

# Experiences of Teachers Teaching Learners with Intellectual Disability During Pandemic

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## Abstract

This study explored the significant experiences of teachers teaching learners with Intellectual Disability (ID) during pandemic in the Island Garden City of Samal, Davao del Norte, school year 2021-2022. The phenomenology approach with in-depth interview was employed. The Child Welfare Code, Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, Education Act of 1982, and DepEd's Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan served as the legal bases while social constructivism, experiential learning, cognitive development, and social learning were the theories regarded in this study. A validated interview guide questionnaire made by the researcher facilitated the gathering of data from the ten purposely chosen participants who had taught for five years in the identified SPED-implementing schools. On the notable experiences of the participants, the themes that emerged were bounded communication, uncapable parents, task modification, teacher effort, effortless performance, and restricted assistance. In addition, communication, resources, effectiveness, accessibility, and monitoring described their challenges encountered. Moreover, they unfolded constant communication, home visitation, effective collaboration, educational adjustment, self-motivation, and extra effort as their coping mechanisms. Finally, their insights include flexibility, regard, upskilling, innovativeness, and tenacity. Implications were drawn from the responses of the participants, and these may be considered by educational leaders, teachers, parents and other stakeholders in innovating policies, programs, and interventions for the advancement of ID education.

Keywords: special education; COVID-19 pandemic; in-depth interview; intellectual disability; phenomenology approach; significant experiences; island garden city of samal; davao del norte

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## 1. Main text

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE

#### INTRODUCTION

##### The Rationale of the Study

The world has dramatically changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted every aspect of people's lives. The pandemic may now be in its endemic stage, but its impact continuously affects and shapes the lives of almost all people around the world.

In the global scenario, education has dramatically changed its landscape because of the pandemic. Education in the new normal needed a lot of adjustments since teachers and students have yet to familiarize themselves with the changes implemented to continue a well-meaningful and effective delivery of instruction.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) initiated ways to continuously deliver quality and equitable education for all learners across all levels of learning. DepEd offers different learning delivery modalities that the school may adopt depending on the geographical location, socio-economic status, and quality of students. However, it cannot be denied that teaching in the new normal had weaknesses and threats. Teachers had a hard time coping with the challenges posed by the situation. One big challenge was that students were finding it difficult to teach without the teacher's actual presence. This challenge became even more extensive with those students belonging to the so-called "with special needs".

Considering the fragile and sensitive nature of these learners with special needs, it is very imperative to ponder on these different situations: the kinds of strategies employed by the teachers during the pandemic; and the adjustments made by the teachers to deliver those needed competencies successfully during the difficult situations.

Special Education should never be discounted or neglected if people talk about education in the new normal setup. For sure, Sped teachers had exhausted all means to deliver instruction to SPED learners, even if it required extra effort, knowledge, and skills from them.

One group of SPED learners that require delicate and specialized means of intervention is the learners with intellectual disabilities (ID). ID students have less capacity to comprehend new or complex information, acquire new skills, and adjust socially. These students need to be assisted well in their learning. Different organizations have laid down strategies to improve the performance of ID learners even before the pandemic. When the pandemic came, the challenge was more extensive to initiate appropriate interventions and strategies well suited to their situation.

It is very imperative to note that teachers play a significant role in the improvement of their learners with intellectual disabilities. This role is crucial and requires total commitment. Teachers need to understand intellectual disability well, and how they should respond to the continuously changing face of education and the unprecedented lousy situation like the COVID-19 pandemic. The more they know, the more they can help themselves and their learners.

Undeniably, the new normal setup has taught the education sector many lessons and realizations, and SPED teachers certainly have their share of this. It is in this light that the researcher opted to explore stories from teachers themselves, how they managed to apply or perhaps modify suggested strategies, or maybe they had their way of helping their students that contributed significantly to their progress. Hearing and culling it out from teachers themselves ensured information, ideas, and concepts that were truly reflective of the actual situation and the real effects of their actions. These aspects need to be explored because time and events sometimes can be unprecedented. Nobody is sure what tomorrow will bring. If another pandemic or any circumstance brings by chance another distance learning or any applicable modality to resort to, then SPED education will be ready to face it. Hence, this qualitative study on the significant experiences of teachers teaching learners with intellectual disabilities during the pandemic is needed.

It is the utmost desire of the researcher, a SPED teacher herself, to open new doors and opportunities for the advancement of ID education or LSEs' for this matter. Undeniably, there are still a lot of aspects to be developed and given value and importance for these vulnerable groups of learners. They appeared to be neglected during the pandemic. Inclusive education seemed not realized during those times. Ultimately, there is a need to echo the voice of the LSEs and the SPED teachers.

### **Theoretical Lenses**

This study was anchored on the Social Constructivist Theory of Vygotsky (McLeod, 2020), supplemented with the Experiential Learning theory of David Kolb (McLeod, 2017), the Cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget (McLeod, 2022) and Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura (McLeod, 2016). Presidential Decree No. 603 of 1974, Education Act of 1982 or Batas Pambansa Bilang 232 and Republic Act 7277 or Magna Carta for Disabled Persons served as legal bases of this study.

Social Constructivist Theory of Learning. Emphasizing social interactions in gaining new knowledge and behavior, this theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky assumes that mental capabilities are gained through social guidance and construction. The development of these abilities like memory, reasoning, learning, problem-solving, and abstract thinking is influenced by culture as mediator. In addition, this theory also focuses on learning by discovery and exploration.

Vygotsky postulates that children's social constructivism theory can be nurtured and implied in education in the following manner: Learning should be Child-Centered, Learners should be active, Social interactions are essential, Learning by discovery should be present, Focus should be on knowledge improvement, Challenging tasks must be included, and Development of Learners must be fostered.

Further, this theory is a philosophy that further improves the logical and conceptual growth of the students and values the vital role of experiences in the education of students. It asserts that people create knowledge and construct meaning based on their experiences. Two of the key concepts within the constructivism learning theory which started the construction of an individual's new ability are accommodation and assimilation. Assimilating would result in relating an individual's unique experiences to the old experiences, which would lead to developing new outlooks, rethinking misunderstandings in the past, and evaluating what is important. Accommodation, on the other hand, is reexamining the world and recent experiences into what is

already present in the mind. Humans conceive a particular fashion in which the world operates. When things do not work within that context, they must accommodate and reexamine the expectations with the outcomes (Constructivism Learning Theory, n.d.).

Furthermore, teachers play significant roles within the constructivism learning theory. The teacher functions more as a facilitator whose role is to guide the student when it comes to their understanding. What is focused are the students and their learning and not on the teachers and lecture. Resources used such as lesson plans are very different in terms of approach from traditional education. The teacher must start by asking, instead of telling. The students come to the conclusions on their own, instead of being told (Constructivism Learning Theory, n.d.).

It is also emphasized in this theory that teachers must always keep in conversations with the students, thus creating a learning experience open to new directions depending upon the student's needs as the learning continues. Instead of relying on other's information and welcoming it as the truth, the constructivism learning theory suggests that students should be exposed to data, and primary sources. They need to develop the ability to interact with other students to learn from the assimilation of their experiences (Constructivism Learning Theory, n.d.).

Finally, the constructivism learning theory will capacitate students to develop the skills and confidence to analyze the world around them and create solutions or support for developing issues. The theory also allows them to justify their words and actions, while motivating those around them to do the same and respecting the differences in opinions for the contributions that they can make to the whole of the situation (Constructivism Learning Theory, n.d.).

Experiential Learning Theory. The theory was introduced by psychologist David Kolb (McLeod, 2017) who was motivated by John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. As the name suggests, experiential learning involves learning from experience.

According to Kolb (1984), this type of learning can be characterized as the process whereby knowledge is gained through the transformation of experience. Knowledge emanates from the combinations of holding and transforming the experience.

Experiential learning theory is different from cognitive and behavioral theories in that cognitive theories emphasize the role of mental processes while behavioral theories disregard the possible part of subjective experience in the learning process. The experiential theory proposed by Kolb takes a more comprehensive approach and highlights how experiences, including mental abilities, environmental conditions, and feelings, influence the learning process.

In the experiential model, Kolb (McLeod, 2017) pointed out two different ways of taking experience: concrete experience and abstract conceptualization. He also recognized two ways of transforming experience: reflective observation and active experimentation. These four modes of learning are often depicted as a cycle. According to Kolb, concrete experience supplies the information that serves as a basis for reflection. From these reflections, we assimilate the information and form abstract ideas. We then use these ideas to develop new theories about the world, which we then actively test.

Depending upon the situation or environment, the learners may come in the learning cycle at any point and will best learn the new task if they practice all four modes. Through testing our ideas, we once again gather information through experience, going back to the beginning of the process. The process does not absolutely start with experience. Instead, each person must choose which learning mode will work effectively based on the specific situation.

For example, imagine that a student will learn how to drive a car. The student might choose to begin learning by observing other people as they drive, or the student might prefer to start by reading and analyzing a driving instruction book. Another way is the student might decide to just leap in and get behind the seat of a car to go through driving on a test course.

It is imperative that an individual must decide which mode of experiential learning will operate best. While environmental factors are important, our choices play a significant role. Kolb emphasizes that people who are considered "doers" are more likely to engage in active experimentation, while those who are "watchers" prefer reflective observation. He further points out that we develop a preferred way of choosing because of our inherited factors, our past life experiences, and environmental demands (McLeod, 2017).

Theory of Cognitive Development. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development focuses both on understanding how children gain knowledge, and on comprehending the nature of intelligence (McLeod, 2022). Piaget concluded that children take a vital role in the learning process, that is, they do experiments, perform observations, and learn about the world. As children interact with the world around them, they continually add new concepts, build upon existing knowledge, and adapt previously held ideas to accommodate further information.

If Lev Vygotsky (1978) Social Constructivist Theory postulated that external factors like culture, and people like parents and peers, play an important role, Piaget's theory believed that development is hugely carried out from within.

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development postulates that children pass through four different stages of intellectual development which mirror the increasing refinement of children's thought. Each child passes through the stages in the same order, and child development is directed by biological interaction with the environment (McLeod, 2022). Further, in each stage of development, the child's thinking is descriptively not the same from the other stages, that is, each stage forms a different type of intelligence (McLeod, 2022).

The first stage is the sensorimotor stage. This is the stage when infants gain knowledge through sensory experiences and handling objects. This happens from birth to 2 Years. The major characteristics and developmental changes during this stage are the following: (1) Knowing the world through movements and sensations, (2) Learning about the world through basic actions such as sucking, grasping, looking, and listening, (3) Learning that things continue to exist even when they cannot be seen, (4) Realizing that they are separate beings from the people and objects around them, and (5) Realizing that their actions can cause things to happen in the world around them (Kendra, 2022).

The second stage is the preoperational stage which occurs from 2 to 7 years old. During this stage, the start of language development is one of the significant features together with these other significant changes (Kendra, 2022), to wit, (1) Start to think symbolically and learn to use words and pictures to represent objects, (2) Tend to be egocentric and struggle to see things from the perspective of others, and (3) Getting better with language and thinking, but still tend to think in very concrete terms.

The third stage is the Concrete Operational Stage which usually happens from 7 to 11 years old. During this stage, children start to think about how other people might think and feel. Other significant characteristics and developmental changes include (1) Beginning to think logically about concrete events, (2) Beginning to understand the concept of conservation, (3) Thinking becomes more logical and organized, but still very concrete, and (4) Begin using inductive logic, or reasoning from specific information to a general principle (Kendra, 2022).

The final stage is the Formal Operational Stage. This happens from 12 years old and up. One important characteristic of this stage is that children already developed the ability to think about abstract ideas and situations (Kendra, 2022). Other development changes include: (1) Begins to think abstractly and reason about hypothetical problems, (2) Begins to think more about philosophical, ethical, moral, political, and social issues that need theoretical and abstract reasoning, and (3) Begins to use reasoning from a general principle to specific information (Kendra, 2022).

Social Learning Theory. This theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the importance of observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. In this theory, environmental and cognitive factors are both considered on how they interact to influence human learning and behavior (McLeod, 2016). Bandura thinks the same with the behaviorist learning theories of classical conditioning and operant conditioning but adds these two important ideas: (1) Mediating processes occur between stimuli & responses, and (2) Behavior is learned from the environment through the process of direct observation.

Presidential Decree 603 or Child and Youth Welfare Code. The late President Ferdinand E. Marcos signed this decree on December 10, 1974, known as the Child and Youth Welfare Code which shall involve persons below twenty-one years old except those liberated under law (CRALAW, 2022).

This decree highlighted that the child is one of the most crucial assets of the country. Effort should be exerted to promote the child's welfare and enhance opportunities for a valuable and happy life. Further, the school, the church, the guild, and the community should assist the home and the State in preparing the child for the responsibilities of adulthood (CRALAW, 2022).

Other important provisions in this decree which are deemed essential and relevant to this research, especially in the conceptualization stage and analysis of results, are the following (CRALAW, 2022):

Article 3, Section 3. Each child has the right to a holistic development of his personality to the end that he may become a happy, functional, and active member of society; The gifted child shall be given the opportunity and encouragement to develop his exceptional talents, The emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted child shall be treated with sympathy and understanding, and shall be entitled to treatment and competent care; The disabled child shall be given the treatment, education, and maintenance required by his particular condition.

Article 3, Section 5. Every child has the right to grow up in an environment of morality and righteousness for the development and strengthening of his character.

Article 3, Section 6. Every child has the right to an education comparable with his abilities and to the development of his skills for the improvement of his potential for himself and his fellowmen.

Article 3, Section 7. Every child has the right to total opportunities for safe and positive recreation and activities, individual and social, for the healthy use of his recreational hours.

Article 3, Section 8. Each child has the right to be protected against exploitation, improper influences, hazards, and other circumstances prejudicial to his mental, emotional, social, moral, and physical development.

Article 4, Section. Each child has to exert his best to develop his potential for service, particularly by undergoing a formal education suited to his abilities, so he may become an asset to himself and society.

Article 9. Each child shall be given appropriate care, support, and guidance through his various levels of growth, from infancy to early and later childhood, puberty, and adolescence, and even after he shall have reached age 21.

Article 10. Each child shall be provided special security and shall be given opportunities and resources, by law and by other means, to ensure and carry out his most total development, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally, physically, and socially in a healthy and normal manner and conditions of freedom and dignity fitted to the corresponding developmental stage.

Article 12. The schools and other organizations engaged in non-formal education shall assist the parents in providing the best learning for the child.

Article 13. Actions shall be taken to address the child's healthy social and emotional growth. These shall be carried out at home in collaboration with the schools and other organizations engaged in the promotion of child welfare.

Education Act of 1982 or Batas Pambansa Bilang 232. Approved on September 11, 1982, Batasang Pambansa enacted the Education Act of 1982 or An Act Providing for the Establishment and Maintenance of an Integrated System of Education, which declared that the state should create and maintain a complete, appropriate, and integrated system of education applicable to the goals of national development (CRALAW, 2022).

Further, this act specified that the State shall promote the right of every individual to applicable quality education, regardless of age, sex, creed, socio-economic status, racial or ethnic origin, physical and mental conditions, political or other affiliation. The State shall therefore encourage and maintain fairness to access to education as well as the enjoyment of all citizens of the benefits of education (CRALAW, 2022).

Other important and relevant provisions of this act are the following (CRALAW, 2022).

Section 4. Providing a broad general education that will assist each individual in the peculiar ecology of his society, to: (a) attain his capabilities as a human being; (b) heighten the range and quality of individual and group participation in the essential functions of society; and (c) gain the essential educational foundation of his development into a productive and versatile citizen.

Section 5. The State shall: (a) Aid and support the natural right and duty of parents in nurturing the youth through the educational system; (b) Promote and safeguard the welfare and interest of the students by defining their rights and obligations, providing them privileges, and encouraging the establishment of good relationships between them and the other members of the school community; (c) Promote the social, economic status of all school personnel, uphold their rights, define their obligations, and improve their living and working conditions and career prospects; (d) Extend support to advance the possibility of those institutions through which parents, students, and school personnel seek to achieve their educational goals.

Section 7. Every educational institution shall provide for the creation of appropriate bodies through which the members of the academic community may discuss sensible issues and communicate information and suggestions for assistance and support of the school and the promotion of their common goals. Representatives from each subgroup of the educational community shall participate in these bodies. The rules and procedures of which must be accepted by them and duly communicated.

Section 9. Students and pupils in all schools shall enjoy the following rights:

(a) The right to receive relevant quality education appropriate to their full development as a person with human dignity; (b) The right to be at liberty to choose their field of study; (c) The right to receive school guidance and counseling services for decisions and selecting the alternatives in fields of work fitted to his capabilities.

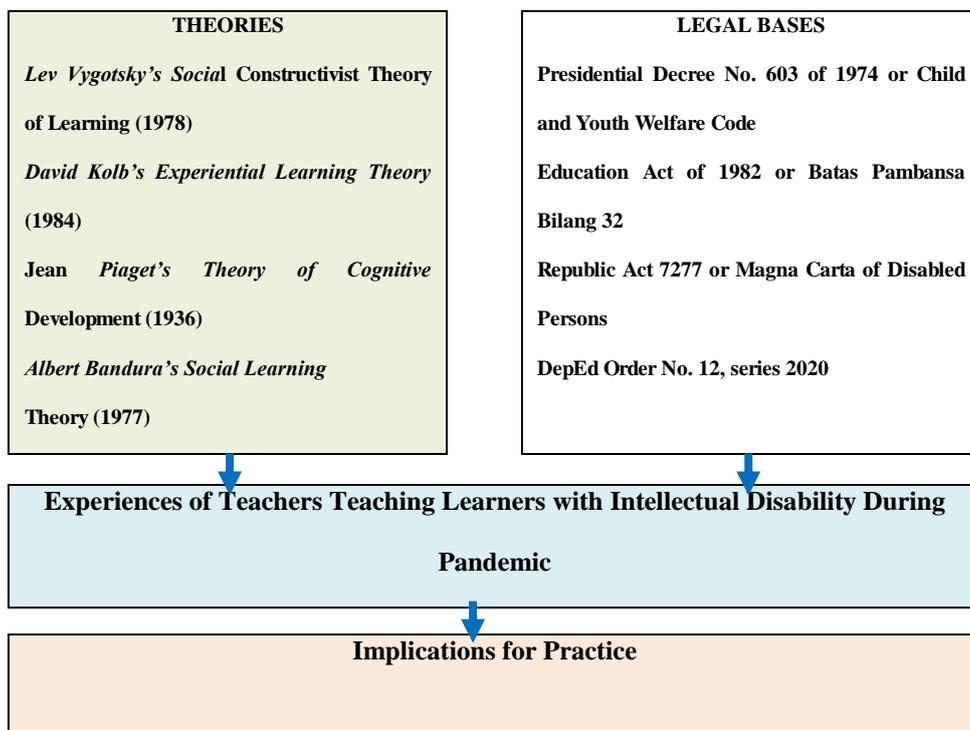
Section 11. Every member of the teaching or academic staff shall enjoy the following rights: (a) The right to be free from obligatory assignments not related to their duties and responsibilities as defined in their appointments or employment contracts; (b) The right to intellectual property consistent with applicable laws; and (c) Teachers shall be considered persons in authority when in the discharge of lawful duties and responsibilities, and shall, therefore, be accorded due respect and protection.

Republic Act 7277 or Magna Carta for Disabled Persons. This is an act granting rights and privileges for persons with disabilities which are guided by the following principles (National Council on Disability Affairs, 2023).

a. Disabled persons are part of the Philippine society; thus, the Senate shall give total support to improving the total well-being of disabled persons and their integration into the activities of society. Toward this end, the State shall implement policies to ensure the rehabilitation, self-development, and self-reliance of disabled persons. It shall develop their skills and potential to enable them to compete accordingly for available opportunities.

b. Disabled persons have the same rights as others, thus, they should be able to live freely and as independently as possible. This must be observed by everyone, the family, the community, and all government and non-government organizations. Disabled person’s rights must never be perceived as welfare services by the Government only.

c. The rehabilitation of disabled persons shall be the concern of the government to advance their capability to achieve a more meaningful, productive, and contented life. To reach out to a greater number of disabled persons, the rehabilitation services and benefits shall be delivered beyond the traditional urban-based centers to community-based programs that will ensure total participation of different sectors as supported by national and local government agencies.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of the Study

d. The State also considers the role of the private sector in advancing the welfare of disabled persons and shall encourage collaboration in programs that address their needs and concerns.

e. To facilitate the integration of disabled persons into the activities of society, the State shall promote and encourage respect for disabled persons. The State shall exert full efforts to remove all social, cultural, economic, environmental, and attitudinal barriers that are prejudicial to persons with disabilities.

Below are some of the critical literature and studies that guided the conceptualization of this research. These include the experiences and challenges of SPED teachers and their coping mechanisms.

Experiences and Challenges of SPED Teachers During Pandemic. The pandemic has given new experiences for teachers, much more for SPED teachers. The implementation of remote learning has changed the way education takes place.

Communication, for one, is an essential aspect, and this is something that SPED teachers are putting importance on. However, communication is such a challenge during the pandemic. Not all parents have smartphones and social media accounts which makes communication with parents a challenging endeavor for educators (Toquero, 2020).

Very significant also during the pandemic is the limited assistance given to the students. According to the American Psychology Association (2020), teachers are vital part of facilitating student learning, well-being, and growth. Thus, it is vital that teachers have easy access and communication with their students to assist and encourage them in their education. However, in-person teaching is not possible, and this becomes a great challenge for teachers during the pandemic.

Another notable experience of SPED teachers is that they have a hard time explaining to the parents the lessons they must teach to their children. Some parents are incapable of assisting their children. They took on the role of teacher without any preparation or training. They don't have the skills and knowledge to do so. According to Liu (2020), parents were forced to take on new and unfamiliar responsibilities as their children participated in emergency remote education, while experiencing increasing instructional responsibilities. This situation affects their well-being. The American Psychology Association (2020) reported that more than 7 in 10 parents claimed that managing their children's learning and adjusting to new routines were extremely stressful (American Psychological Association, 2020).

In addition, teachers also must work more than 100% to make sure that education for LSENs continues even during the pandemic. There is such a need to double their efforts during this time. For teachers who work with students with disabilities or others who belong to vulnerable populations, the challenges are much more significant in this pandemic situation, especially if students are taught remotely (Around the O, 2022).

Very important to mention also is the fact that SPED teachers have limited knowledge and skills when it comes to the use of technology. This has posed a challenge on their part. According to Balatucan (2022), one of the concerns in the implementation of teaching during the pandemic is the difficulty of navigating various technological tools that would help teachers to conduct lessons, monitor student progress, and communicate with parents and colleagues. Boholano and Jamon (2021) asserted that one of the most important skills teachers must have in teaching during the pandemic is the ability to use technology. Thus, teachers without technological skills certainly will not be able to survive in these unprecedented circumstances.

**Coping Mechanisms of SPED Teachers During Pandemic.** With all the challenges posed by the pandemic, SPED teachers look for ways and means to cope up. Maintaining constant communication with concerned individuals is one of their coping mechanisms. According to Balatucan (2022), through teacher-parent collaboration and communication between co-speds teachers, solutions were developed to partially address constraints in monitoring and assessing student progress. Teachers' coping mechanisms and adaptability in teaching during the pandemic were attributed mainly to the support obtained from colleagues and assistance acquired from the parents of the students with special needs (Balatucan, et al., 2022).

Further, as remote teaching and use of modules and other resources are much more applicable during the pandemic, teachers have their way of making learning as effective as possible. They even make some changes to the resources to suit it well to the capacity and needs of their students. In an exploratory study conducted by Dayagbil (2021), teachers adjusted teaching and learning designs as long as it was still guided by the policies implemented by the institution. According to the Center for Parent Information and Resources (2020), modifications must be individualized for students based on their needs and their learning styles and interests. Also, effective teachers change their teaching methods to match the learning demands of their pupils (Scales, 2009). This adaptation of teaching methods should meet all three criteria: (1) it is non-routine, proactive, thoughtful, and invented; (2) it must include a modification in the teacher's professional knowledge or professional practices; and (3) it will be done to anticipate the needs of students or instructional situations (Scales, 2009).

Furthermore, home visitation is also one of the ways for SPED teachers to cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic. They have limited accessibility to their pupils because of the situation. Alferez (2022) emphasized that teachers conduct home visitation to monitor the progress of the students, particularly the challenging students.

In addition, in a phenomenological study conducted by Villareal (2022), it was revealed that flexibility and adaptability, the power of communication, and practical problem-solving strategies are the top three emerging themes for the teachers' lived experiences during the pandemic.

Finally, it is very essential to mention also that stress management and self-motivation are some of the significant ways SPED teachers implement on themselves. The feelings of worry, uneasiness, discomfort, and uncertainty engulfed the teachers during this pandemic time. (Balatucan, et al., 2022). Aydin (2021), as mentioned by Balatucan, (2022), stressed that teaching

anxiety may profoundly affect both the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, emotional management is now an essential factor in teaching effectively and adapting to the new normal teaching (Balatucan, 2022).

Guided by the theories, legal bases of Special Education in the Philippines, and related literature and studies, the theoretical framework of the study (Figure 1) has been conceptualized. Teachers teaching learners with intellectual disabilities (ID) are the main subjects of the study, culling out from them their significant experiences during the pandemic. The exploration focuses on their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights as they deliver instruction to ID learners in the new normal setup. Their accounts shall be analyzed carefully to come up with an action plan that is relevant and effective in a pandemic situation.

## THE PROBLEM

### Statement of the Problem

This study explored significant experiences of teachers teaching learners with ID during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Island Garden City of Samal during the school year 2021-2022 as the basis for implications.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following queries:

1. What are the experiences of teachers teaching ID learners during the pandemic time?
2. What are the challenges teachers faced in teaching ID learners during the pandemic?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of teachers teaching ID learners to address the challenges they faced during the pandemic time?
4. What are the insights of teachers from their experiences in teaching ID learners during the pandemic?
5. Based on the findings, what implications can be drawn?

### Significance of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological exploration investigated the present circumstances and lived experiences of SPED teachers in the Island Garden City of Samal teaching ID learners specifically during the pandemic, assessed the effectiveness of the new learning modalities and strategies applied, and developed an evidence-based finding for the improvement of the delivery of learning and instruction to learners with intellectual disability, especially during a distance learning situation such as the one during COVID 19 pandemic. Thus, this study would be significant for the following:

**Department of Education.** Through this study, the department of education would gain insights as to what policies and programs suit very well with ID students and other LSENs when distance learning needs to be implemented as circumstances demand it.

**Education Leaders.** The results of the study would provide insights to education leaders as to what behavior, interventions, and practices fit well in implementing distance learning education for SPED implementing schools in the Island Garden City of Samal.

**Regular Education Teachers.** This study would also help regular education teachers as they would gain some knowledge and guidance as to how learners that need special attention be treated during a pandemic. They might have learners that need special attention and advice and the implications drawn from this study could somehow help them in successfully carrying out their responsibilities, especially during trying times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Special Education Teachers.** The results of this study would help special education teachers acquire teaching methodologies, approaches, principles, and skills relevant to teaching ID learners in a pandemic or distance learning situation.

**Parents.** This study would help parents realize the importance of guidance in their child's education, creating spaces for collaboration with teachers and education leaders.

**Learners with Intellectual Disability.** Through this study, the learners would be taught and/or familiarized with ways to adapt and cope with the new learning modalities during a crisis.

**Researcher.** This study would provide rich information for the researcher which could be used in future research. As a SPED teacher herself, the significant results generated would give her the best idea as to how instructions and dealings with ID students should be delivered.

**Future Researchers.** This study would provide a foundation for how ID learners shall be taught effectively in a distance learning education. The implications drawn from this research could be good information for future researchers who are

very much interested in helping ID learners in coping with the challenges brought about by any crisis, such as the COVID 19 pandemic. Moreover, the themes generated from this qualitative study could also be good explorative factors for conducting a quantitative analysis of this topic.

### **Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The scope of the study included in-depth interviews (IDI) utilizing open-ended interviews with SPED teachers teaching ID learners, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purposive sampling was employed which included 10 participants. The selection of participants was based merely on trustworthiness that these participants can give important and relevant information, are willing to articulate their experiences well, and was based only on these criteria: (a) They are SPED teacher teaching ID learner in a SPED-implementing school of the Island Garden City of Samal, and (b) They have been in the service for at least five years.

Further, the study was limited to the challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights drawn by the researcher from the participants' accounts. The researcher did not consider any information outside of participants' statements as to the analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section details the methods utilized in this phenomenological study which aimed to explore significant experiences of teachers teaching learners with intellectual disabilities (ID) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes the research design, flow of the study, the environment or research locale, research participants, research instrument, and data gathering procedure. Likewise, it discusses the systematic way of presenting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, and as the trustworthiness and ethical considerations in this research.

#### **Design**

A sound research design is very crucial to the process of social science inquiry (Patton, 2002). It will serve as a blueprint that maps out a logical sequence of data-gathering and evaluation. For this study, the phenomenological approach grounded on Heidegger's (1962) philosophy was utilized in exploring and illuminating the lived experiences of special education teachers teaching ID learners during this global pandemic.

In clarifying the meanings and experiences of the phenomenon, the research design consisted of interviewing people directly involved in the undertaking. Utilizing this research an in-depth semi-structured interview data collection method enabled SPED teachers to describe their interpreted meanings and understandings of their experiences. Furthermore, the researcher became the research instrument and directed the attention to human realities rather than the concrete realities of objects (Reñosa, 2016), which created a symphony of meanings and understandings and co-created the data from the lived- experiences of the research participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Aside from giving value to the participants' experiences, van Manen (1990) expresses that the nature of this research also gives attention to the practice of thoughtfulness. Careful presentation and interpretation of the experiences of the research participants were observed by the researcher and were deduced to the developments of this research through narration (Letts, 2007).

In particular, the data gathered were subjective and flexible, which were derived from the different points of view of the research participants and were based on their understanding, feelings, and experiences. In this study, the researcher explored, described, and understood the narrative experiences of SPED teachers teaching ID students during the pandemic.

Congruently, Sullivan (2009) reiterated that the data gathering in qualitative research should be non-numerical. To clarify this, the researcher gathered data such as words and categories which are essential in this research. It also considered reality as subjective, personal, and socially constructed concerning the research participants. In detail, the data were gathered through in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires. However, the data collected among the research participants might not represent the general population of SPED teachers who have experienced the same phenomenon (Sullivan, 2009).

Moreover, this inquiry applied the constructivist worldview as it perceives that social phenomenon is created from perceptions and consequent actions of the participants concerned with their existence, and the reality will consist of people's subjective experiences (Bryman, 2015). As outlined by Creswell (2013), constructivism believes that individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work and develop subjective meanings of their experiences that are varied and

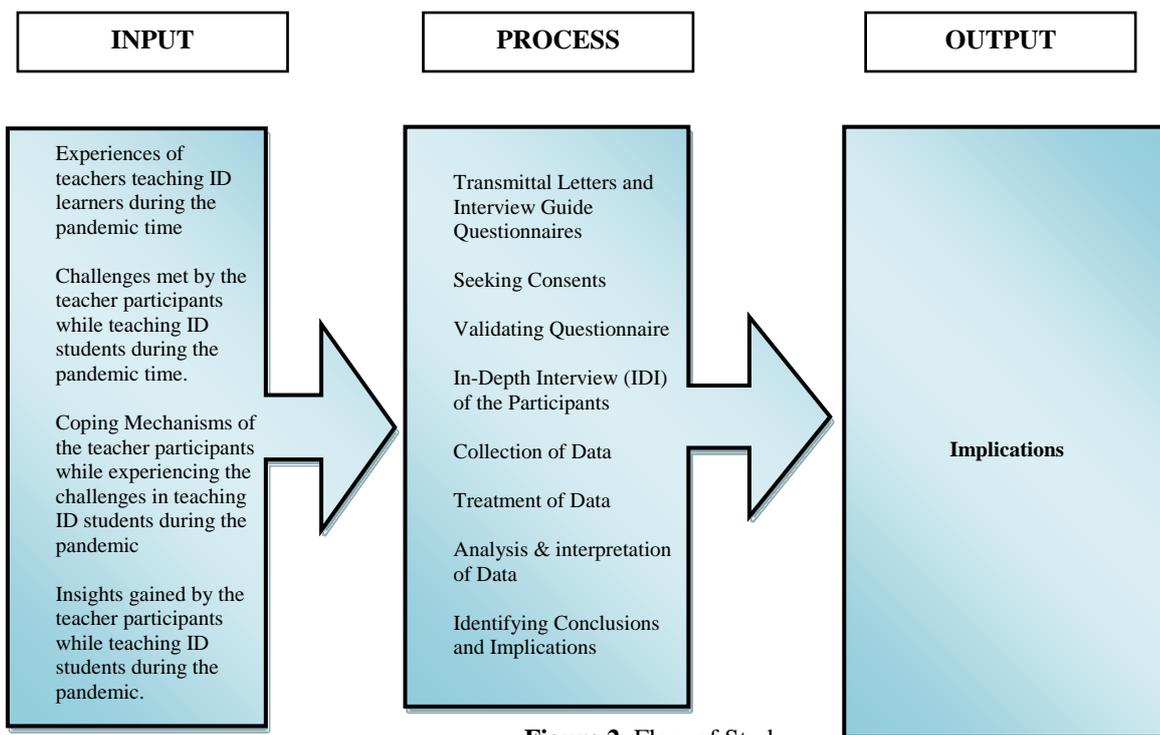
multiple. Human beings construct meanings as they get involved with the world they are interpreting and engage with and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives (Crotty, 1998).

**The Flow of the Study**

The study had three stages following the IPO Model: input, process, and output (Figure 2). Canonizado (2021) iterated that the IPO diagram includes all the materials and the information required in the process, the specific details of the process itself, and the products anchored on the process that took place. Congruently, the input stage in this research includes the preparing required letters such as a letter of permission from the supervisors and to the participants, and the interview guide questionnaire. Moreover, part of the input stage are the experiences of the teachers that need to be culled out and illuminated, which include the challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights.

For the process stage, the letters were sent to the concerned individuals and offices for consent, and the interview guide questions were subjected to validity by experts: one supervisor in special education (SPED), one research expert (preferably Ph.D. in Research), and a school principal of a SPED-implementing school. To illuminate the significant experiences of SPED teachers in teaching ID learners during the pandemic, an in-depth interview was conducted. Afterward, data were collected, consolidated, and treated before they were analyzed and interpreted. Then, as a final step for the process stage, the researcher drew some conclusions and implications from the results.

Finally, the last stage is the output stage. Here, the researcher, after carefully interpreting the results and drawing conclusions, came up with an action plan which includes intervention programs, proposed programs, activities, modules, and other related things.



**Figure 2.** Flow of Study

**Environment**

The study was conducted in the Island Garden City of Samal. This city lies between longitude 125 degrees and 39 minutes 30 seconds to 125 degrees and 47 minutes 28 seconds East, and latitude of 6 degrees 54 minutes to 7 degrees 11 minutes 28 seconds North. Further, it is bounded on all sides by Davao Gulf in which at the west by the municipal waters of Davao City,

at north by the municipal waters of mainland Davao del Norte Province, on the east by the municipal waters of the provinces of mainland Davao De Oro and Davao Oriental. The total land area is 30,130 hectares, inclusive of all component islets, tidal flats, and roads which is approximately 3.7% of the total land area of the entire Davao del Norte Province. It is composed of 46 barangays with four (4) of these are unattached to the mainland, being located at Talicud Island in Kaputian District. The northwest portion of IGACOS is approximately 900 meters away from Davao City, the major economic center of Mindanao Island. It is located at the Apex of Davao Gulf which is part of the summit of the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Economic Region which is the wealthiest zone for marine biodiversity in the whole world (www.samalcity.gov.ph).



**Figure 3.** Geographical Location of Island Garden City of Samal

This study specifically targeted SPED teachers from SPED-implementing schools of the Island Garden City of Samal, namely, Angel Villarica Central Elementary School, Peñaplata Central Elementary School SPED Center, Buhangin Elementary School, Aundanao Elementary School, Kaputian Central Elementary School, and Sta. Cruz Elementary School (Figure 3). The purposely chosen 10 participants were interviewed face-to-face in their houses, in school or any comfortable place the participants chose. Here is the history, programs, services, and LSENs catered by each school:

**Angel Villarica Central Elementary School.** It has been a longtime dream of Angel Villarica Central Elementary School to open a SPED class for learners with special educational needs. It was conceptualized by the school principal and established in the school year 2005–2006. It started with nine pupils, all of whom have an intellectual disability. Unfortunately, it was not sustained due to some circumstances. But the program continued in the year 2011 with eight enrollees, and now it is still open and available, and more learners were catered. At present, they have fifty-one learners, and seven of them are in full inclusion in the general education classroom. The programs of the school are self-contained classes, mainstreaming, full inclusion, and transition program. They catered for learners with intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, visual and hearing impairment.

**Peñaplata Central Elementary School SPED Center.** The Special Education Program started in the year 2004. Enrollment has grown year after year, and there are now 27 self-contained learners, and 25 learners are mainstream and fully integrated into general education classrooms. The SPED implementation is okay because the learners and parents know that there are LSENs in the school, and they are also respected. The programs of the school are self-contained classes, mainstreaming, full inclusion, and transition program. They catered to learners with intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, visual and hearing impairment, and learning disabilities.

**Buhangin Elementary School.** It is one of the SPED implementing schools in the division of Island Garden City of Samal. In the year 2019, one child has already been assessed by a psychometrician and a psychologist. In the same year, they started catering to children with special needs. In 2020, three children were formally evaluated. They don't have a teacher to handle learners with special educational needs during that time. In the same year, God answered their prayer. They already have a SPED teacher to take those children with mild intellectual disabilities. The programs and services of the school are self-contained classes, and full inclusion. They catered to learners with intellectual disabilities.

**Aundanao Elementary School.** The school implemented the Special Education Program in the year 2018. At that time, the school reported five identified learners with special educational needs, and they were diagnosed by a professional expert—a psychologist. In the following years, the number of identified learners with special educational needs increased to eleven. The school currently has seven enrolled learners and is tagged in the Learners Information System (LIS). Of the seven enrolled learners, one of them has a manifestation, and the other six have a medical abstract. Also, the school has one learner enrolled in full inclusion in the general education classroom. The programs and services of the school are self-contained classes, mainstreaming and transition programs (Cookery). They catered to learners with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, difficulty in understanding, difficulty in remembering, difficulty in applying knowledge, and difficulty in communicating.

**Kaputian Central Elementary School.** The Special Education Program was implemented in the year 2015. At present, there are eight (8) learners with special educational needs enrolled in a self-contained class. The school also has three (3) hearing impaired learners enrolled in full inclusion in the general education classroom. The programs and services of the school are self-contained and complete inclusion. They catered to learners with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, and learning disabilities.

**Sta. Cruz Elementary School.** The school opens its doors to children with special needs in the school year 2011-2012. The enrollees at that time were not adequately assessed by a clinical psychologist. Still, the teacher, who was trained in special education, used a checklist to identify children with special needs. It started with just four learners. The school has now enrolled 14 enrollees in self-contained classes and has two fully mainstreamed learners in grade 4. The school also allocated a budget from the school MOOE for the clinical assessment of the learners. The programs and services of the school are self-contained class, mainstreaming, and full inclusion. The school catered to learners with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and hearing impairment.

## Participants

Selection of the research participants was purposively, conveniently, and uniquely done that has the characteristics relevant to the phenomenon and willing to give their informed consent. Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) emphasized the

importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the capability to relay experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants of the study from the six SPED-Implementing schools of the Island Garden City of Samal.

**Table 1**  
Distribution of Participants

School	Number of Participants	%
Angel Villarica Central Elementary School	3	30%
Peñaplata Central Elementary School SPED Center	3	30%
Aundanao Elementary School	1	10%
Buhangin Elementary School	1	10%
Kaputian Central Elementary School	1	10%
Sta. Cruz Elementary School	1	10%
<b>Total</b>	10	100%

Precisely, a set of inclusion criteria were specified by the researcher for this study (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995; Patton, 1990). These are the attributes that participants must possess to qualify for the survey, to wit: a) They are SPED teachers teaching ID learner in a SPED-implementing school of the Island Garden City of Samal; b) They have been in the service for at least five years.

There were ten (10) identified research participants that were perceived to be “information-rich” on the topic, ensuring that the research participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied and that they are willing to share these experiences (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005).

It was believed that the number of research participants did not affect the outcome of this undertaking. Neuman (2003), as referenced by Davis (2009), assured that the number of research participants would not determine the accuracy of a qualitative study. Mason (2010) posited that at least “five to twenty-five” research participants are needed in phenomenological research and “at least six” according to Morse (1994). In addition, Sandelowski, Docherty, and Emden (1997) posited that in any qualitative research, overly large sample sizes tend to impede deep analysis and can threaten the interpretive validity of findings.

These participants were contacted through different platforms, containing a Letter of Invitation outlining the study procedures. The researcher obtained full informed consent before each interview and reaffirmed it as discussions continued. The participants were fully informed and had adequate information regarding the research, could comprehend the information, and had the power of free choice, enabling them to consent to or decline participation voluntarily and its potential risks and benefits of participating in the study. The researcher indicated that participation was strictly voluntary and that failure to volunteer would not result in any penalty or loss of benefits.

## Instrument

The study used a validated researcher-made interview guide questionnaire (Appendix C) which consists of two parts. Part I asks some important demographic profiles of the participants, such as their name (optional), age, sex, school where they teach, teaching position, and the number of years in teaching.

Part II focuses on culling out the significant experiences of teachers while teaching ID learners during the pandemic. It consists of four subparts, namely, experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights. Each subpart has a focus question supported by several probing questions to facilitate ease in answering on the part of the participants.

## Data Gathering Procedure

To explain the participants' lived experiences, the study utilized a semi-structured interview involving predetermined open-ended questions that allow spontaneous, in-depth responses and richness of content with approximately 20 – 50 minutes or longer sessions as permitted and as deemed necessary. The interview was audiotaped using a high-quality audio-recording gadget.

According to Minichiello (1995), in-depth interviewing is a technique that enables the researcher to gain an understanding of meaningful human interaction via the participants' point of view. The goal of in-depth interviewing is to have the participants reconstruct their experiences of the phenomenon under study. In doing so, they will attach their interpretations and meanings to the incidents. Hence, the product of the introspection depended primarily on the research participants' ability to illustrate facts out of their involvement, and the researcher made sure that they fully understood the questions being asked to them (Polkinghorne, 2005).

The contents of the open-ended questions were validated by a member of the research committee, policymakers, SPED supervisors, and DepEd Officials; and the researcher conducted a mock interview with peers (teachers, classmates, etc.) on knowing how to translate and probe the questions to make it more understandable for the participants. Similarly, this was to test if there could be a communication barrier that may interfere with the interview and to understand every single word from the question as common vocabulary between the researcher and the participants is essential to acquire a complete understanding of the phenomenon to be studied.

Before the videotape recorder was turned on, each participant was given an orientation of the possible questions so that they would be comfortable in sharing their answers, and so they could pause in the middle of their statements, knowing that what was in their mind could be answers to other questions. The researcher transcribed all recorded information verbatim after every interview, following the preparation and transcription protocol and principles formulated by McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig (2003). The researcher coded the interview narratives with pseudo-names to protect individual anonymity and any other identifiable data.

## Ethical Considerations

The researcher understands that the outcome of any research investigation can be either beneficial or harmful to the research participants. For such a reason, research protocols and other related procedures and policies of the institution were correctly observed during data collection.

Following the US Department of Health and Human Services (2013), there are five core principles that the researcher needs to consider, such as respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent, and confidentiality. Respect for persons needs an obligation of the researcher not to exploit the weaknesses of the research participants. Self-sufficiency was avoided to maintain friendship, trust, and confidence among the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2012). Beforehand, the researcher sought clearance from the Graduate School and asked permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of DepEd Island Garden City of Samal before conducting the research. Participants who met the criteria were given a letter of invitation and a brief description of what would happen to ease initial apprehension and anxiety; they were informed of the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained. All participants were informed about the study purposes and procedures, and because the study involved only the collection of information, there were no anticipated risks for involvement. Of course, they were informed of the results and findings of the study.

In beneficence, it required a commitment to minimizing risks to the research participants rather than maximizing the profits that are due to them. The anonymity of the interviewee was kept in order not to put each participant at risk. At all times, participants were protected, so every file information file was not left unattended or unprotected (Bricki & Green, 2007).

Transcripts and video files were kept in a secured area after the data analysis, together with the master list of participants' names and code numbers in the event that a participant needed to be contacted for further information or scheduled for a follow-up interview.

Maintaining confidentiality of information to be collected from research participants, the researcher kept all the transcriptions, journals, video recordings, and others related to the study. The researcher maintained the participants' anonymity and prevented anyone outside this undertaking from connecting individual subjects with their responses. The use of study codes was considered as an effective way of protecting the confidentiality of research participants. Any names of persons or places to be disclosed during the interviews were edited and not divulged in any dissemination of the study findings. Where changes are made to the data to ensure confidentiality, care was taken not to distort the meaning conveyed by the participants (Welch, 2001). Meaning, the participants' identities were hidden (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007).

Lastly, justice requires a reasonable allocation of the risks and benefits as results of the research. It is essential to acknowledge the contributions of all the participants as they are generally part of the success of the study. They must be given due credit in all their endeavors (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The researcher hoped that through this study, they had found relief and optimism that all their yearnings concerning distance learning would be addressed by the local and national bureaucracy.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis of this study was guided by the hermeneutic interpretive analysis following the methods of van Manen (1990) for textual features of the qualitative report and was incorporated with the modified version of the process described by Diekmann, Allen, and Tanner (1989). It is a seven-step method of textual analysis to help build a meaning-making process and reflective awareness of the phenomenon being studied, each of which is explicated the work of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle. The process included a re-reading of the narratives and taking notes to encourage visual emergence of "essences" within the individual transcripts and among all interviewees to reveal themes and constitutive patterns.

The answers of the participants were analyzed using hermeneutic thematic analysis with interpretation and reflection of the texts to reveal the embedded meaning of the lived experience. Thematic analysis refers to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work (van Manen, 1990). It is a method of analyzing and reporting pattern or themes with data (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001). This approach was selected to enable in-depth and detailed continuous process of interpretation to expound meanings that participants articulated and their views in relation to their relationship to the whole of the text. Narratives were translated and analyzed. Words, phrases, and statements that describe the lived experiences and those that appeared to be edifying were identified and highlighted. These meanings were isolated, thus forming themes reflecting teachers' experiences and can be understood as the structures of experience.

Following the formation of themes, the highest level of hermeneutical analysis, which is the search for constitutive patterns, was conducted. This involved reading each whole interview again, which projects the perspective of the stories while cascading the linkage between relational themes that exist in all transcriptions. In this way, both the researcher and the participants journeyed to the core of the phenomenon through constant dialogue. The researcher enhanced the interpretation using other relevant text and aesthetic expressions. At the end, an eidetic insight, which is rich in description and interpretation, was used to enmesh varied layers of meaning on the experiences. In this case, new possibilities from this study arose as emerging truths were identified by the researcher and offer as enhancements to distance learning modality (Cody, 1995).

The purpose of phenomenological reflection was to grasp the essential meaning of something. The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involved a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Diekmann, Allen, and Tanner (1989) as cited by Welch (2001) develop a seven-stage analysis process where the text analogues of the collected data are examined for meanings that arise either implicitly or explicitly in the texts. The following details outline the modified hermeneutic interpretative analysis process used by the researcher for this study.

Immersion. Following transcription of the interviews, the first stage of analysis is to examine the individual transcripts of the interviews and familiarize the data. While reading the text of each interview and listening to the videotape, the researcher was again immersed in the participants' stories. Hearing the stories again extended the researcher's overall understanding of

each participant's experiences. Minor editing of the text analogues was made at this point, which included typographical errors and the removal of all identifying information.

**Understanding and Abstraction.** Each individual transcript was summarized into sections or tags/codes. The researcher identified sections as natural breaks within the conversations or when the focus changed. At times, the participants' stories were very long, therefore when this occurred the researcher divided the story into manageable sections usually when the participant paused briefly. When it was necessary to divide the stories into sections, the researcher was extra careful not to distort the meanings expressed by the participants. At this point meaningful statements and excerpts from the texts were used to support the researcher's interpretations.

**Uncovering Thematic Aspects.** At this stage, the researcher compared the identified categories/themes within each individual transcript for commonalities or dissimilarities. That is, each participant's transcript was again individually re-read while the researcher checked the interpretations written in the summaries against the participant's own stories. According to Diekelmann (1992), if unsubstantiated meanings are revealed and inaccurate interpretations are not supported by textual reference, the researcher returns to the text. Therefore, where any differences were noted, the researcher returned to the original transcript and the interview file. This process of comparing the researcher's interpretation with the raw data enabled the researcher to listen to the tone of voice and meaning being attached to the story by the participant, therefore, clarification of any discrepancies was identified.

**Isolating Thematic Statements.** The initial codes and texts generated in the previous stages of analysis were re-read as a whole rather than as individual texts. The purpose of this stage was to identify the essential themes. An essential theme cuts across all texts, highlighting the similarities or contradictions of meaning within the participants' experiences (Diekelmann et al., 1989). Following extensive re-reading and interpretation of the texts, a number of essential themes were identified or extracted from the participants. The overarching themes or dimensions were identified through a deductive process.

**Illumination and Illustration of Phenomenon.** The researcher began to compare and interpret the relational themes to uncover the constitutive patterns existing within the relational themes. The constitutive pattern expressed the relationship of all the themes to be identified. Once themes were identified, they became the objects of reflection and interpretation through follow-up interviews with participants.

**Collaborative Discussions.** The purpose of this stage calls for a validation of interpretations by asking the participants again. The researcher viewed drafts of the themes and constitutive pattern. All responses and suggestions received were integrated into the final draft. The individual texts and audiotapes were also revisited many times enabling the researcher to become further immersed in the hermeneutic circle, gained in-depth understanding of each of the participants' experiences and further validated the interpretation.

**Composition of Linguistic Transformation.** Following validation of the interpreted data, the final analysis occurred. During the presentation of the data, the researcher included in the final written report the translations of the participant's meaningful statements in his own words.

### **Internal Validity**

Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2002) identified several strategies to strengthen a qualitative study's internal validity. Among these strategies are member checks, and peer review or debriefing (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2002).

**Member checking.** Member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the research findings. Member checking involved taking data, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants for their feedback on the accuracy and the overall confirmation of the data (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Participants were asked to review transcripts of their interview to make corrections, deletions, or additions to the data. In addition, the themes associated with the transcript were shared with the participants to determine if they believed the findings were accurate (Creswell 2009; Merriam, 2002).

**Peer review/debriefing.** Peer reviewing is a strategy to be used when peers read and comment on the findings. Basically, the peer examination involves asking a co-worker or a colleague to check some of the raw data and evaluate whether the findings are sensible based on the data (Merriam, 2002). The researcher tapped fellow teachers and principals as the peer reviewers for this study (Creswell, 2009).

### Trustworthiness

The researcher adhered to Guba and Lincoln's (1985) criteria in establishing rigor that includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The four parameters suggested the true value of the products of the study and the accuracy of data interpretations to be collected from the participant's experiences as evidenced by the faithful descriptions to be presented by the researcher.

The credibility of a study equated to the faithful representation or descriptions of the participants' experiences as reflected within the data (Welch, 2001). To establish the credibility, the researcher allowed the participants to review their own transcribed interviews. This provided the participants with the opportunity to modify and agree on the stipulations of the transcript. Minichiello et al. (1995) explained that trustworthiness is achieved by ensuring a close fit between data and what people say and do. Understanding the participants' point of view and seeking clarification of their perception will ensure trustworthiness of data (Welch, 2001). During the interviews, the researcher constantly utilized various methods of probing and cross checking to assist with accurate interpretation and truthfulness during data collection and analysis. Additionally, member checking was done through the involvement of the research participants in ensuring that the experiences of the phenomenon presented in the manuscript were the same as how they were presented by the research participants. This was done through a scheduled face-to-face discussion with the research participants. At this point, the researchers apprise the participants in coming up with the codes, themes, and interrelatedness of the ideas that provided the visual representation of the phenomenon under investigation.

To ensure dependability, the researcher guaranteed that the correct procedure in conducting research was followed. It is guaranteed that the methodological decision through documentation of the research processes or methods to be undertaken in the data collection and analysis, the recorded interviews, and the utilization of the exact transcripts were kept on track. The researcher ensured that copies of all transcripts and drafts were kept intact in a safe place.

Addressing confirmability or auditability, the researcher kept the videotaped interviews, personal journal, transcripts, and note-takings. It refers to the researcher's paper-trail, decisions, methods, and documentations related to the study (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2006). The decision trail of this research was documented and described the methods and processes utilized in this study, including the personal interest in the phenomenon, the aims of the study, invitation to participate and the decisions that encompasses the choice of method and analysis process (Welch, 2001). Correspondingly, the researcher used strategies that narrowed down biases as a researcher by bracketing herself.

In promoting transferability of this research, the researcher committed to share back the result of this undertaking to the research participants, Department of Education, policymakers and to the public at large. As Byrne (2001) defined that transferability refers to the extent to which results, and findings of the study can be applied or gained in other contexts or with other participants. Also, transferability talks about the fittingness of the study that refers to the appropriateness of methods used for data collection, sample size and that the descriptions fit the data from which they are derived (Sandelowski, 1986; Welch, 2001).

The participants of this study are representation of SPED teachers employed at DepEd Island Garden City of Samal. The findings and stories presented characterize a slice of the life world of the participants (Sandelowski, 1986). This slice has meaning and significance to others, thus reflecting the fittingness of this study (Welch, 2001). The findings of this undertaking did not have meaning and significance that can be transferred outside the domain of this study. The reason for sharing this research is to inspire other researchers to conduct similar studies that will support the result of this study. Another key point is that the researcher made sure that the thoughts were organized in a logical manner so that it would be easier for them to understand the views of this research and would have an exciting read.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms used in the study are defined operationally to facilitate ease in understanding the trajectory of this research work.

**Challenges.** These are the tasks, experiences, and situations encountered by the ID teachers that demand their effort to improve or be done successfully.

**Coping Mechanisms.** These are ways, adjustment, or adaptation done by ID teachers that decrease tension and anxiety in a stressful task, experience, or situation.

**Distance Learning.** This refers to a learning delivery modality where instruction and learning occurs remotely between the teacher and the learners.

**Implications.** These refer to the careful interpretations of the researcher on the significant findings and conclusion generated from the thorough analysis of the experiences of SPED teachers while teaching ID learners during the pandemic, as guided by the theories, related studies, and legal bases.

**Inclusive Education.** This means accepting, understanding, and catering to students' differences and diversity, whether that's physical, cognitive, academic, social, or behavioral.

**In-Depth Interview.** This is a qualitative data collection method that permits collecting huge amounts of information about the attitude, behavior, and perception of the SPED teachers teaching ID learners during pandemic.

**Intellectual Disability.** This term is used when an individual has certain restraints in cognitive functioning and skills, including communication, social function, and self-care skills.

**Learners with Special Needs.** These are learners who differ significantly from their peers in terms of their characteristics and educational competence for various reasons.

**Pandemic.** This specifically refers to the COVID-19 pandemic time, where learning takes place through distance learning modalities.

**Phenomenology.** This refers to a qualitative method that studies the appearance of things, or things as they appear in one's experience, or the ways people experience things. Thus, it is much concern on the meaning things have in one's experience.

**Significant Experience.** This refers to the meaningful interpretations and understanding of the SPED teachers on their lived experiences in teaching ID students during pandemic.

**Special Education.** This refers to educating students in a way that adjusts to their individual differences, disabilities, and special needs.

**Special Education Teacher.** A teacher in a SPED-implementing school in the Island Garden City of Samal who instructs learners who have special needs such as emotional, physical, and learning disabilities,

**SPED-Implementing School.** This refers to a school in the Island Garden City of Samal that offers SPED programs catering to those children with special needs.

**Teaching.** This refers to the process of attending to students' needs, experiences, and feelings, and making specific interventions to help them learn during the pandemic situation.

## PRESENTATION, DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This reveals the significant experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of teachers teaching students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) during the pandemic.

Careful thematic analysis was carried out following the seven-step method of textual analysis (Diekmann, 1989). First, individual transcripts of the interviews were examined and familiarized. Then, each transcript was summarized into sections to easily manage the data. Uncovering themes was the next step, followed by isolating these themes to identify the essential themes that cut across all texts, highlighting the similarities or contradictions of meaning within the teachers' experiences. Consequently, relational themes were compared and interpreted to uncover the constitutive patterns existing within them. Then, the drafts of the themes and constitutive patterns were presented to the teacher participants for validation. Finally, significant themes were generated.

## EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS TEACHING ID LEARNERS DURING PANDEMIC

Six (6) significant themes could describe the experiences of ID teachers during the pandemic. For easy recall, the acronym BUTTER is used. It stands for Bounded Communication, Uncapable Parents, Teacher Modification, Teacher Efforts, Effortless Performance, and Restricted Assistance.

### Theme 1. Bounded Communication

COVID-19 increased the use of distance learning and social media for educational and communication purposes. Distance learning can be referred to as e-learning, blended learning, or mobile learning; and can take various forms and be supported by different systems and applications (Ajayi, et al., 2019). The common feature of all these approaches is the fact that

the delivery is remote (Means, et al., 2010). The focal point of remote delivery is to facilitate the exchange of information, which enables the interaction and exchange of knowledge between students at any time. In other words, communication is crucial in the delivery of instruction during the pandemic.

However, this aspect was such a challenge for the teachers as they had a hard time communicating with their students during the pandemic. One very notable response coming from one of the participants goes:

Feedbacking to your learners was very difficult. I cannot talk to the learners personally because at that time we are not allowed to have direct contact to the learners. And I cannot say if they learned something on the module given to them. – **IDT10**

Children with learning differences, like those with intellectual disability, often have difficulties determining their levels of understanding and proficiency. Accordingly, they may need direct feedback and support as often as possible, to evaluate their successes and challenges, hence, feedback must not only be informative, but also supportive to effectively address past difficulties (Time 4 Learning, 2020). Thus, it is essential to make the feedback meaningful for learning.

However, giving feedback during the pandemic is limited due to communication problems. This is something that the study participants considered as one of their significant experiences because they feel that this is such an important aspect of teaching during the pandemic.

## **Theme 2. Uncapable Parents**

Parental Involvement during the COVID-19 lockdowns has taken on an entirely new meaning. Parents were forced to take on new and unfamiliar responsibilities as their children participated in emergency remote education, while experiencing increasing instructional responsibilities (Liu et al., 2020). As a result, parents often struggle with understanding and delivering within the role they are expected to play in their children's learning (Boulton, 2008). They took on the part of teacher without any preparation or training.

In this situation, teachers are uncertain if students learn from the tasks given to them or if they were at least given the proper instruction and assistance for them to accomplish the tasks successfully. One of the participants commented:

That is the very reason if the learners learn something on the module without the presence of the teacher. Not all parents are capable of teaching their children. – **IDT10**

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, parents were suddenly forced to take on additional roles, that is the role of the teacher (Letzel et al., 2020). However, parents were not prepared for this role. They did not have the necessary knowledge, nor did they know how to manage their children as pupils. This is affirmed as one of the participants revealed:

Naa koy mga studyante na ID siya tapos ang parent pod nya no read no write so unsaon pagfollow up sa balay? Gipadala nako ang module for what purpose? Dili siya maansweran, mobalik ang module mo ana ang parent, Ma'am walay nahitabo. (I have an *ID student whose parent can't read nor write, so how is follow up done at home? I gave the module for what purpose? Modules were returned unanswered, and the parent just said, "Maám nothing happens."*) – **IDT8**

Parents may be in the best position to assess their children and their needs. However, they often worry that their insufficient educational background or skills, combined with ever-increasing work and life commitments, will prevent them from providing adequate help or giving enough time to their children's learning.

Indeed, educating their children under the new pandemic realities was a great challenge for parents. This is because they don't have the know-how to teach their children. The worst thing is that this situation did not just affect the students and their learning, but it also affected the well-being of parents. More than 7 in 10 parents claimed that managing their children's learning and adjusting to new routines were extremely stressful (American Psychological Association, 2020).

### Theme 3. Task Modification

For students with disabilities, the key to success in the classroom lies in making the instruction and other classroom activities modified correctly. These modifications may involve changing the way the learning materials are presented, or the way the students answer the tasks to show what they learn. It is for this reason that teachers need to create flexible, adaptable assignments that students can complete in different environments.

Here are some of the thoughts the participants have on this matter.

Yes, ma'am kay kabalo man ko sa bata ma'am na unsa lang iyang kaya mabuhat o dili pa niya makaya. Akong ginamodify ang activity sheets o ilang mga buhaton kay dili nimo mamodified o imoha lang general ang activity sheets nay lisod nay pod sayon lang so mao to modify para masuit sa ilang needs. (Yes, *Ma'am* because I know what the child can do and cannot do. I modified the activity sheets or tasks because if these are not modified, some are difficult and some are easy, so it has to be modified to suit to their needs.) – **IDT7**

Usahay dili na namo ipadala ang learning modules from central office magpadala lang mi og activity sheets na simple lang, mga modified activity sheets. (*Sometimes we don't give them learning modules from the central office, we just give them simple and modified activity sheets.*) – **IDT8**

Modifications must be individualized for students based on their needs and their learning styles and interests (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2020). That is why special education teachers emphasized establishing new routines and behaviors toward adapting to the new teaching dynamics (Balatucan, 2022).

Scales (2009) opined that effective teachers change their teaching methods to match the learning demands of their pupils. This adaptation of teaching methods should meet all three criteria: first, it is non-routine, proactive, thoughtful, and invented; second, it must include a modification in the teacher's professional knowledge or professional practices; and third, it will be done to anticipate the needs of students or instructional situations (Duffy et al., 2008).

### Theme 4. Teacher Efforts

Working during the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly put more pressure on teachers than ever before. And for teachers who work with students with disabilities or others who belong to vulnerable populations, the challenges are much more significant, primarily since students are taught remotely (Around the O, 2022).

While the pandemic made it hard for teachers around the world to perform their jobs, ID teachers had it harder as they experienced lack of training, support, and collaboration with other teachers. There are a lot of issues bombarding ID teachers. For one, they seem to be neglected as they don't have adequate and appropriate resources that they can use in the delivery of instruction. Added to that is the fact that there is no specialized implementation plan for their teaching with the ID and other LSEs.

With these negative situations, ID teachers still instilled in their minds and heart that education of ID students, despite the adversities, must continue. Gradually, they learned how to adapt to the new situation. Little by little, they were able to find ways and means to handle the situation.

One of the many responsibilities of a special education teacher is to make sure that each student with disabilities gets the specific services that are identified within their IEP or Individualized Education Program. Aside from that, you assess students' needs to determine your lesson plans, track student progress, supervise teacher assistants, work with students in groups and one-on-one, and keep parents and other teachers abreast of a student's progress (All Education Schools, 2022). It takes a big heart and enormous effort to be a teacher of ID students and other LSEs.

Two of the participants declared:

Dili ning ana kadali ang pagtudlo sa mga bata nga adunay mga special needs labi na ang mga bata nga ID. Dili siya lalim tudluan,

kailangan siya tagaan og dako nga effort para ang mga bata makakat-on sa imohang pagtudlo sa ilaha labi na gyud walay face to face tanan natong instruction through module. (Teaching children with special needs is not that easy, especially the IDs. They need to be given extra effort to learn from your teaching especially that all instructions are through module and not face to face.) – **IDT9**

During the pandemic, as teachers we are going to strengthen our efforts, time, and concern in reaching out our learners. – **IDT5**

Many students depend on the structure and support of in-person school to help them be at pace with tasks, activities, and assignments (Child Mind Institute, 2022). In distance learning, students need to be responsible for their own learning. Families could be there to help, but many have issues juggling work while their children are learning at home, or worse nobody at home can offer help.

### **Theme 5. Effortless Performance**

The school looks different during the COVID-19 pandemic as it resorted to remote learning, online learning, or distance learning, and while some students are adjusting with this way of learning, many students don't seem to be actively involved in it (Child Mind Institute, 2021). As the schools automatically shifted from face-to-face learning to distance learning, several problems emerged, which included parents answering their children's modules (Luaña, 2021). One participant opined:

Matingala pod ka pagkanext week maisa ra pod hatod tanan makapangutana ka giunsa kaha ni og answer sa bata kay nagtapok na ang buhatonon human makaya ra og answer sa pila ka days, if ang bata lang dili gyud makaya so mao to nay uban parent na ginatolerate ang bata na sila na mobuhat sa activity then ang bata dili makaparticipate sa home-based learning. (You would wonder how come that in the following week, they submitted all modules, how did the child answer all in just a few days. So, some parents tolerated their children, and they accomplished the activity, then the child no longer participated the home-based learning.) – **IDT7**

Luaña (2021) uncovered in his research that this malpractice of parents answering their children’s modules is happening because of these reasons: a) poor reading and writing skills of their children; b) time constraints due to work and household chores; c) too many children to attend to; d) too difficult lessons and subjects; and e) too many learning activities in the modules. It is because of these reasons that students didn’t have the interest to make some efforts in answering the modules.

One participant revealed:

They always say to the teacher, “Ma’am dili na gyud sila ma’am magpatid-patid na sila. Dili na ganahan mo answer sa module kay gikapoy na sila ma’am. (They always say to the teacher, “Ma’am they don’t want to answer anymore the module because they are already tired.”) – **IDT1**

Reasons why students were effortless in doing their tasks during the pandemic are irrelevant and inappropriate content, and stress and trauma (Child Mind Institute 2021).

### **Theme 6. Restricted Assistance**

More than ever, teachers are a vital part of facilitating student learning, well-being, and growth (American Psychology Association, 2020). It is then very essential that teachers have easy access and communication with their students to assist and facilitate them in their learning. However, this is not the case during the pandemic, as in-person learning in the classroom is not possible.

Some of the participants articulated:

Sa panahon sa pandemic, mura bitaw na disconnect ta sa atong studyante. Lahi ra ang feeling na makita nimo sila. Sa pagtudlo man gud if face to face matagaan nato sila og instruction. (In this time of the pandemic, we seem to be disconnected from our students. It’s different when you see them. In teaching through face to face, we can give them instruction.) – **IDT3**

Akong paghandle sa mga bata ma'am na-experience nako na lisod ang transitioning method sa bata gikan sa classroom setting tapos na transition into home-based learning kay naay pandemic. If naa ka sa school mas daghan ang imong magive na time, learnings and needs sa bata ma-address gyud nimo. (Handling the kids during pandemic, I experience that transition from classroom setting to home-based learning is hard for the child. If you are in school, you can give more time, and the learnings and needs of the child are addressed.) – **IDT7**

*The thing I don't like most during the time of pandemic is losing the quality of special attention nga kailangan to address because they need to be given special attention to assist their needs.* – **IDT2**

*I don't like most in teaching ID learners during the pandemic is I don't have direct contact with the learners to give instructions and additional inputs based on their educational needs.* – **IDT10**

Because teachers were restricted in assisting their students, the needs of the students were left unattended, causing the students to be unmotivated and uninterested in doing their tasks.

## **CHALLENGES OF TEACHERS TEACHING ID LEARNERS DURING PANDEMIC**

ID teachers undeniably faced lots of challenges during the pandemic. This research was able to cull out from them five (5) significant themes describing their challenges. These are Communication, Resources, Effectiveness, Accessibility, and Monitoring (CREAM).

### **Theme 1. Communication**

Before COVID – 19 pandemic, communication could be easier established through direct contact and feeling the other. This was already difficult when the pandemic struck. But the value of communication has never changed significantly in education. Teachers still need direct contact with their students to give them the assistance they need to facilitate their learning. This is much more applicable to students with learning disabilities, like those with intellectual disabilities. This is because these students can learn best if there is the actual presence of their teacher. However, parents were already the ones contacted by teachers to help them to facilitate the learning of their children. This was done through the use of social media and other applicable platforms.

Educators emphasized the challenge of communicating with parents because not all parents have smartphones and social media accounts (Toquero, 2020).

A participant opined:

Pinakachallenge (The most challenging) are the feedbacks and the communications between the teacher and the parents because some of the parents without cell phone or any gadgets we cannot communicate them – **IDT2**

Since communication was done through the use of gadgets, this was a challenge mentioned by parents because there are families who cannot afford to have it, or if they have the gadget, the internet connection will be another issue.

### Theme 2. Resources

The teachers recognized that the inadequacy of available support and assistance, such as teaching materials and training during pandemic had caused difficulties in teaching effectively to the students with additional needs (Balatucan, 2022). Additionally, effective teaching methods are critical for student achievement (Hande, 2014), and a scarcity of teaching materials contributes to ineffective teaching methods (Mupa, 2014). This is experienced by the participants of the study. Two of them commented that:

During the time of pandemic, our learning materials are not available dili kaayo substantial sa mga bata. Usually, module sa Kinder ang atong ginagamit pero dili kaayo totally ma-fit sa ilaha so ginamodify pod namo. (During the time of the pandemic, our learning materials are not available and are not substantial for the students. Usually, Kinder modules were used but modified because the *modules don't fit well to them.*) – **IDT6**

Maybe the modules because in the *SPED Program we don't have a modified activity* or modules that we call our own. We just copy the MELC from the kindergarten and the MELC are not simplified, and the instructions are not concise so with the learners with intellectual disability the activity are more repetitive because we only give those activities that are appropriate for them. – **IDT7**

While it is true that the pandemic gave some difficulties in teaching children with special needs, teachers are always expected to find ways and means to attain the objectives set for the specific lessons. According to Zuur et al. (2013), in the context of classes as a standardized form of teaching and learning, teaching, and learning resources could be defined as the instruments of presentation and transmission of prescribed educational materials. The wide usage of instructional materials has its positive and negative ideas. Hence, there is a need for teachers to correctly choose the appropriate ones for the level of the learners.

### Theme 3. Effectiveness

Because of the limitations caused by the pandemic, which included limited personal interactions, school environments have drastically changed to meet students' educational needs by using distance learning (Davis, 2021). The problem is how special education teachers deliver services for students with disabilities using distance learning. It is a fact that LSENs need to have personal interactions with their students for effective learning to happen. That is why one of the themes emerged in a study conducted by Davis (2021) is that distance learning is less effective for LSENs.

You cannot teach them the lessons properly, you cannot teach them physically, you cannot extend help in their study, and you cannot cater it well because of pandemic. – **IDT2**

Another aspect that has affected the effectiveness of the delivery of instruction was the limited know-how of teachers in using new forms of delivering education. One of these was the use of gadgets and computer applications which was essential during the pandemic.

A participant commented:

Isa ka challenge is gusto ta na magtudlo gyud sa mga bata pero tungod sa pandemic kay gi allow na mag online class pero dili man ko kabalo unsaon pagkuri-kuri sa gadget. Lahi man gud ang accommodation sa balay ug sa school mao to nga mag online unta para makita ang mga bata pero wala nabuhat kay dili ta hanas sa computer. (One of the challenges is we really want to teach the students because we are allowed to do it online, *but I don't know how to use the gadget. Accommodation at home is really different from school so online can be done but I can't do it because I'm not skilled about computers.*) – **IDT3**

The increasing influence of media, especially television, internet, and internet communication, and the rapid development of science and technology, has already embraced the whole community, including that of the education system. This is the reason why the students of today in this era of technology, have varied interests and views on education and the educational process (Zuur, 2013). Hence, in today's world, it isn't easy to imagine teachers teaching only through a verbal presentation. Modern teaching and learning resources are needed to get the children motivated. Their contribution to the teaching process is manifold, therefore, the teaching process is interesting for the children. Hence, their intellectual and emotional capacities are enhanced.

#### **Theme 4. Accessibility**

For teachers, accessibility is essential to have direct communication with their learners during the pandemic. However, this aspect was also a challenge for the teachers. For one, transportation is a challenge during the pandemic.

One participant stated:

Challenges lang is that lagyo ilang balay, lahi-lahi ang barangay. Then the kalisod sa dalan maski nagkotse nami gibilin lang namo sa dalan. (The challenge is that their houses are far from each other, of different barangays. Then we just left our car on the road because the road is not passable.) – **IDT4**

Some students are located in different areas while others are in remote locations, so it is a challenge to reach out to the learners during this pandemic since the clustering limits the jurisdiction for their mobility (Toquero, 2020).

Another participant affirmed:

Because of the pandemic not every day you can go to their place because bawal (we are prohibited) or layo ang distance sa mga houses (far distances of houses). – **IDT2**

This problem is inevitable. Even during regular classes in a face-to-face situation, teachers are expected to go around the classroom so that their presence is felt by each and every one. Learners are motivated when the proximity of the teacher is felt (Plos One, 2020).

### **Theme 5. Monitoring**

Many SPED teachers are struggling to monitor and assess the learning of the students during the pandemic. Long (2021) emphasized that there is difficulty in establishing and strengthening connections with students with additional needs because they rely on body language, eye contact, and other face-to-face interactions when learning. That is why ID teachers looked for ways to reach their students so that they could have at least a chance to monitor and give the proper feedback to their students. They resorted to home visitation and/or requesting parents to visit the school.

Some of the participants pronounced:

As a teacher, the challenge is home visitation, and you monitor the progress of the child and in answering the module. – **IDT2**

Makacomunicate ka through parent lang pod naay mga feedbacks pero dili nimo makita ang actual na bata na siya gyud nagconduct ana na activities. (You can only communicate through the parents. They give you feedback, but you cannot see the child conducting the activities.) – **IDT7**

It can be deduced from the responses from the participants that although they have the avenues available to monitor and give feedback to their learners, there is still a question of effectiveness. They were not sure if they gave the proper feedback because students were not directly assessed as to their performance in the tasks assigned.

### **COPING MECHANISMS OF TEACHERS TEACHING ID LEARNERS DURING PANDEMIC**

Six (6) themes could describe the coping mechanisms of ID teachers during the pandemic. These are Constant Communication, Home Visitation, Effective Collaboration, Educational Adjustment, Self-Motivation, and Extra Effort (CHEESE).

### **Theme 1. Constant Communication**

Despite the challenges of the SPED teachers in monitoring and assessing their students' development while learning remotely, they have also noted that through teacher-parent collaboration and communication among co-sped teachers, solutions were developed to partially address constraints in monitoring and assessing student progress (Balatucan, 2022).

One participant stated:

Challenges na state ganiha akola lang masulti para ma-address ang challenges is full cooperation and full communication between parent and teacher kay mao mana ang bridge namo sa pag-address pagkuan sa bata. (For the stated challenges, these can be addressed through full cooperation and full communication between parent and teacher because this is the only bridge to address the needs of the child.) - **IDT7**

Another participant affirmed:

My most successful intervention, actions during the pandemic are the home visitation, consistent communications between me and the parents, and asking them what the difficulties are in teaching their children and how they implement discipline during the activity in answering the modules. – **IDT1**

### **Theme 2. Home Visitation**

Some students have difficulties answering their modules, and their parents are unsure how to advise and instruct them. Thus, teachers conducted home visitation to monitor the progress of the students, particularly the challenging students (Alferez, 2022).

The participants declared:

During the pandemic, home visitation plays a big role in teaching the children. This is the time that we meet the pupils and parents, and instructions were also given. – **IDT5**

Most successful is the home visitation. That is also the time to review their answer in the module as a way of follow up or tutoring the child. – **IDT2**

It can be deemed from the participants' responses that home visitation became one if not the most effective and efficient avenues for teachers to deliver instruction. In this way, they can have direct interaction, which is essential for ID students in facilitating their learning.

### Theme 3. Effective Collaboration

During the pandemic, the skills in communicating and collaborating were developed among special education teachers. These two 21st century skills have played a critical part in allowing teachers to carry on with the challenges of teaching during the pandemic (Balatucan, 2022).

Participants of this study have these statements to confirm this.

Siguro ma'am makatabang ang mga colleagues nga ma-ask nimo if unsa pod mga strategies ilang mga ginahimo. Naa mi GC sa akong friend from Davao City, ang uban naa sa Tagum. Mga SPED teachers sila diin maka-ask pod ka giunsa nila ug makakuha ka ideas unsaon. (I think colleagues can help a lot because you can ask them what strategies and interventions they applied. We actually have a group chat with my friends in Davao City and Tagum City who are also SPED teachers and you can ask them what they do so you can get ideas.) – **IDT8**

I keep on asking for information from my co-SPED teacher on what to do to cater their needs and they are very responsive with my concerns. – **IDT8**

Teachers' coping mechanisms and adaptability in teaching during the pandemic were largely attributed from the support obtained from colleagues and assistance acquired from the parents of the students with special needs (Balatucan, et al., 2022).

### Theme 4. Educational Adjustment

Adjustment in the educational settings is very crucial, especially for learners with special needs. This was true also with ID teachers in dealing with their students amid the dire situation. They were adjusting by initiating their own contextualized materials and ways of delivering them just to ensure that learning would take place.

The participants shared:

There are lessons na kinahanglan makita nila ang teacher na maghatag og verbal instruction so nagbuhat ko og video lessons sa mga bata and gihatagan nako ang mga parents. (There are lessons that they need the teacher to give instructions so what I did was that I made video lessons and I gave it to the parents.) – **IDT6**

Nagbuhat mi og movable cubicle/table nakabalot og cellophane og didto ko maghatag instructions sa mga bata while sila pod nagset up og table gawas sa ilang balay with social distancing na makita lang pod mi nila na mag-instruct. Very participative ang mga bata while nagshow mi og flashcards, nagbasa sila, and naka-identify sila. So, mao to ang the best na nabuhat namo para sa mga bata. (We made a movable cubicle wrapped with cellophane and it's where we give instructions to the children while they also set a table outside their house just to see us when we give them the instruction. They were very participative while we showed flashcards. They read and identified. That was the best strategy we have done for the children.) – **IDT6**

An exploratory study conducted found that during the pandemic, the teachers made adjustments in teaching and learning designs guided by the policies implemented by the institution (Dayagbil, 2021). This was true also with ID teachers in dealing with their students amid the dire situation. They were adjusting by initiating their own contextualized materials and ways of delivering them just to ensure that learning would take place.

#### **Theme 5. Self-Motivation**

Undeniably, teachers have emotional struggles while teaching during the pandemic. The feelings of worry, uneasiness, discomfort, and uncertainty engulfed the teachers during this trying and difficult time. (Balatucan, et al., 2022).

Below are significant statements from the participants regarding stress management and how they motivate themselves to continue their tasks despite the odds.

The coping mechanisms that I did to address the challenges that I encountered is I let myself to be motivated. I set my mind to focus, that I need to reach out my learners so that I can address their educational needs. – **IDT10**

Kailangan gyud mangita og mga pamaagi sama sa stress management kay kato na time stress pod ta kay gusto nato naa pod tay mahimo. (We need to find ways like stress management because at that time we are so stressed, we want to do something.) – **IDT10**

The ability of teachers to manage their feelings of worry, uneasiness, and discomfort is essential since teaching with fear and tension affects the learning achievements of students. Aydin (2021), as mentioned by Balatucan (2022), stressed that teaching anxiety may profoundly affect both the teaching and learning processes. In addition, emotional management is now an essential factor in teaching effectively and adapting to the new normal teaching.

Balatucan (2022) commented that while stress is inevitable, the way teachers respond to it and learn to manage stress makes them more effective in teaching students and attending to their school responsibilities.

### Theme 6. Extra Effort

Making extra effort was crucial if we talk about education during the pandemic, especially with the LSEs. These groups of students were already difficult to handle even in the face-to-face scenario, much more with the pandemic situation where personal interactions were less possible.

The participants have these statements to say:

Ikaw teacher effort lang ka mangita og paamagi para makatabang sa mga bata. Isa lang gyud ka word ma'am effort lang gyud ang kailangan. (You as a teacher must exert effort to find ways to help the child. *One word only, Ma'am, we need effort.*) – **IDT9**

Constant follow-up through their parents and asking about what the child did in their home. Do they answer their module or not? – **IDT5**

ID teachers have shown extraordinary efforts just to carry out their responsibilities. Just like any other teachers, they are always on the go for the advancement of quality education even in difficult times. In a joint statement of David Edwards, General Secretary, Education International; Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organization; Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO; and Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, UNICEF, they said that in this crisis, teachers have exerted great leadership and innovation to make sure that no learner is left behind (UNICEF, 2020). Everywhere, teachers have worked individually and collaboratively to seek solutions and create unique learning environments for their students to ensure that education continues (UNICEF, 2020).

### INSIGHTS OF TEACHERS TEACHING ID LEARNERS DURING PANDEMIC

Pandemic time was challenging but fruitful. Fruitful in the sense that ID teachers were able to realize and learn many things from their experiences. There are five (5) significant themes generated from their insights. These are Flexibility, Regard, Upskilling, Innovativeness, and Tenacity (FRUIT).

#### Theme 1. Flexibility

A phenomenological study revealed flexibility and adaptability, the power of communication, and effective problem-solving strategies as the top three emerging themes for the teachers' lived experiences during the pandemic. (Villareal, et al., 2022). In this study, flexibility is also one of the significant themes that could describe their insights as they teach ID students during the pandemic.

One participant remarked:

I learned na dapat flexible ang teacher para madeliver nato ang desired learning outcome sa bata. Ang atong gusto na ihatag sa ilaha is makuha nila kadtong paghatag o pagsupport sa mga instructional materials, communication, modified activity sheets, og pag-instruct sa parent unsa iya buhaton sa bata. (I learned that the teacher must be flexible so that we can deliver the desired learning outcome. We want to support them with instructional materials, communication, activity sheets, and the giving of instruction to parents on what the child should do.) – **IDT7**

Flexibility also comes with readiness. When a teacher is ready for whatever possibilities, adjustments and adaptability can be easily implemented.

Another participant realized:

Teaching ID learners during pandemic gave me an eye opener that we should be ready anytime, whatever difficulties that will come in teaching them.  
– **IDT5**

Teaching special education can be discouraging at times, and what is frustrating is that ID students may not have the maturity to suffer quietly alone. Being tough and focusing on positive feedback will protect teachers from burning out over negative situations (All Education Schools, 2022).

### **Theme 2. Regard**

Special education teaching provides the opportunity to love and appreciate others regardless of their capabilities or behavior. Seeking to truly understand and encourage students will help both the teacher and student go far (All Education Schools, 2022).

Some notable statements from the participants are the following.

The lessons I learned from my experience in *teaching ID learners during the pandemic is that “no children should be left behind.” If you have this kind of learner, you should embrace them and let them feel that they belong and exist in the society.* – **IDT10**

Realization nako is murag nabutang ko diri na situation siguro gi-annoint gyud sa Ginoo to really open your big heart pa gyud sa mga kabataan nga sama niini because some of them are neglected baya gyud sila tungod kay ning ana ilang sitwasyon human ang parents wala kaayo nagcare basta lang naprovide nila ang needs pero actually ang gusto lang man gyud sa mga bata na mo keep in touch lang gyud sa ilaha. Akong narealized na to really love more the children with special needs. (I realized I am here because God wants me to open my big heart to children like them because some of them *are neglected and their parents don't care much for them.* They just provide the needs but actually what these children want is to keep in touch with them. I realized that I really love more the children with special needs.) – **IDT4**

During the pandemic teaching ID learners is difficult but then kung naa lang gyud tay (when we have heart towards that kind of children nothing is impossible.) – **IDT8**

### Theme 3. Upskilling

One of the concerns in the implementation of teaching during the pandemic is the difficulty to navigate various technological tools that would help teachers conduct lessons, monitor student progress, and communicate with parents and colleagues (Balatucan, 2022).

This is what the participants discerned about this.

Kung mostorya ta sa performance sa teacher wala may nausab kay motrabaho man gihapon ta as teacher. Ang maistorya lang nako is kailangan gyud ta na ma-equip sa mga gadgets ug social media platforms kay wala baya ta nagdahum na maabot ni nga time. (*Talking about teachers' performance, nothing would change because teachers still work. What I can only say is that we need to equip ourselves with gadgets and social media platforms*) – **IDT3**

My insights from the experience that I have in teaching ID learners is that "you cannot give what you don't have." Just expose yourself to the different SPED trainings that the department might offer so that you can grasp new things, new knowledge, and skills that you can impart to your learners that will keep them develop and enhance their needs. – **IDT10**

Given the current circumstances, there is a growing need for teachers to integrate technology into their teaching methods and lessons. Boholano and Jamon (2021) asserted that one of the most vital skills that teachers must have in teaching during the pandemic is the ability to use technology. Certainly, teachers without technological skills will not be able to survive in these unprecedented circumstances (Boholano & Jamon, 2021)

### Theme 4. Innovativeness

The ability to find new ways to explain and demonstrate subject matter is often the single most effective characteristic a special education teacher can possess. Bringing creativity into the classroom will have the benefit of enriching your classroom environment as well (All Education Schools, 2022).

In this time of pandemic nakakita ta og lain na venue sa pagtudlo (we find other venues in teaching). We used different approaches and I think it is effective like home-based instruction. – **IDT6**

With the experience that I have in teaching ID learners during the pandemic it made me realize that handling learners with educational needs is not easy especially during the pandemic because you will do all the necessary things to fill in the gap that your learners should cope up. – **IDT10**

### Theme 5. Tenacity

Worry, uneasiness, discomfort, and uncertainty definitely have engulfed the teachers during the pandemic. (Balatucan, 2022). However, they eventually learned to adapt to the new teaching and learning modality and became comfortable with it.

Although they still worried and felt uneasy at times, they were capable of managing their worry, uneasiness, and discomfort (Balatucan, et al., 2022).

Two participants contended:

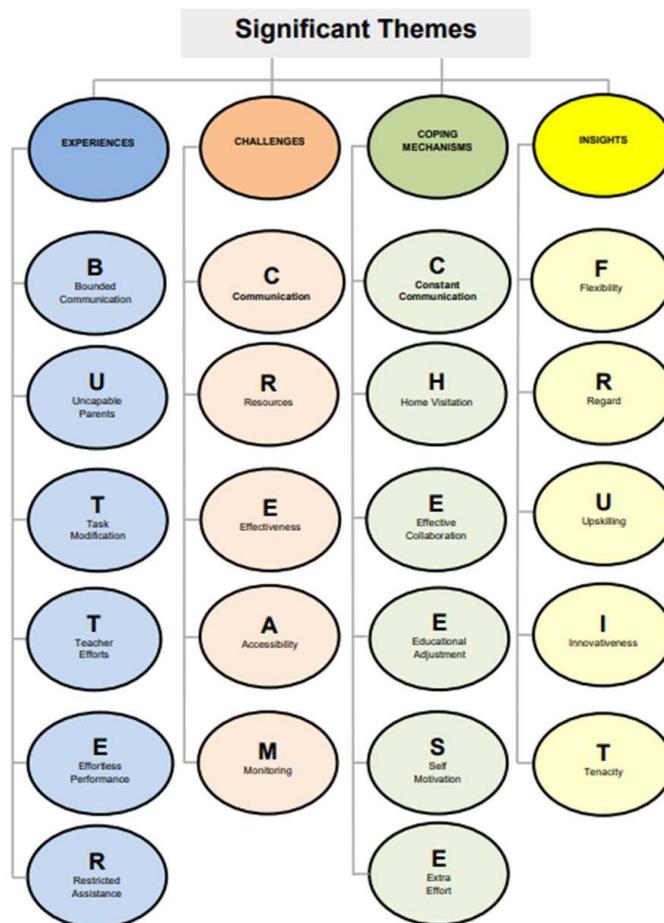
Though challenging, naay time stress, naay time hopeless pero dili ta pwede magpaluya-luya so effort, effort, effort. Dili pwede mawala ang effort para sa mga bata. (Though challenging, sometimes stressed, sometimes *hopeless, but there's no time to feel tired and hopeless, so we need to have effort, effort, effort. We need effort for the children.*) – **IDT9**

Dili diay dapat maluya. Kung mawad-an man og gana mangita pod ta og ways and means nga mo cope up ta sa atong sarili nga molaban pata kay naay mga bata naghulat sa atoa. (We should not be weak. If we lose interest, we will find ways and means to cope up ourselves to fight because there are children waiting for us.) – **IDT8**

Sometimes comparatively simple tasks can become long, arduous battles for students with learning disabilities. Teachers need to offer hope and encouragement in difficult situations. Teaching special education means celebrating victories, whether for long-awaited successes or simple ones (All Education Schools, 2022).

#### **SUMMARY OF THEMES**

In a nutshell, four areas were carefully explored in this study relative to the experiences of teachers teaching ID learners during the pandemic. These are their remarkable experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and their insights. Presented in Figure 4 is the summary of the major themes generated after careful analysis of the data which were discussed one by one in the preceding sections. For their remarkable experiences, the themes generated are bounded communication, incapable parents, task modification, teacher efforts, effortless performance, and restricted assistance. With regard to their challenges, it includes communication, resources, effectiveness, accessibility, and monitoring. Their coping mechanisms are constant communication, home visitation, effective collaboration, educational adjustment, self-motivation, and extra effort. Finally, the insights of the teachers are flexibility, regard, upskilling, innovativeness, and tenacity.



**Figure 4.** Significant Themes on Teaching ID Learners During Pandemic

**SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS**

This presents the summary, findings, conclusions, and implications based on the data collected, thematic analysis, and establishment of links among the themes vis-a-vis related studies, theories, legal bases, and other relevant information.

**SUMMARY**

This study utilized the phenomenological approach grounded on Heidegger’s philosophy in exploring and illuminating the lived experiences of special education (SPED) teachers teaching students with intellectual disabilities (ID) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In-Depth Interview (IDI) was the tool of inquiry used in this study to enable SPED teachers to describe their interpreted meanings and understandings of their experiences. There were ten purposely identified research participants perceived to be “information-rich” on the topic. They are teachers from SPED-implementing schools teaching ID Students for at least five years in the Island Garden City of Samal. Their answers were analyzed using hermeneutic thematic analysis with interpretation and reflection of the texts to reveal the embedded meaning of their lived experiences. Finally, to unfold the implications of the study, careful analysis was done by linking the significant themes to related studies, theories, legal bases, and other significant information.

## **FINDINGS**

The summary of findings is presented and arranged according to the research problems. They are as follows:

Relative to the remarkable experiences of ID teachers during the pandemic, six significant themes were unfolded. These are Bounded Communication, Uncapable Parents, Task Modification, Teacher Efforts, Effortless Performance and Restricted Assistance (BUTTER).

As to their challenges encountered, these can be compressed into five themes, namely, Communication, Resources, Effectiveness, Accessibility and Monitoring (CREAM).

Further, ID teachers revealed six themes describing their coping mechanisms that could address the challenges they encountered. These are Constant Communication, Home Visitation, Effective Collaboration, Educational Adjustment, Self-Motivation and Extra Effort (CHEESE).

Finally, on the insights of ID teachers on their experiences during the pandemic, five significant themes were illuminated. These are Flexibility, Regard, Upskilling, Innovativeness and Tenacity (FRUIT)

## **CONCLUSION**

Education, indeed, has dramatically changed its landscape because of the pandemic. Teachers undoubtedly experience a lot of challenges as they continue to deliver the quality education the students deserve. Several issues were also culled out based on the shared experiences of ID teachers during the pandemic. It can be deduced from the results of this study that ID teachers, despite the challenges and difficulties encountered, were up and kicking to keep ID students still on track to learn and improve themselves even during this challenging time of the pandemic. ID teachers were innovative and strategic as they looked for ways and means just to make learning as effective as it could be.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The following are the implications based on the findings of the study.

For effective learning to occur, it is better to implement face-to-face modality, but this should come along with intensive care for the safety of these students. With proper application of the safety protocols and a carefully thought-out implementation plan, this could be possible since there are only a few students in SPED programs.

It is also very imperative that the education sector should fully support special education teachers to ensure that students with additional needs receive a high-quality education despite the pandemic. This study emphasized that the education sector should provide other training sessions for Special Education teachers on how to use various online platforms so that they will become proficient in using technology inside the classroom and better teach students in remote instruction.

It is also imperative that teachers are ready for whatever circumstances that might occur. Being forward-looking could be of great help. Teachers must be at pace with the present demands of education. That is why it is of utmost importance that they must upskill and upgrade themselves.

On the parents' side, the new setup means they play an even more significant role in their children's studies. It is then very vital to capacitate and empower parents in the learning process of their children. They need to be equipped, at least at a minimum, with how to deal with their ID children, and instruct them well as to how to guide their children in accomplishing the task. They need to be aware also of some basic things that they have to do in dealing with their children. The school and the SPED teachers must initiate training of this kind so that parents are not just dependent on teachers, but they can be of help also in the progress of their children.

For the researcher who is also SPED teacher, it is high time that more studies on ID students and other LSENs must be done to understand their situation and be able to come up with better initiatives and interventions. Research of this kind in the future would open more doors and opportunities for LSENs. We need a lot of empirical evidence so that educational leaders would be convinced to come up with relevant policies, programs, actions, and interventions for this particular group of learners.

For other researchers who are also willing and interested in studying LSENs, it is encouraged that they use the important information from this study to explore more. Exploratory research would be very fascinating and relevant so that more valid and reliable information could be generated. It is recommended that more research be conducted to understand the situation and perspectives of special education teachers deeply in teaching during the pandemic and address their concerns to better the teaching-learning situation of SPED.

## OUTPUT OF THE STUDY

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the findings of the study, the following implications were drawn:

The Department of Education must consider a face-to-face modality to be implemented for ID students as this is more appropriate for them so that learning would take place. Since ID students and other LSEs need a lot of personal encounters with their teachers for their education, it is very imperative to implement face to face modality or, at a minimum, intensify home visitation. There were a lot of experts saying that with the pandemic situation, it would be impossible for special education to be meaningful and fruitful because they would rely more on personal, individualized instruction. They even considered halting their classes during this time, but this should not be an option. Education must continue and DepEd must find practical and reliable means to cater to the needs of the ID learners.

Moreover, the results of this study strongly imply that education leaders must not neglect the LSEs and that this particular group of learners must also be laid down with a concrete and viable plan should there be situations like this of COVID-19 pandemic. Educational leaders must consider crafting policies and programs that would help the LSEs experience learning still at its best in the pandemic situation.

On the part of the teachers, this study opens many doors for them to open and opportunities for them to consider. For one, there is a need for them to upskill themselves so that they can be at pace with the needs of the time. They must also realize that self-motivation or simply pushing oneself to do more is very essential in dealing with ID students during the pandemic. When motivated well, patience and tenacity would prevail, and making extra efforts from them is no longer a job but a passion. One more thing is that they need to be flexible and resourceful. They need to understand that DepEd sometimes has lapses and shortcomings and that they must make some adjustments and modifications. They have to be innovative and strategic so that approaches, resources, and methods are appropriate for the unique needs of their students.

Parents also have takeaways from the results of this study. Constant communication and collaboration with the teachers are essential for effective learning. When teachers have good access to parents and students, monitoring and feedbacking become manageable, and appropriate interventions, assistance, and actions can be given. Special education teachers had to shift to teaching parents to teach their children, because the only way they can reach the students is through their parents or other adults who are with them. Thus, as the facilitators of learning, parents should be capacitated and empowered to facilitate education at home effectively. It is then very essential that parents have suitable access and communication with the school and the teachers, and this is something that needs to be developed and strengthened in SPED schools.

The ID learners must also do their share for their advancement. With the help of the teachers, parents, and other concerns they need to develop a sense of responsibility and cooperation. They have to understand that they are also responsible for their learning. This is something that needs to be instilled in them. Without their cooperation, no action or intervention will succeed.

As to the researcher of this study, this demands more exploration on this topic. There are still a lot of areas and aspects of ID education that need to be studied deeply. So, there is a need to do more research.

For future research, there is a need to focus on getting the real stories from the people directly involved in the situation. Thus, more qualitative studies could strengthen the information gathered and lead to a better understanding of the actual situation. This research has culled out significant themes, some are expected and familiar, and some are new and unique, but one thing is for sure, there could be other themes that might not have been explored in this study. This could somehow ignite the researcher of this study and other interested researchers to investigate further in order to provide a clearer view and understanding of the situation. Consequently, having a good grasp of the circumstances and additional information involving the teachers while teaching ID students during the pandemic would lead to coming up with more reliable actions and interventions which could serve as a guide every time there are unprecedented times like this of COVID-19 pandemic.

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