Experiences of Students with Special Needs in Senior High School: A Phenomenology of Success

Joy R. Amit, LPT[a], Mary Ann M. Palima, LPT[b]

[a]joy.amit@hcdc.edu.ph, [b]maryann.palima@hcdc.edu.ph,

[a] Monkayo National High School, Davao De Oro, 8806
[b], Jesus J. Soriano National High School, Davao City, 8000,

Abstract

Having a disability is not easy. It hurdles so many things that a student wants to do. It limits their mobility and capability, especially in achieving school-related tasks. This study aimed to explore the challenges, aspirations, and coping mechanisms of Senior high School students with disability and is anchored to Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura and others as this study's guiding theoretical framework. A qualitative design utilizing a phenomenological approach was used with a purposeful sample of four students from Senior High school with different disabilities. Interviews and semi-structured guide questions were conducted to explore the students' experiences with special needs. Thematic analysis was employed for the data by coding, categorizing, creating themes, and data reduction. The themes that emerged from the data on the lived experiences of Senior High school students were challenges in terms of accessibility, Curriculum Adaptation, and Peer interaction. The themes in terms of coping mechanisms were ignoring individuals, managing time wisely, and having faith in God. The findings of this study can contribute to teachers and future researchers about Senior high school students' lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in dealing with students with disabilities.

Keywords: lived experience, coping mechanism, Special Needs, qualitative research

1. Introduction

In pursuit of educational equity and social inclusion, the experiences of students with special needs in senior high school and their phenomenology of success represent a critical frontier. We can make a real difference, strengthen individual s, and create environments that allow all students to be successful regardless of their abilities through recognition of the urgency of this issue and exploring the lived experience of these students. Reid (2015) stated that students with disabilities are likely to be bullied. It means that there are a lot of problems or impacts on the emotions of students with special needs. If there are some activities that require physical strength and ability, it may be difficult for them to adjust, and it can affect their mental or emotional health by comparing themselves to other normal students. In this way, they will lose hope or interest in their study because they cannot focus, or they will see it as a hindrance in achieving their life goals.

Darrow (2014) found out that students with special needs are often faced with numerous challenges as they progress through their school years. In addition, to challenges, they may encounter additional difficulties such as bullying in school and a lack of social acceptance by their peers that affects their emotions and even in their everyday living it will add struggle to their feelings.

In Davao City, Llemit (2020) students who have special needs like hearing impairment or deaf since birth face challenges in expressing themselves and the message they try to convey. They also tend not to become successful in higher education. This affects their emotional status because of the problem they are encountering, and it has a huge impact on students with special needs.

It was highlighted that the Philippine Government apply possible educational interventions to supplement their learning amid the pandemic and offers recommendations and services to be responsive to the educational, socio-emotional, and mental health needs of the students with disabilities amid the pandemic. So, in that case, the emotions of differently abled students will be guided to lessen the problems that affect their emotional status.

The Senior High student with special needs wants to share their experiences about the challenges and difficulties in dealing with the emotional problems that they encountered. On the other side, all students have a fair share of educational goods and fair access to the benefits these yield. Equality in education is a right for every student, even if they are students with special needs. There are students with special needs in the school, and they have the same treatment and freedom. It is being promoted in School that there is equality for all the students.

This will be anchored at Senior high students in which it will be exploring challenges and difficulties in dealing with their emotional problems from differently abled students in participating in class activities, specifically in their respecti ve strands. Knowing the different lived experiences in handling their emotion in a classroom setting and knowing their coping mechanisms in this kind of situation. It will help them to understand their situation in class, despite being a student with special needs.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to answer the following objectives:

1. To explore the challenges of senior high school learners with special needs.
2. To identify the coping mechanism of senior high school students with special needs.
3. To gain insights about being a student with special needs.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to recognize and understand the lived experiences of senior high school students with special needs. Moreover, this will give enlightenment on how challenging it is to live and go to school with a disability. This will also aim to present an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges, and insights of senior high school students with special educational needs. Hence, the researcher will explore the challenges experienced by the learners and their coping mechanisms in dealing with their special needs.

1.3 Review Related Literature

Experiences of Senior High School Students with Special Needs

There are experiences of students struggling in their classroom activities. They have faced several challenges, sometimes they feel anxious and stressed because of the words or hurtful words that are thrown at them. According to Hong (2015), students with special needs try to maintain a fake smile to hide their pain at being made fun of in front of their peers and their instructors. Kim & Kutscher (2020) stated that senior high schools should establish a positive environment where students with special needs may develop their intellectual confidence and academic skills alongside their colleagues. As a result, students can experience low achievement. Therefore, the student invested time and energy decreasing impairment obstacles to receive the grades they deserved by acting as their coordinators. In addition, reveals that being a female student with a disability is more challenging than others. They must fight within themselves, society, peers, instructors, and even their welfare organizations to show their ability and implement their knowledge. To be successful and achieve excellent results, they must be given equal opportunities to their colleagues. Giving them this chance can be an inspiration, motivating them to strive for more and pursue their ambitions despite physical limitations which are limiting their ability to do so.

Challenges of Senior High School Students with Special Needs

Meeting individuals from diverse backgrounds posed a significant challenge for them. Although they received praise for their positive demeanor, they often faced harassment due to their distinctive physical appearance as a student with disabilities. Individuals who fall victim to bullying are vulnerable to various adverse consequences, such as heightened levels of despair and contemplation of suicide (Turner, Exum, Brame, & Holt, 2013). A rising body of research indicates that, compared to students without disabilities, students with disabilities are generally far more likely to become victims of bullying.

Coping Mechanism of Senior High School Students with Special Needs

There are surveys or data collection that showed the problems of students with special needs in learning. One of them is a barrier. Morina and Orozco (2021) stated that barriers and aids to learning and participation. Some of the barriers identified included physical obstacles, faculty, peers, and a lack of resources and information; some of the sources of aid and support were disability offices, peers, human and external resources, faculty, and the university itself. The study shows how each faculty member's unique experience determines their view regarding potential barriers and aids for university students with disabilities. Indeed, throughout the article, it becomes clear that what is perceived by some as barriers is regarded by others as support. There are no processes or steps that are not yet conducted to illuminate this kind of barrier for differently abled students to learn easily.

The study examines how students with special needs cope with inclusive education and prepares them for future roles in the "person to person" system. It stresses independence, self-awareness, and evaluation. Problem and emotion-focused coping methods help students cope with challenges and achieve self-realization. Practical solutions, system diagnostics, and stress management strategies are primary coping mechanisms.

However, Heiman, and Tali (2004) stated that the rights of children to have their special educational needs identified and met through education legislation and the right of individuals with disabilities to equal opportunities. Even in public schools, differently gifted students have equal rights and treatment as normal students.

1.1 Theoretical Lens

In this study, the theory of Bandura guides in taking the experiences of the senior high school students and noting the learnings that helped them in overcoming those challenges they faced. This study is anchored on the following theories: Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory states that learning happens during observation Albert Bandura's theoretical lens, most notably his social learning theory, has had a profound impact on the field of psychology, offering insightful explanations into how individuals learn and adapt behaviors through the observation of others. This theory, established in the 1960s, diverged from the traditional views of behavioral psychology by introducing the concept of vicarious learning, where learning occurs through observing the actions of others and the consequences that follow, rather than through direct experience alone. Bandura's work emphasized the role of cognitive processes in learning, suggesting that individuals are not passive recipients of information, but rather active processors who pay attention to, retain, and reproduce observed behaviors.

2. Methodology

This study used a qualitative design utilizing a single-case method. This method is inquiry-based and describes specific phenomena in detail (Hassan, 2022). This approach includes open-ended, in-depth interviews (Bliss, 2016). The

design suited the way we sought data collection on how parents with autistic children address family issues and challenges.

2.1 Research Design

This research was conducted as qualitative research; the researchers employed a Phenomenological approach in presenting a thorough exploration of the problems of the study. Qualitative research is a type of social science research that aims to col lect non-numerical data to interpret meaning from these data that help us understand social life through the study of the target population (Crossman, 2019).

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2.2 Research Participants

Creswell (2007) states that in the phenomenological study, the participant may be located at single or multiple sites based on: accessibility, rapport, and willingness to participate. In this study, the locale is only one site.

This research is a qualitative phenomenology study conducted in 2024 to unveil the struggles and experiences of senior high school students. This study focused on the experiences and coping mechanisms of senior high school students with special needs. The participants in this study will be four (4) ages eighteen and above and all of them are either female or male. The research participants in this study are students with special needs.

Additionally, it will look at how differently able students cope with difficulties to stay stable despite the numerous obstacles they face. Participation of the participants in this study was voluntary by obtaining an informed consent, and voluntarily declaration to participate in the study. As allowed by the participants, all interviews were captured by using an audio recording. They have the voluntary willingness to give and produce the information that the researchers need. The researcher asks for their consent first before they are going to produce their study. The researcher protects them from any type of harm whether it is physical/psychological or social harm. The data gathered will be extremely confidential and the researchers will ensure the safety of their personal identity/personal information.

2.3 Data Collection

The main instrument of this study is the researcher. Prepared semi-structured guide questions were utilized and checked by the experts. The interview questionnaires consist of introductory, transition, and probing questions. Moreover, these were things to be considered before, during, and after the conduct of the interview; this was intended to avoid researcher biases toward the process and result of the research. The participants were given prior consent to sign the agreement. During an interview, the purpose of the study was explained to the informant as the interview process. These include consent, interview time allocation, and audio or video documentation. In addition, the researchers also observed interview guide protocols. Minimum of forty-five (45) minutes for interview per informant. The recorded answers were transcribed and translated into English if the participants answered in vernacular.

2.4 Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed following the recommended and appropriate procedures. These include conducting in-depth interviews, transcribing the recorded data, and translating notes, including all the angles in the investigation. These

were done to obtain the factual findings of the research study.

After the tardy transcription of the different responses of the four (4) key informants, the researchers sought the assistance of the data analyst. The data were then transmitted to the analyst. This is for theme identification and provided significant support to the researcher for theme analysis. Accordingly, the thematic analysis analyzed information based on commonalities, relationships, and differences. Thematic relates to the aim of searching for aggregated themes. with the data. Three identified steps were taken during the data analysis.

When a phenomenon arises that refers to the existing results and theories to test whether such claims are coherent with the existing principles or a manifestation of new evidence in the study's field of focus, we, the researchers, record the observations during the in-depth interview and perform further research on the impact of the answers. If necessary, research questions were translated from English to Bisaya dialect for a better understanding of the questions.

2.5 Ethical Consideration

The ethical consideration was centered on the conditions portrayed solely from the participants' experiences, interactions, and actions observed. The researcher sought permission from the school principal. The participants made voluntary participation and were not compelled by researchers; informed consent was humbly sent to the concerned individuals. As requirements for honesty, confidentiality, and anonymity, the participant's name and identity were pseudonymized according to the Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act.

Experts in the field of special education, language, and research validated the content of the interview guide. The researcher provided an agreement that included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, time and place commitments, permission to record, and detailing the ethical principles of research. The researcher reported authentic findings and conclusions.

3. Results

This section represents the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations regarding the sentiments of students with special needs. This was conducted somewhere in Davao De Oro. In this study, there were ten (4) students with special needs, specifically one (1) student from grade 11 to grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMMS), one (1) student from grade 11, and one (1) General Academic Strand (GAS) Students and one (1) from Grade 11 and 12 Accountancy and Business Management (ABM). These students were the sources of this study's gathered information and data phenomenon.
The discussion of the findings of this study was broadened by the existence of emerging and structured themes. To have a proper and appropriate presentation, the themes were linked to various related literature and studies to show that they are substantial and correlate to the given study.

3.1 Experiences of Senior high School students with Special Needs

The result of the study indicates that students with disabilities have different views of their experiences as to when and how they carry out challenges as it affects them. This specifies that most of them faced bullying, ignoring bullying individuals, time management, accessing information strategies, realizations, and advice.

3.1.1 Accessibility limitation

Accessibility limitations in inclusive education refer to the barriers that prevent students, especially those with disabilities, from fully participating in all aspects of educational experiences. These limitations can stem from

a wide range of factors, encompassing physical, sensory, cognitive, and social obstacles. Physical barriers, for instance, might include buildings that are not wheelchair-accessible or lack adaptive equipment for students with mobility challenges. Sensory limitations could involve insufficient support for students with visual or auditory impairments, such as the absence of Braille materials or sign language interpreters.

"I want to learn pero dili gyud kaya usahay kay kulang…dili dali ma-access…." P3

Sa pareha nako na naay physical disability, malimit ra gyud ang mga movements nga mabuhat nako." P1

Biswarajan et al (2023) concreted in their study and found out that special needs students still face challenges despite teachers' and students' positivity. Accessibility problems and transportation are among the challenges that hinder quality education for special needs students.

3.1.2 Curriculum Adaptation

When it comes to activities, there are instances where there should be adjustments or modifications. As narrated through their experiences, they cannot compete sometimes with their classmate. Some activities and instructions really need to be done repeatedly because they failed to follow it. Biswarajan et al (2023) found out that Lack of educational resources, unplanned curriculum, and inexperienced teachers are factors also in not attaining the goal in inclusive education.

"Sometimes, I maulahi ko ug pasa kay wala kayo ko kasabot sa buhaton." P1

"Malisdan ko kay dili kayo ko makadungog ug tarong sa lesson mayo gani kay ang teacher, makasabot ra pod sa akoa." P2

3.1.3 Peer Interaction

According to the statements provided by the participants, they experience bullying and mistreatment by receiving some hurtful words from other people or students. The act of mistreatment can have severe and long-lasting effects on individuals who experience it. It is important to note that not everyone will experience the same effects, and some individuals may be more resilient to bullying than others. However, the impact of it should never be underestimated, and it is crucial to provide support and intervention to those who have been affected by it. To avoid bullying, it is better to continue making efforts to protect the rights of disabled students through vigorous enforcement to fully understand their legal obligations to address and prevent disability discrimination in schools as to Lhamon (2014).

"…, when I speak, or I am in reporting in front of our classmates they are copying the way I speak. They embarrassed me in front of other people even now I still experience it." P3

Sarkar (2023) said that the most significant ones among the many that contribute to the mistreatment, discrimination, and exclusion of women in or from higher education are their disabilities. Despite the fact of having difficulties, there are still kind-hearted and good classmates who still love to be friends with people who have a special need.

"I still have many friends even though I have disability" Participant 1

"Gina-amigo gihapon ko nila bisan ug naa koy kapansanan" Participant 2

3.2 Coping Strategies of Senior High School Students with Special Needs

The second major theme, "Coping strategies of senior high school students with special needs," is beneficial to know how these students cope with the challenges they are facing.

3.2.1 Ignoring Bully Individuals

In this theme, one thing the students with disabilities did was not to give attention to those people who bullied them. They put in their mind that they are also not perfect. Attested by the study by Bourke et al (2010), ignoring bullies will give you peace and all they need to do is to focus on yourself for you to achieve your dreams in the future. Even though ignoring bullying behavior is not recommended as an effective strategy to address the issue, it is important to address bullying directly and take appropriate steps to prevent and intervene in such situations.

"Instead nga akoa silang pansinon, gina-balewala or gina-ignore na lang nako kay kabalo ko dili pod sila perpekto." P1
"Mas maningkamot nalang ko mi, nga naay disability, mag-pokus sa amoang dreams nga ma-achieve." P2

3.2.2 Managing Time Wisely

In this theme, they shared that as a student with disabilities, you need to use your time correctly to focus academically. Instead of wasting time on useless people, try to consume time that is beneficial for you as a student. Kreider et al (2019) pointed out that students should foster routines and behaviors that promote time management and organization,

Disabilities can sometimes present additional challenges or require extra time for certain tasks. By managing their time well, disabled students can reduce stress and anxiety associated with deadlines and workload. Proper time allocation allows for a more balanced and manageable schedule, helping to avoid last-minute rushes or feeling overwhelmed. Also, by allocating dedicated time slots for specific tasks, they can minimize distractions and maintain focus, leading to increased productivity.

"Instead nga mag -mind sa gipangsulti sa uban, mas dapat i-manage na lang nako ang akoang oras sa mga bagay nga mas importante." P3
"I should make use of my time wisely and spend it to something productive because in our condition, ga-require gyud sya ug time to prepare or do things."P4

3.2.3 Have Faith in God

As to the participants, their faith in God made them strong and this was validated by Heiman (2002), indicating that a few of the coping mechanisms frequently used by Special needs students are accepted as the impairment, faith in God, constructive avoidance, minimization, autonomy, and participation in acts of worship.

"I always have faith in God that he will not leave me." P2
"Prayer is my ultimate weapon sa akoang life, especially with my goals and plans in life." P

3.3 Positivity and Insights of Senior High School Students with Special Needs

The third major theme, "Positivity and Insights of Senior High School Students with Special Needs," delves into the aspirations and desires that students with Special Needs hold for a better future ahead and is positive to all of their goals and plans.

3.3.1 Embracing Uniqueness

In this theme, the participants realize that everyone is born with uniqueness and has a different purpose in life. Even though they are born with disabilities, they can still have talent and knowledge when it comes to sports. They are also human, and they can have the same opportunities just like normal people. Realize that having a disability does not define your worth or abilities as a person. Embrace and accept yourself for who you are, recognizing that everyone has unique strengths and challenges. To develop resilience and a positive mindset to overcome obstacles. Learn from failures, adapt to new situations, and persevere in pursuit of your goals.

"I just realized that every individual kay unique--nga same ra mi ug opportunity sa normal people." P1
"We can also compete in any field. Dapat lang na naay positive mindset aron matuman ang mga goals in life------ bisan pa ug disable mi." P2

3.3.2 Received Support and Advice

In this theme, they shared that they had received a lot of advice from other people. Wood et al (2019) stated that disabled youth needed to have the support of their peers, family, and school personnel to prevent bullying and assist them in overcoming victimization. Those are always believe in your ability and never stop achieving your dreams in life. God has a better plan for you and all you need to do is to believe in his action and process because everything is possible. Never give up in life because there are a lot of opportunities waiting for you even though you are part of a different abled student. Remember that your disability does not define you. You are capable, deserving, and have valuable contributions to make. Believe in yourself, embrace your journey, and never hesitate to reach out for support when needed.

"...I received overwhelming support from the people that surround me… my teachers, family and friends." P4
"...Nagtatak gyud always sa akoang hunahuna ang gisulti sa akoang Mama nga capable ko ug I need to believe in myself jud... " P2

In conclusion, students' positivity will help them achieve what they have desired in life. Despite the fact they have special needs, their belief in becoming the person they want to be will come true with the support of teachers, family, and the community that surrounds them.

3.3.3 Showcase talents

All humans are unique. God has designed them with abilities and talents that need to be shown and used. And according to the partcipants that has a talent in singing, she will use it and show to the world her gift from God. Nese et al (2018) in his study pointed out that talents in sports may be developed and help students with special needs.

"...I will show to the world nga naa koy talent sa pagkanta bisan ug naa koy disability." P4

4. Conclusion

The journey of Senior High Students with special needs left a significant imprint, as this study sought to investigate the student's feelings, emotions, and lived experiences in the school. Academic institutions hold a unique role in our society. They bring their unique experiences, viewpoints, and insights to classroom interactions, enriching the learning process for themselves and their peers. Also, they can offer support, guidance, and assistance to fellow students who may be struggling academically or socially. By demonstrating positive behavior, empathy, and respect, students inspire others to possess those qualities. Conducting a study about students with special needs is a crucial endeavor with significant implications for education, inclusivity, and societal progress.

By delving into the challenges, needs, and experiences of disabled students, researchers can contribute to a more equitable and supportive educational landscape. It empowers educators with knowledge and tools to create inclusive classrooms, promotes empathy and understanding among students with special needs, and nurtures a culture of acceptance and respect. Also, the outcomes of the study in this area have the potential to positively impact the lives of disabled students, enhancing their educational experiences, and empowering them to achieve their full potential. This study illustrates how an individual can manage the difficulties and challenges of being a student with special, other students and people can learn a lot from this study. This gives students and teachers illumination as they continuously learn, adjust, and acknowledge.

4.1 Implications for Teaching Practice

Implications for practice this study includes a variety of recommendations based on the findings, analysis, and results of an in-depth interview performed with a focus on the existing issues and coping mechanisms of disabled students. These data accordingly help many as they encounter such bullying, ignoring bullying individuals, time management, accessing to information's strategies, realizations, and advice. Academic Institution. As to the findings of this research, it is highly recommended that the school administration and program head provide mentoring for those disabled students who are experiencing challenges being bullied. It will help the school to implement rules and regulations that can protect them and to check the status of their mental health teachers.

This study is beneficial for them to create a more inclusive classroom environment. By understanding the specific needs and barriers faced by these students, teachers can adapt their teaching strategies, materials, and assessments to ensure equal participation and learning opportunities for all students. Thus, understanding the challenges and struggles of disabled students enables teachers to create an inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment that promotes the success and well-being of all students. Other Students. The researchers wanted the other students to become aware of the struggles and challenges faced by the students with special needs. When students are aware of the challenges faced by their classmates with special needs, it helps foster empathy and understanding. It allows them to develop a greater appreciation for the unique experiences and perspectives of others. This understanding promotes a more inclusive and compassionate school environment where all students are valued and respected.

4.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Future research that inclines to the topic of the experiences of disabled students can make use of this study to understand further and have knowledge about how students with disabilities manage those situations, the challenges they can experience, and what coping mechanism is applicable. This study examines the viewpoints of Senior High students about their living

experiences in this challenge. On the other hand, future researchers can use this study as a reference to explain how difficult it is to be in this situation wherein, they need to be responsible for their academic performances and participation in any activities. Moreover, this research was done to determine the effects and challenges students with special needs in Senior High. In line with this, future researchers can utilize this study as they will also elaborate on the experiences and difficulties of students with special needs.

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