**TEACHING STRUGGLING LEARNERS FROM THE VIEWPOINTS**

**OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS (SPED):**

**A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study aimed to explore the realities in teaching the struggling learners from the data provided by the SPED teachers. The study particularly gathered data on the experiences of the SPED teachers, the challenges they encountered, their coping mechanisms to the challenges, and the insight they would like to share about their job as SPED teachers. There were 17 SPED teachers who participated in the interview and focused group discussion. The study revealed that the SPED teachers experienced emotional labor; giving specialized care; assessing the children even if they are not trained to do so; and experienced the feeling of fulfillment as SPED teacher. The challenges they face include the difficulty in addressing the needs of the children; stress and negative emotions; struggle with children’s behavioral problems; and lack of support for SPED. To address the challenges, teachers shared they cultivate positive emotions, attend professional development activities, and establish support group. They shared insights that: SPED Teaching is not for everyone; SPED Teaching is a special and fulfilling task; and SPED Teaching is a tough job. This study therefore recommends support for the SPED teachers to be more effective and less burdened in their job.

**Keywords:** *SPED teaching, SPED, Struggling Learners, Qualitative Study, Magpet East/West Districts*

**INTRODUCTION**

Children with exceptional needs who attend school have legal guarantees that they will receive an instruction that meets their individual needs. These requirements may vary depending on the individual's impairment; however, many kids struggle to learn and/or participate in the general education curriculum due to a number of disabilities. Programs for special education are a result of this.

Specialized instruction tailored to each student's individual learning needs is provided in special education programs, enabling children with disabilities to reach their full potential (Masters in Special Education, 2019). As for the people who handle the SPED program, they are called Special Education (SPED) teachers. These are teachers specially trained in handling students with special needs in a face-to-face environment (US. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2020). The SPED program supports Republic Act 7277 in the Philippines (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons). Equal educational opportunities for children who have disabilities should be offered, and special needs education should be established in all schools.

However, Allam and Martin (2021) revealed that it is essential to understand the several difficulties that teachers encounter when managing courses for SPED. The same author also came to the conclusion that the majority of teachers who work with students who have learning disabilities felt unqualified to do so because they had not received any education training from the school, and that teachers who were assigned to SPED classes lacked approaches for working with students who had disabilities.

Special education teachers must be capable of giving instruction that is specific to students' strengths and shortcomings in addition to meeting the conventional teaching requirements. SPED teachers deal with struggling learners, and they have the strategies in teaching literacy on language; and these are worth exploring. More so, understanding the challenge they face, and their coping mechanisms are equally important. In addition, there is a dearth in literature which accounts the strategies of the SPED teachers in teaching the young learners who are struggling to learn; and their challenges and coping mechanisms since most literature are foreign in origin and do not account the real context this study dwell. Hence, this research will fill in the research gap and the above premises were considered reasons for the conduct of this study.

**FRAMEWORK**

Exploring the study involving SPED teachers was gleaned from the proposed theory on inclusive education for special education needs and disabilities (SEND) by Hornby (2015). According to inclusive special education, providing access to curriculum that is suitable for children with SEND throughout their educational careers should be a top priority. Finding the ideal balance for each child with SEND between an academic or developmental education system, which is centered on the needs of the children, and a functional curriculum, which addresses the specific educational needs of children with SEND, is a crucial issue in inclusive special education.

But the truth is that numerous teachers in traditional institutions don't feel qualified or eager to use this scenario. In many nations, initial teacher education programs do not provide enough information on how to teach students with SEND, and there is a dearth of in-service SEND training available to teachers. This implies that many instructors lack the attitudes, expertise, and abilities needed to properly include students with a variety of SEND in their courses. They are also concerned that there won't be enough supplies and staff to fully carry out a policy of full inclusion.

Because of limited instruction on educating students with SEND in their preparation and a lack of resources, inclusive special education recognizes the current situation in mainstream schools in which many teachers lack confidence in their ability to instruct students with SEND. Therefore, giving mainstream class instructors adequate and continuing training and support is a crucial part of inclusive special education. A larger percentage of teachers in mainstream classrooms will feel more qualified and confident to work with students who have a variety of SEND with better training and support.

The concept and values of inclusive education are combined with the special education tactics and interventions to create the theory of inclusive special education. The philosophy of inclusive special education offers principles for laws, practices, and research-proven instructional techniques that will help deliver an excellent education to all students with SEND. This new strategy aims to guarantee that every child with SEND receives an effective education from early childhood to secondary level in mainstream or special facilities, depending on what is most appropriate.

As a result, the paradigm creates inclusive special education by fusing important elements of special education with inclusive education. In order to achieve the highest level of participation in the community beyond school, inclusive special education entails offering the finest teaching for all children with SEND, within the most suitable environment, across all phases of a child's education. Its key goals are to successfully include as many kids as possible in regular classrooms, provide a continuous placement possibility from mainstream education to special schools, and foster strong cooperation between regular classes and special schools. These components of inclusive special education include organizing to provide the best education for all children with SEND; implementing effective practices from inclusive and special education; pattern of placement options from regular classrooms to special schools; schooling in the most appropriate venue, through all stages of a child's education; and other efforts to ensure the quality of the special education.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Rationale for Research Approach**

Walters posited that with so much characteristics qualitative research has, inductive reasoning and topic specificity are vital to lay the assumptions and reasons why this design can be appropriately utilized. Inductive reasoning is a feature of qualitative research enabling researchers to find out the information from the data instead of looking for specific findings since it is emergent. The researcher looks at the meaning of the data and objectively understands the subject based on the data they provide.

In exploring the SPED teachers’ experiences, the researcher assumes that a person has his or her thoughts, interpretations, and meanings of the world; hence, interpretative techniques in data gathering like an interview and focus group discussions were applicable.

Moreover, there is a reality about SPED teachers’ experiences that other teachers did not experience. SPED teachers belong to a particular setting in teaching and the knowledge they share is considered adequate and legitimate for they are the experiencers of the phenomenon under study.

The decision to use qualitative research opens up the possibility of interpreting phenomena in terms of the interpretations people make of them. This study employed the qualitative-phenomenology as a research design.Phenomenology is a type of qualitative inquiry about unfolding the meaning of the subjects’ experiences and understanding underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations; this means the focus is understanding the phenomenon in the context of those who experienced it.

**Research Setting and or Context**

This research captured how the SPED teachers deal with children who are struggling in learning. Most of the schools in the Division of Cotabato do not offer SPED classes for children with learning difficulties. As a result, learners are in the mainstream class handled by teachers who are trained in SPED and in some schools, these are handled by untrained teachers. These learners with difficulties in learning can be found in any classes where they are placed for the corresponding grade level. Hence, the conduct of this study would give deeper insights for teachers on how they have to deal with learners with difficulties.

**Research Sample and Data Sources**

The participants of the study were SPED teachers both of those who are handling the position as SPED teachers and those who are trained in handling SPED classes. Teachers who are not SPED teachers and SPED trained teachers and those teachers who are in the secondary level were excluded in this study. There were 17 participants who took part in the study, and they were recruited for the in-depth interview and for the focused group discussion. They were selected through purposive sampling by following the above-mentioned selection criteria.

Data sources were the interviews and the focused group discussion. Their answers to the interview questions served as the data of the study that were analyzed thematically.

If participants wished to withdraw from the study, they were allowed to do so. They were also asked if they will allow the researcher to include some of their answers in the data analysis. They were assured that they will not incur any consequences from not continuing as participant of the study.

**Data Collection Methods**

Permission was sought from the Schools Division Superintendent and the School Heads, prior to the conduct of the study. A letter was sent expressing the intention to conduct the study and to interview teachers who served as the participants of the study. After the permission was obtained, an informed consent was distributed to the target participants and those agreed were interviewed at their convenient time.

During the data collection, the researcher ensured that the interviews and focused group discussion were recorded in a quality recording device to ensure that the audio to be transcribed is clear and free from noise. The recording was transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data were then analyzed to draw themes that were used to answer the research questions of this study.

This study was conducted from September 2022 to December 2022.

**Data Analysis Methods**

In this study, the data analysis presented by Gibson and O’Connor (2003) was employed. Discovering and structuring ideas and concepts, developing underlying themes in the data, validating the accuracy and validity of the data analysis and the conclusions, and identifying likely and logical explanations were included in the data analysis. As to how these steps were done in the study, these are described below:

Organizing the data. The data were determined and organized based on the research question. The statements were extracted from the interview transcripts which are related to the topic or the question of the study. Then notes were generated from it.

Finding and Organizing Ideas and Concepts. This was about categorizing the data. However, before categorizing was done, ideas and concepts were organized in these steps. The words and phrases needed to be looked into, including the ideas coming from how the interviewees have expressed themselves and from the narratives that they have shared. These words or phrases or statements were assigned with codes or categories.

Building Over-Arching Themes in the Data. This was the step wherein the coded or categorized data were associated to themes which will give deeper meaning to the data. This means, the codes were combined into a certain overarching theme.

Ensuring Reliability and Validity in the Data Analysis and in the Findings. This was done by validating and confirming findings. Feedback from the participants were obtained.

Finding Possible and Plausible Explanations of the Findings. This was the step where presentation of the findings and the themes were done. The literature were used to compare the findings and may also help for possible explanations of the themes.

**Limitations and Delimitation**

In the conduct of this study, limitation on the use of the methodology may arise. One of the issues was whether the data gathered were enough to find answers to the research problems posed at the beginning of the study or not. However, this was addressed by ensuring that the data gathering instrument was validated to check if this can potentially gather the needed data.

Moreover, since the study is qualitative in nature, its eminent limitation was its inability to generalize the findings. This study only involved few participants which could not present the whole picture of SPED teaching.

The study only focused on the lived experiences, the challenges, and coping mechanisms in handling SPED learners. This also drew insights from the participants with regards to SPED teaching.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Experiences of the SPED teachers in handling struggling learners**

SPED teachers have shared several experiences as they handle the struggling learners in the class. These teachers are trained as SPED teachers and some are educationally SPED teachers; however, they have rich experiences to share. The general themes taken from the experiences they shared are: emotional labor, giving specialized care, assessing the children, and feeling of fulfillment as SPED teacher. These themes with the corresponding core ideas are shown in Table 1.

**Emotional labor**. The SPED teachers shared about different emotions they are into while dealing with the children. They have this emotional labor as they hide negative emotions towards children whose behavior is testing teachers’ patience. As teachers agree that these children need to be accepted as they are, teachers could not be angry to what they do or even reprimand the children for showing disgusting behavior.

“As what I`ve experienced in teaching sped learners, I found out it is not easy especially in dealing with their emotions or social behaviours. You cannot get angry at them. You have to be patient. You cannot show negative emotion towards them. Only understanding.” **IDI-P6**

“You need to be physically, emotionally and psychologically ready in facing their bad moods or bad day.” **IDI-P4**

In many instances according to the participants, they have been facing chaotic classroom when one of the learners exhibit behavior that is disturbing to the class like the one narrated by the one of the teachers.

Attention seeker. Fond of spanking. She will keep on writing and rewriting when she gets wrong answer for she does not like not to get a perfect score. She could easily consume her pencil for sharpening and resharpening it after knowing she got mistakes. She keeps on asking the me while I am talking and will never keep silent unless she is answered. When she gets angry, she will hurt her classmates or throw away things. **FGDP1**

“Worst day when your learners are having their episodes in the middle of your class, tantrums, calling out, yelling, crying that hampers the delivery of the lesson and the whole class is affected”.**IDI-P7**

Aside from witnessing how some children physically hurt their classmates, SPED teachers are also being hurt by their pupils. These are the instances shared by the teachers.

“I was training my girl with autism to sit down still. I clip her on the arm chair. She cried so much and resisted for 20 minutes . After 20 Mins, She stopped crying . I hug her thinking that she is exhausted and effortless. To my surprise, she bit me on my shoulder.” **FGDP2**

Similar incident is also experienced by another SPED teacher:

‘Gilabay ko ug bato and was hurt with the things being thrown anywhere in the classroom.(A stone was thrown to me….)” **IDI-P10**

Teachers have experienced handling children who could not express themselves and thus, the teacher does not know what to do; instead, she shred she has to relax and get focused.

“The worst day was when one SPED learner cried loud that nobody understands why she cried”. **IDI-P8**

They have trouble in controlling their emotions.**IDI-P3**

“A learner who has behavior problem and a learner who is mute quarreled in my class. I could not facify them as I do not know how to communicate with the mute.” **IDI-P10**

As shared by the teachers, they have encountered various situations and characteristics of children who have various needs. This manifests that the needs of special children could not be easily understood and could not be easily addressed specially by the teachers who lack training like the respondents of this study. Slee, 2013 as cited by Auge (2021) pointed out that learners with special needs may continue to be labeled as having developmental impairments, mental health issues, behavioral issues, or some other classification.

**Giving specialized care**. SPED teachers have vast experience in giving specialized care. They accommodate all types of learners. This made them handle children with different diagnosis on their behavior and cognitive abilities. Their task is to teach these children struggling to learn, and thus, they have to accommodate these learners no matter who they are.

“Managing difficult students. It can be very challenging to manage difficult students in a special education classroom. These students can often be disruptive and challenging to teach as a result of their disabilities”.**IDI-P4**

“Special education is the practice of educating pupils in a way that accommodates their individual differences, disabilities and special needs”.**IDI-P3**

Since children are special and they have varied learning needs, and learning styles, so, SPED teachers are also adjusting their teaching styles.

“You have to vary your approach, learning style, strategies, modify activities and apply proper accommodations to cater both the needs of these groups of learners. The teacher do multi- tasking which exert more time, effort and resources”.**IDI-P7**

“Dealing with learners whose learning styles are way different from the majority is so challenging.

It takes lot of training coupled with years of experience to make the challenging task easy”.**IDI-P5**

“It is so challenging to handle pupils with difficulties before each of them has different learning capabilities and difficulties so you have to find and apply different strategies and techniques for their development and for the attainment of your objectives and plan for them”.**IDI-P1**

They too are looking for strategies and employ various teaching styles in order to ensure that the needs of the students are addressed.

“I’m handling learners with Hearing Impairment (HI).Teaching them is a challenging task. Knowing their strengths and weakness of a learner is a big help on how and where to start to teach them”.**IDI-P2**

“The time , resources and multi-tasking of teacher’s to accommodate learners needs, strategies, learning style and differences of learners are things to be considered by a SPED teacher.”**IDI-P7**

Other teachers have to adjust and even do what the child should supposedly do in the class.

“I write for her. I copy the lesson for her. “**ST2**

Magsambol (2020) declared that teaching ordinary students versus students with special educational needs is significantly different. Results of this study revealed that teachers are giving extra and specialized care tailored to individual needs of the children.

**Assessing the children.** Being an experienced SPED teacher, some have also made assessment to children. They already know the signs and symptoms of those who are struggling learners. Thus, there may be instance that a SPED teacher also experienced assessing children. One of the SPED teachers, tell this story:

“During my five years in teaching, I have this student who seemed and looked like a normal kid. Every time I call her name to read, she won’t do as I say. I thought she was just shy. Also, everytime I ask for their scores in each test, she would always go to the comfort room. I observed her and I concluded that she has special needs”.**IDI-P5**

The teacher participants also shared that they also determine by themselves how these special children are handled.

“It’s hard to handle learners with SPED learners’, you have to study their behavior well and should have much patient so that they be will catered well”.**IDI-P8**

**Feeling of Fulfillment.** SPED teachers claimed that in performing their tasks handling the special children, they experienced the feeling of fulfillment which can be in a form of attaining academic success among learners who are considered struggling academically. According one of the teachers, her source of happiness is seeing the children learning her lesson.

“The best day for me as a SPED teacher is that when my pupil learned the lesson, which they can use in their daily lives despite of their difficulties and limitations. It feels like heaven and successful when my objective was attained by my learner. And when I saw them happy, learning and enjoying my class.”**IDI-P1**

“kaisa lang nimo tudluan, gusto na niya magsigi basa English. Karon nga day sound pa imong tudlo sa iyaha pagkaugma kaya na niya magbasa even a sentence. Tapos gusto niya magsigi English. (I only teach him once, and he wants to read in English. This day I teach sound then the next day he could now read sentences. He wants to talk in English.)” **FGDP8**

For the SPED teachers, if they notice progress in a child, this is very overwhelming for them. They feel successful.

“Basta makabasa bisag ginagmay, magbehave sila, maminaw sa instructions, that make me happy and fulfilled being a teacher who have been trying hard for them to learn.(If they can read a little, they behave and listen to instructions…).” **FGDP3**

Also, when the teacher successfully communicate to the learner, this is success for them-the source of their happiness as a teacher. The teacher values inclusion in the class and so they need to really address each needs and when these needs are unexpressed, they still have to address these.

“the best experience for me is when they can express their feelings and I understand what they wanted to relay. I feel myself happy and proud when I understand them clearly or we understand each other.”**IDI-P10**

In the Philippine setting, Muega (2016) as cited by UNESCO (2021) reported that finding out how much teachers value inclusion and how they value it is one thing that has to be done. The same author also stressed the need to encourage school communities to recognize the importance of fostering the presence of diverse students and to create an appreciation for doing so. General education instructors are not prepared to implement inclusion in their classes, she added. Teachers who have self-efficacy, a positive attitude, and appropriate behaviors toward inclusive practices are directly urged to cherish diversity (Raguindin et al.,2020).

Table 1. Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of the SPED Teachers in Handling Struggling Learners

| **Themes** | **Core Ideas** |
| --- | --- |
| **Emotional labor** | Hiding negative emotions  Handling chaotic classroom  Being physically hurt  Handling unexpressive children |
| **Giving specialized care** | Accommodate all types of learners  Adjust teaching based on the learning needs  Do the task for the children  Deal with diverse learning styles |
| **Assessing the children** | Assess the needs of children  Determine how to handle the children |
| **Feeling of Fulfillment** | Attaining academic success  Seeing progress or changes in the behavior and cognition of children  Being appreciated |

**Challenges the SPED Teachers Encountered**

The SPED teachers also expressed about how they have been affected with situations which confront them and there is a need for them to address. These are challenges they encountered as SPED teachers. These are described in the themes: difficulty in addressing the needs of the children, stress and negative emotions, struggle with children’s behavioral problems, and lack of support for SPED. These are presented in table 2.

Difficulty in addressing the needs of the children. For the SPED teachers, they encounter challenges as they run out of the strategies in dealing with the children.

“Taking the time to learn about the pupils disabilities and figuring out ways for that pupils to cope can help the pupils get control over their behaviour”.**IDI-P3**

“Understanding the special needs of my students and formulating strategies to help them learn are the two challenges I have is dealing with the learners”.**IDI-P5**

In some instances, they also lack of instructional materials suited for the children.

“Sometimes the limitation of the time and the gadgets for the learners affects my teaching”.**IDI-P1**

“lack of materials in teaching”**IDI-P3**

SPED teachers also admitted they have limitation in the capacity and knowledge to understand the needs of the children.

“The difficult for me is that you have to be more knowledgeable and expert on handling their difficulties because when your knowledge is limited about them your teaching capacities are limited to and you can’t attain your objective on what you want them to achieve”.**IDI-P1**

Furthermore, handling learners at beginning stage is also challenging. As described by one of the teachers:

“It is very difficult to deliver my lessons to my learners with hearing impairment at the beginning stage because they have no idea/knowledge about sign language. It’s hard to communicate them using the proper sign language because they are used their local sign language used at home. It is difficult also to teach them the meaning of every word used in teaching my lessons.”**IDI-P2**

Magsambol (2020) declared that teaching ordinary students versus students with special educational needs is significantly different. Only SPED teachers are qualified to provide the specialized care that these students need. The results of this study showed that teachers find the difficulty in addressing the needs of the children since they are not trained.

**Stress and negative emotions.** SPED teachers are stressed due to emotional demands in handling children. They claimed they do not just extend more effort but they also have to give more patience.

“Stress is expected with any teaching position, but it’s especially stressful as a special need teacher. This is mainly due to the amount of attention you need to give the students who require your help. A level of understanding and empathy will go a long way as a special needs teacher. A wide range of patience is needed and above all your love and passion in teaching learners with special needs are some of the characteristics of special education teacher that he/she must possessed.” **IDI-P2**

“Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are the best tools in handling pupils with disabilities. Some persons with disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond, so exercise patience.” **IDI-P3**

In connection to other themes, this result also shows that when teachers are not trained, they believe they are not capable of addressing the needs of the children. The situation is giving them stress and other similar forms of negative emotions. In the essence of inclusive education, teachers struggle, but they are also capable of pushing themselves over their comfort zone and creating coping mechanisms. Filipino teachers value their work highly, which is evident in their desire to provide a positive learning environment for their different students (Raguindin et al., 2020).

**Struggle with children’s cognitive and behavioral problems.** Another challenge they face is when they deal with different cognitive and behavioral problems.

“I encountered some problems while teaching with SPED learning: when the lesson is very difficult and they don’t listen because they were bored”.**IDI-P8**

“These are the problems I have encountered while teaching the SPED learners: Working with short attention span; participating during the lesson; and conducting effective lessons”.**IDI-P3**

There are uncontrollable and unpredictable behavior that children exhibit and that teachers have to deal with these.

“we have a pupil that was already 16 year old and she immediately stood up and ran to the canteen and pick some biscuits and ran to the canteen and shout then she was the center of attraction of most of the pupils.” **IDI-P9**

“dili siya maminaw sa ako magklase mas prefer niya magdula og blocks then nikalit lang dagan pagawas sa room ug naghigda higda sa oval sa kasagbutan”.**FGDP2**

The utterances of the participants clearly show they have difficulties managing the special children. Allam and Martin (2021) revealed that it is essential to understand the several difficulties that teachers encounter when managing courses for SPED. The same author also concluded that the majority of teachers who work with students who have learning disabilities felt unqualified to do so because they had not received any education training from the school, and that teachers who were assigned to SPED classes lacked approaches for working with students who had disabilities.

**Lack of Support for SPED.** There are participants who also mentioned that lack of support to SPED is also a challenge for them. One of the teachers enumerated these challenges related to lack of support:

“The problems I have encountered while teaching SPED learners are the following: Non- full support from parents; lack of facilities and equipment for instruction; not enough trainings and seminars.” **IDI-P5**

Similar aspects are pointed out by another participant:

“Lack of parents/stakeholders support; lack of training and background of each disabilities; no developmental doctors/ OT/ Assessment clinic in the community to help in the assessment of the learners”.**IDI-P5**

**The challenges that teachers face are varied.** According to an analysis by Sales (2019), the challenges faced by teachers in inclusive education include lack of special education teachers and classes, facilities for special care, appropriate resources, and an inefficient distribution of instructional materials. In addition, many schools lack the staffing necessary to provide inclusive instruction. However, their overall response suggests they are not ready to take on the challenge of managing students with disorders or disabilities, as evidenced by the 87 in-service teachers who stated they are willing to handle and collaborate with specialists for the inclusion of learners with special needs in general education settings (Ecoben, 2019).

Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on the Challenges the SPED Teachers Encountered

| **Themes** | **Core Ideas** |
| --- | --- |
| **Difficulty in addressing the needs of the children** | Running out of strategies to deal with the children  Lack of instructional materials  Limitation in the capacity and knowledge to understand the needs of the children  Handling learners at beginning stage |
| **Stress and negative emotions** | Emotional demands  Losing confidence and self-esteem |
| **Struggle with children’s behavioral problems** | Uncontrollable behavior  Unpredictable behavior and actions |
| **Lack of Support for SPED** | Lack of parental support  Absence of continuous training  Lack of experts |

**How SPED Teachers Address the Challenges**

To address the challenges, teachers shared they cultivate positive emotions, attend professional development activities, and establish support group. The themes and core ideas are presented in table 3.

**Cultivate Positive Emotions.** For the SPED teachers, challenges are part of their daily routines as they face children who are not part of the regular class. These are special children who need special attention. Hence, they cultivate positive emotions by motivating oneself to do the job they are into as part of the so-called missionary work.

“For me to become more motivated and be motivated in finding ways, techniques to apply on how to solve this kind of problem and situation. Because I do believe that when you teach them with your heart then you can touch their heart and mind too. Teaching SPED learner is a missionary work”.**IDI-P1**

“Always think positive, be strong and be proud of being a SPED teacher.” **IDI-P7**

There are teachers who believe that things can get better by being calm:

“Stay calm all the time. Treat the situation with humour, rather than getting angry. Distract their attention, rather than getting confrontational. Listen to the student and check your understanding of their situation.”**IDI-P2**

They also must employ extensive understanding, patience and fortitude.

“…have more patience and by that you can learn how to love and care them”.**IDI-P6**

“it is not easy to address that learning needs it needs lot of patience and motivation”.**IDI-P4**

Moreover, SPED teachers also hold the belief that teaching problems they have, can be solutioned and they must focus planning and finding out what they can do for the children.

“I just smile and realize that all those problems be accepted and make some strategies in order not to experience same problems the next day”.**IDI-P8**

“I am challenged to find ways, techniques and strategies wherein I can build their self-esteem and address their different difficulties”. **IDI-P10**

**Attend Professional Development Activities.** SPED teachers’ other ways to cope with the challenges they have experienced is to attend to professional development. They attend seminars and make use of their knowledge to handle the learners.

“For me to become more effective to my learners, I joined different trainings and seminars about SPED teaching offline and online. I equipped myself with enough knowledge through watching videos about teaching SPED learners. And also I consulted individuals who are more knowledgeable about this.”**IDI-P2**

Aside from attending seminars, others are also learning by themselves through available resources.

“I Keep on reading and researching on internet the different strategies that are suitable for their learning gaps and difficulties and capabilities”.**IDI-P10**

Filipino teachers value their work highly, which is evident in their desire to provide a positive learning environment for their different students. To support the teachers in this transition, many school divisions are conducting a number of trainings and activities for professional development (Raguindin et al., 2020).

**Establish Support Group.** Teachers also seek help from the parents, the experts and their colleagues. SPED teachers shared that once they have problem, they share to their colleagues and seek support of the parents and stakeholders. One of the participants has this example:

“…one SPED learner cried loud that nobody understands why she cried so we called the mother and let them talk together and later she stopped crying and the mother explained that she got hurt by her classmate. It’s hard to understand them but with God we can make them ok”.**IDI-P8**

In addition, teachers in general seek support for the SPED and advocate for this kind of education for these school children.

“We need support of the community to accept the learners. Learners with special needs or even the adult one should be understand and accept in society they’re still human after all even though they think and act as young they still have feeling”.**IDI-P6**

The study holds true with the findings of Ecoben (2019) that teachers are ready to take on the challenge of managing students with disorders or disabilities, and collaborate with specialists for the inclusion of learners with special needs in general education settings (Ecoben, 2019).

Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on How SPED Teachers Address the Challenges

| **Themes** | **Core Ideas** |
| --- | --- |
| **Cultivate Positive Emotions** | Motivate oneself to do the job  Extensive understanding  Patience and fortitude  Belief that teaching problems have solutions |
| **Attend Professional Development Activities** | Seminars and workshop  Update knowledge |
| **Establish Support Group** | Ask for community/stakeholders’ support  Build relationship with colleagues |

**Insights shared based on the experiences as SPED teachers**

From the experiences of the SPED teachers, they shared insights which are described in Table 4. These insights tell that that: SPED Teaching is not for everyone; SPED Teaching is a special and fulfilling task; and SPED Teaching is a tough job.

**SPED Teaching is not for everyone.** For the participants, with the experiences the have encountered every single day, with the challenges they are confronted and with the emotions they have dealt with as SPED teachers, they formed an insight that this job is not for everyone. For them, SPED teaching is only for those who have immeasurable patience to deal with the kind of work a SPED teacher has and to deal with the special children.

“One thing that I could share in dealing sped learners is to have more patience and by that you can learn how to love and care them.”**IDI-P6**

“Special education teachers have valuable insights to share with their peers about patience, empathy, working with parents, and more’.**IDI-P4**

Teachers need to have highest level of acceptance and deepest understanding.

“A level of understanding and empathy will go a long way as a special needs teacher. A wide range of patience is needed and above all your love and passion in teaching learners with special needs are some of the characteristics of special education teacher that he/she must possessed”.**ST2**

**SPED teachers love and care for the children.** In a very deep and descriptive manner, this insight is something to ponder.

“Being a SPED teacher is not an easy task. There are challenges that you will encounter along the way. The secret of being a successful SPED teacher is to Love your profession, Love your students, enjoy what you are doing and everything will run smoothly. Accept the differences of your learners, always carry with you the virtue of being patient. Behind sight it brings me joy to see my students improving with the right intervention. They deserve to be a part of a classroom with all the usual fun and occasional silly things that form part of school life. A SPED teacher needs to be patient, passionate, creative and compassionate to enrich the student’s life”.**IDI-P7**

“As a teacher you should teach your learners with your heart. Understand your pupils about their difficulties so that you know how to teach and handle them, how to mould them as an individual. Teach them like your own children”.**IDI-P1**

For Balang (2021), not everyone can succeed in their teaching when they deal with children who have special needs. The preparation done by the teachers allows them to manage the workload well. Adequate readiness can also ensure efficient task management. Once the teacher is not ready, the task will not also be performed easily.

**SPED Teaching is a special and fulfilling task.** In addition to the above-mentioned insights, it can also be deduced from the utterances of the participants that believe SPED Teaching is a special and fulfilling task. It is a special and fulfilling task as the teacher must spend time making their own instructional materials and they look for own ways in handling struggling learners in the absence of proper diagnosis, services of occupational therapists and centers for special children.

“I make my own material kasi walang available na material minsan. I also buy from my own pocket. I spend time looking for ways and learning from different sources paano ko ihandle ang needs ng mga learners ko”. **IDI-P4**

“so made some strategies in order for them to love and be able to understand coz I know if they don’t have the love in learning nothing will happen.”**IDI-P8**

Above all the responsibilities the SPED teachers fulfill, they shared that they have the feeling of being appreciated and valued.

“the best thing about teaching them is that you are being valued by your learners even though their capabilities are limited but their heart is very wide for you. They respected and loved you with all their heart”.**IDI-P3**

“The best of SPED teaching is that when your pupil loved you, it is true and nothing can change that. They will adore you, whenever and wherever you met them they will still recognize you. Because they believe that you are one of the people whom they can trust and believe”.**IDI-P10**

Fulfillment in teaching depends entirely on the teacher. While the teacher respondents in this study have revealed they have difficulties encountered while teaching children with special needs, they also consider their jo as fulfilling. Similar study result in the context special education among teachers handling mathematics. Job satisfaction reflects a positive feeling towards the task performed. Through this value of job satisfaction, an individual will feel confident and enthusiastic in every job undertaken. In the field of education, of course the discussion is focused on the job satisfaction of teachers because the main role in the delivery of knowledge in schools is the teachers. Even in special education specifically, job satisfaction is very important in increasing the accountability of special education teachers as well as motivating themselves to continue to dedicate themselves to teaching (Amin, 2021).

**SPED Teaching is a tough job.** Another insight the SPED teachers shared is that: SPED Teaching is a tough job. For the SPED teachers, it is tough as you encounter diverse emotions; and surprised with new and confusing situations like what are told by some participants:

“To my surprise, mangurog man diay ug manghilak ang mga bata if makakita ug ambulance katong nag earthquake drill me. Wala ko kabalo nga ana diay ilang attitude. So I asked myself, what will I do to calm them? “**FGD-P3**

“My teaching episodes with SPED learners can be described as the toughest thing to do. Dealing with learners whose learning styles are way different from the majority is so challenging. It takes lot of training coupled with years of experience to make the challenging task easy. “**IDI-P5**

Since children have special needs and their needs are diverse and difficult to handle, it is not surprising that teachers who lack SPED training will also find the job tough. According to an analysis by Sales (2019), the challenges faced by teachers in inclusive education include lack of special education teachers and classes, facilities for special care, appropriate resources, and an inefficient distribution of instructional materials. In addition, many schools lack the staffing necessary to provide inclusive instruction.

Table 4. Themes and Core Ideas on Insights shared based on the experiences as SPED teachers

| **Insights** | **Core Ideas** |
| --- | --- |
| **SPED Teaching is not for everyone** | ***SPED teaching is only for those who have…***  Immeasurable patience  Highest level of acceptance and deepest understanding  Stand as a mother of special children with special needs |
| **SPED Teaching is a special and fulfilling task** | Spend time making your own instructional materials  Look for own ways in handling struggling learners  Feeling of being appreciated and valued |
| **SPED Teaching is a tough job.** | Encounter diverse emotions  Surprised with new and confusing situations |

**PROPOSED ACTION PLAN**

**ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SPED TEACHERS**

| **Activities** | **Objectives** | **Persons Involved** | **Timeline** | **Expected Outcome** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Seminar on Strategies in Teaching SPED | To help teachers find out relevant strategies in teaching SPED | School Heads  SPED Teachers  Resource Speakers | February, 2023 | List of Strategies |
| Understanding Children with Special Needs: A Seminar Workshop | To enable teachers gain deeper insights about children with special needs | School Heads  SPED Teachers  Resource Speakers | March, 2023 | Reflection Paper |
| Instructional Materials: Development and Enhancements | To equip teachers with the skills of developing or enhancing instructional materials appropriate for SPED | School Heads  SPED Teachers  Resource Speakers | April, 2023 | Developed or enhanced instructional materials |
| Psychological Debriefing for SPED Teachers | To help teacher manage stress and other negative emotions | School Heads  SPED Teachers  Resource Speakers | May, 2023 | Reflection paper |
| Building Partnership with Stakeholders | To establish partnership with the stakeholders | School Heads  SPED Teachers  Stakeholders | April, 2023 | Covenant Signing of teachers and stakeholders |

**IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The SPED teachers in handling the struggling learners experienced emotional labor, giving specialized care; assessing the children with special needs; and feeling of fulfillment as SPED teacher.
2. The SPED teachers also encountered challenges described in their difficulty in addressing the needs of the children; stress and negative emotions; struggle with children’s behavioral problems; and lack of support for SPED.
3. To address the challenges, SPED teachers shared that they cultivate positive emotions, attend professional development activities, and establish support group
4. The insights that SPED teachers shared are: SPED Teaching is not for everyone; SPED Teaching is a special and fulfilling task; and SPED Teaching is a tough job.

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