

EXPLORING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Inclusive education promotes equal access to quality learning for all, guided by the 1987 Constitution, RA 10533, and RA 11650, which support the inclusion of SEN learners in regular classrooms. This study investigated the challenges experienced by SPED teachers in managing behaviors of learners with special educational needs (LSEN) who were integrated into regular classrooms. A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized to gather and analyze the experiences and perspectives of the teachers from Lapu-Lapu City Central Elementary Public School in the Division of Lapu-Lapu City. There were sixteen participants in the study chosen utilizing purposive sampling. Through one-on-one interview employing a researcher-made questionnaire, data gathered were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis revealed five themes to include managing classroom dynamics, implementing inclusive classroom strategies, addressing behavioral challenges, creating a supportive learning environment, and adapting management approaches to accommodate SEN learners. In managing classroom dynamics, educators employed accessible learning materials, peer collaboration and support, and clear expectations. Classroom management strategies include utilizing supportive and structured strategies, used incentive-based strategies, and observed consistency in implementing classroom routines. Teachers handle behavioral challenges through emotional regulation activities and group engagement. They create a supportive classroom environment through cultivating an inclusive learning environment and by modeling politeness and respect. Finally, Teachers adjust classroom management to meet SEN learners' needs through reward systems and regular parent communication. The study recommends teacher training, stronger parent collaboration, and peer learning that promotes respect and equality. The findings support more inclusive classroom practices. An implication of practice is the output of the study.

Keywords: Inclusive education, learners with special educational needs, behavior and classroom management, qualitative phenomenological design, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu

Introduction

Inclusive instruction, as a cornerstone of educational equity, provides access to high-quality, comprehensive, and accessible learning environments for all students, including those with disabilities. The Department of Education is administered a piece 1987 Constitution, Republic Act 10533 and Republic Act 11650 to implement the unification of juniors accompanying Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the formal classrooms, to harness socialization and blow-up situations. Some 1.6 heap juveniles are in the Philippines, the World Health Organization (WHO) says, and something close to 15-20% of children around the world suffer some form of disability. Such statistics highlight the necessity of investigating how much inclusive education can offer support to these learners. Due to the importance of inclusive practices, Byrd and Alexander (2020) remind about responsibility for educating Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) has shifted beyond special education (SPED) teachers. Mainstreaming is considered the most effective instructional approach, which involves placing LSEN kids in regular standard settings with the necessary aid, aligned with the curriculum. Education Enhancement Act for Individuals accompanying Disabilities (IDEIA) Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) standard. This method creates a cooperative learning atmosphere that better meets the various demands of LSEN learners.

Progress towards inclusive education has been made over time. According to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, in addition 60% of graduates with disabilities now give 80% or more of the school epoch in consistent school room scenes. This transformative model is not only a "win" for disabled students, but also for all students who learn in an environment that is designed to include them by fostering a culture of diversity and equity. In such a critical environment, educators, such as myself, must facilitate means for kids with disabilities can be motivated to reach their full potential, whilst also providing everybody with meaningful and inclusive learning experiences (School of Education Online, 2020). Students with disabilities face many academic challenges, including reading, math, language, and written expression (National Association of Special Education Teachers, n.d.). Many students in this population whose perceived potential did not match their performance, who learn at a slower rate than non-GT students. Unfortunately, up to 90% of these learners are affected by reading problems, which often originate from a lack of basic language components like phonological awareness. Mathematics suffers from similar issues, where students often have difficulties with problems that involve solving equations and using mathematics in application problems. They may also experience challenges with handwriting, composition, spelling, and oral language, which may reduce their engagement and success in the classroom. These challenges often continue across the course of a

child's academic career in the absence of interventions delivered in timely manner and tailored to the need. The ongoing support is what we need to continue providing to ensure every learner when provided the opportunity to fully participate and succeed in their educational experience. These barriers can remain for the duration of a child's school career without appropriate, and correctly timed, interventions. We need to respond to these needs with sustained assistance so that every student is ready to fully participate and excel in their education. Through mainstreaming, the Department of Education encourages inclusive education. LSEN was able to flourish in an inclusive educational environment thanks to practices like lesson contextualization, Project LCD-FILE for interactive learning, and Sign Language integration, which promoted social integration, skill development, and improved employment opportunities, according to the Lorenzita (2023) study carried out in Legazpi City.

The meaning of utilizing a range of customized education methods that aimed the strengths and troubles of scholars accompanying special instructional needs (LSEN) is stressed by Aqilah et al., (2019). They support the use of technology, music, and art as instruments to improve learning and increase participation. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of addressing not only intellectual development but also social and emotional growth, supporting a holistic approach to education. Teachers can create an all-embracing knowledge environment that advances both academic accomplishment and personal development by fusing focused remediation with an awareness of each student's unique strengths. Even though inclusive education is becoming more and more popular, there are still disagreements about how effective it is for LSEN. According to some scholars, inclusive education guarantees all students fair and equal access to educational opportunities. Other studies, however, cast doubt on how realistically such models can be applied. As an illustration of the gaps in the continuity and efficacy of inclusive practices, McCoy et al. (2020) discovered that pupils alongside special instructional needs frequently face major obstacles when they move from primary to secondary school. According to studies by Saloviita (2020) and Vaz et al. (2015), teachers' perceptions of their readiness to assist kids with a wide scope of learning are among factors that impact their attitudes toward inclusion. The effectiveness of personal training for professionalism and school adviser programs prepares directly related for success of inclusive set-up. According to current investigators observational data, many teachers do not have adequate access to training courses and seminars that are especially designed to support LSEN, which may hinder their capacity to use inclusive teaching practices in the classroom. In addition, teachers are unable to create an environment that is suitable for mainstreamed LSEN kids due to unprovided appropriate instructional materials. These results demonstrate that there is still much to learn about the best times and ways to use mainstreaming with SEN students. The literature on the efficacy of inclusive set-up policies, specifically SEN kids inside Philippines were seriously lacking. Although several international studies emphasize the beneficial of the inclusive set-up, there is a dearth of locally carried out, evidence-based research that examines how national teachers view and apply mainstreaming practices. The main source of this research is to gather information on how instructors view success to mainstreaming LSEN at inclusive classroom environments. This study aims to collect firsthand information from educators who are leading the charge in putting inclusive policies into practice, given the paucity of empirical research in this field, especially in the Philippine educational context. The research study wanting to provide a deeper source of information factors that help or hinder inclusive education in local environments by looking at their perspectives, the difficulties they encounter, and the coping strategies they use. It is anticipated that the results will add expanding collaboration, specifically to developing nations like Philippines. Earlier research by Kogdar and associates. Schwartz and others (2024). (2021) acknowledge the difficulties of integrating juniors with special educational needs into general knowledge studies classes while highlighting the potential advantages of focused interventions for these juniors. This study concludes that by offering evidence-based insights into supervisors' perspectives and competence, it can provide beneficial implications to strengthen comprehensive teaching methods in the Philippines.

Methodology

To realize the paper's goals and purposes, this study made use of phenomenological dependent research to search schoolteachers' happenings and ideas of all-encompassing instruction and school room administration when handling LSENs at the Lapu-Lapu City Central Elementary public school-advanced center in Lapu-Lapu City Division. This approach was used to gain a thorough knowledge of the study by conducting one-on-one interviews with the selected teachers. Data were collected using a set of guide questions and evaluated using thematic analysis. Neubauer et al. (2019) define phenomenology as a qualitative research method that focuses on a person's lived experiences in the world. It is consistent with Husserl's (1931) thesis that humans derive meaning from the world through personal experience. To delve deeper into disclosing people's lived experiences, Alhazmi and Kaufman (2022) emphasized the importance of annotating, clarifying, describing, or interpreting them thoroughly. The writers also explained that phenomenology can be descriptive, meaning it records lived experiences without examining them, or interpretive, which goes beyond description. Both approaches encourage active contact with participants rather than relying on established methodologies, admitting faculty members to scrutinize personal occurrences in a more aware category.

The research was undertaken specific public school-SPED center in Lapu-Lapu City, particularly Lapu-Lapu City Central Elementary School, that is constituent the DepEd Division of Lapu-Lapu City and will take off 2024 to 2025. The Division of Lapu-Lapu City in Cebu, containing the Department of Education in Region VII, are administrative of achieving the all-embracing instruction school room system in the peninsula of Mactan. It helps all schools, one and

the other private and public, to have supremacy in guaranteeing status instruction in the stage of Inclusive Education by providing instruction for all, containing gender-specific and education for those with special needs, and in pursuance of productive knowledge endeavors for all pupils.

The twenty-seven special education faculty members at the school will participate in the study as respondents. To manage LSEN students in an inclusive environment, the school has a one-to-one ratio. This study will only use public sampling because there aren't many expert respondents in the area. This is a deliberate examination method where researchers identify a whole group that has a, often unique, face (Laerd Dissertation, 2024). This design is particularly useful when there is a lack of human population research, such as when examining coaches who teach children with special educational needs, as dismissing even one person results in significant understanding gaps.

Purposive sampling will be used to select these faculty members; one must meet the following criteria: (a) forthwith guidance; (b) employed and accompanying mainstreamed LSENs; (c) completed least particular period of background education LSEN; and (d) be willing to perform the study freely.

Results and Discussion

The information acquired through interviews and observations is presented in this section. The study used thematic analysis to understand the information gathered through coding after reaching data saturation.

Theme 1: Managing Classroom Dynamics in Inclusive Setting

Dynamics inclusive educational setting, encourage to foster an environment that promotes equal opportunities to all, addressing their needs so they can learn and succeed. Managing classroom dynamics involves finding the right balance between academic support, social, and emotional development for all LSEN students. It is about making sure that every student feels included, respected and motivated to be part of their learning.

Effective classroom management in this scenario calls for a safe space for learners to meaningfully interact with each other and the information. In this context, the participants identified three sub-themes: accessible learning materials, peer collaboration and support, and clear expectations and inclusive practices. These findings imply that to effectively implement inclusive practice, these sub-themes mentioned above should be observed. These approaches assure all concerned children, especially those kids with instructional needs, feel supported and empowered to do more in classroom activities and tasks.

Sub-theme 1: Accessible Learning Materials. Creating an inclusive classroom environment can be achieved when learners have equal opportunities to learn and grow through thoughtful approaches. One basic way is providing accessible learning materials. In an inclusive classroom, it is vital to present lessons in a way that learners can comprehend easily and engage confidently in learning activities. Three participants supported this idea.

"I began providing instructional materials and activities in both Filipino and English, alongside visuals and group tasks, to ensure accessibility for all students." – GDP

"I started offering visual aids, group projects, and educational materials and activities in both Filipino and English to make sure all kids could access them." – EQS

"To ensure that all children could access them, I started offering group projects, visual aids, and educational resources and activities in both Filipino and English." – MANANG

Sub-theme 2: Clear Expectations. Clear rules and expectations are necessary in establishing order and structure in the classroom. This sub-theme discusses how setting these expectations can promote respect. It also helps students feel safe and included. When learners understand what is expected of them, they are more likely to participate and contribute to a supportive classroom culture. It also shows how different strategies can work together to manage classroom dynamics effectively.

"I often manage the dynamics in inclusive classes by establishing clear expectations. I offer clear rules and classroom protocols that promote security and friendly safety environment." – WZV

Theme 2: Strategies in Managing Inclusive Classrooms

The main objective of managing inclusive classroom is to minimize disruptions, in this case, undesirable behavior of LSEN, to aid interest in the concept of learning journey. In inclusive setting, a teacher with skills and knowledge in addressing classroom problems can lead to effective learning because students are engaged in their learning (Salma, 2018 cited in Garland et al., 2013). This theme presents the strategies that the teacher participates used in managing

their inclusive classrooms with three sub-themes: supportive and structured strategies, incentive-based strategies, and consistency of classroom routines.

Applying the strategies for managing inclusive classrooms in practice involves consistency. When the teacher is consistent in their rules and policies, it provides stability and reduces learners' anxiety, allowing them to focus on learning. These approaches help teachers establish a welcoming and upbeat environment in the classroom where all kids feel supported and actively participate in the learning process.

Sub-theme 1: Incentive-Based Strategies. A reward system serves as an extrinsic motivation, designed to inspire individuals to perform at their best (Alexander, 2020). Rewards encourage consistent engagement and may lead to excellence performance in companies and even in education. In this sub-theme, the participants explained how reward system has been effective in managing inclusive classrooms.

"Reward System: I employed a straightforward reward system in which students receive stars or points for maintaining focus, which they can then trade for minor benefits (like controlling a game)." – MANANG

"To give a reward System: To compensate students for maintaining focus, I implemented a straightforward system in which they can swap stars or points for minor benefits, such as playing a game." – BOD

Sub-theme 2: Consistency of Classroom Routines. Consistently enforcing rules and procedures is another tactic for running inclusive classes. The methods that promote consistency are covered in this sub-theme.

"Consistent and straightforward One approach that teachers employ when working with LSEN students is interaction because it guarantees that expectations and instructions are understood, minimizes misunderstandings, fosters security and trust, and, ultimately, establishes a stable learning environment where students feel safe." – WJV

Theme 3: Approaches to Addressing Behavioral Challenges in Inclusive Setting

In communities, companies, and educational institutions, behavioral issues are a major concern. Addressing these challenges requires deep understanding between the relationship of causes and effect pedagogies to address this problem. Through data-based approaches that encompass different interventions can promote positive outcomes. In this theme, the responses yield two sub-themes: emotional regulation activities, and group engagement.

It is therefore important for educators to integrate these techniques through collaborative learning, peer support networks, and other practices that promote a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. It can help LSEN develop self-regulation skills, build positive relationship and create a productive learning setting. Sub theme 1: Emotional Regulation Activities through Proactive Management. This sub-theme deals on the importance of promoting emotional regulation in students, especially in inclusive settings. It will discuss the strategies employed by teachers in regulating the emotions of students.

"The student felt more at ease taking part in group activities and learned how to use calming techniques on their own. Peers in my classroom also became more understanding and supportive of their classmates, as seen by the following: Visual Cues: I provided each student a little card with calming instructions, such as "1. Stop. 2. Breathe. 3. Go to the calm-down area if needed." Validate Emotions: "I see you're upset," I said, acknowledging their feelings. Establish a Safe Space: I led the student to a peaceful section of the classroom, known as the "calm-down area," where they may sit with sensory aids like a weighted blanket or stress ball. It's acceptable to take a moment to feel better. In my classroom, preventing or reducing behavioral problems requires proactive measures, cultivating wholesome connections, and establishing a welcoming and stimulating learning environment. Here are some successful strategies I've employed: Know Your Students: Have informal interactions with students and involve their families to learn about their interests, abilities, and issues. Transition Activities: To provide a seamless transition between jobs, use brief, captivating activities such as a song, countdown, or question. – GDP

"According to my experience, reducing behavioral problems in my classroom requires proactive measures, cultivating wholesome connections, and establishing a welcoming and stimulating learning atmosphere. Here are some successful strategies I've employed: Know Your Students: Have informal interactions with students and involve their families to learn about their interests, abilities, and issues. Transition Activities: To provide a seamless transition between jobs, use brief, captivating activities such as a song, countdown, or question. – EQS

"Managing behavioral concerns from LSEN in the context which requires a proactive, empathetic, and systematic approach. As educators, we should understand the root cause of the problem. The teacher should be aware of the behavior because LSEN students often act in this way and share their feelings." – WJV

Theme 4: Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

Participants outputs indicated that creating a supportive classroom environment comes out to be a unified theme that the participants revealed. This theme shows the significance of establishing best surroundings in the classroom

since it promotes development, engagement, and well-being. It becomes a space where learners feel safe, valued, and empowered to express themselves and explore their inborn abilities. A supportive classroom not only nurtures individual strengths but also cultivates a sense of community, ensuring that every learner thrives both socially and academically. In this study, it capsulates two sub-themes: inclusive learning environment and modeling politeness and respect.

Sub- theme 1: Inclusive Learning Environment. This sub-theme presents the integration of culturally diverse materials which encourage students to appreciate individual differences, promotes understanding, and generates an environment of support where all students feel appreciated and accepted.

"Ensuring that my kids with Special Instructional Needs requires intentional planning and implementation of inclusive practices like promote understanding and respect among students by integrating activities and lessons on diversity and empathy. Simplify or scaffold lessons without compromising essential learning objectives. I will conduct activities and discussions that emphasize understanding, respect, and appreciation for individual differences. Take time to learn about each student's interests, strengths, and challenges to show they are valued. Provide varied ways for students to engage with content, express learning, and demonstrate understanding, ensuring inclusivity," -GDP

"It takes deliberate planning and execution of inclusive practices, such as encouraging students' understanding and respect by incorporating activities and lessons on diversity and empathy, to make sure that my kids with Special Instructional Needs feel inspired and included in a general classroom. I'll lead conversations and activities that prioritize appreciating, respecting, and comprehending individual diversity."- EQS

Sub-theme 2: Modeling Politeness and Respect. The second sub-theme is centered on demonstrating courteous behavior in daily interactions serves as a powerful setting an example for kids, emphasizing to them the value of treating others with empathy and respect. Participant Manang and BOD shared the same sentiments.

"I create the tone for a positive learning environment in the classroom by modeling and reiterating courteous behavior via everyday interactions, using resources and activities that reflect the cultural, linguistic, and learning diversity of the students, and encouraging tolerance and respect."- Manang

"I establish the tone by modeling and reiterating polite conduct in daily interactions, use materials and exercises that represent the students' linguistic, cultural, and educational variety, and fostering tolerance and courtesy to create a productive learning atmosphere in the classroom." - BOD

Theme 5: Adapting Classroom Management Strategies

The fifth theme centers on how educators adapt and change their methods of classroom management to accommodate the various demands of both ordinary students and students with special education requirements. It showcased flexibility, creativity and responsiveness in addressing the challenges met pertaining to behavior of students. There were two strategies in adapting to classroom management: through reward system and communication with parents.

These findings imply the importance of flexible and responsive approaches to classroom management. Educators need to craft individualized strategies appropriate to the learners. Emphasis on personalization despite of the academic status.

Sub-theme 1: Reward System. In this sub-theme, the participants shared that implementing simple reward system motivated learners to finish tasks and exhibit acceptable behaviors. Participants GDP and EQS shared that giving rewards to students is a strategy they commonly used in the classroom.

"I will implement a reward system to recognize my student's efforts to stay seated, participate appropriately, and complete tasks." - GDP

"To honor my students' efforts to remain seated, engage in proper participation, and finish assignments, I will put in place a reward system." - EQS

Sub-theme 2: Communication with Parents. Consistent communication fosters strong partnership between teachers and parents, especially while attending requirements development education. This method aids parents in comprehending learning difficulties, abilities with aim winning over the child's parents, it gives educators a chance to exchange observations, tactics, and successful interventions.

"Consistency inside the house and inside the school is ensured by follow-up linkages with parents, which reinforces constructive behaviors and techniques..." - GDP

"I collaborate with parents, professionals, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to understand the distinct challenges and strengths of every learner. By strategically positioning my students (for instance, near the teacher or away from distractions) and planning the seating arrangement, I also establish a flexible setting." – WJV

Conclusion

The study identified useful tactics that educators employ to control LSEN behavior in inclusive classrooms. Teachers reported that supportive and structured activities, incentive-based strategies, and communication with parents were effective in creating a nurturing environment. Likewise, teaching children to regulate their emotions proved beneficial for behavior management. Groupworks provided LSEN with peer support, while regular learners helped by sharing calming techniques. A reward system motivates learners to stay engaged and complete tasks given to them.

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Conflict of Interests

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