content validation and trustworthiness process with experts. Experts in inclusive education and qualitative research assessed the instrument to determine the appropriateness of the questions and their alignment with the research objectives. Their feedback was instrumental in refining the wording of the questions and improving the overall structure of the interview protocol. This validation process ensured that the questions accurately captured the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, interviews were conducted with three teachers as a preliminary trial, but their responses were not included in the participant group.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Ensuring trustworthiness was essential for establishing the rigor of this qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for evaluating trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria were applied as follows:

Credibility was enhanced through data source triangulation using teacher interviews, principals' field notes, and parent perceptions. Triangulation allowed the researcher to compare findings across stakeholder perspectives and identify consistent patterns in IEP fidelity implementation (Patton, 2015).

Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research setting, participant characteristics, and contextual conditions of NCR schools, which enabled readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar educational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability was ensured by documenting the research procedures and maintaining consistency in data collection and analysis. The systematic use of Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis and Saldaña's (2021) coding framework helped ensure that the analytic process was transparent and methodologically sound.

Confirmability was strengthened through the use of an audit trail and reflexive practices during data analysis, which allowed the researcher to remain aware of potential biases and to ensure that interpretations were grounded in participants' narratives rather than personal assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In addition, compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 further supported confirmability by requiring responsible stewardship of participants' data throughout the research process (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012). Data management practices—including secure storage, restricted access, and the eventual disposal of identifiable information—were designed to align with national data protection standards and Department of Education research guidance, mandated in the Department of Education Order No. 16, s. 2017 and DepEd Order No. 26, s. 2021.

Data Analysis

The data collected from teacher interviews, principals' field notes, and parent perceptions were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). They further explained that reflexive thematic analysis was a qualitative analytic method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning across datasets. It was particularly appropriate for studies that sought to understand how participants interpreted their experiences and constructed meaning within their social contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach aligned with the study's aim of examining how stakeholders in NCR schools understood and enacted IEP fidelity.

Consistent with the principles of naturalistic inquiry, the analysis focused on understanding participants' experiences within their real-world educational environments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rather than imposing predetermined categories, themes emerged inductively from participants' narratives through iterative engagement with the data. This ensured that the findings reflected the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers, principals, and parents involved in IEP implementation.

The analytic process followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the analytic narrative. Throughout these phases, coding was guided by Saldaña's (2021) principles of qualitative coding, which emphasize cyclical, reflective engagement with the data.

Data triangulation was incorporated into the analysis by comparing emerging themes from teacher, principal, and parent accounts. This process helped identify emerging patterns of how IEP fidelity was interpreted and enacted across stakeholder groups, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings (Patton, 2015). Reflexive memo writing was used to document the researcher's analytic decisions and reflections, supporting transparency and confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Birks *et al.*, 2008).

The final stage of analysis involved synthesizing the thematic findings into the NCR IEP Fidelity Framework and its component models (IEP Fidelity Instructional Framework, IEP Fidelity Leadership Framework, and Parent Engagement Framework), as introduced in Chapter 1 and elaborated in subsequent chapters. These frameworks integrated multiple stakeholder perspectives and contextual factors influencing inclusive education practices in NCR schools.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations played a critical role in ensuring that this research involving human participants was conducted responsibly and with respect for participants' rights, dignity, and well-being. In this qualitative research, ethical practices were particularly important because researchers interacted closely with participants and collected detailed narratives about their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In the Philippine context, the study observed the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and its Implementing Rules and Regulations, which protected the fundamental right to

privacy of individuals with respect to the processing of personal information (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012) was observed in this research. In addition, the research followed the Department of Education's Research Management Guidelines, which emphasized ethical conduct, confidentiality, and responsible dissemination of research in basic education settings (Department of Education No. 16, s. 2017).

Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For teachers, principals, and parents, consent forms explicitly described how their personal information and narratives would be collected, processed, stored, and used solely for research purposes, in accordance with RA 10173's requirements on transparency, legitimate purpose, and proportionality (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012).

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifying information from transcripts, field notes, and reports. In line with the Data Privacy Act, any personal and sensitive personal information gathered in the study was processed fairly and lawfully, used only for the declared research purposes, kept secure, and retained only for as long as necessary (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012). Participants were assured that their data would not be shared with unauthorized third parties and that only aggregated or anonymized findings would be reported in the thesis and subsequent dissemination.

All digital files were stored in password-protected devices, and hard copies were kept in locked cabinets to prevent unauthorized access (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistent with RA 10173 and DepEd research policy, access to raw data was limited to the researcher and, when applicable, to the adviser or ethics-reviewing body solely for verification purposes (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012).

Institutional permissions were obtained from the appropriate school authorities prior to data collection to ensure compliance with school and division-level research policies. Where required, the study sought clearance from the relevant institutional research ethics or review body, consistent with national expectations that research involving human participants undergo ethical review by accredited committees (Concha, 2021). Throughout the research process, the researcher practiced reflexivity to remain aware of potential biases and ensured that participants' experiences were represented accurately and respectfully (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Framework

The research framework for this study linked the constructivist–interpretivist paradigm in Chapter 1 with the methodological choices in Chapter 3, showing how policy, institutional, and stakeholder conditions (inputs) fed into IEP implementation processes and led to thematic findings and the NCR IEP Fidelity Framework (outputs) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It clarified that the qualitative, naturalistic, and phenomenological design was a logical expression of the study's ontological and epistemological assumptions.

At the paradigmatic level, the framework was grounded in a constructivist–interpretivist stance and a naturalistic inquiry orientation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Teachers, principals,

and parents were seen as active meaning-makers who interpreted RA 11650, DepEd policies, and inclusive education discourses through their beliefs, experiences, and professional schemas (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Their understandings of IEPs and IEP fidelity were continually constructed in interaction with learners, colleagues, and institutional demands, while interpretivism held that what counted as “faithful” IEP implementation was produced through these interpretations rather than fixed externally (Schutz, 1967; Weber, 1949). Naturalistic inquiry, following Lincoln and Guba (1985), further insisted that IEP fidelity be examined in real NCR school environments characterized by diverse learners, resource constraints, and complex organizational dynamics.

Within this paradigmatic base, the framework was organized around inputs, processes, and outputs. Inputs include: (a) the legal–policy environment (Magna Carta for Persons with Disability, K to 12, DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, and RA 11650 and its IRR), which institutionalize IEPs as systematic, purposive, developmental programs requiring multidisciplinary development and regular review; and (b) the institutional context of NCR public schools, marked by large classes, diverse learners, uneven SPED supports, and varied leadership and professional development conditions. These factors shaped how policies are interpreted and implemented. A third set of inputs consisted of stakeholder roles: teachers as primary implementers of IEP goals and accommodations, principals as leaders who shaped culture, resources, and oversight, and parents as partners who advocated and monitored support. Differences in their experiences and expectations influenced how IEP fidelity was understood and pursued.

On this foundation, the framework highlighted three core processes. First, stakeholders interpreted IEP fidelity in different ways—ranging from strict adherence to written provisions to flexible responsiveness that preserved IEP intent—based on policy discourse, institutional expectations, professional norms, and personal beliefs about inclusion and effective teaching. Second, they enacted IEP provisions in daily practice by translating goals and accommodations into lesson planning, instructional strategies, classroom supports, and progress monitoring, while adapting these when faced with time, resource, or contextual constraints; fidelity was thus treated as dynamic and context-sensitive rather than purely procedural. Third, they engaged in reflective and collaborative decision-making: teachers reflected on challenges and consult colleagues, principals created structures and mobilized resources, and parents contributed experiential knowledge about learners. In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic stance, IEP fidelity was viewed as co-produced through these collaborative routines and relationships, not as the product of isolated individual action.

Methodologically, the framework was implemented through a qualitative phenomenological design that examined how IEP fidelity was experienced and made meaningful by teachers, principals, and parents in their own settings. Phenomenology enabled the study to capture both shared patterns and variations in understandings and practices, while naturalistic inquiry ensured that data are gathered in the participants' actual school contexts to preserve complexity and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within this design, reflexive thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke, provided the main analytic pathway,

moving from familiarization and initial coding to theme construction and an analytic narrative. Themes were treated as interpretive constructions rather than objective discoveries, consistent with a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, and the researcher’s reflexive role in shaping analysis is explicitly acknowledged. Saldaña’s iterative coding framework supported this by framing coding as cyclical and reflective, progressively refining descriptive and process codes into more abstract patterns.

Through these analytic processes, the framework yields thematic outputs that explained how teachers, principals, and parents defined IEP fidelity, how they experienced its enactment, and how they negotiated tensions between policy expectations and contextual realities. These themes underpinned the development of the NCR IEP Fidelity Framework, which comprised an instructional component for classroom practice, a leadership component for school and division supports, a parent engagement component, and an integrated ecosystem model that linked these dimensions. Designed as practice-oriented tools, these outputs aimed to guide instruction, leadership, and family engagement, while also offered empirically grounded insights into how RA 11650 was interpreted at school level and where leverage points—such as professional development, structured collaboration, and supportive leadership—can be strengthened. Overall, the research framework thus traced a coherent flow from inputs through processes to outputs, deepening understanding of IEP fidelity as a socially constructed, contextually embedded phenomenon in NCR inclusive education and ensured that the result of NCR IEP Fidelity Framework was grounded in stakeholders’ lived experiences.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach used to investigate how IEP fidelity was constructed, interpreted, and enacted in public schools within the National Capital Region. Grounded in naturalistic inquiry and informed by constructivist and interpretivist perspectives, the study employed a qualitative design using reflexive thematic analysis and Saldaña’s coding framework to analyze data from teachers, principals, and parents. The chapter detailed the NCR urban school context, the purposive and snowball sampling strategies, and the use of semi-structured interviews, principals’ field notes, and parent narratives as triangulated data sources, alongside procedures to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and adherence to Philippine research ethics and data privacy regulations. Building on this methodological foundation, Chapter 4 presented the qualitative findings generated from teacher interviews, principals’ field notes, and parent narratives, organized around the five primary research questions and their sub-questions and synthesized into seven overarching themes that illuminate how IEP fidelity is understood, enacted, and supported in NCR inclusive education settings.

4. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presented the findings from a qualitative inquiry into IEP fidelity within the National Capital Region, conducted through a naturalistic, interpretive lens that foregrounded participants’ lived experiences, contextual realities, and the evolving meanings of fidelity as they unfolded in natural settings. Grounded in Naturalistic

Inquiry, the study treated participant narratives, classroom interactions, documentation, and field notes as co-constructive data sources, assembled to illuminate how fidelity to individualized education program (IEP) practices was enacted, negotiated, and interpreted across diverse contexts in the NCR. The analysis was circulatory rather than linear: coding drove the emergence of interpretive insights, which in turn sharpened questions and refined understandings of fidelity as a dynamic phenomenon rather than a static compliance check.

Introduction

Methodologically, the analysis began with a rigorous, iterative coding process. From the dataset, 620 emergent codes were identified, representing granular moments, decisions, and perceptions related to IEP implementation. These codes were clustered into 220 categories, reflecting patterned ideas, processes, and contextual factors that shape fidelity. Through systematic comparison and synthesis, seven higher-order themes emerged, encapsulating core dimensions of fidelity as experienced by educators, families, and administrators within NCR settings. These themes illuminated the interplay between policy ideals, classroom realities, resource constraints, professional judgment, stakeholder collaboration, and the local interpretive work that sustained or challenged fidelity in practice.

The five overarching research questions—each unpacked by ten sub-questions—structure the analytic narrative and anchored the presentation of findings in a coherent framework. The sub-questions guided targeted coding and deeper exploration of contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes associated with IEP fidelity. The subsequent presentation of results therefore, followed a deliberate analytic sequence: (a) an integrated account of how the seven themes manifested across the five primary questions, (b) a detailed mapping of sub-question findings to corresponding codes and categories, and (c) an interpretive synthesis that linked empirical patterns to the Practical Framework for IEP Fidelity in NCR. Throughout, findings were described with attention to variation across schools, grade levels, and service delivery models, acknowledging how context shaped fidelity processes and outcomes.

To situate the findings within the broader scholarly and practical landscape, the discussion foregrounded the NCR Practical Framework informing this study’s analytic lens. This framework, operationalized through deliberate coding constructs and interpretive criteria, served to translate qualitative insights into actionable implications for policy, professional development, and collaborative practice in IEP processes. By coupling rich, contextually grounded evidence with a principled interpretive stance, this chapter contributed to a nuanced understanding of how fidelity was produced, perceived, and sustained in NCR educational environments, and it offered evidence-informed recommendations for enhancing practical fidelity through targeted strategies, reflective practice, and stakeholder collaboration.

Qualitative Findings

The researcher offered to share the study’s findings with participants and schools involved in the research. The researcher believed that this would help to create a sense of ownership and reinforce the value of their contributions to the study. This chapter presented the qualitative findings of the study, organized around seven interrelated themes that

illuminated the fidelity of Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation in practice. The themes—Fidelity of IEP Implementation in Practice, Evolving Understanding of IEP Fidelity, Collaboration and Team-Based Implementation, Instructional Adaptation and Student Outcomes, Classroom Reality and Misalignment with General Education, Decision-Making and Professional Judgement, and Student Needs and Outcomes—collectively elaborated how IEP provisions were interpreted, enacted, and experienced in actual classroom contexts. Drawing on illustrations with verbatim excerpts from the participants, these themes directly addressed the study's research questions by demonstrating how fidelity was understood and negotiated, how collaborative processes and professional judgment shaped implementation, and how these processes ultimately influenced student needs and outcomes. In doing so, the chapter linked the emergent thematic patterns to the central aims of the study and provided an interpretive account of how the qualitative evidence supported and extended the answers to the research questions.

This section presented and interpreted the seven themes that emerged from the participants' accounts of IEP implementation in the National Capital Region and Lucena City. Building on the coded matrices and exemplar narratives, the discussion moved beyond description to explain how teachers made sense of "IEP fidelity" and how they enacted it within real classroom constraints. The themes were interrelated rather than isolated; together they traced a trajectory from teachers' day-to-day practices to their deeper understandings, the conditions that supported or hindered fidelity, and the concrete outcomes for learners.

The first three themes focused on how teachers defined fidelity and operationalized it in practice—through consistent implementation of plans, evolving interpretations of what "faithful" meant, and collaboration with other adults in the system. The next three themes highlighted the dynamic, situated nature of implementation, showing how teachers adapted instruction, negotiated misalignments with general education realities, and exercised professional judgment when written plans collided with contextual limitations. The final theme centered on the ultimate test of fidelity in student needs and outcomes, emphasizing that for these teachers, faithful implementation was not only about procedural compliance but about securing meaningful progress for learners with disabilities. Together, these themes provided a nuanced picture of IEP fidelity as both an instructional process and a moral commitment in Philippine public-school settings.

Theme 1: Fidelity of IEP Implementation in Practice

Teachers primarily understood IEP fidelity as ensuring that what was written in the plan actually happened in daily lessons through aligned instruction, accommodations, and progress monitoring. *P4 defined it as "consistently implementing each student's IEP as it is written in my daily instruction... providing required accommodations, delivering specially designed instruction tied to IEP goals, and monitoring progress through ongoing data collection."* Similarly, *P10 described fidelity as "making sure that what I planned in the IEP is actually happening in the classroom,"* especially by *"using modifications consistently during lessons" and "regularly checking their progress to see if the strategies are helping them learn."*

Participants illustrated this through concrete classroom episodes. In a small-group reading session, *P7 reported that they "implemented the IEP with high fidelity by consistently providing the documented accommodations, using the specified instructional strategies, and aligning instruction directly to the student's IEP goals,"* while *"monitoring progress in real time."* *P10 similarly felt confident of high fidelity when they "followed the IEP closely by using the required phonics program, giving visual supports and providing extra time,"* then *"took quick data on how the student did."*

Teachers defined IEP fidelity as the consistent and accurate execution of what was written in the IEP within daily classroom instruction. This includes aligning lessons with IEP goals, providing required accommodations, delivering specialized instruction, and continuously monitoring student progress. Fidelity was demonstrated through intentional teaching practices where plans were not merely documented but actively implemented, ensuring that instructional strategies directly supported learners' individualized needs.

Theme 2: Evolving Understanding of IEP Fidelity

Teachers' conceptions of fidelity shifted over time from a narrow, legalistic view toward a more intentional, student-centered practice. Early on, some participants saw the IEP mainly as a legal commitment; *P2 called it "an essential legal document to show the commitment as a teacher to our students with special needs, in following the IEP and giving them the services" written in it.* Others stressed sincerity toward the written plan, with *P5 defining fidelity as "sincerity to our IEP teaching towards the goals stated in our IEP."*

With experience, many moved beyond simple "checklist" compliance. *P10 reflected that at first they thought fidelity meant "following every detail exactly as written, almost like a checklist,"* but a turning point came *with a student whose needs changed throughout the day; they realized that being rigid "didn't always serve the student well,"* and that they had to *"stay true to the IEP while also being responsive... using the accommodations in flexible ways."* *P6 captured this mature view: "IEP fidelity to me means consistently honoring the intent of the IEP... not just compliance on paper... what matters most is whether my instructional decisions genuinely align with the student's documented needs."*

Teachers' understanding of IEP fidelity developed over time from a rigid, compliance-based perspective into a more flexible and student-centered approach. Initially viewed as strictly following the written plan, fidelity later became associated with honoring the intent of the IEP while adapting to students' changing needs. This shift reflected a deeper professional insight where responsiveness, rather than strict adherence, was seen as essential to truly supporting learners.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Team-Based Implementation

Collaboration emerged as a critical condition for sustaining IEP fidelity across settings. *P1 stated that "collaboration with other adults plays a vital role in maintaining IEP fidelity,"* because working with *"special education teachers, therapy staff, paraprofessionals and general education colleagues allows me to gain valuable insights, align*

strategies and ensure consistency across settings.” P3 likewise described collaboration as *“one of the cornerstones of IEP,” fostering “shared understanding, consistency, [and] accountability,”* and helping ensure that strategies and accommodations stay aligned with goals and present levels. Participants highlighted concrete collaborative practices such as constant communication, shared planning, and coordinated accommodations. P2 spoke of *“constant communication... through verbal and written communication, through emails and asking help or whatever things that we can do for the benefit of the special student.”* In schools without full IEP teams or therapists, teachers leaned on informal networks; P10 described working with *“general education colleagues and parents,”* sharing progress notes and *“training co-teachers on accommodations,”* so that the learner receives *“consistent supports across settings, even without therapists or aides.”* At the same time, several teachers noted that limited structures mean fidelity often becomes *“teacher-dependent,”* making collaboration—even informal—an important buffer against *“drift from the IEP.”*

Collaboration emerged as a key factor in sustaining IEP fidelity, as teachers relied on coordination with colleagues, specialists, and parents to ensure consistent implementation across settings. Through shared planning, communication, and mutual support, educators aligned strategies and maintained continuity of services. In contexts with limited formal structures, informal collaboration became especially important in preventing inconsistencies and supporting effective implementation.

Theme 4: Instructional Adaptation and Student Outcomes

Teachers frequently described on-the-spot adaptations as they balanced fidelity to written goals with responsiveness to students’ immediate needs. In one reading lesson, P9 recounted that a student became frustrated with an IEP-specified independent comprehension task; although the plan called for *“minimal prompts,”* the teacher *“quickly decided to provide scaffolding—breaking the task into smaller steps and giving targeted prompts—while still keeping the focus on the goal.”* They *“weighed maintaining strict independence versus supporting access to the skill”* and chose the latter, leading to a positive outcome where *“the student completed the task successfully, remained engaged,”* and the adaptation was documented *“for future planning.”*

Participants tied this adaptive work directly to student progress. P1 observed that *“many of my students have become stronger readers because I intentionally implemented each short term objective with consistency and purpose,”* describing *“growth from developing foundational phonics skills to mastering sight words and now confidently reading longer passages.”* P10 similarly linked fidelity and outcomes when they *“planned the lesson around IEP goals,”* used required supports, and *“took quick data,”* which made them feel they were implementing *“with high fidelity.”* For these teachers, adapted instruction remained faithful as long as it stayed goal-aligned, used accommodations intentionally, and produced visible gains. Teachers frequently adapted instruction in real time to balance fidelity with responsiveness to student needs. While maintaining alignment with IEP goals, they modified strategies, provided scaffolding, and adjusted approaches to

ensure student engagement and success. These adaptations were viewed as consistent with fidelity when they remained goal-focused and resulted in observable student progress, reinforcing the connection between effective instruction and positive learning outcomes.

Theme 5: Classroom Reality and Misalignment with General Education

Teachers also highlighted tensions between what IEPs prescribed and the realities of Philippine classrooms and general education structures. P12 explained that *“tensions arise when IEP goals assumed resources like assistive tech that our school lacked, or when class sizes (30+ students) made individualized attention impossible,”* so they *“used low-cost alternatives (ex. handmade visuals), and documented changes in the IEP review meetings to maintain some fidelity within DepEd guidelines.”* Another teacher noted that *“there was no unified IEP in the National Capital Region... it depended upon the school how they interpreted it,”* making consistent implementation difficult.

Limited services and staffing deepen this misalignment. P13 described cases where *“a goal may require specialized intervention that we do not have staff for,”* so they *“adapt by modifying the instructional approach while still aiming for the same skill area,”* ensuring students still receive *“meaningful support, even if the method is adjusted.”* P10 similarly acknowledged, *“here in our school, we don’t have complete IEP... there is no unified IEP... but I did my best to follow my own IEP that I made.”* In these accounts, fidelity becomes a negotiated practice, shaped by large class sizes, resource gaps, uneven general education support, and non-standard IEP formats.

Teachers encountered challenges in implementing IEPs due to mismatches between prescribed plans and actual classroom conditions, such as large class sizes, limited resources, and lack of standardized practices. These constraints required teachers to adjust methods while still aiming to meet IEP goals. As a result, fidelity became a negotiated process shaped by systemic limitations, highlighting the gap between policy expectations and real-world educational settings.

Theme 6: Decision-Making and Professional Judgement

Across interviews, teachers framed IEP fidelity as a series of professional decisions rather than a purely technical task. When describing the frustrated reader, P9 emphasized that they *“weighed maintaining strict independence versus supporting access to the skill,”* ultimately choosing scaffolding to *“preserve learning and motivation without changing the goal itself,”* and saw this as upholding *“the intent of the IEP while responding flexibly to classroom realities.”* P3 shared a similar example where a reduced-distraction testing setting caused anxiety; they based their adaptation on *“the student’s emotional and behavioral data, collaboration with... other professionals... and the IEP intent, not just the literal wording of [the] accommodation,”* aiming *“to really put into practice what is written in guidance.”*

In resource-constrained settings, teachers understood that their judgment often compensates for weak structures. P7 explained that when goals assume unavailable services, they *“break goals into manageable tasks, use alternative strategies, or sequence skills differently, while keeping the intended outcome intact,”* focusing on *“maintaining the*

integrity of the goal rather than rigidly following the original structure.” P8 described fidelity as “*a balance of maintaining intent while adapting to constraints,*” while P5 admitted that “*because I feel unsupported by the principal and there is limited guidance from the division, fidelity depends largely on my own effort... policies exist, but implementation support is weak.*” These narratives position teacher judgement as central to preserving the spirit of the IEP in complex contexts.

IEP fidelity was experienced as a process of ongoing professional decision-making, where teachers exercised judgment in adapting instruction while preserving the intent of the plan. Rather than strictly following procedures, teachers evaluated student needs, contextual factors, and available resources to make informed choices. Their expertise became central in maintaining the integrity of IEP goals, especially in environments with limited institutional support.

Theme 7: Student Needs and Outcomes

Finally, teachers evaluated fidelity through the extent to which IEP implementation met students’ needs and produced tangible outcomes. P1 emphasized that they “*find fulfillment in witnessing my students’ growth... across social, academic and emotional domains,*” and viewed faithful implementation as the “*consistent and purposeful use of educational accommodations*” so that “*each student... access[es] learning and reach[es] their full potential.*” For this teacher, IEP fidelity was successful when students could not only “*learn new skills, but also apply those skills meaningfully in their everyday lives.*”

Participants framed promised supports as obligations that must result in progress. P3 described fidelity as “*ensuring that the students receive what are the promises, the promised support for effective progress... that the goals and objectives in the IEP are met,*” including “*the special accommodations and modifications written in the IEP.*” In literacy, P1 shared that “*many of my students have become stronger readers because I intentionally implemented each short-term objective with consistency and purpose,*” noting their growth from “*foundational phonics skills*” to “*confidently reading longer passages.*” In this sense, student outcomes serve as a practical test of whether IEP fidelity has been genuinely achieved.

Teachers ultimately measured IEP fidelity by its impact on student growth and development. Faithful implementation was seen not only as compliance with planned supports but as the ability to produce meaningful academic, social, and emotional progress. When students demonstrated improved skills and could apply learning in real-life contexts, teachers considered the IEP successfully implemented, emphasizing outcomes as the true indicator of fidelity.

Having presented the seven themes in detail, it was now possible to return explicitly to the study’s research questions and examine how these findings responded to them. The first research question explored how teachers in the National Capital Region perceived and enacted IEP fidelity in daily instruction, as well as the practices that supported alignment among goals, instructional delivery, accommodations, and progress monitoring. Themes 1 to 4 directly addressed this question by illustrating how participants defined fidelity, translated written plans into classroom practices, and adapted instruction while maintaining alignment with intended learning outcomes. The second research question

examined how contextual realities, leadership, and systemic supports shaped IEP fidelity. Themes 3, 5, and 6 responded to this by highlighting the critical role of collaboration, the tensions arising from limited resources and non-standardized practices, and the centrality of teachers’ professional judgment in navigating these constraints. Finally, the emphasis on student needs and outcomes in Theme 7 provided an integrative lens for both questions, demonstrating that across contexts, teachers ultimately evaluated fidelity based on whether IEP implementation led to meaningful progress for learners with disabilities. These themes were further triangulated with principals’ field notes and parents’ reflective accounts to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of IEP fidelity. Through this multi-perspective analysis, the findings were synthesized to address Research Questions 1 to 8 more rigorously and to inform the development of a contextually grounded and actionable framework for practice.

RQ 1: How do teachers in the National Capital Region perceive and enact “IEP fidelity” in daily instruction, and which practices most reliably support alignment between IEP goals, instructional delivery, accommodations, and progress monitoring?

Theme 1: Fidelity of IEP Implementation Practice Category 8 Instruction and Teaching Practice

The analysis indicated that fidelity of IEP implementation practice emerged as a multifaceted construct shaped by contextual enactment, **P3** states that “*follow what is written in the IEP—especially the goals, accommodations, and supports—within the realities of my classroom. Since we do not have a full IEP team or a school psychologist*” (L3 – L10) as practitioner judgment, and organizational supports, it would rather by a single set of prescriptive steps, as **P1** states that “*I find fulfillment in witnessing my students growth higher across social, academic and emotional domains. To me, the most essential component of faithful IEP implementation in my classroom is the consistent and purposeful use of educational accommodations that allow each student to access learning and reach their full potential*” (L1 – L16). It revealed that fidelity manifested through adaptive alignment—where collaborators interpreted standards within local constraints, negotiated prerequisite resources, and recalibrated goals to fit classroom realities. **P4** says “*In my classroom, that includes providing required accommodations, delivering specially designed instruction tied to IEP goals, and monitoring progress through ongoing data collection.*” (L9 – L14) while **P10** narrates that “*faithful because everything I did marks the students’ goals and accommodations exactly as written. The supports were consistent and built in the flow of the lesson and the student was able to participate confidently because the IEP was truly guided the instruction guiding the instructions.*” (L20 – L30) The findings suggested that consistent implementers maintained strong communication channels, engaged families meaningfully, and leveraged within-district norms to sustain high-quality IEP execution, such, **P6** says “*IEP fidelity to me means consistently honoring the intent of the IEP, especially the goals and the accommodations with within the daily instructions, not just compliance on paper.*” (L1 – L9) while variability in leadership expectations, time pressures, and resource availability moderated fidelity levels. This emergent theme underscored the essential balance between

adherence to evidence-based parameters and responsive adaptation to unique student needs, informing a practical framework that acknowledged both the necessity of consistency and the value of thoughtful, context-responsive practice. **P9** acknowledged that “*Parent/guardian communication supports that would make these indicators actionable: structured PD on IEP implementation, collaboration time, accessible data tools, and coaching or mentoring for teachers. These measures would allow teachers to maintain fidelity efficiently while adapting to diverse classroom contexts*”. (L8 – L22).

Category 4 Collaboration and Support System

In the Collaboration and Support System, the participants demonstrated their experienced in the category of collaboration within the context of IEP in education. They viewed Support system as the character that they must possess which was essential to establish not just a good sentiment but as a critical and actionable mindset that could empower them.

As **(P10)** remarked *I saw it faithful because everything I did marks the students' goals and accommodations exactly as written. The supports were consistent and built in the flow of the lesson and the student was able to participate confidently because the IEP was truly guided the instruction guiding the instructions.* (L20 – L31) and **(P2)** *I understand IEP fidelity as sticking closely to the student's individualized plan* (L1 – L4). and **(P4)** also shared *For me, IEP fidelity means honoring both the legal and instructional intent of the IEP. It is not just about checking boxes; it is about making sure the student actually receives the goals, accommodations, and services written in the plan in a meaningful way. In my day-to-day teaching, fidelity means I consistently align my lesson objectives, strategies, and assessments with each student's individualized goals.* (L1 – L21) and as for **(P6)** *To me, IEP fidelity means implementing each student's goals, accommodations, and services as intended, with consistency and intentionality, while monitoring progress. In my classroom, the most central aspects are aligning daily instruction to the goals, consistently using accommodations like visual support and manipulatives, and documenting progress. These ensure the student receives what the IEP specifies, even if the broader team is absent.* (L1 – L20).

The discussions revealed that collaboration and support system were a vital ingredient in nurturing Informing practical framework within educational environments. Fostering a culture of Collaboration and Support system, the selected participants can harness the strengths of their communities, ensuring that all stakeholders were equipped to face challenges and contribute positively to their educational ecosystems.

Category 15 Progress Monitoring

Participants shared their experienced that highlighted the category of Progress Monitoring. They discussed how this category added a huge impact in their professional and personal lives. As mentioned by **(P4)** *In my classroom, that includes providing required accommodations, delivering specially designed instruction tied to IEP goals, and monitoring progress through ongoing data collection.* (L6 – L17) As mentioned by **(P6)**, *IEP fidelity to me means consistently honoring the intent of the iep, especially the goals and the accommodations with within the daily*

instructions, not just compliance on paper. (L11 – L17) *monitor the progress so that the lesson that I integrate or that I deliver to my student is based on the student progress, which is the checklist on the different domains. Ah, that's good.* (L22 – L30) Co-Planning and Co-Teaching Teams jointly select evidence-based practices aligned with IEP goals and student needs. The partnership enabled the blending of general instructional approaches with individualized supports. Strategies were adapted to NCR schools' linguistic, cultural, and community contexts, recognizing urban diversity, resource variability, and classroom heterogeneity. Teachers documented how contextual factors shaped implementation, which allowed the practical framework to reflect local realities. A naturalistic inquiry approach supported ongoing cycles of observation, reflection, planning, and action. Teams gathered qualitative and quantitative data to understand what worked, for whom, and under what conditions. Collaborative use of fidelity rubrics, checklists, and progress-monitoring tools ensured transparent, ongoing monitoring of IEP implementation. Data was interpreted collectively to adjust instructional approaches while honoring IEP goals. On-site coaching and professional development sessions were co-delivered by university researchers and school-based experts to strengthen teacher capacity. Reflective practice, through structured debriefs and collaborative inquiry, deepened understanding of instructional effectiveness. **(P9)** remarked that *their IEP goal. The IEP specified that they should complete the task independently with minimal prompts, but it was clear in the moment that continuing without support would lead to disengagement and anxiety. I quickly decided to provide scaffolding—breaking the task into smaller steps and giving targeted prompts—while still keeping the focus on the goal.* (L6 – L22), *supporting access to the skill, and I chose the latter to preserve learning and motivation* (L25 – L28) *document the adaptation for future planning. This decision allowed me to uphold the intent of the IEP while responding flexibly to classroom realities.* (L35 – L41) **(P10)** *I saw it faithful because everything I did marks the students' goals and accommodations exactly as written. The supports were consistent and built in the flow of the lesson and the student was able to participate confidently because the IEP was truly guided the instruction guiding the instructions.* (L20 – L31) **(P2)** *I understand IEP fidelity as sticking closely to the student's individualized plan* (L1 – L4), *aligning lessons to specific goals, like breaking down math skills for a child with learning disabilities, and regularly checking progress.* (L13 – L19), **(P3)** *to follow what is written in the IEP—especially the goals, accommodations, and supports—within the realities of my classroom. Since we do not have a full IEP team or a school psychologist,* (L3 – L12), *making sure the student receives the accommodations consistently* (L18 – L21).

RQ2 *What lived experiences and everyday decisions illustrate fidelity or deviations in IEP implementation from a teacher's vantage point, and how do these shape interpretations of fidelity over time?*

Theme 2 Evolving Understanding of IEP Fidelity

Category 58 Teacher Mentoring

In the category of teacher mentoring under the theme of Evolving Understanding of IEP Fidelity the participants shared their insights and experiences on how this category

helped them overcome challenges in achieving academic and personal success of IEP.

(P1) says “*IEP fidelity in my day to day teaching as intentionally supporting students (L3 – L6), I find fulfillment in witnessing my students growth higher across social, academic and emotional domains.*” (L10 – L14), “*the most essential component of faithful IEP implementation in my classroom is the consistent and purposeful use of educational accommodations that allow each student to access learning and reach their full potential.*” (L14 – L24), (P4) says “*I provided the accommodations listed in the IEP, such as extended time, visual support, and chunked directions, and delivered specially designed instruction focused on the student’s reading comprehension goal.*” (L9 – L18), “*The lesson felt faithful to the IEP because every instructional decision I made was directly connected to what was written in the student’s plan and designed to support their individual needs. Though we have some issues in writing IEPs.*” (L22 – L33). (P6) cited, “*I’ve reinterpreted an accommodation when it wasn’t working instructionally using the students data and also the team input to guide the necessary adjustment.*” (L1 – L7), General Education Teachers and Special Education Teachers Co-planning and co-teaching, ensuring that evidence-based strategies were accessible to all students and that IEP goals translated into actionable classroom practices.

IEP Coordinators and Administrators: Facilitate access to resources, schedule collaborative planning time, and oversee fidelity monitoring processes. as (P7) states that “*I adjusted the pacing and delivery of an IEP-specified instructional strategy to better fit the classroom structure while still honoring the intent of the goal and required accommodations; my decision was guided by the student’s immediate data.*” (L11 – L19) while (P9) says “*The IEP components that translate most consistently into my classroom practice are goals, accommodations, and progress monitoring. Goals guide my daily instructional planning because they clearly define the skills the student is expected to develop, making it easier to align lessons and interventions directly to those targets. Accommodations also translate.*” (L12 – L28). Seemingly, (P10) point out that “*I showed how to write uppercase and lowercase Bb, broke the task into small steps like tracing, copying, and then writing independently, and gave short, simple instructions.*” (L4 – L12). (P9) narrates that “*I implemented an IEP with high fidelity. I used the student’s specific reading goal to guide the lesson, provided the required accommodations such as extended time and guided practice,* (L3 – L12), additionally, (P10) added that *documented the student’s progress* (L17 – L16). UDL informed the creation of flexible lesson plans that accommodated diverse learners, with collaborative refinement to ensure that IEP goals were supported within general instruction. Co-design explicit routines, modeling, guided practice, and independent practice with clear success criteria aligned to IEP objectives. Paraprofessionals and specialists coordinated supports to ensure consistency across differentiation was not a one-size-fits-all approach; researcher tailor materials, pacing, and supports based on ongoing data from progress monitoring and formative assessments. Collaborative data discussions helped identify when to intensify or modify interventions to maintain fidelity. Regular cycles of data collection like probes, rubrics, performance-based tasks are analyzed by the researcher to determine fidelity levels and adjust teaching

strategies accordingly. Teacher feedback and self-monitoring contributed to an iterative improvement process. A well-defined split between roles and responsibilities reduced ambiguity and enhanced fidelity. In some contexts, team members rotate roles to build shared expertise and reduce dependency on a single facilitator.

RQ3 How do school – and district level context (leadership, policy mandates, resource distribution, professional development) influence teachers’ sense of what counts as high-fidelity IEP implementation?

Theme 3 Collaboration and Team-Based implementation Category 63 Teaching Strategies Used in Class

Most of the participants shared their experience in the category of growth. They discussed how they cultivated a growth mindset teaching strategies used in class which led them to exploration and collaboration and team based implementation.

(P3) tells that “*It’s about consistency, accuracy and the high quality delivery of a specialized instruction and services exactly as designed in the iep.*” (L5 – L11), while (P4) relates “*Contextual factors shape that definition a lot. Division policies set expectations for service delivery and progress monitoring, leadership messaging signals what’s prioritized, and available resources—like staff, materials, and collaboration time—determine what can realistically be done. All of these influence how I approach fidelity in practice.*” (L10 – L26), These discussions highlighted that teaching strategies were critical components in fostering IEP fidelity, which evolved through understanding within the NCR. Investing in the growth of skills, team-based implementations, and supportive relationships enhanced educational strengths and overall performance. (P7) *Authentic fidelity is reflected in consistent goal-aligned accommodations, progress monitoring, and collaboration.* (L1 – L6), seemingly, (P8) speaks “*There is very less collaboration in terms of the general education colleagues. In fact, they are not so welcoming In terms of adjusting their lesson to align with our Iep, maybe because of lack of training. So our collaboration still centers on with the special education teachers ourselves.*”, (P10) says, “*In my school and district, this is shaped by policies, leadership guidance, and available resources like learning materials and visual aids which help make IEPs practical and meaningful in the classroom*” (L9 – L19), (P13) *we lack a full IEP team and specialized staff, fidelity often means honoring the intent of the IEP. Leadership messaging, district expectations, and available resources strongly influence this definition. When policies are unclear or support is limited, fidelity becomes more about consistency and responsiveness than perfect compliance.* (L13 – L27) Participants recognized that it was essential to have effective resources, supportive relationships, active parental involvement, and transparent communication to create an empowered school community. (P10) *Central to this is translating the written IEP into daily classroom practice while adapting thoughtfully to each student’s needs. Contextual factors—such as unclear district policy on monitoring, supportive but sometimes uninformed school leadership, and limited resources—shape how I prioritize fidelity in my planning and instruction.* (L9 – L23) Meaningfully, the IEP fidelity, collaboration, and team-based implementation of teaching strategies used in class were significant factors. (P1) *District-wide policies such as*

progress monitoring requirements guide my daily decisions about IEP fidelity by ensuring instruction aligns with student goals and assessments to support accurate progress. (L1 – L9), “These policies shape what’s feasible in my classroom and help me prioritize which aspects of the IEP to focus on each day, while still aiming to meet the intent of the goals and support student progress.” (L13 – L22), (P6) says *I think there should be a clear guidelines guide. There should be a clear guidance and a protected plan, protected planning time and coaching that would strengthen the fidelity system.* (L1 – L9), (P10) says *If a student Is struggling, I break the skill down further or add more support.* (L1 – L12), (P1) states that “District policies, like progress-monitoring requirements and service delivery rules, guide how I follow IEPs every day like I schedule lessons and activities to make sure I collect data on student progress as required.” (L1 – L12) This discussion explored how collaborative practice and a team-based approach shaped the implementation of teaching strategies within classrooms, as framed by the dissertation topic “IEP Fidelity in the National Capital Region: Naturalistic Inquiry Informing Practical Framework.” Grounded in naturalistic inquiry, this focused on how educators, special education professionals, administrators, families, and researchers worked together to ensure that individualized education program (IEP) requirements were implemented with fidelity, and how teaching strategies in classrooms were informed by practical, contextually relevant insights. (P4) tells that “Service delivery models also affect scheduling decisions. If minutes are mandated, I structure my week carefully to ensure students receive required services, even when unexpected events disrupt the schedule.” (L10 – L21) (P10) “In my school, this is influenced by division policies, the principal’s support, and available resources. While my principal is supportive, her lack of IEP knowledge means I largely define fidelity based on professional judgment and best practices.” (L7 – L18), (P4) says, *I understand and implement IEP fidelity. When leaders provide clear guidance, model best practices, and give constructive feedback, it helps me focus on the most important parts of each student’s goals and ensures support was applied consistently.* (L4 – L15), (P6) “There should be a clear guidance and protected plan, protected planning time and coaching that would strengthen the fidelity system.” (L3 – L9) Collaboration was aligned with the complexity of IEP fidelity, which required alignment across multiple stakeholders—special education teachers, general education teachers, school psychologists, related service providers, administrators, families, and students. Fidelity, in this context, referred to the degree to which IEPs were implemented as intended and designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities.

A collaborative framework supported shared decision-making about instructional strategies, accommodations, modifications, progress monitoring, and data interpretation, ensuring that teaching practices reflected the diverse learner profiles in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Naturalistic inquiry emphasized understanding teaching and learning in real-world settings, acknowledging the social, organizational, and cultural contexts that influenced fidelity. Collaboration became a mechanism to capture, interpret, and respond to these contextual factors.

RQ4 When teachers encounter challenges or perceived gaps in IEP fidelity, what reflective processes and collaborative problem-solving approaches do they use, and how do these responses contribute to local practice and the emerging practical framework?

Theme 4 Instructional Adaptation and student outcomes

Category 21 Accommodations/Modifications/Adjustment

In many classrooms, IEP fidelity—the degree to which instructional practices aligned with a student’s individualized education program—functioned less as a static checklist and more as a living, evolving practice. When teachers encountered gaps or challenges in fidelity, they did not simply recalibrate a piece of pedagogy; they engaged a dynamic process that blended reflection, collaboration, data, and professional judgment. Teachers frequently began with a triad of data sources: formal IEP goals, ongoing progress monitoring data, and in-class observations. When fidelity gaps appear, these sources often reveal patterns across time, settings, or content areas.

In practice, teachers triangulate: a standard-aligned objective might have existed in the IEP, but progress was inconsistent; accommodations that should have been in place were inconsistently implemented; or modifications appeared in one setting but not another. (P1) says *what’s not working and discuss it with colleagues to clarify the problem.* (L6 – L9) while (P4) says *observing student performance and comparing it to the goal. For example, if a student isn’t making progress despite instruction* (L2 – L7) (P6) narrates that *I think there should be a clear guidelines guide. There should be a clear guidance and protected plan,* (L9 – L13). (P8) says *The goal Is very specific to the kids. So this is the curriculum. This Is the grade level curriculum of the kid.* (L42 – L47) (P3) said that *School and district reporting requirements push me to track progress consistently. Even with simple checklists or anecdotal notes, these systems guide me to review growth, adjust instruction, and communicate with parents, keeping fidelity aligned with documentation expectations.* (L1 – L14).

Progress data showed fluctuations: decent gains on weekly fluency checks but inconsistent comprehension across genre tasks. The teacher noted that while fluency improved, the comprehension measures lagged when tasks required inferencing or citing textual evidence. The reflective question arose: was the issue primarily cognitive load, distractions, or a misalignment between assessment prompts and instructional supports? (P9) says *When the division introduced a new progress-monitoring template, I reevaluated my documentation practices. I adopted the template while maintaining my own observation logs for day-to-day decision-making. The change improved reporting alignment without altering my core instructional practices.* (L1 – L14).

RQ5 From teachers’ perspectives, which indicators of IEP fidelity are most actionable, feasible, and meaningful for informing a practical framework in the National Capital Region?

Theme 5 Classroom reality and misalignment with general education

Category 25 Administrative Support

In the classroom reality of the National Capital Region, a practical and teacher-centered discussion emerged around

the misalignment between general education expectations and the everyday work of implementing IEPs. From the teachers' perspective, the central question asked which indicators of IEP fidelity were most actionable, feasible, and meaningful for informing a practical framework in NCR, with administrative support as a key driver. The aim was to bridge the gap between fidelity and day-to-day instructional practice by foregrounding teachers' experiences, constraints, and needs within NCR schools, and to understand how administrative systems, resource allocation, and professional support shaped what was possible in inclusive settings.

Actionable indicators were those that teachers could observe, measure, and influence with the tools and time available. Feasibility required that indicators fitted within school workflows, staffing, and administrative constraints, while meaningfulness tied directly to student learning, participation, and access to the general curriculum. Within this administrative lens, leadership clarity and expectations for IEP implementation mattered, as did scheduling and workload adjustments that enabled planning and collaboration. The availability of substitutes, aides, and related service personnel, along with data systems that collected useful fidelity information without overburdening teachers, were also critical components of a workable framework.

From there, a set of teacher-centered, NCR-focused indicators emerged, organized to balance practicality with the realities of classroom practice, collaboration, assessment, and data use. First, Curriculum and Accommodation Alignment focused on the adaptation-consistency of accommodations—how consistently IEP-mandated supports were applied across lessons and units—and the degree to which the general curriculum aligned with IEP goals. This included regular checks to verify alignment between accommodations and daily lesson plans, documentation of mismatches with quick administrative troubleshooting, crosswalks linking IEP objectives to district benchmarks, and evidence that students maintained access to grade-level content through scaffolds. **(P5)** *I usually recognize a fidelity gap when student progress data is stagnant or when I notice that an accommodation is not being implemented consistently. I name the problem by asking myself: Is the student receiving what is written in the IEP, and is it producing growth? If the answer is no, then I know there is a fidelity issue. (L1 – L14).*

Second, Individualized Assessment and Progress Monitoring centered on frequent progress data collection and measurement fidelity clarity. Teachers benefited from short, actionable progress checks tied to IEP goals, with administrative support that streamlined data entry. Clarity about what constituted growth for each goal, along with consistent interpretation of data across classrooms, was essential. Rubrics and anchors that were understandable and printable helped ensure consistency.

Third, Collaboration and Time Allocation emphasized collaborative planning time—protected blocks for IEP team activities involving general education teachers, special educators, and related service providers. Structured agendas and district-approved protocols, plus administrative support for substitute coverage, were crucial. Interdisciplinary coordination efficacy relied on shared digital spaces for updates and regular brief check-ins to adjust supports based on data. **(P9)** *Looking ahead, I would recommend three core indicators for a scalable, practical IEP fidelity framework in*

the National Capital Region: goal-aligned instruction, consistent application of accommodations, and routine progress monitoring. These indicators are directly tied to student outcomes, observable in daily teaching, and feasible across diverse school contexts—from urban to suburban, elementary to high school, and resource-rich to lean settings. (L1 – L21).

Fourth, Resource Availability and Accessibility highlighted the sufficiency of aide and support staffing, with clear role definitions and scheduling that prevented coverage gaps. Material and environmental adaptations—accessible instructional materials, assistive technologies, and physical accommodations—were required to be readily available through timely procurement and training, ensuring assessments and handouts could be provided in accessible formats. **(P10)** *says The most stable parts of IEP fidelity for me are accommodations and routines. Things like visual supports, chunk directions or extra time are easily to build in into daily lessons so they happen consistently.*

Fifth, Professional Development and Administrative Leadership centered on PD relevance and applicability to daily IEP implementation. Teachers looked for PD that emphasized practical classroom strategies and offered follow-up coaching and model classrooms. Administrative guidance and clear expectations from school leaders mattered, including feedback loops and responsive mechanisms to address feasibility concerns, with explicit timelines for fidelity checks.

(P2) *For instance, if a goal involves improving fine motor skills for writing, but the student consistently struggles despite accommodations, I name it as a "fidelity mismatch due to inadequate tools. I need a stable IEP system where I can write everything in place" (L11 – L15).*

Sixth, Compliance Documentation and Data Systems addressed the usability of data systems, emphasizing the ease of entering, retrieving, and interpreting fidelity-related data. Dashboards that provided at-a-glance indicators relevant to daily practice, along with automation to minimize redundant fields, supported teachers. It was also important to consider the realism of compliance burden—ensuring reporting cycles aligned with instructional rhythms and offering support staff to assist with data entry. **(P10)** *I use progress notes, checklists, and meeting summaries to document challenges and solutions. These records help me track improvement over time and communicate with parents and administrators for accountability. (L1 – L10).* **(P2)** *They allow me to quickly adjust strategies like collaborating with team when needed and ensure instruction remains aligned with students IEP goals. (L1 – L7).*

RQ 6. What IEP fidelity practices were demonstrated by NCR teachers, principals, and parents, and how were these practices manifested in actual implementation?

This section examined how key stakeholders—teachers, principals, and parents—collectively sustained IEP fidelity in school settings. The findings indicated that fidelity was not enacted solely by teachers but was a shared, relational practice shaped by collaboration, communication, and contextual constraints and affordances.

Through thematic analysis of participant responses, three interrelated sub-themes emerged: Collaborative Support Systems, Instructional and Leadership Support, and Home–School Partnership in Reinforcing IEP Goals. Together, these themes demonstrated that IEP fidelity was

strengthened when support mechanisms operated coherently across classroom, school, and home contexts.

Collaborative Support Systems

Findings suggested that collaboration among stakeholders was foundational to sustaining IEP fidelity over time. Teachers emphasized that ongoing coordination with colleagues, paraprofessionals, and school leaders helped ensure consistent implementation and reduced the risk of deviation from agreed-upon IEP provisions. One teacher explained:

(P2) *“Collaboration is essential in any part of the IEP process. Regular check-ins with general education teachers, specialists, and paraprofessionals, if there is any help, ensure consistency and prevent drift from the IEP.”*

This perspective underscored collaboration as a mechanism for maintaining alignment between instructional practices and individualized goals, mirroring broader literature that framed IEPs as living documents that required continuous, team-based communication. From the vantage point of school leadership, a principal highlighted the importance of coordinated guidance and oversight: (P15) *“We ensure that teachers are guided and supported in implementing accommodations and monitoring student progress through regular meetings and supervision.”* Parents likewise recognized the value of collaborative engagement with schools: (P18) *“When teachers update us, and we work together, we can follow the same strategies at home.”*

Collectively, these accounts suggested that IEP fidelity was reinforced through shared accountability, where regular, structured communication among teachers, administrators, and families supports continuity of services and coherence of interventions across settings.

Instructional and Leadership Support

Stakeholders were found to occupy distinct and complementary roles in supporting IEP implementation. Teachers served as the primary implementers, who translate written IEP plans into daily instructional practices. As one teacher articulated: (P3) *“IEP fidelity means making sure that what I planned in the IEP is actually happening in the classroom.”* At the same time, teachers pointed to structural gaps that constrain fidelity, particularly in contexts where complete IEP teams or formal support structures were absent: (P5) *“Since we do not have a complete IEP team, I rely on the written plan and my own observations.”* This highlighted how limitations in institutional arrangements shifted the burden of decision-making and problem-solving onto individual teachers, potentially undermining the systematic monitoring of fidelity. From the perspective of school heads, leadership was described in terms of creating enabling conditions for implementation: (P11) *“We provide training, monitor implementation, and ensure that teachers have the materials and support needed.”* These accounts demonstrated that school heads contributed to IEP fidelity by shaping the organizational and instructional climate—through professional development, supervision, and resource allocation—which the broader literature identified as critical to sustaining high-fidelity implementation of educational interventions. Overall, the findings indicated that instructional fidelity was intimately linked to leadership structures, such that the presence or absence of robust support systems directly influenced teachers’ capacity to implement IEPs as intended.

Home–School Partnership in Reinforcing IEP Goals

The data also highlighted the crucial role of parents in extending IEP implementation beyond the classroom and reinforcing targeted skills at home. Teachers acknowledged the impact of parental engagement on continuity of learning and student progress: (P9) *“I also communicated progress to the parent, who is very supportive and reinforces reading practice at home.”* Parents, in turn, described their efforts to align home practices with school-based strategies: (P17) *“We practice what the teacher gives and follow the strategies so my child can improve.”*

These accounts illustrated how parents contributed to IEP fidelity by reinforcing skills, providing emotional and motivational support, and maintaining consistent routines that mirror school interventions. However, the findings also implied the variability in the level and quality of parental involvement, reflecting differences in time, resources, and capacity across families, which was consistent with broader evidence on uneven home–school collaboration in special education. Thus, IEP fidelity appeared to extend beyond formal instructional delivery; it was strengthened by an active, reciprocal home–school partnership that supported the aligned implementation of IEP goals across contexts.

Cross-Theme Analysis

Viewed across the three sub-themes, a central insight emerged: IEP fidelity functioned as a distributed practice rather than an individual responsibility. Teachers, school heads, and parents contributed in interconnected ways that collectively shaped the quality and consistency of implementation:

- Teachers → implemented instruction, adapted strategies, and monitored student progress against IEP goals.
- School heads → provided leadership, structure, and resources, and monitored adherence to IEP provisions.
- Parents → reinforced learning at home, provided contextual information, and supported continuity of interventions.

The effectiveness of this distributed support system was influenced by contextual factors such as resource availability, professional training, and institutional capacity, which aligned with broader evidence linking implementation climate and leadership to fidelity. The findings also revealed a tension between ideal collaborative models—where responsibilities were shared and coordinated—and the realities of practice, in which teachers often compensated for gaps in leadership support or inconsistent parental engagement by relying more heavily on their individual effort and professional judgment.

Synthesis

In response to Research Question 6, the analysis showed that stakeholder support was fundamental to achieving and sustaining IEP fidelity. When collaboration, leadership, and parental involvement were aligned, they created an interconnected support system that enhanced implementation consistency, maintained alignment between IEP documents and classroom practices, and improved student outcomes. While teachers remained central as frontline implementers, robust support structures—both within schools and between home and school—amplify their efforts and reduce the likelihood that fidelity would depend solely on individual discretion. Conversely, limitations in

these systems, such as incomplete IEP teams, insufficient training, or uneven family engagement, could hinder fidelity and place disproportionate demands on teachers, underscoring the importance of viewing IEP implementation as a systemic rather than purely individual endeavor.

RQ 7. What patterns emerged across teachers, principals, and parents regarding the meaning and implementation of IEP fidelity in NCR schools?

Analysis of responses from teachers, school heads, and parents revealed distinct yet interconnected patterns in how IEP fidelity was understood and enacted. While all stakeholders recognized the importance of supporting learners with disabilities, their perspectives varied by role, responsibilities, and degree of involvement in the IEP process. Four major patterns emerged: (1) Shared Understanding of Goal Alignment and Student Support, (2) Variations in Interpretation of Fidelity (Compliance vs. Meaningful Practice), (3) Consistent Emphasis on Accommodations and Progress Monitoring, and (4) Gaps in Systemic Support and Implementation Structures.

Shared Understanding of Goal Alignment and Student Support

Across all stakeholder groups, there was a common understanding that IEP fidelity centered on meeting students' individualized needs. Teachers framed fidelity in terms of instructional alignment, emphasizing the translation of plans into practice: (P5) *"IEP fidelity means making sure that what I planned in the IEP is actually happening in the classroom."* Principals viewed fidelity as ensuring that school systems and processes support this alignment: (P12) *"We ensure that teachers implement accommodations and monitor student progress as guided by the IEP."* Parents, meanwhile, focused on outcomes and consistency of support: (P20) *"We follow what the teacher gives so our child can improve and learn better."*

Collectively, these perspectives showed a shared purpose: IEP fidelity was ultimately understood as supporting student learning and development, even though stakeholders engaged with the process from different positionalities and with varied degrees of control over implementation.

Variations in Interpretation of Fidelity (Compliance vs. Meaningful Practice)

Despite this shared purpose, stakeholders differed in how they defined and prioritized fidelity. Teachers tended to describe fidelity as both adherence and responsiveness, emphasizing that implementation should honor the intent of the IEP rather than merely fulfilling procedural requirements: *"IEP fidelity means consistently honoring the intent of the IEP... not just compliance on paper."* Principals, by contrast, often emphasized structure, documentation, and policy adherence: *"Implementation should follow the prescribed plan and be properly documented."* Parents interpreted fidelity primarily through observable results and perceived changes in their child's learning and behavior: *"We know it is working when our child improves."*

To summarize, these accounts suggested that IEP fidelity was understood along a spectrum: technical and compliance-based for principals, practical and instruction-based for

teachers, and outcome-based for parents. This spectrum highlighted a tension between procedural fidelity and meaningful, context-responsive practice.

Consistent Emphasis on Accommodations and Progress Monitoring

Across groups, two components of IEP implementation consistently surfaced as the most concrete and visible aspects of fidelity: accommodations and progress monitoring.

In terms of Accommodations, teachers identified accommodations as the most actionable part of the IEP, noting their capacity to adjust and individualize them in classroom practice: *"The accommodations... I can personally adjust it."* Principals supported their consistent implementation through supervision and guidance, while parents reinforced accommodations at home when strategies were clearly communicated.

While Progress monitoring teachers described using checklists and structured tools to track student performance across domains: *"Progress monitoring... is like a checklist of different domains."*

Principals and parents, in turn, relied on teachers' feedback and reports to judge the effectiveness of interventions.

These patterns indicated that accommodations and progress monitoring function as core practices of IEP fidelity across stakeholders, serving as shared reference points for what it means to implement the IEP in a concrete, day-to-day manner.

Gaps in Systemic Support and Implementation Structures

Alongside these shared practices, a significant pattern was the presence of structural and contextual constraints in NCR schools that shaped how IEP fidelity is realized. Teachers reported relying heavily on their own judgment in the absence of complete IEP teams or standardized processes: *"Since we do not have a complete IEP team... I rely on the written plan and my own observations."* They also noted inconsistencies across schools: *"There is no unified IEP... it depends on the school how they interpret it."*

Principals acknowledged limitations in resources, staffing, and system-wide structures, while parents experienced variability in communication and support across schools. These accounts suggest that IEP fidelity was unevenly implemented and heavily influenced by resource availability, training, and institutional frameworks.

Conclusion

Across teachers, principals, and parents, IEP fidelity in NCR schools could be characterized as shared in purpose but uneven in structure. Stakeholders converged on the goal of supporting student development and inclusion, yet they understood fidelity differently: teachers as instructional alignment, principals as compliance and monitoring, and parents as observable outcomes. Core practices such as accommodations and progress monitoring are consistently emphasized, but implementation is shaped—and at times constrained—by limited resources, lack of unified systems, and incomplete support teams. Ultimately, IEP fidelity is a dynamic, context-dependent process in which teachers served as primary implementers, principals as system enablers, and parents as reinforcement partners.

RQ 8. How was the IEP fidelity framework utilized by NCR teachers, principals, and parents within their respective school contexts?

Utilization of the IEP Fidelity Framework Across Stakeholders

The findings indicated that the IEP fidelity framework was used by stakeholders in role-specific, context-driven ways. Rather than operating as a rigid, standardized model, the framework functioned as a guiding structure that stakeholders adapted to their responsibilities, available resources, and school conditions. Three major patterns of utilization emerged: (1) teachers as primary implementers of instructional fidelity, (2) principals as facilitators of structural and organizational fidelity, and (3) parents as reinforcers of continuity and outcome-based fidelity.

1. Teachers as Primary Implementers of Instructional Fidelity

Teachers engaged with the IEP fidelity framework primarily at the instructional level, using it to translate written IEP plans into daily classroom practice. The framework guided their decisions to align lessons with IEP goals, implement accommodations and modifications, monitor student progress, and adjust instruction in response to learners' real-time needs. As one teacher explained, (P2) *"IEP fidelity means making sure that what I planned in the IEP is actually happening in the classroom."* Teachers also described an adaptive use of the framework that extended beyond procedural compliance: (P6) *"IEP fidelity means consistently honoring the intent of the IEP... not just compliance on paper."*

In practice, teachers used the framework as a flexible instructional guide, modifying strategies while maintaining alignment with individualized goals. This suggested that instructional fidelity was enacted as a negotiated balance between adherence to the written plan and responsiveness to student needs, consistent with broader views of fidelity that allow for context-appropriate adaptation.

2. Principals as Facilitators of Structural and Organizational Fidelity

Principals utilized the IEP fidelity framework at the organizational level, focusing on creating and maintaining conditions that supported implementation. Their use of the framework involved monitoring teacher compliance and documentation, facilitating staff collaboration, providing resources and training, and ensuring alignment with policy expectations. From a leadership perspective, one school head noted: (P12) *"We ensure that teachers are guided and supported in implementing accommodations and monitoring student progress."*

Principals thus acted as system enablers, working to ensure that the framework was operationalized within the school's routines, structures, and accountability mechanisms. However, the findings also indicated that structural limitations—such as incomplete IEP teams, inconsistent procedures, and resource constraints—affected the consistency and depth of implementation. In this sense, principals utilized the framework as a management and accountability tool, but its effectiveness depended heavily on the strength of the surrounding institutional support systems.

3. Parents as Reinforcers of Continuity and Outcome-Based Fidelity

Parents engaged with the IEP fidelity framework more indirectly, primarily by reinforcing learning and behavior support outside the classroom. Their role included practicing skills at home aligned with IEP goals, supporting communication and behavior strategies, and collaborating with teachers through ongoing feedback and communication. A teacher described this partnership: (P7) *"I communicated progress to the parent, who is very supportive and reinforces practice at home."* Parents themselves articulated their role in outcome-oriented terms: (P18) *"We follow what the teacher gives so our child can improve."*

Parents thus applied the framework through an outcome-based lens, focusing on whether their child showed improvement and whether home practices were consistent with school-based strategies. This highlighted that fidelity was not confined to school-based implementation but relied on home-school continuity to sustain and generalize gains.

Cross-Stakeholder Utilization Pattern

Taken together, the data suggested that the IEP fidelity framework functioned as a multi-level system across stakeholders:

Stakeholder	Level of Use	Function of the Framework
Teachers	Instructional Level	Guide for teaching, accommodations, and progress monitoring
Principals	Organizational Level	Tool for supervision, coordination, and structural support
Parents	Home/support Level	Reinforcement of learning and outcome-focused monitoring

This pattern reflected a distributed utilization of the framework in which each stakeholder engaged with fidelity from a different vantage point, yet all contributed to maintaining alignment with IEP goals.

Contextual Influence on Utilization

The utilization of the framework was significantly shaped by the school context. Key factors included the lack of standardized IEP systems across NCR, limited resources and personnel, incomplete IEP teams, and variability in teacher training. As one participant observed, (P18) *"There is no unified IEP... it depends on the school how they interpret it."*

These conditions meant that the framework was not applied uniformly but adapted to local constraints and capacities, leading to variations in implementation quality and consistency.

Synthesis and Integrative Conclusion

The findings demonstrated that the IEP fidelity framework operated as a dynamic, context-dependent tool rather than a fixed model. Teachers operationalized the framework through instruction, principals institutionalized it through leadership and organizational support, and parents extended it through home-based reinforcement. Despite their differing roles, all stakeholders contributed to maintaining alignment with IEP goals.

At the same time, the effectiveness of the framework depended on the robustness of support systems and the consistency of implementation across schools. Overall, the utilization of the IEP fidelity framework in NCR schools reflected a distributed model of implementation, where responsibility was shared but unevenly supported by institutional structures. While the framework provided a common reference for practice, its enactment varied by context, underscoring the need for stronger systems, targeted training, and enhanced collaboration to ensure more consistent and effective implementation.

Within NCR schools, teachers, principals, and parents utilized the IEP fidelity framework in ways that reflected their distinct roles while converging around a shared focus on supporting learners' individualized goals. Teachers primarily used the framework as a practical guide for planning and adjusting instruction, drawing on its core components (e.g., goal alignment, accommodations, services, progress monitoring) to structure lesson plans, select strategies, and track learner progress in relation to IEP targets. Principals engaged with the framework as an organizational tool, using it to inform scheduling, resource allocation, supervision, and the design of school-level processes such as IEP reviews, documentation routines, and case conferences. Parents, in turn, took up the framework as a reference point for advocacy and collaboration, using its concepts to understand their child's goals, ask questions about support and progress, and participate more confidently in IEP meetings and decision-making. Across these roles, the framework functioned less as a static checklist and more as a flexible, context-responsive scaffold that stakeholders interpreted and applied within the constraints and possibilities of their specific school settings with these indicators in mind, a practical NCR framework could be envisioned. The framework aimed to translate IEP fidelity into observable classroom practices and to identify administrative levers to support implementation. Structurally, this involved mapping core fidelity indicators to daily routines, aligning administrative supports with each indicator (time, staffing, PD, data tools), and establishing simple data collection and feedback loops—such as weekly micro-checks and monthly reviews. Professional learning communities could focus on shared challenges and solutions, with a phased implementation: co-create a fidelity dashboard with teachers, administrators, and specialists; embed protected planning time in master schedules; provide role-clarifying PD and on-site coaching; pilot streamlined progress-monitoring cycles tied to IEP goals; and continuously monitor, reflect, and revise indicators based on teacher feedback and student outcomes.

Data sources to inform this process included teacher self-reports and reflections gathered through brief termly prompts, structured classroom observations using fidelity-focused checklists, IEP team meeting records that summarized alignment between accommodations, goals, and instructional plans, progress-monitoring artifacts such as rubrics and exemplars, and administrative records detailing scheduling, staffing, and PD participation.

Anticipated challenges included time constraints and workload burden, variability across NCR districts and schools, and potential misalignment between policy, regulation, and classroom practice. Mitigation strategies centered on streamlined data tools, automated data capture,

and guaranteed planning time; keeping indicators core yet flexible to accommodate district differences; and creating robust feedback loops between teachers and district leadership to refine policies.

In conclusion, the most actionable, feasible, and meaningful indicators were those tightly linked to daily instructional decisions, collaborative processes, and manageable administrative supports. Centering teachers' experiences in the NCR, the framework could foster genuine fidelity to IEP goals while upholding high-quality inclusive education. The proposed indicators emphasized practical alignment of accommodations and assessments, structured collaboration, resource sufficiency, and administrative clarity, together offering a coherent pathway from policy to classroom reality.

Summary of Findings

In summary, Chapter 4 advanced a faithful, context-aware narrative of IEP fidelity in the NCR, grounded in Naturalistic Inquiry, and organized to illuminate the relationship between detailed qualitative findings, codes, categories, and themes and their implications for a practical, implementable framework. The ensuing sections presented the findings in a structured, thematically rich manner, aligned with the five research questions and their ten sub-questions, followed by integrative insights that connected the data to the NCR IEP Fidelity Practical Framework and to implications for practice, policy, and future research.

5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter synthesized the findings of the study on IEP fidelity in selected public schools in the National Capital Region, drawing together the major themes and relating them to the research questions, theoretical framework, and reviewed literature. It presented a concise summary of the study, discussed the conclusions, and offered recommendations for practice, policy, and future research, culminating in the NCR IEP Fidelity Framework and its components.

Discussion

This study examined how IEP fidelity was interpreted, negotiated, and enacted in inclusive education settings in the National Capital Region using a qualitative naturalistic inquiry design. Data were generated from semi-structured interviews with ten teachers, field notes from five principals, and narrative accounts from five parents, and analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis supported by Saldana's coding procedures.

The following section presented the primary themes and categories resulting from the analysis of qualitative data conducted after interviews were held with the participants in this study. The identity of each participant was protected by the use of numbers and letters to protect their anonymity when using direct quotes as supporting evidence for each theme, 7 major themes and 220 categories emerged following the researcher's analysis of codes of 620.

The purpose of this study was to yield a rigorous qualitative account of how individualized education program (IEP) fidelity manifested within everyday educational settings across the National Capital Region, employing naturalistic inquiry to capture authentic institutional practices, stakeholder perspectives, and contextual constraints. It aimed to illuminate the nuanced, real-world processes by

which IEPs were implemented, interpreted, and adapted in diverse classrooms, thereby informing a practical framework that could be feasibly applied by educators, administrators, and policy makers. Focusing on depth over generalizability, the research sought to generate richly contextualized insights into fidelity determinants, variability across schools, and emergent strategies that supported consistent, high-quality IEP implementation, ultimately contributing to more meaningful, student-centered outcomes.

The data were collected through qualitative methods. The population of the study consisted of participants from different City public schools in the National Capital Region. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with 10 teachers, 5 Principals, and 5 parents to gather diverse perspectives. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions; the 5 interview guide questions consisted of ten sub-questions to gather detailed responses, rich descriptions, and a deeper understanding and to achieve data saturation. This was designed to elicit participants' experiences and interpretations regarding IEP fidelity implementation. The questions focused on several key areas, including participants' understanding of IEP fidelity, instructional practices used in implementing IEP goals, collaboration among teachers, principals, and parents, institutional support for inclusive education programs, and challenges encountered in implementing individualized educational supports. Open-ended questions were intentionally used to encourage participants to describe their experiences in their own words and to provide rich narrative data that reflected the complexity of inclusive education practices (Patton, 2015).

To protect the identity of participants, the researcher assigned pseudonyms and ensured that personal information were kept confidential. Data were stored securely, accessible only to the researcher.

The researcher made it clear that all participants who participated in the interview were entirely voluntary, and participants were assured that their decision to participate or not certainly does not affect their relationship with the school or their standing in any way.

For Emotional and Psychological Safety, the researcher, through the respective group facilitators, acknowledged that discussing personal experiences related to IEP may evoke emotional responses. The researcher provided participants with information on support services as needed and created a supportive environment during the interviews.

The researcher was aware of and respected the cultural context of the participants. The researcher used language and examples that are culturally relevant and appropriate, ensuring that the research process was inclusive and respectful of local customs and practices.

For data integrity, the researcher presented the findings honestly and accurately without fabrication or misrepresentation of data.

The Researcher also acknowledged the limitations of the study and avoided overgeneralizing the results. As for the ethical review, the researcher submitted the research proposal to the Panel of Ethics during the pre-oral defense for approval, particularly from the researcher's dissertation adviser, Dr. Judito Camacho, before commencing this research. This ensured adherence to ethical standards and practices in research.

Interpretation of Findings and Relation to Literature

This section presented the Interpretation of Findings and Relation to Literature, where the study's results were analyzed in light of existing research on inclusive education and IEP fidelity. The findings were interpreted to explain emerging patterns and themes and to draw connections to both local and international literature. This discussion highlighted areas of convergence and divergence, thereby situating the study within the broader scholarly discourse and reinforcing its contribution to understanding the implementation of IEPs in real-world educational contexts.

Research Question 1

The findings for RQ1 showed that teachers in NCR constructed IEP fidelity as a flexible but intentional alignment of IEP goals, daily instruction, accommodations, and progress monitoring within real classroom constraints. Participants' descriptions of "sticking closely to the student's individualized plan," "honoring the intent of the IEP," and "implementing with consistency and intentionality, while monitoring progress" closely mirrored the literature's definition of implementation fidelity as the degree to which core components of an intervention are delivered as intended (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020). This understanding was consistent with multidimensional conceptualizations of fidelity—encompassing adherence, quality, dosage, and responsiveness (Gage *et al.*, 2020)—and with this study's own framing of IEP fidelity as the faithful implementation of goals, strategies, accommodations, and services in classroom practice that supported learner outcomes (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024).

At the same time, the narratives moved beyond a procedural view of fidelity and foregrounded what might be termed adaptive fidelity. Teachers repeatedly situated fidelity "within the realities of my classroom," acknowledging the absence of full IEP teams or school psychologists, limited time, and resource constraints while still anchoring decisions in IEP intent. This adaptive stance resonated with Philippine and international evidence that implementation fidelity was a context-dependent, relational process shaped by teacher competence, institutional conditions, and everyday negotiations rather than mere compliance with written plans (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025). It also responded directly to gaps identified in Philippine research, which had largely examined attitudes, policies, or broad challenges rather than how fidelity was practically constructed and negotiated in specific school settings (EDCOM II, 2023; Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025).

Within the theme of Instruction and Teaching Practice, participants emphasized three interlocking practices: aligning lesson objectives and strategies with IEP goals, embedding accommodations in the natural flow of lessons, and using ongoing data to adjust instruction. Teachers described faithful implementation as "allowing each student to access learning and reach their full potential" through consistent accommodations and specially designed instruction tied to stated goals. These accounts strongly affirmed international findings that high-fidelity IEP implementation—characterized by clear goal-instruction alignment and appropriate accommodations—was

associated with improved academic, behavioral, and engagement outcomes for learners with disabilities (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Michael, 2024). They also echoed Philippine studies that documented teachers' commitment to individualized support, while making visible how this commitment was operationalized under heavy workloads and resource limitations (Concepcion *et al.*, 2025; Marchan *et al.*, 2025; Looc, 2024; Donaire *et al.*, 2024).

The Collaboration and Support System theme underscored that teachers did not view fidelity as an individual endeavor but as a shared responsibility sustained by collegial support, leadership, and meaningful parent engagement. Participants pointed to structured professional development, dedicated collaboration time, accessible data tools, and coaching or mentoring as essential conditions for maintaining fidelity while adapting to diverse classroom contexts. This finding aligned with Philippine research that identified sustained professional development, administrative backing, and standardized yet flexible processes as key determinants of effective IEP use (Arcipe *et al.*, 2025; Concepcion *et al.*, 2025; Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Gabutan *et al.*, 2025) and with international work showed that professional learning communities, multidisciplinary teams, and transformational leadership enhanced IEP implementation quality (Yell & Bateman, 2025; Castle, 2025; Dewi *et al.*, 2026; Segers, 2024). Conversely, teachers' references to uneven leadership expectations and fragmented support echo the literature's documentation of an "implementation gap," where strong policy frameworks coexisted with inconsistent classroom enactment (Comia, 2021; Ciocon, 2022; EDCOM II, 2023; Jeter, 2025).

Finally, the Progress Monitoring theme demonstrated how teachers anchored their enactment of fidelity in ongoing assessment and documentation. Participants described monitoring progress through checklists, continuous data collection, and systematic recording of instructional adaptations to ensure that instruction remained aligned with IEP goals while remaining responsive to emerging learner needs. This practice reflected international recommendations that robust data systems, fidelity rubrics, and clear progress-monitoring procedures were crucial for maintaining high fidelity and preventing IEPs from functioning merely as compliance documents (Gage *et al.*, 2020; Poch *et al.*, 2024; Baker *et al.*, 2026). It also addressed a recurring weakness in Philippine studies, which reported that teachers were least confident in ongoing assessment, goal refinement, and systematic monitoring, by showing how NCR teachers attempted to institutionalize these processes in their daily routines (Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Looc, 2024; Bansag, 2025; Mates *et al.*, 2025).

In summary, the findings for RQ1 corroborated and extended the literature by portraying IEP fidelity in NCR as adaptive alignment rather than rigid rule-following. Teachers actively interpreted policy requirements, negotiated constraints, and recalibrated instructional moves while preserving the legal and instructional intent of the IEP, thereby illustrating how fidelity was produced through relationships, routines, and context-responsive judgment (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; EDCOM II, 2023). In doing so, the study provided the locally grounded, practice-based evidence that Philippine and international authors had called for and offers an empirical foundation for a context-responsive NCR IEP Fidelity Framework that

integrated consistency with thoughtful, student-centered adaptation (Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025; Choi *et al.*, 2020).

Research Question 2

Looking at the RQ2, the findings indicated that teachers' understandings of IEP fidelity were shaped less by formal policy texts and more by their repeated, everyday experiences of planning, teaching, adjusting, and monitoring IEP-aligned instruction. Participants initially described fidelity as closely aligning written IEP components with daily practice—using goals to guide lesson objectives, embedding specified accommodations such as extended time, visual supports, chunked directions, and guided practice, and documenting progress through checklists, probes, and performance-based tasks. This lived view was consistent with the literature, which defined implementation fidelity as the degree to which goals, instructional strategies, accommodations, and services outlined in an intervention or IEP were delivered as intended in actual classroom practice (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024).

Over time, however, teachers' everyday decisions led them to adopt a more adaptive and nuanced interpretation of fidelity. Participants recounted instances when prescribed accommodations or pacing did not work instructionally, prompting them to reinterpret or adjust strategies based on student data and team input while still "honoring the intent" of the IEP goal. These experiences illustrated that, from the teacher's vantage point, fidelity is not rigid literalism but a disciplined balancing of adherence and responsiveness, aligning with multidimensional models that conceptualized fidelity in terms of adherence, dosage, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness (Gage *et al.*, 2020). They also concretized Philippine and international findings that implementation fidelity was a context-dependent process, shaped by resource constraints, incomplete multidisciplinary teams, and workload pressures, which required practitioners to recontextualize interventions in real school environments (Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025; EDCOM II, 2023).

Teacher mentoring, collaboration, and leadership supports emerged as key mechanisms through which these interpretations were refined. Participants highlighted co-planning and co-teaching between general and special educators, the role of IEP coordinators and administrators in ensuring access to resources and planning time, and the contributions of paraprofessionals and specialists in coordinating supports across settings. These structures provided opportunities for modeling, feedback, and shared data discussions, allowing novice teachers to see how experienced colleagues broke tasks into scaffolded steps, explicitly linked instructional decisions to IEP goals, and decided when and how to modify interventions. Such accounts aligned with Philippine and international literature that identified professional development, collaborative planning, and supportive leadership as central determinants of implementation fidelity and teacher competence (Arcipe *et al.*, 2025; Concepcion *et al.*, 2025; Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Yell & Bateman, 2025; Castle, 2025; Dewi *et al.*, 2026). In contrast to earlier Philippine studies that emphasized persistent difficulties with ongoing assessment and monitoring (Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Bansag, 2025; Mates *et al.*, 2025), the present findings showed that NCR teachers actively engaging in iterative cycles of data collection,

reflection, and adjustment, thereby deepening and nuancing their interpretations of fidelity across their professional trajectories.

Research Question 3

RQ3 reflected, the findings showed that teachers' sense of "high-fidelity" IEP implementation was profoundly shaped by division and school policies, leadership signals, resource distribution, and the availability of structured collaboration and coaching. Participants explicitly tied their daily decisions about goals, accommodations, and progress monitoring to district rules on service delivery and data collection, to how principals interpreted and communicated these rules, and to what is realistically possible given staffing, time, and materials. In schools with clearer policies, progress-monitoring requirements, and service-delivery expectations, teachers reported using these guidelines to schedule instruction, plan data collection, and prioritize IEP components, echoing literature that identifies policy clarity, monitoring systems, and leadership support as central conditions for high implementation fidelity (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Poch *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, when policies were vague and leaders were supportive but lack IEP expertise, teachers described relying more heavily on professional judgment and "honoring the intent" of the plan, which aligned with Philippine findings that, in the absence of robust structures, teachers shouldered the burden of interpreting and enacting fidelity under resource constraints (Comia, 2021; Ciocon, 2022; EDCOM II, 2023; Michael, 2024).

The data further indicated that school- and division-level collaboration systems strongly influenced how teachers defined and pursued fidelity. Participants described "authentic fidelity" as not only consistent goal-aligned instruction and accommodations, but also regular collaboration among special and general educators, IEP coordinators, administrators, and other personnel. Where co-planning, protected planning time, and coaching were present, teachers reported being better able to break skills into manageable steps, adjust strategies when students struggled, and keep progress monitoring aligned with IEP goals, reflecting international evidence that professional learning communities, multidisciplinary teamwork, and sustained coaching improve fidelity and student outcomes (Yell & Bateman, 2025; Castle, 2025; Mesui, 2024; Michael, 2024; Dewi *et al.*, 2026). At the same time, accounts of weak collaboration with general education teachers, limited training, and absent team members mirror both Philippine and international literature that documented an implementation gap: strong legal and policy frameworks existed, but inconsistent collaboration and uneven capacity caused IEPs to function more as compliance documents than as fully realized instructional guides (Nagandran *et al.*, 2025; Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Jeter, 2025; EDCOM II, 2023).

Finally, the findings suggested that resource distribution and leadership practices mediated whether teachers experienced fidelity as "exactly as written" or as "consistency and responsiveness within constraints." Participants noted that division policies, service-minute mandates, and resource availability (e.g., staffing, materials, visual aids) shaped scheduling, grouping, and the feasibility of providing all specified supports, which was consistent with research showing that fidelity was conditioned by organizational and material realities, not just teacher will (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005;

Gage *et al.*, 2020; Aldas *et al.*, 2025; Marchan *et al.*, 2025). In under-resourced or loosely guided contexts, teachers in this study still strove for high fidelity but defined it more in terms of sustained goal alignment, careful prioritization, and responsive adaptation than perfect procedural compliance, thereby concretizing the literature's portrayal of implementation fidelity as a context-dependent construct produced through everyday negotiations among policy, leadership, collaboration, and classroom realities (Michael, 2024; Dewi *et al.*, 2026; EDCOM II, 2023).

Research Question 4

The findings in RQ4 showed that when teachers perceived gaps or challenges in IEP fidelity, they responded through a cyclical process of data-based reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and targeted instructional adaptation, rather than treating fidelity as a fixed checklist. Participants described starting with a triad of evidence—formal IEP goals, ongoing progress-monitoring data, and in-class observations—to identify where implementation was breaking down (for example, inconsistent progress toward goals, uneven use of accommodations across settings, or misalignment between assessments and supports). This reflective use of multiple data sources aligned with the literature that conceptualized fidelity as ongoing alignment between documented plans and day-to-day instructional practice, and emphasized the centrality of monitoring and data systems in sustaining high implementation fidelity (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Poch *et al.*, 2024).

Once a fidelity issue was identified, teachers in the study did not simply "tighten compliance"; instead, they engaged colleagues, adjusted strategies, and recalibrated supports while preserving the intent of the IEP. Participants described "naming what's not working" with peers, observing student performance relative to specific goals, and then modifying accommodations, breaking skills into smaller steps, or changing pacing to better match learners' needs. These collaborative, iterative adaptations mirrored international findings that effective fidelity interventions often combined performance feedback, coaching, and team-based planning, and that implementation quality improves when teachers were supported to adjust practice in response to data rather than follow scripts rigidly (Michael, 2024; Mesui, 2024; Wong *et al.*, 2018). They also echoed Philippine studies that highlighted the importance of collegial networks and adaptive strategies as teachers coped with heavy workloads, limited resources, and variable external supports (Aldas *et al.*, 2025; Marchan *et al.*, 2025).

The findings further indicated that formal reporting and accountability systems served as both constraints and catalysts for reflective practice. Teachers noted that school and division progress-monitoring templates and reporting requirements pushed them to track progress consistently and review growth, even if they relied on simple checklists or anecdotal notes. Rather than resisting these tools, some participants described integrating new templates into their routines while maintaining their own observation logs for day-to-day decisions, thereby aligning documentation with system expectations without losing instructional flexibility. This pattern resonated with literature arguing that robust data systems and monitoring frameworks are essential levers for sustaining fidelity and preventing IEPs from becoming static compliance documents (Gage *et al.*, 2020; Poch *et al.*, 2024; Baker *et al.*, 2026). At the same time, it illustrated

how teachers locally adapted such tools to preserve responsiveness to student needs, reflecting the broader view that implementation fidelity was co-constructed through relationships, routines, and context-sensitive interpretation of policy and guidance (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; EDCOM II, 2023).

Overall, the RQ4 findings suggested that NCR teachers contributed to an emerging practical framework for IEP fidelity by modeling fidelity as a dynamic, reflective, and collaborative process: one that integrated IEP goals, data, collegial dialogue, and instructional adaptation in real time. This empirically substantiated the literature's call for context-responsive fidelity models that are grounded in everyday school practice rather than solely in abstract metrics or policy prescriptions (Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025; EDCOM II, 2023).

Research Question 5

For RQ5, the findings indicated that teachers in NCR viewed the most useful indicators of IEP fidelity as those that are directly observable in daily instruction, realistically doable within their constraints, and clearly linked to student learning and access, rather than abstract or purely compliance-oriented measures. This perspective aligned with the literature, which emphasized that fidelity indicators must capture alignment between planned interventions and enacted practice, while remaining sensitive to institutional, instructional, and relational conditions (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020).

First, teachers consistently foregrounded goal-aligned instruction, curriculum–IEP alignment, and consistent application of accommodations as core, actionable indicators. They identified fidelity gaps when progress data was stagnant or when accommodations were not implemented consistently, asking whether students are “receiving what is written in the IEP” and whether it was actually producing growth. This emphasis reflected research showing that high-fidelity implementation required a close match between IEP goals, daily instructional decisions, and accommodations to ensure access to grade-level curriculum (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024). It also responded to Philippine evidence that gaps commonly arise, particularly at the monitoring and everyday classroom translation levels of IEP implementation (Concepcion *et al.*, 2025; Karaan *et al.*, 2025).

Second, teachers highlighted frequent, focused progress monitoring as both feasible and meaningful, provided that assessment tools are simple, clearly tied to goals, and supported by streamlined administrative systems. They valued short checks, clear rubrics or anchors, and templates that made it easy to enter and interpret data without overwhelming them. This was consistent with the literature that underscored robust data systems and clear goal-linked measures as critical for maintaining fidelity and avoiding situations in which IEPs existed on paper but were not systematically monitored in practice (Gage *et al.*, 2020; Poch *et al.*, 2024; Baker *et al.*, 2026). It also extended Philippine findings that teachers struggled with ongoing assessment and monitoring by specifying which tools and supports would make progress-monitoring indicators workable in NCR (Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Bansag, 2025; Mates *et al.*, 2025).

Third, collaboration structures and protected time emerged as necessary conditions that made key fidelity indicators

actionable. Teachers stressed the importance of scheduled co-planning time, clear agendas, district protocols, and shared digital spaces so that general and special educators, related service providers, and administrators could regularly adjust supports based on data. This directly echoed the literature that identified collaboration, professional learning communities, and multidisciplinary teamwork as major determinants of implementation fidelity and as mechanisms for recontextualizing IEPs in real-world schools (Yell & Bateman, 2025; Castle, 2025; Dewi *et al.*, 2026; Arcipe *et al.*, 2025; Gabutan *et al.*, 2025). Teachers' recommendation of three “core indicators”—goal-aligned instruction, consistent accommodations, and routine progress monitoring—thus aligned with international and Philippine studies that linked these elements to improved outcomes and equitable access.

Fourth, the findings underscored that resource availability and administrative leadership shaped which indicators were genuinely feasible. Teachers pointed to the sufficiency and scheduling of aides, clear role definitions, access to assistive technologies and adapted materials, and timely procurement as essential to sustaining accommodation and service delivery indicators. They also emphasized the value of practical, classroom-focused professional development supported by ongoing coaching and feedback, along with clear expectations and responsive problem-solving from school leaders. These priorities aligned with research indicating that fidelity depended on adequate resources, targeted professional development, and supportive leadership, without which implementation remained uneven despite positive teacher attitudes (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Michael, 2024; Aldas *et al.*, 2025; Marchan *et al.*, 2025; Arcipe *et al.*, 2025).

Finally, teachers identified usable documentation and data systems as a distinct set of fidelity indicators that both support and constrain practice. They valued progress notes, checklists, meeting summaries, and dashboards that allowed them to quickly see where a student was relative to IEP goals and to communicate clearly with families and administrators. At the same time, they stressed that reporting cycles and data demands must align with instructional rhythms and be supported by data-entry assistance. This aligned with international literature arguing that fidelity frameworks must integrate manageable data practices that feed instruction, not merely compliance, if IEPs are to function as “living guides” rather than bureaucratic artifacts (Gage *et al.*, 2020; Poch *et al.*, 2024; Baker *et al.*, 2026). Collectively, the RQ5 findings suggested that a practical NCR IEP fidelity framework should prioritize a small set of observable, instruction-anchored indicators—goal-aligned teaching, consistent accommodations, and routine progress monitoring—supported by collaboration time, adequate resources, focused professional development, and user-friendly data systems, all of which are strongly supported by the reviewed literature.

Research Question 6

For RQ6, the findings showed that IEP fidelity in NCR was enacted as a shared, distributed practice among teachers, principals, and parents, rather than as the sole responsibility of teachers. This aligned with the literature that conceptualized IEP implementation fidelity as a relational, context-dependent process shaped by collaboration, leadership, and family engagement, rather than merely by

individual practitioner behavior. Studies on implementation fidelity similarly emphasized that high-quality implementation depends on multiple, interacting conditions—teacher competence, leadership support, stakeholder collaboration, and monitoring systems—rather than on classroom practice in isolation (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020).

First, the theme of *Collaborative Support Systems* showed that regular coordination among teachers, general educators, specialists, paraprofessionals, and school heads was foundational for sustaining fidelity. Participants described ongoing check-ins, supervision, and shared problem-solving as mechanisms that prevented “drift” from IEP provisions and keep accommodations and goals aligned with daily practice. This reflected international and Philippine literature that framed IEPs as “living documents” requiring continuous team-based communication and identifies collaborative structures—such as professional learning communities and multidisciplinary IEP teams—as critical for consistent implementation (Yell & Bateman, 2025; Castle, 2025; Dewi *et al.*, 2026; Arcipe *et al.*, 2025). These findings also echoed local studies showing that, where collaboration was weak or irregular, IEPs risked becoming compliance artifacts rather than active guides to instruction. Second, under *Instructional and Leadership Support*, the findings indicated that teachers acted as frontline implementers who translated written plans into daily instruction, but their capacity to maintain fidelity depended heavily on leadership practices and institutional arrangements. Teachers reported relying on their own observations and judgment when IEP teams are incomplete or formal supports were lacking, illustrating how structural gaps shifted the burden of decision-making onto individuals. By contrast, principals who provided training, monitored implementation, and secured materials helped create an enabling climate for high-fidelity practice. This pattern was consistent with research showing that implementation fidelity was strengthened by supportive instructional leadership, adequate resources, and structured professional development, and weakened when these conditions were absent (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Michael, 2024; Comia, 2021; Ciocon, 2022; Aldas *et al.*, 2025). The literature likewise highlighted that leadership and organizational support were central determinants of whether interventions were implemented as designed in school settings.

Third, the *Home-School Partnership in Reinforcing IEP Goals* theme underscored parents’ role in extending IEP implementation beyond the classroom. Teachers and parents described coordinated efforts to reinforce targeted skills at home, follow school-recommended strategies, and maintain consistent routines, thereby promoting continuity of interventions across contexts. This aligned with international evidence that family engagement and alignment between home and school practices support better outcomes for learners with disabilities, even though direct links between parent-implemented activities and specific IEP goal attainment were sometimes undermeasured (Movahedazarhouli, 2021; Baker *et al.*, 2026). Philippine literature similarly noted that meaningful parent-school partnerships were essential for effective IEP use but are often uneven due to resource, time, and communication barriers (Gabutan *et al.*, 2025; Looc, 2024). The present findings confirmed this variability while illustrating concrete ways engaged parents helped uphold IEP intent.

Collectively across themes, the RQ6 findings supported the well-established view in the reviewed literature that IEP fidelity was best understood as a systemic, multi-stakeholder *practice* rather than a purely individual task. Teachers, school heads, and parents contributed in complementary ways: teachers implemented and adapted instruction and monitored progress; school leaders provided structure, training, monitoring, and resources; and parents reinforced learning, shared contextual information, and supported continuity. This distributed model reflected broader syntheses showing that fidelity was produced through relationships and routines in which educators and families interpreted policy requirements and enacted shared responsibilities within real school environments (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; EDCOM II, 2023). At the same time, the findings highlighted tensions between ideal collaborative models and actual practice in NCR, where incomplete teams, uneven training, and variable family engagement could force teachers to compensate through individual effort—a condition repeatedly documented in Philippine and international research on IEP implementation gaps. These insights reinforced the need, also emphasized in the literature, for practical frameworks that treated IEP fidelity as a collective enterprise supported by robust collaboration, leadership, and home-school partnerships, particularly in complex urban systems such as the National Capital Region.

Research Question 7

In summary, RQ7, the findings showed that teachers, principals, and parents in NCR shared a common purpose around IEP fidelity—supporting the individualized learning and development of learners with disabilities—but they approached and interpreted fidelity differently based on their roles, which closely mirrored how the literature framed implementation fidelity as multi-perspectival and context-dependent. Across all groups, IEP fidelity was anchored in goal alignment and student support: teachers emphasized making sure “what I planned in the IEP is actually happening in the classroom,” principals described ensuring that accommodations and progress monitoring are carried out as guided by the IEP, and parents focused on consistently following teacher guidance so their child could “improve and learn better.” This convergence on student-centered purpose aligned with studies that conceptualized IEPs as the primary mechanism for translating inclusive education policy into individualized practice and link high-fidelity implementation with improved academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024).

At the same time, the findings revealed patterned variations in how fidelity is defined—ranging from compliance-focused to meaning- and outcome-focused—echoing the literature’s distinction between technical/procedural fidelity and more substantive, instructional fidelity. Teachers described fidelity as both adherence and responsiveness, “not just compliance on paper,” but honoring the intent of the IEP in real classroom conditions, which reflects multidimensional models of fidelity that include adherence, quality, dosage, and responsiveness (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020). Principals tended to emphasize structure, documentation, and adherence to prescribed plans, reflecting system-level accountability and monitoring concerns highlighted in policy and leadership studies. Parents,

meanwhile, interpreted fidelity primarily through observable improvements in their child's learning and behavior, aligning with the literature, which noted that families commonly judge special education effectiveness by tangible progress rather than procedural details (Movahedazarhouli, 2021; Looc, 2024). Together, these patterns positioned IEP fidelity along a spectrum: more technical for principals, instructional and interpretive for teachers, and outcome-based for parents.

A strong cross-stakeholder pattern was the consistent emphasis on accommodations and progress monitoring as the core, concrete practices through which fidelity was recognized and evaluated. Teachers described accommodations as the most actionable and adjustable IEP component in daily teaching, principals supervised and guided their implementation, and parents reinforced them at home when clearly communicated. Likewise, teachers relied on checklists and structured tools to track progress across domains, while principals and parents depend on these reports to gauge effectiveness. This aligned with the reviewed literature, which repeatedly identified accommodations and goal-linked progress monitoring as central dimensions of IEP fidelity and as key predictors of improved outcomes when implemented consistently (Gage *et al.*, 2020; Poch *et al.*, 2024; Baker *et al.*, 2026). Philippine studies similarly pointed out that teachers struggled most with ongoing assessment and systematic monitoring, underscoring why these shared practices emerged so prominently as markers of fidelity (Karaan *et al.*, 2025; Bansag, 2025; Mates *et al.*, 2025).

Finally, the findings highlighted systemic gaps and uneven structures that shaped how these shared purposes and practices play out in NCR schools. Teachers reported relying on their own judgment in the absence of complete IEP teams and standardized processes, and noted that “there is no unified IEP... it depends on the school how they interpret it,” while principals acknowledged resource and staffing limitations, and parents experienced variability in communication and support. This pattern of uneven implementation and school-to-school variability was strongly supported by both Philippine and international research, which documented implementation gaps driven by limited teacher preparation, resource constraints, inconsistent leadership, and fragile collaboration systems, causing IEPs to functioned as compliance documents in some settings rather than fully realized instructional tools (EDCOM II, 2023; Michael, 2024; Nagandran *et al.*, 2025). Overall, the RQ7 findings reinforced the literature's view that IEP fidelity was shared in purpose but uneven in structure: teachers operated as primary instructional implementers, principals as system enablers and monitors, and parents as home-based reinforcement partners, with the quality of fidelity ultimately contingent on the strength of systemic supports that connect these roles into a coherent implementation environment (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Dewi *et al.*, 2026).

Research Question 8

Lastly, the findings for RQ8 indicated that the IEP fidelity framework in NCR schools operated as a flexible, multi-level guide that different stakeholders use in role-specific, context-responsive ways, rather than as a rigid, uniform model. This pattern was consistent with the literature conceptualizing implementation fidelity as a

multidimensional, context-dependent construct shaped by institutional roles, resources, and relational dynamics rather than by formal design alone (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020).

First, teachers used the framework primarily at the *instructional level*, treating it as a guide to align lessons with IEP goals, to embed accommodations and modifications, to monitor progress, and to adjust instruction in real time. Their emphasis on “making sure that what I planned in the IEP is actually happening in the classroom” and “honoring the intent of the IEP... not just compliance on paper” reflected the broader research view of instructional fidelity as the degree to which planned goals, strategies, and accommodations were enacted in day-to-day practice, with room for context-appropriate adaptation (Choi *et al.*, 2020; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Donaire *et al.*, 2024). This adaptive, intent-focused use of the framework aligned with multidimensional fidelity models that incorporated adherence, quality of delivery, dosage, and responsiveness rather than demanding rigid replication (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020).

Second, principals utilized the framework at the *organizational and structural level*, acting as system enablers who created conditions for fidelity. They applied the framework to guide supervision, ensure accommodations and progress monitoring are implemented, facilitated collaboration, and aligned school practices with policy expectations. This role mirrored findings from leadership and implementation studies showing that supportive instructional leadership, clear expectations, monitoring systems, and resource allocation were critical determinants of whether intervention frameworks were sustained with high fidelity (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Michael, 2024; Comia, 2021; Ciocon, 2022). However, as in the literature, the NCR data also highlighted that incomplete IEP teams, inconsistent procedures, and resource constraints limited principals' ability to fully institutionalize the framework, contributing to variability in implementation quality (Aldas *et al.*, 2025; EDCOM II, 2023).

Third, parents engaged with the framework more indirectly, at the *home/support level*, by reinforcing IEP goals and strategies outside school and judging fidelity largely through their child's outcomes. They reported “following what the teacher gives” so their child could improve, and teachers described how supportive parents “reinforce practice at home.” This utilization aligned with literature that positioned families as key partners in extending intervention effects across settings and notes that parents typically interpreted effectiveness and fidelity through observable gains in their child's skills and behavior (Movahedazarhouli, 2021; Looc, 2024). At the same time, as other studies have found, variability in time, knowledge, and resources results in uneven home-based reinforcement, contributing to differential implementation across contexts (Gabutan *et al.*, 2025; Bansag, 2025; Mates *et al.*, 2025).

To sum up, these patterns showed that the IEP fidelity framework in NCR functions as a *distributed implementation tool*: teachers operationalized it instructionally, principals institutionalized it structurally, and parents extended it through home-based practice. This distributed utilization reflected synthesis work arguing that effective fidelity frameworks must be enacted across multiple system levels—classroom, school, and family—and that the quality of implementation depends on how well

these levels were aligned (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Gage *et al.*, 2020; Dewi *et al.*, 2026). The NCR findings also resonated with Philippine evidence that, in the absence of unified systems and standardized IEP processes, schools and stakeholders adapt frameworks locally, leading to uneven but context-fitted enactments (EDCOM II, 2023; Michael, 2024). Overall, RQ8 underscored that while the IEP fidelity framework provides a shared reference point across stakeholders, its effectiveness was contingent on the robustness of leadership, collaboration, resources, and training that support its use—precisely the systemic conditions the literature identified as essential for high-fidelity implementation.

Conclusion

This study has pursued a rigorous qualitative exploration of IEP fidelity within the National Capital Region (NCR) through a naturalistic inquiry that foregrounded the lived experiences of teachers, families, and administrators. Examining fidelity not as a static checklist but as an emergent property of dynamic educational ecologies, the research illuminated how policy, practice, and context converged to shape what fidelity looks like in real classrooms, clinics, and schools. The conclusions drawn here were both explanatory and practically actionable, offering scholars a nuanced understanding of fidelity as situated, relational, and contingent, and offering practitioners and policymakers concrete avenues to enhance fidelity without sacrificing equity, relevance, or responsiveness to student need.

Fidelity as an Emergent Practice: The central finding was that fidelity operated as an emergent practice rather than a fixed protocol. Legal mandates provided a framework, but the actualization of fidelity depended on ongoing sense-making among diverse actors, negotiation of competing priorities, and adaptive strategies that responded to local constraints. This reframing invited a shift from compliance-centric metrics to context-aware evaluations that capture the quality of decision-making, collaboration, and documentation.

Relational and Contextual Framing: Fidelity was inseparable from interpersonal relationships and organizational culture. Trust between families and professionals, the clarity of communication, and the quality of collaboration across disciplines profoundly influenced how faithfully IEPs were translated into services and supports. Contextual factors—such as time pressures, service variability, and district priorities—shaped both opportunities and barriers to achieving fidelity, underscoring the need for tailored supports for teams that acknowledge these realities.

Professional Identities and Collaboration: The study revealed that professional identities and interprofessional dynamics were pivotal to fidelity work. When clinicians, teachers, and administrators shared language, aligned expectations, and engaged in reflective practice, fidelity was more likely to be enacted consistently across settings. Conversely, misalignment in roles or dispersed collaboration could create gaps between stated intentions and on-the-ground implementation.

Family Engagement and Equity: Families were not passive recipients but active agents shaping fidelity through advocacy, goal setting, and feedback. Effective fidelity required structures that nurture transparent communication,

collaborative goal alignment, and culturally and linguistically responsive practices. Equity considerations emerged as central to fidelity, revealing how disparities in service availability and resource allocation could undermine consistent, fair provision. An equity-forward approach to fidelity emphasized proactive identification of gaps, targeted resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms that monitor differential outcomes.

Practical Indicators and Framework Implications: The findings pointed to the necessity of developing practical fidelity indicators that were sensitive to context while enabling meaningful comparison across settings. A decision-support toolkit for teams, paired with targeted professional development, could strengthen collaborative fidelity activity by providing concrete structures for deliberation, documentation, and reflection. Such tools should balance standardization with flexibility, allowing for context-driven adaptation without eroding core commitments to student-centered outcomes.

Policy and System-Level Considerations: The NCR context illustrated how district-level signaling—through funding priorities, service arrays, and administrative workflows—had cascading effects on fidelity. Policymakers should recognize that fidelity was not solely a classroom concern but a systemic issue requiring alignment across policy levers, resource planning, and accountability frameworks. This necessitated investment in infrastructure that supported timely assessments, access to diverse services, and mechanisms for monitoring equity in service delivery.

Implications for Practice: For practitioners, the study offered a actionable roadmap: cultivate transparent, ongoing communication with families; engaged in structured, interprofessional collaboration with clear role definitions; employ adaptable fidelity indicators that reflected local realities; and participate in continuing professional development that emphasized equity, family-centered practice, and reflective decision-making. For administrators, the findings advocated for processes that reduced extraneous administrative burden while preserving rigorous documentation and fidelity signaling; for policymakers, they underscored the importance of equity-oriented policy design, data-informed resource allocation, and accountability systems that measured not only adherence to procedures but the quality and equity of outcomes.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

Theoretically, the study advanced the understanding of fidelity as a socio-material phenomenon—an emergent property shaped by the interplay of policy, practice, relationships, and resource constraints. It integrated perspectives from constructivist and critical realist epistemologies to illuminate how latent mechanisms (e.g., power dynamics, resource distribution, organizational routines) interacted with surface-level practices to produce fidelity outcomes. This synthesis extended existing models of fidelity by foregrounding context, equity, and relational processes.

Methodologically, the study demonstrated the value of a naturalistic, multi-method approach (interviews, document analysis, and observations) for capturing the complexities of IEP fidelity. The analytic strategy—rooted in iterative coding, thick description, and comparative cross-site analysis—produces a robust, practice-relevant

understanding that could inform both theory and practical frameworks.

Limitations and Reflexivity

While the study offered rich, context-specific insights, its scope was geographically bounded to the NCR. The transferability of findings to other regions might be moderated by variations in policy landscapes, resource configurations, and cultural contexts. Future research could test the practical framework in diverse settings to refine its applicability.

Reflexivity was acknowledged as a core component of qualitative inquiry. The research team engaged in ongoing reflection about how our positions, assumptions, and interactions with participants might shape interpretation. Transparent documentation of analytic decisions, member-checking with participants, and triangulation across data sources were employed to bolster credibility and trustworthiness.

Towards an Actionable Framework

Building on the key findings of the study, this section presented a Towards an Actionable Framework that translated the identified patterns of IEP fidelity into practical and context-responsive strategies for implementation. Grounded in the lived experiences of teachers, principals, and parents, the proposed framework aimed to bridge the gap between policy and classroom practice by providing clear, feasible, and collaborative approaches to strengthening IEP implementation in inclusive education settings.

Synthesis into Practice: The conclusions supported translating insights into a practical framework that combined flexible fidelity indicators, structured team deliberations, and equity-centered accountability. The framework would guide teams through stages of interpretation, decision-making, documentation, and review, with explicit attention to family engagement, cultural responsiveness, and resource considerations.

Implementation Roadmap: A phased approach was recommended—pilot the framework in a diverse set of schools and clinics, collect process and outcome data, refine indicators based on stakeholder feedback, and scale with professional development and policy alignment. Transparent reporting, stakeholder ownership, and ongoing evaluation should accompany the rollout to ensure responsiveness and sustainability.

Research Agenda: Building on this work, future studies could explore longitudinal trajectories of fidelity, the causal pathways linking fidelity to student outcomes, and the interplay between fidelity and local innovation in service delivery. Comparative analyses across regions with distinct policy ecosystems would further illuminate the conditions under which fidelity frameworks were most effective.

This study contributed to a nuanced, practice-oriented understanding of IEP fidelity in the NCR that centered the voices and experiences of those closest to the work—families, educators, and administrators. Articulating fidelity as an adaptive, relational process embedded in larger systems of policy and resource allocation, the research offered a principled basis for a practical framework that

supported equitable, high-quality, student-centered IEP implementation. The conclusion pointed toward a future in which fidelity metrics were complemented by qualitative and equity-sensitive indicators, and where professional learning, collaborative decision-making, and family partnership were foundational to the realization of meaningful educational outcomes for all students.

Summary

Fidelity to IEP processes in the National Capital Region emerged as an emergent property of complex ecologies, wherein fidelity was negotiated rather than fixed, as stakeholders continually interpreted legal requirements, balanced student needs with resource constraints, and were shaped by central relationships among families, teachers, and administrators; decision-making was deeply influenced by contextual constraints such as time pressures, service variability, district priorities, and administrative workload, which affected documentation thoroughness and service calibration; professional identities and collaborative cultures—how clinicians and teachers made sense of roles and how interprofessional collaboration unfolded—either bolstered or hindered fidelity efforts, shaping both decisions and their recording; families' experiences and expectations were central, with trust, clear communication, and alignment or misalignment between family goals and IEP provisions affecting perceptions of fidelity and engagement; day-to-day operation of fidelity was reflected in practical indicators and workarounds, including templates, checklists, and documentation practices, along with informal pre-decision conversations that scaffolded or constrained faithful implementation; the analysis pointed toward a practical, context-sensitive framework that supported fidelity indicators respectful of variation, provided team-oriented decision-support tools, and guided professional development to strengthen collaborative fidelity activities; equity and access considerations revealed that disparities in service availability, accommodations for linguistic and cultural diversity, and equity-driven judgments influence fidelity, with resource constraints and advocacy dynamics shaping prioritization and measurement, underscoring the need for an equity-forward approach; overall, fidelity to IEP processes in the NCR was best understood as an emergent property of interacting legal mandates, organizational structures, professional practices, family engagement, and resource realities, laying a foundation for translating these nuanced insights into actionable guidance for practitioners, administrators, and policymakers.

The subsequent findings drew on a rich, multi-source data set, including in-depth interviews with special education coordinators, special needs education teachers, administrative staff, and families; classroom and IEP document analyses; and participating observer notes from district and school-level meetings. Across these sources, several central themes emerged that illuminated how fidelity to IEP processes was produced, negotiated, and potentially constrained within the NCR. The themes were presented in an integrated narrative that foregrounded empirical detail, contextual nuance, and implications for practice.

This profile outlined the participants' involvement in this qualitative dissertation that comprised a total of 20

individuals from eight different schools. Each individual contributed to the diversity of perspectives and experiences in this study.

Conclusions

The journey toward aligning IEP fidelity with classroom reality in the National Capital Region rested on listening to teachers, valuing their time, and strengthening the administrative fabric that supported inclusive practice. A workable framework emerged not from lofty mandates alone but from tangible, daily actions: consistent application of accommodations, timely progress monitoring that informed instruction, protected planning time for collaborative work, reliable staffing and resources, and leadership that translated policy into practical steps. When administrators provided clear expectations, streamlined data tools, and practical professional development—and when teachers contributed their insights about feasibility and usefulness—the gap between general education standards and the realities of diverse learners narrowed. The most impactful indicators were those teachers could observe, measure, and adjust within the rhythms of a school day. They tied directly to students' access to the curriculum, participation in learning, and meaningful growth. By prioritizing actionable, feasible, and meaningful measures, the NCR could move toward a coherent system where fidelity was not an abstract target but a lived, observable practice supported by thoughtful leadership, family support, adequate resources, and ongoing reflection. Ultimately, this collaborative, teacher-informed approach held the promise of more consistent inclusion, better outcomes for students with IEPs, and a professional culture where educators felt empowered, supported, and prepared to enact inclusive excellence.

Implications

The findings of this study carried significant implications for policy, practice, and research in inclusive education, particularly in strengthening the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in the National Capital Region. By highlighting how IEP fidelity was interpreted and enacted by teachers, principals, and parents, the study underscored the need for more structured professional development, stronger instructional leadership, and sustained collaboration among stakeholders to ensure consistent and meaningful implementation. The results suggested that policies such as Republic Act No. 11650 must be supported by context-responsive frameworks, adequate resources, and monitoring mechanisms to bridge the gap between policy and classroom practice. Furthermore, the study provided a practical foundation for developing localized IEP fidelity frameworks to guide schools in improving instructional alignment, accountability, and learner outcomes, while also informing future research on implementation fidelity across diverse educational settings.

Policy and practice alignment: The proposed teacher-informed indicators provided a practical bridge between national or regional policy requirements for IEP fidelity and the realities of classroom implementation. If adopted, policies should emphasize not only compliance but also the actionable data and administrative support that enabled daily practice.

Administrative priority and resource allocation: Effective implementation depended on deliberate

scheduling, staffing, and tooling. Divisions and schools had to commit to protected planning time, adequate paraprofessional support, and streamlined data systems. Without these resources, fidelity indicators risked becoming aspirational rather than achievable.

Professional development redesign: PD should shift from purely theoretical training to ongoing, context-rich coaching that directly addressed classroom challenges. Follow-up coaching, model classrooms, and PLCs focused on shared challenges would likely yield greater adoption and IEP fidelity.

Equity and access for diverse learners: By foregrounding accommodations, accessible materials, and progress monitoring linked to IEP goals, the framework supported more equitable access to the general curriculum. This had implications for reducing achievement gaps and promoting inclusive practices across schools with varying resource levels.

Data-informed decision making: Emphasizing user-friendly IEP data systems and clear dashboards encouraged teachers and administrators to rely on evidence when making instructional and scheduling decisions. This could foster a culture of continuous improvement and timely responses to student needs.

Scalability and adaptability: The NCR focused indicators had to be adaptable to district differences in policy, culture, and capacity. A core set with context-specific extensions could facilitate scalable implementation while honoring local variations.

Measurement validity and reliability: To be meaningful, IEP fidelity indicators required clear definitions, standardized rubrics, and reliable data collection methods. Ongoing calibration among observers, teachers, and evaluators was essential to maintain trust in the data.

Sustainability and long-term impact: Ongoing administrative support, stable funding for resources, and consistent leadership endorsement were critical for sustaining fidelity efforts. Short-term gains might wane without enduring structures, cycles of evaluation, and periodic refreshers.

Research and evaluation opportunities: Implementing these indicators offers rich opportunities for iterative research—tracking correlations between IEP fidelity measures, instructional practices, and student outcomes. Such evidence could inform refinements to the framework and contribute to broader knowledge about inclusive education in resource-variable contexts.

Recommendations

In moving from the abstract to the actionable, the NCR framework should be put into practice through a concise set of interlinked recommendations that foreground teachers' voices, administrative support, family involvement, and a clear path for implementation.

First, adopt a teacher-informed core set of IEP fidelity indicators. Build these indicators around daily classroom realities—accommodations consistently applied, progress monitoring aligned to goals, collaborative planning time, accessible materials, and streamlined data systems. Ensure each indicator comes with concrete exemplars, simple rubrics, and ready-to-use checklists so teachers can observe, record, and reflect without added burden. Encourage districts/divisions to pilot these indicators in a representative sample of schools, then iterate based on feedback.

Second, guarantee protected planning time and efficient staffing structures. Administrative leaders should embed scheduled blocks for IEP team collaboration in master schedules and provide reliable substitutes or coverage so teachers can participate in planning and data review without sacrificing instruction. Clarify roles for general education teachers, special educators, and related service providers, and establish predictable routines for cross-team communication.

Third, reimagine professional development as ongoing, job-embedded support. Move beyond one-off trainings to sustained coaching, model classrooms, and Professional Learning Communities that tackle concrete classroom challenges. PD should be co-developed with teachers, parents training in the IEP implementation and support, reflect NCR contexts, and include follow-up coaching, observable demonstrations, and opportunities to try, receive feedback, and adjust practices in real time.

Fourth, invest in user-friendly IEP data systems and dashboards. Prioritize IEP data tools that minimize entry burden, automate routine tasks, and present at-a-glance indicators aligned with daily practice. Create feedback loops where teachers can discuss data interpretations with administrators and specialists, using findings to inform instructional decisions and scheduling.

Fifth, ensure equitable access through resource adequacy and adaptable materials. Provide timely procurement of assistive technologies, accessible formats for assessments and materials, and clear guidelines for paraprofessional supports. Align procurement and training with actual classroom needs so accommodations are practical, scalable, and sustainable across diverse NCR schools.

Sixth, embed data-informed decision-making within a culture of continuous improvement. Establish regular data-review cycles at the school and division levels, with clear responsibilities for action. Use fidelity data not solely for accountability but as a catalyst for instructional refinement, resource reallocation, and policy adjustments that respond to teachers' feedback and student progress.

Seventh, design for scalability and local adaptability. Start with a core, NCR-wide set of indicators and offer district-specific add-ons that reflect local contexts, capacities, and populations served. Provide a framework for adaptation that preserves fidelity principles while allowing schools to tailor practices to their unique environments.

Eighth, commit to ongoing evaluation of measurement validity and reliability. Develop IEP standardized rubrics, train observers, and conduct regular calibration sessions to preserve trust in fidelity data. Use mixed-methods evaluations—quantitative indicators complemented by qualitative teacher insights—to capture a holistic picture of practice and impact.

Ninth, emphasize sustainability through leadership and funding. Secure long-term commitments from district/division and school leaders to maintain support, protect time, and fund essential resources. Recognize that fidelity is a long-term investment requiring stable governance, recurring investments, and visible, continued administrative backing.

Tenth, deepen research collaboration. Treat implementation as a living inquiry: document processes, share findings across NCR, and engage in collaborative research with universities or educational research centers. Use findings to

refine indicators, sharpen PD offerings, and inform policy development at regional levels.

Together, these recommendations chart a practical, teacher-centered path from policy to classroom reality. Centering administrative support, streamlining resources, and embedding continuous learning, the NCR can progress toward authentic IEP fidelity that translates into meaningful access, participation, and growth for students with disabilities.

Limitations

This study, grounded in the National Capital Region and centered on teachers' perspectives about IEP fidelity and administrative support, was inherently bounded by several limitations that shaped the interpretation of its findings. *First*, its scope was geographically limited to NCR schools, which, while diverse, might not capture the full range of policy environments, resource constraints, or cultural contexts present in other regions. As a result, the indicators and framework proposed here might require careful adaptation to fit different districts, states, or countries with distinct governance structures and accountability systems.

Second, the reliance on teacher perspectives introduced potential biases related to self-reporting and recall. Teachers' judgments about feasibility, usefulness, and everyday practice reflected personal experiences, current workloads, and the specific administrative climates of their schools. While these insights were invaluable for grounding fidelity in real classroom realities, they might underrepresent the views of other stakeholders—such as school leaders, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, parents, and students with IEPs—whose experiences could reveal additional dimensions of fidelity or conflict.

Third, the study faced limited causal inference. While correlations between administrative supports and observed fidelity indicators could be discussed, establishing direct causal links required longitudinal designs, experimental or quasi-experimental approaches, and robust control for confounding factors. The focus on practical indicators and perceived feasibility provided directional guidance but could not definitively prove that implementing particular supports would produce specific fidelity gains or student outcomes.

Fourth, data availability and quality might constrained the depth of analysis. In many schools, progress monitoring data, documentation practices, or collaboration records vary in completeness and consistency. This heterogeneity could complicate comparisons across sites and might lead to uneven representation of practices, particularly in under-resourced schools where data capture systems are yet-to-be-fully-developed.

Fifth, the balance between standardization and local adaptation posed a challenge. A core NCR-wide set of indicators aimed for consistency, yet districts differed in policies, calendars, staffing models, and population needs. While the framework sought to accommodate local variation, the tension between fidelity to a common standard and responsiveness to local context might influence implementation fidelity and sustainability.

Sixth, the temporal dimension had to be acknowledged. The insights reflected a snapshot in time, influenced by current administrative priorities, funding climates, and recent policy developments. Changes in leadership, budget cycles, or

regulatory shifts could alter the relevance or practicality of the proposed indicators and supports, necessitating ongoing revision and revalidation.

Seventh, cultural and linguistic diversity within NCR schools could shape experiences of IEP implementation in ways that were not fully captured by the indicators as currently framed. Diverse classroom contexts, language learner considerations, and family engagement dynamics required attentive, culturally responsive expansion of measures and supports.

Eighth, the study's emphasis on teacher-centered indicators might inadvertently downplayed systemic barriers that required policy reform or state-level action. While teacher input was essential for feasible practice, meaningful fidelity improvements often hinged on macro-level changes in funding, accountability, and service delivery models. A comprehensive improvement effort had to integrate bottom-up support with top-down policy alignment.

While the study offered practical, teacher-informed guidance for aligning IEP fidelity with classroom reality in the NCR, its conclusions should be interpreted with caution. The findings illuminated actionable pathways anchored in teachers' lived experiences but had to be complemented by broader stakeholder engagement, longitudinal research, and adaptive policies to ensure robust, equitable, and sustainable improvements in inclusive education.

6. Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my beloved parents, Delfin and Lucia Tejon, whose guidance, sacrifices, and unconditional love continue to inspire me even in their absence. Their values and dreams remain the foundation of my perseverance and strength.

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Finally, this work is dedicated to all Filipino schoolchildren, especially those with special needs. May this study, in its own way, contribute to building more inclusive, supportive, and meaningful educational experiences for every learner.

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