

The Unsung Heroes: A Phenomenological Study on Experiences and Struggles of Special Education Language Teachers

ABSTRACT

Aims: To document the experiences of Special Education (SPED) language teacher in their language teaching, collaboration with parents and interaction with fellow educators in the mainstream education.

Study design: Qualitative method

Place and Duration of Study: Monkayo Central Elementary School, Compostela Valley, Philippines during the school year 2019-2020.

Methodology: The participants were five male and female Special Education teachers. They were using purposive and snowball sampling. Information were gathered through in-depth interview using a validated researcher-made questions written in multilingual (English, Tagalog, and Cebuano). The information were analyzed thematically.

Results: Special Education teacher dealt various areas of language learning depending upon the learner's impairment. Teachers also improvised approaches and developed coping mechanism in dealing experiences. This research provided implications to increase efficiency in language teaching in Special Education program; increase parents' engagement in school activities and programs; and improve special education and mainstream education teachers' interaction.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the research highlights the significant challenges faced by SPED language teachers in educating learners with special needs. Despite these obstacles, SPED teachers have demonstrated remarkable resilience, employing various coping mechanisms and fostering cooperation with parents and mainstream teachers. Their unwavering commitment, patience, and positivity exemplify their dedication to providing the best learning opportunities for their special needs students

Keywords: Special Education, Inclusive Education, SPED Teacher, SPED Learners, Language Teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Special education is an educational approach designed to meet the unique needs of learners with exceptional learning development requirements (August, n.d.). It emphasizes the importance of teachers' attitudes toward this specialized field of instruction and the careful identification of learners' needs in this educational program.

In the mid-20th century, there was a significant increase in the number of children requiring special education. According to the National Centre for Educational Statistics (2018), the number of young people in need of special education in the USA rose from 6.3 million in the school year 2000-2001 to 6.7 million by the school year 2004-2005. This growth underscores the ongoing need for special education. However, some critics argue that special education

is overrepresented compared to "typical learners," potentially leading to exclusive education rather than the inclusive education that treats all learners equally.

The Philippines' educational system places learners at the center of educational endeavors, recognizing them as the ultimate goal of quality education. However, the critical role of teachers is sometimes overlooked. Teachers, according to Cobett and Winston (2002), play a vital role in learners' development and academic achievements. Therefore, neglecting their needs can hinder educational progress.

In the Philippines, special education teachers face numerous challenges in this relatively new field. UNESCO's 1998 report highlighted limited access to in-service education and insufficient training in special education for these teachers. Despite the Department of Education's efforts to provide quality education, the needs of these dedicated special education teachers have often been overlooked.

Language acquisition and development are fundamental factors in every learner's education. Early language skills development significantly impacts academic progress (Acero, Javier, Castro, 2008). However, not all learners have a typical learning trajectory; some have "exceptional needs in learning," which is the focus of special education.

Teaching language is a challenging task, but it becomes even more complex when dealing with learners who have exceptional learning needs. This research aims to explore the experiences and challenges faced by language teachers in special education, specifically in the areas of language teaching and enrichment, collaboration with parents, and coping with the unique challenges of special education. The study was conducted in the Special Education Program at Monkayo Central Elementary School, with the goal of shedding light on the heroic efforts of these teachers.

1.1 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of Special Education teachers in relation to language teaching instruction?
2. What are the experiences of Special Education teachers in relation to collaboration with parents and fellow teachers?
3. Based on the findings, what development programs could be developed to support Special Education teachers?

1.2 Theoretical Assumptions

The research was grounded in Caplan and Van Harrison's Person-Environment Theory (1982), which the researcher believed would provide valuable insights into various aspects explored in the study. By employing this theory, the researcher aimed to uncover the underlying issues in the phenomena under investigation. The study primarily focused on the experiences of special educators in language teaching instruction, collaboration with stakeholders, and their interactions with both fellow special educators and mainstream teachers.

The theory was utilized to comprehend the language teachers' experiences within the special education context, particularly concerning classroom instruction and the challenges they encountered in their work environment. Notably, this theory had historically been applied in standard or mainstream educational settings, but the researcher adapted it to understand the unique nature of language learning among exceptional needs students and the experiences of language teachers in this context.

Secondly, the researcher applied the theory to gain insights into the experiences of special education teachers as they engaged with parents, offering support and resources. The theory posits that negative experiences can impact teacher performance, and the researcher aimed to understand both positive and negative experiences that special educators encountered when collaborating with parents in educational endeavors. Furthermore, the theory guided the researcher in developing implications for resource-focused interventions to enhance resource procurement and management among special education teachers.

Lastly, the theory was employed to elucidate the experiences of teachers when interacting with their peers, both within the special education field and in mainstream education. According to the theory, pleasant and unpleasant work experiences are influenced by individuals' skills, resources, abilities, and the demands of the work environment. Thus, the theory served as a lens through which the researcher analyzed issues, stigmas, and dynamics associated with the pleasant and unpleasant experiences that special educators encountered when working alongside their fellow special educators and mainstream teachers.

1.3 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, certain limitations were encountered. Firstly, the study had constraints regarding the number of participants and the selection criteria for respondents. The aim was to gather in-depth information from language teachers in special education, but the limited sample size may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, ethical considerations played a significant role, as the study involved sensitive issues related to the cultural, customs, and traditions of the respondents.

Despite these limitations, the primary goal of this research was to capture a rich and nuanced understanding of the experiences of language teachers in special education settings. The researcher acknowledges that a larger sample size would enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings. Nonetheless, within the confines of these limitations, this study seeks to shed light on the unique challenges and experiences faced by these educators in the past.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS / METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative design, specifically utilizing a phenomenological approach for conducting the study. Phenomenology was chosen because it focuses on individuals' lived experiences (Ndlovu & Schutte, 2023). Its main concern is the interpretation of the experiences of the person who encounters the phenomenon (Torres et al., 2020). In this study the aim was to understand the essence of the phenomenon by exploring the perspectives of special education language teachers within the special education program. The information were gathered through focus group interviews. The interview questionnaire used was validated by experts. with teachers engaged in teaching students with special abilities. Validation of instrument according to San Jose (2023) is critical to information gathering because it adds to the reliability and credibility of results. The researcher believes

that this approach will facilitate the extraction of information from the research participants with the utmost accuracy.

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study will include language teachers of any age, both male and female, from the Municipality of Monkayo, who have substantial experience in teaching language at Monkayo Central Elementary School, the research locale. Through purposive sampling and snowballing techniques, we will interview five language teachers who are willing to share their insights and experiences without reservation and who grant permission to uncover their unique experiences in language teaching.

The researcher employed purposive and snowball sampling due to the limited number of potential participants in this research. These participants were referred to the researcher by their fellow teachers, given the restricted pool of individuals meeting the study's criteria. Ultimately, the researcher selected five respondents from whom information were extracted. They were chosen as respondents with confidence and trust in their ability to provide valuable information required for the study. They were considered suitable candidates for focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, as they could offer credible information about the subject under investigation.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Experiences in Teaching Language

Teaching language in special education settings presents unique challenges. Special education language teachers often encounter students with varying levels of verbal abilities. Some learners are non-verbal, making it challenging to assess their language skills. Consequently, teachers resort to alternative methods, such as emphasizing writing skills, to facilitate communication and language development. Moreover, teachers grapple with the task of handling students with diverse language levels. Some learners may experience significant language delays, posing difficulties in delivering effective instruction. Consequently, the necessity for additional support, like speech therapists, becomes evident in such cases.

Teaching sign language to deaf learners can be particularly challenging, especially when students have limited exposure to formal sign language. Establishing trust and rapport with these students is crucial, as it helps alleviate their fear, doubt, and intimidation, which can impede their willingness to effectively learn sign language. Furthermore, writing is a fundamental skill in language learning, but some special education students may face physical challenges that hinder their ability to write. In response, teachers must exhibit patience and adapt their teaching methods to cater to these students' needs. This may involve allowing extra time or utilizing alternative approaches to writing.

Lastly, students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often have shorter attention spans and may display disruptive behavior in the classroom. To engage these students effectively, teachers must implement strategies such as encouraging active participation and redirecting their focus when necessary.

2.2 Language Instruction Hard to Learn

Language instruction in special education presents a multifaceted challenge, as revealed by teachers' responses, which can be distilled into five prominent themes. Firstly, accommodating individual language preferences among special education learners proves demanding for educators, necessitating extra dedication to ensure comprehensive language skill acquisition. Moreover, effective communication emerges as a substantial obstacle for

some students, requiring instructors to initiate foundational exercises like alphabet mouth exercises to foster improved communication capabilities.

Secondly, the pivotal role of phonetics in communication cannot be understated, yet physical impairments can obstruct some learners' phonetic development. While teaching vowel sounds remains plausible for those using hearing aids, profound deafness poses a formidable barrier. Concurrently, the intricacies of grammar and sentence structure pose a distinct challenge, as certain students may struggle with even basic sentence construction and the correct usage of essential words such as "is," "are," "has," and "have." Overcoming these obstacles demands patient and repetitive instruction.

Lastly, physical limitations manifest in students' handwriting abilities, encompassing issues like incorrect letter formation and slow writing. These challenges extend beyond the individual learner, impacting classmates' comprehension of written work. In sum, language instruction within special education requires a nuanced approach, addressing diverse language preferences, communication hurdles, phonetic limitations, grammatical complexities, and physical writing impediments, all while fostering an inclusive learning environment.

2.3 Challenges and Struggles Encountered in Special Education Language Teaching

Special education teachers often grapple with the complexities of assessment, a task that may not be their primary role. This challenge is exacerbated by the lack of support from parents, further complicating their ability to effectively gauge students' progress.

In the realm of communication, special education students may face difficulties responding verbally, but they often possess a solid grasp of concepts. Their reliance on non-verbal communication, such as pointing, becomes crucial in expressing their thoughts and needs, emphasizing the need for educators to understand and encourage diverse forms of expression. Moreover, learners in special education exhibit varying levels of comprehension, often influenced by physical disabilities or remote living conditions. This diversity necessitates adaptability in teaching strategies, ensuring that each student's unique needs are addressed to facilitate effective learning experiences.

Psychological factors and a lack of motivation can impede some special education students, leading to delayed learning. Irregular attendance and external commitments further hinder their progress, underlining the importance of creating a supportive and motivating learning environment.

Teaching writing skills in special education can be particularly challenging, as some students may have slow handwriting due to physical limitations. Patience and individualized support are essential components in helping these students develop this vital skill.

Lastly, encouraging active participation in the classroom can prove challenging in special education settings, given the variability in students' learning phases and moods. This necessitates a personalized approach and extra efforts from teachers to engage and support each student effectively. In navigating these challenges, special education educators play a crucial role in fostering inclusive and nurturing learning environments.

2.4 Contributions to Anxiety, Plight, and Worries

Special education teachers often face daunting challenges, but these experiences can ultimately lead to personal growth and the development of improved teaching methods. Adaptation is key in this field, as teachers constantly need to find new strategies to overcome hurdles and provide effective support to their students.

One crucial trait that special education teachers must possess is patience. Understanding that students may require more time to grasp concepts and set their own pace is essential. This patience allows educators to create a supportive and nurturing environment where each student can thrive on their unique learning journey. However, the workload and emotional toll of special education teaching can lead to burnout. Dealing with diverse learning groups and preparing individualized instructional materials can be physically and mentally exhausting. This underscores the importance of self-care and support systems for special education teachers to sustain their passion and commitment. In addition to the workload, special education teachers may encounter emotionally taxing situations. Students with special needs may express self-doubt about their abilities, making it crucial for teachers to not only motivate their students but also find ways to motivate themselves in the face of these challenges.

Another aspect that requires extraordinary patience is conducting examinations. Special education students often need more time and explanation during assessments, making this part of teaching particularly demanding. Nevertheless, special education teachers persist in their efforts to ensure that every student has a fair chance to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

In summary, special education teaching comes with its share of difficulties, but the growth, adaptability, patience, and resilience of teachers are vital in overcoming these challenges and fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment for their students.

3.5 Experiences of the Special Teacher in Relation to Collaborating with Parents

Active parental involvement in a child's education is highly valued by special educators, as it offers valuable support and assistance in the learning process. These engaged parents play a pivotal role in reinforcing discipline and facilitating learning both at home and in the classroom, creating a collaborative and nurturing environment. However, not all parents consistently follow up on their children's lessons at home, failing to review assignments or engage with their schoolwork beyond school hours. This lack of involvement can impede a student's progress and pose challenges for educators in introducing new topics effectively.

Awareness among parents regarding their role in their child's education is deemed essential by educators. They emphasize the importance of parents reinforcing classroom learning at home and consider this partnership between parents and teachers vital for a student's overall development. Providing parents with orientation and information about Special Education (SPED) can enhance their understanding of their responsibilities in supporting their child's education.

In some cases, educators encounter challenges when parents do not provide the necessary support. This situation can increase teachers' workload and hinder a student's educational progress. When parents are not fully engaged or fail to prioritize their child's education, it can adversely affect the student's motivation and commitment to learning. Moreover, special educators recognize that some students may face unique family situations, such as parents working abroad or relying on extended family members for support. These circumstances can impact a student's ability to receive consistent support and assistance at home, necessitating additional coordination between educators and caregivers to ensure the student's educational needs are adequately addressed. In conclusion, parental involvement in special education is a crucial factor in a student's academic journey, and fostering this partnership is essential for their overall success.

3.6 Parents as Teachers' Partners

Highly supportive parents play a crucial role in their children's education by actively engaging in various aspects of their school life. They attend meetings, participate in school events, and exhibit a genuine interest in their child's academic progress. This level of involvement fosters a positive relationship between parents and teachers, making collaboration more effective.

Teachers, in turn, appreciate parents who maintain open lines of communication. Even when faced with challenges in their collaborative efforts, special educators value parents who consistently follow up on their child's academic progress. This ongoing dialogue enables teachers to provide specific feedback, particularly in the context of Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). Such feedback empowers parents with a clear understanding of their child's strengths and areas that require improvement. Furthermore, supportive parents extend their involvement beyond academics, encouraging their children's talents and hobbies, whether it's painting or participating in competitions. They actively participate in school events and celebrations, further reinforcing their child's sense of belonging in the school community. By ensuring that their child feels included in these activities, parents contribute significantly to their overall development and well-being.

3.7 No Support to Children

Conversely, there are parents who demonstrate a lack of engagement in their child's education, often providing excuses for their limited involvement. This apathy can pose significant obstacles to both the child's progress and the teacher's ability to enhance the learning experience.

In instances where parents are not actively involved, teachers may find themselves resorting to more conventional teaching methods. This shift away from innovative approaches can restrict their capacity to explore alternative teaching strategies, ultimately hindering their efforts to create a more enjoyable and meaningful learning environment. Regrettably, the absence of parental support can serve as a formidable barrier to a child's educational advancement. Teachers may struggle to implement effective teaching methods when met with parental disengagement, thereby diminishing the child's opportunities for academic growth and overall development.

3.8 Role of Parents for Children's Academic Growth

The role of parents in their children's academic growth is undeniably critical, as underscored by respondents in various educational contexts. They are seen as indispensable partners to teachers in delivering high-quality education.

Parents assume a vital role by providing early training and support to their children. This includes imparting essential skills such as following instructions, which not only lightens the load on teachers but also contributes to improved classroom behavior and overall learning atmosphere.

Collaboration between parents and teachers emerges as a central theme. Active parental involvement is recognized as a catalyst for creating a conducive learning environment. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that some parents may grapple with the challenge of balancing their own responsibilities with their children's education.

Special education learners, in particular, often necessitate more personalized attention. Here, teachers rely on parents to provide this additional care and support, recognizing that addressing all the unique needs of these students can be daunting solely within the confines of the classroom. Furthermore, parents' assistance in self-help activities, like accompanying students to the restroom, proves to be crucial for special education teachers. This support

enables educators to focus on teaching while ensuring that students' basic needs are met, facilitating a smoother learning experience.

Lastly, parents also play a pivotal role in maintaining safety and discipline within the school environment. Their active involvement can help uphold order and ensure that the teacher's attention is not unduly consumed by managing student behavior, thus allowing for a more efficient and effective educational process.

3.9 Effects of Parent's Efforts to Work

Respondents emphasized the positive impact of parents' involvement in their children's education on reducing teachers' workloads and enhancing their efficiency

3.10 Stigma as Teacher for Children with Special Needs

Some respondents expressed that they did not personally experience stigma within their circle of special education teachers. They attribute this lack of stigma to the limited social interaction with mainstream teachers and the willingness of mainstream teachers to provide support. Receiving help from other teachers and appreciating lessen anxiety.

While some teachers reported no stigma, others shared experiences of feeling belittled by mainstream educators. They encountered comments like "only teaching non-graded students" and felt the need to defend the value of their work. They noted that outsiders often fail to understand the complexities of individual instruction but slowly accept the program as they witness its benefits

Certain teachers admitted that their efforts in the special education program were not always appreciated by their colleagues in the general education field. Informant 3 shared examples of colleagues questioning why they invested effort in a program with a small number of students. This lack of appreciation sometimes led to hurtful comments, such as being called "crazy." The informant stressed the importance of raising awareness about the value of students with special needs.

In addition to feeling belittled and unappreciated, one informant recounted experiences of being ridiculed by co-teachers. Such ridicule negatively affected their professional self-esteem and morale. Informant 5 mentioned that, in the past, it was not uncommon for special education teachers to face jokes and hesitancy from colleagues. However, they shared their personal motivation for taking on the role, inspired by their nephew with a similar condition.

3.11 Teachers's worries at Work

In the realm of education, a notable divergence exists among teachers in their responses to the challenges and stigmas associated with their field. For some educators, these issues seem to have a minimal impact on their overall well-being. Their resilience stems from a sense of gratitude and the presence of supportive colleagues and students, which effectively alleviates many of their worries.

Conversely, there is a cohort of teachers who find themselves spurred on by the very discrimination and discouragement they encounter. Rather than succumbing to negativity, they perceive these challenges as opportunities to showcase their proficiency as educators and shatter stereotypes. Negative comments, in their view, serve as catalysts that fuel their determination to excel in their roles. However, not all teachers are impervious to the effects of stigma and adversity. Some educators admit to moments of discouragement when negative thoughts and comments weigh heavily on their motivation and job satisfaction. In such instances, maintaining a genuine passion for teaching despite these setbacks becomes a significant personal endeavor.

Yet, another set of teachers expressed their frustration over the constraints placed on them in terms of participating in school activities and competitions, primarily due to their responsibilities in special education. They recognize the importance of these events for professional development and benchmarking but lament their inability to take part. This limitation, although occasionally exacerbated by the reluctance of students with special needs to participate, significantly impacts their performance and engagement in such aspects of their profession.

3.12 Coping in Facing Challenges with Language Instruction Teaching

Maintaining a positive mindset is considered essential in handling the frustrations that come with language instruction. The participants emphasized that having a positive outlook can lead to positive long-term results despite the difficulties faced. They should not take the challenges too seriously and to believe that students will eventually learn. Being positive is not only beneficial for teachers but also for the learners themselves, creating a more conducive learning environment.

Dealing with learners who require more attention than usual can be challenging, but participants stressed the importance of patience. Patience is seen as a valuable resource, and the belief is that with enough patience, there is hope that these students can still learn. The key message is to persevere and not give up, even if it means repeating lessons many times. The motto "only quitters quit" highlights the determination to keep trying.

To address the unique needs of learners, especially those facing challenges, participants emphasized the importance of conducting research. Teachers actively seek out strategies and instructional materials that cater to individual students' needs. Personalized and research-based teaching methods are recommended to enhance the learning experience. Techniques such as revising and editing for correct grammar and summarizing content are mentioned as strategies that can be effective in teaching these students.

3.13 Coping in Facing Challenges with Collaboration with Parents

The participants stressed the importance of reminding parents about their essential role in their child's education. Constant support and awareness from parents were crucial for a child's progress. Teachers highlighted the correlation between parental involvement and the child's learning outcomes, emphasizing that the level of support parents provide directly impacts the child's potential. Showing parents the progress their children had made could be a powerful motivator for continued involvement.

Maintaining an open and continuous line of communication between teachers and parents is considered vital. Open communication serves as a platform for discussing the progress of learners, addressing challenges, and planning improvements in instructional delivery. Teachers acknowledged that communication could help prevent misunderstanding and ensure that parents and teachers are on the same page regarding the child's education. When communication lacked, it could lead to frustration and ineffective collaboration.

Teachers suggested that one effective way to cope with challenges and frustrations is collaborating with parents was simply to focus on doing their jobs as teachers. It entailed fulfilling their responsibilities in the classroom and maintaining a positive attitude even in the face of parental challenges. Teachers were encouraged to remain dedicated to their role as educators, regardless of external factors. The emphasis was on staying professional and persevering in providing quality education to the students.

3.14 Coping in Facing Challenges with Fellow Educators

Respondents in the field of education consistently underscored the importance of mutual assistance among co-teachers as a means to effectively address frustrations and challenges. They emphasized that by helping one another, not only do teachers alleviate their own burdens but also create a more conducive learning environment for their students. This collaborative spirit aligns with the collective goal of providing the best possible education for all learners.

Amidst the challenges and frustrations that can be inherent in teaching, self-motivation emerged as a valuable strategy. It serves as a powerful tool in alleviating the weariness and disappointment that teachers may encounter. More than just a coping mechanism, self-motivation empowers educators to persevere and, remarkably, to find contentment in their teaching endeavors. It can even transform frustration into a personal challenge, motivating teachers to continually improve and excel in their roles. Furthermore, when teachers confront challenges that surpass their individual capabilities, they often seek solace in collaboration with their colleagues. A supportive work environment was deemed crucial in these instances, highlighting the significance of teamwork in the teaching profession. The inherent nature of collaboration among teachers is not only beneficial for addressing challenges but also for fostering a more enriched educational experience for students.

In the face of negative comments and external pressures, some teachers advocate for staying resolutely committed to their role as educators. They stress the importance of ignoring jests and distractions, allowing them to remain focused on their primary mission: teaching. This steadfast commitment helps teachers maintain their sense of purpose and continue delivering quality education despite external criticisms or challenges.

3.15 Programs for Improving Academic Instruction in Language Learning

To enhance instruction for learners with special needs, informants offer valuable insights. They emphasize the importance of providing efficient and sufficient instructional materials that are carefully tailored to the unique needs of these students. Tailored materials can significantly improve the learning experience and outcomes for learners with special needs, ensuring that their educational needs are appropriately addressed.

Another crucial aspect highlighted by the informants is the need for adequate training for Special Education (SPED) teachers. Many educators in this field have not had the opportunity to attend relevant seminars or training programs. Such training is essential to equip SPED teachers with the specialized skills and knowledge required to effectively support and educate students with special needs.

Access to specialized therapists is identified as a critical component of providing comprehensive support for learners with special needs. These therapists can play a pivotal role in conducting thorough assessments and offering expert guidance on the most effective strategies for these students. Their expertise contributes significantly to the development of tailored educational plans and interventions.

Furthermore, some informants advocate for the establishment of separate classrooms staffed by trained teachers specifically dedicated to learners with special needs. This proposition arises from the recognition that many educators lack the necessary training and expertise to handle these students effectively within mainstream classrooms. Creating specialized environments and providing specialized training can ensure that these learners receive the focused attention and support they require for their educational success.

3.16 Programs for Enhancing Special Education Teacher and Parent Collaboration

Training parents is essential to create effective partnerships with teachers, easing their workloads and supporting their children's learning. The government can play a vital role by

providing support and implementing programs to improve the learning experience of these learners. Also, holding conferences can strengthen collaboration between parents and teachers.

3.17 Programs for Enhancing Interaction and Understanding Between SPED and Standard Education Teachers

The participants in the discussion have put forward several important recommendations to address the challenges faced in special education. One significant proposal is the organization of conferences that bring together both special education and mainstream teachers. Such conferences can serve as platforms for open dialogue and collaboration, helping to address issues related to the well-being of all learners, including those with special needs. This collaborative approach can lead to a more holistic and inclusive educational system.

Another crucial step suggested by the participants is extending orientation programs about special education to teachers at all levels and the broader community. Increasing awareness about the unique needs and challenges of special education learners is vital to fostering understanding and empathy among educators and the general public. This heightened awareness can lead to more inclusive and supportive environments for special education programs.

Furthermore, providing training to mainstream teachers about special education processes and teaching methods is emphasized as a means to promote appreciation for the program. Equipping mainstream teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively support students with special needs can lead to more inclusive classroom settings and better outcomes for these learners.

Lastly, raising awareness and appreciation of special education programs among all educators is considered essential. By highlighting the importance of these programs and the positive impact they can have on students' lives, mainstream teachers may be more inclined to embrace and support learners with special needs, creating a more inclusive educational environment.

In summary, these proposed programs and initiatives aim to improve various aspects of special education, including instructional materials, teacher training, therapist availability, collaboration with parents, government support, teacher interactions, and awareness among educators. These efforts collectively seek to enhance the educational experience of special education learners and create a more inclusive and supportive educational system.

3. DISCUSSION

4.1 Experiences in Teaching Language

Special education teachers face the formidable task of addressing the diverse verbal abilities of their students. To meet this challenge, they often need to implement individualized instruction and create customized instructional materials tailored to accommodate these variations (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh & Reid, 2005). Additionally, students with varying levels of language mastery, particularly those with developmental delays, pose unique challenges in language teaching. Unfortunately, these challenges can be further compounded by the potential lack of specialized skills among teachers in this field (Laurenda, 2012; Thwala, 2015).

Teaching standard sign language to deaf learners can present its own set of difficulties. Psychological barriers, including feelings of discrimination, shame, fear, and doubt, can

hinder students' willingness to engage in the learning process. Overcoming these emotional obstacles becomes a crucial aspect of effective instruction for students with hearing impairments.

4.2 Learning Reception and Response

Student participation and responsiveness vary widely. Teachers must adjust their language instruction and approach accordingly. Some students may require fundamental instruction. Learning in special education is a gradual process, and learners' reception and response depend on the suitability of learning materials. Modification of instructional materials and teaching approaches is often necessary to accommodate diverse learning preferences. Creating a non-threatening classroom atmosphere where students feel accepted and have a sense of belonging can encourage greater student participation and responsiveness. Summarize into paragraphs with connecting words.

4.3 Language Instruction Challenges

Special education language teachers often grapple with the complexities of using three languages—mother tongue, Filipino, and English—as mediums of instruction. Learners with special needs may exhibit distinct preferences for one language over the others, necessitating the creation of individualized instructional materials to cater to their specific linguistic needs and preferences.

Communication barriers pose a significant challenge in special education language instruction. These barriers may arise from various factors, including delayed development and varying levels of understanding among learners. The diverse communication profiles of students can make it difficult for teachers to effectively convey information and facilitate meaningful interactions within the classroom.

Teaching phonetics to learners with vocal and hearing impairments can be exceptionally challenging. The severity of the impairment plays a significant role in the difficulty of this task. Special education teachers must employ innovative and tailored strategies to address the unique needs of these students, ensuring that they can acquire phonetic skills despite their hearing limitations. Furthermore, teaching grammar poses particular challenges when working with deaf learners. Sign language, often the primary mode of communication for deaf individuals, has distinct features, structures, and grammar compared to verbal language. Special education teachers must navigate these differences to effectively teach grammar skills, ensuring that deaf learners can grasp essential language concepts.

Another obstacle arises when teaching writing skills, especially for learners with physical handicaps such as cerebral palsy. This condition affects their motor skills, making it challenging for them to develop proficiency in writing. Special education teachers must exercise patience and implement adapted strategies to help these students overcome physical limitations and acquire the necessary writing skills to communicate effectively.

In navigating these multifaceted challenges, special education language teachers must demonstrate exceptional adaptability, creativity, and a deep understanding of their students' unique needs to ensure a meaningful and inclusive educational experience.

4.4 Challenges and Struggles Encountered

Assessing learners in special education is a complex task that demands specialized skills and knowledge. Without proper identification and assessment, students with learning difficulties may not receive the appropriate support they need, which can significantly impact their educational experiences (Gin et al., 2021). One particular challenge is that some

learners may exhibit minimal responses to teachers' efforts to impart knowledge, making it difficult to gauge their level of comprehension.

Furthermore, the varying comprehension levels among special education students underscore the necessity for individualized instruction and assessment. This individualization adds an additional layer of complexity to the already challenging work of educators in this field. Teachers must adapt their teaching methods and assessment strategies to cater to the unique learning needs of each student, ensuring that they have the best possible chance of success.

The duration and frequency of meetings between teachers and students, as well as the students' level of interest and engagement, also play crucial roles in the educational journey of special education students. Extended gaps between meetings or disinterest on the part of the student can contribute to delayed learning, which ultimately affects their academic performance. Consistent and tailored support is essential to mitigate these issues and help students make progress. Moreover, learners with neurophysiological disorders, such as cerebral palsy, face specific challenges in activities that require physical capabilities, such as writing. These students may require specialized assistance and accommodations to participate fully in educational activities. Ensuring that their unique needs are met is essential for fostering their academic growth and overall well-being.

In summary, assessing and supporting learners in special education involves a specialized skill set due to the potential for varied learning problems and the need for tailored interventions. Recognizing the challenges of minimal responsiveness, varying comprehension levels, meeting dynamics, and physical limitations is vital in providing a comprehensive and effective education for these students.

4.5 Contribution to Anxiety, Plight, and Worries

Special education teachers often grapple with anxiety, especially when they are new to the profession. This anxiety stems from the need to navigate a testing and adjustment process as they learn to adapt to the unique challenges of teaching students with special needs. It can be a daunting task, as they must acquire specialized skills and knowledge to effectively support their students.

One fundamental aspect of teaching in special education is recognizing the importance of students' readiness to learn. Unlike traditional classrooms, pushing students with special needs too hard to learn can lead to increased anxiety and unwanted behaviors. Patience becomes a vital virtue for special education teachers, as they must create a safe and supportive environment where students can learn at their own pace and comfort level. However, the demands of teaching in special education can take a toll on educators, potentially leading to burnout. The heavy workloads, including the preparation of unique instructional materials tailored to individual students, can be overwhelming. This constant pressure can result in feelings of depression and exhaustion, making it crucial for special education teachers to prioritize self-care and seek support when needed.

Administering assessments in special education can also be a source of stress, particularly when students have neurophysiological conditions that affect their performance. Special education teachers must carefully design assessments that accommodate their students' unique needs while ensuring accurate evaluation of their progress.

In summary, teaching in special education is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that demands specialized skills, adaptability, patience, and a deep understanding of students' diverse needs and challenges. Special education teachers play a critical role in helping their

students overcome these barriers to learning and achieve success. However, they must also navigate the personal challenges of anxiety, burnout, and the stress of assessment in their mission to provide the best possible education for their students with special needs.

4.6 Parental Support in Education

Parents' support in educating their children is undeniably vital, but the degree of involvement can vary significantly. Some parents actively engage in their child's education by attending meetings, participating in school events, and taking an active role in disciplining their children when necessary. Supportive parents often make the effort to attend orientations provided by schools to gain a comprehensive understanding of their role in their child's education.

To ensure constant improvement in a special education setting, it is essential for parents to follow up on lessons and Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). However, not all parents are equally enthusiastic or committed to this task. Neglecting this duty can have a detrimental impact on a child's academic progress, as the home-school connection is a critical factor in a student's success. This lack of parental support can also place added strain on teachers who are already tasked with caring for many students, making it challenging to provide the necessary level of individualized attention.

Furthermore, some parents may hold misconceptions about special education (SPED) schools, viewing them as mere child-minding facilities rather than recognizing the full potential of their children. This misconception can exacerbate the challenges faced by SPED educators, as it may lead to lower expectations for the students and less engagement from parents in their educational journey. It is crucial to bridge this gap in understanding and ensure that parents are aware of the opportunities and potential their children have in a special education setting.

In conclusion, parental support plays a pivotal role in the education of children with special needs. While some parents are highly engaged and proactive in their involvement, others may struggle to fully embrace their role. Addressing these variations in parental support is essential to create a supportive and collaborative educational environment for students with special needs and to alleviate the challenges faced by SPED educators.

4.7 Parental Proactivity in School Activities and Events

Parental involvement is crucial in childhood development. Supportive parents benefit both students and teachers. They help boost students' self-confidence, character development, and self-actualization, especially for SPED learners with talents and skills. Collaborative efforts between teachers and parents create instructional processes that benefit learners. However, some parents do not provide support, making it challenging for teachers to create effective teaching platforms. Parents, as the immediate people who interact with students, provide essential information about their children's learning condition.

4.8 Importance of Parents for Children's Academic Growth

Parents play a primary and fundamental role in shaping their children's development across various domains, including self-help activities, discipline, instilling values, and fostering language skills. These critical areas of growth should ideally be cultivated at home and then reinforced at school. When children acquire these skills and values at home, it significantly aids special education (SPED) teachers in their efforts to concentrate on enhancing academic aspects of their students' education. However, the absence of strong parental involvement can place a significant burden on SPED teachers. In many cases, SPED classrooms may have larger class sizes compared to regular education settings, and each student may require a high level of individualized attention. When parents neglect their role

in reinforcing essential life skills and values at home, teachers find themselves in a challenging position. They must attempt to compensate for this gap in students' development, which can potentially delay their overall learning advancement and hinder their ability to access academic content effectively.

In summary, parents play a primary role in molding various aspects of their children's growth, from self-help skills to values and language development. When these foundations are established at home, SPED teachers can more effectively focus on improving academic aspects of their students' education. Neglecting parental involvement can strain teachers and impact students' progress, particularly when dealing with larger class sizes and individualized learning needs in special education settings.

4.9 Effects of Parental Effort

When parents cooperate with teachers, their work becomes more manageable. Constant follow-up and assessment at home can accelerate students' mastery of lessons. Failing to do so may require teachers to re-teach lessons or conduct remedial instruction, causing further delays. Parental effort is an investment in their children's education. The less effort parents invest, the less their children can benefit from their schooling.

4.10 Stigma in Special Education

Stigma, as described by Almeida and Sousa (2022), involves severe social disapproval due to perceived differences. This phenomenon is primarily experienced by students in SPED programs, but teachers in special and inclusive education also face stigmatization.

Stigmatization negatively impacts people's quality of life, causing stress, anxiety, and further stigma. It can lead to reduced acceptance, disapproval, discrimination, rejection, and social exclusion. Some SPED teachers feel belittled by mainstream educators and unsupported by their colleagues. Not all SPED educators are affected by stigma, especially when they receive support from colleagues. Some educators view stigmatization as a challenge to become better in their field.

4.11 Effects of Stigmatization on SPED Teachers

Stigmatization in the context of special education can have profound negative effects on both students and educators. It often leads to discouragement and elicits negative emotional responses, including anxiety, stress, and depression. When individuals with special needs are stigmatized, they may internalize these negative perceptions, impacting their self-esteem and overall well-being. Moreover, educators, particularly special education (SPED) teachers, may also experience these negative emotions when they witness the effects of stigma on their students.

Inclusive programs, although well-intentioned, can sometimes inadvertently hinder SPED teachers' participation in school competitions. This can be attributed to biases in the evaluation process, which may not fully account for the unique challenges and achievements of students in special education. As a result, SPED teachers may feel sidelined or disadvantaged in such competitions, further exacerbating the effects of stigma and potentially discouraging their involvement in school-wide activities.

To cope with the frustrations and challenges they encounter while teaching language skills to students with special needs, SPED teachers employ various strategies. One crucial coping mechanism involves maintaining positive thoughts and outlooks. By cultivating a positive mindset, they can better navigate the hurdles they encounter, overcome frustration, and remain productive in their teaching efforts. Additionally, SPED teachers understand the importance of accepting that some aspects of teaching are beyond their control. This

acknowledgment helps set realistic expectations and reduces frustration when certain outcomes may not align with their initial goals.

Another coping strategy for SPED teachers is investing patience in their students who may have unique learning phases and preferences. Recognizing that each student has their own pace and style of learning allows teachers to tailor their approaches accordingly and provide the necessary support and guidance. Furthermore, SPED teachers engage in continuous research to develop innovative teaching strategies. By staying updated with the latest research and educational techniques, they can adapt their methods to better meet the specific needs of their students. This proactive approach not only helps SPED teachers overcome challenges but also fosters a more effective and inclusive learning environment.

In summary, stigmatization in special education can have detrimental effects on both students and educators, leading to discouragement and negative emotional responses. Inclusive programs may inadvertently hinder SPED teachers' participation in certain school activities. To cope with the challenges of teaching language skills in this context, SPED teachers employ strategies such as maintaining positive thoughts, accepting limitations, exercising patience, and engaging in ongoing research to enhance their teaching methods. These coping mechanisms help create a more supportive and effective learning environment for students with special needs.

4.12 Coping with frustration in Collaboration with Parents.

Effective communication and accepting parental limitations help teachers cope with challenges. Being positive and staying focused on their role as educators can alleviate frustration, anxiety, and worries

4.13 Coping with Frustration in Facing Challenges with Fellow Educators

SPED teachers can cope with frustration by helping colleagues who need assistance in teaching. This not only benefits academic development but also fosters a sense of belonging and reduces frustration. Self-motivation is essential for remaining positive and focused on students despite challenges. Collaborating with fellow educators promotes a supportive work environment, increasing productivity and reducing the likelihood of quitting.

4. CONCLUSION

The research findings highlight that SPED language teachers face significant challenges in educating SPED learners, particularly in addressing various language-related issues among their students. Despite these challenges, these educators have developed innovative ways to overcome deficiencies in the special education program. They have made efforts to improve instructional materials, classroom environments, assessment tools, and communication channels with parents. These coping strategies have played a crucial role in helping SPED teachers remain resilient and satisfied in their profession. Furthermore, the research reveals that SPED educators have effectively established rapport and cooperation with both parents and their colleagues in mainstream education programs. This collaborative approach has contributed to providing better learning opportunities for SPED learners.

Despite the difficulties they encounter, SPED educators maintain their enthusiasm and unwavering commitment to their students. They cultivate positive thinking, focusing on their goals rather than dwelling on negative thoughts. They demonstrate immense patience and hope in their learners, believing that, with time and effort, every student can make progress. These teachers consistently go above and beyond to support their learners, regardless of the challenges they face.

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