

# Navigating Inclusion: Understanding the Experiences of Non-Special Education Teachers in Teaching Learners with Special Needs

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## Abstract

Promoting inclusive education is on top of the trends in the academe, wherein teachers with or without specialization in special education have to teach or accommodate learners with special needs. This is because of the vigorous proclamation of the Department of Education (DepEd) and Republic Act 11650, which seeks to promote the rights of learners with special needs to acquire the same quality of education as other regular students. This study will primarily use qualitative-phenomenological research to investigate the lived experiences of non-special education teachers who handle and teach learners with special needs. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify the qualified participants for this study. Using the thematic analysis in analyzing the data that have been gathered from in-depth interviews of the participants, several themes and core ideas have been generated from participants' responses, which answers the questions regarding experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights that can be shared from non-sped teachers who handle and teaches learners with special needs. Research findings provide significant implications for teachers regarding teaching and dealing with learners with special needs and create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that shows collaboration among stakeholders.

*Keywords: Inclusive Education, Accommodation, Lived Experience, Coping Mechanism*

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## 1. Introduction

Promoting inclusive education in all types of schools is the current trend in the academe because it seeks to develop a sustainable and equitable education without barriers. Inclusive education's bright concept and goal is to allow learners to acquire the same quality education regardless of their cultural background, socioeconomic status, and differences. However, the outcome of inclusive education adds to the challenges of a teacher inside a classroom. Dealing with a diverse learner makes teaching and learning challenging to achieve their educational goal quickly and possibly. As a result, this leads to the discovery of the experiences of non-special education teachers who teach learners with special needs in the regular classroom.

In the study of Nishan (2018), they emphasized the benefits of inclusive education as they also implemented the same educational policy in schools in Maldives and surveyed 125 teachers from different schools. As stated in their literature, inclusive education also plays a vital role in enabling children to develop their full potential. Moreover, the aim of being inclusive is to allow learners with disabilities to acquire essential knowledge and skills and to manifest collaborative learning with peers, leading to acceptance of their exceptionalities and the development of social skills inside the learning environment. However, challenges mounted as a significant factor of inclusion. He added that some teachers consider it "quite challenging" to handle learners with disabilities. In their findings, lack of resources in teaching-learning material prevailed as the major challenge in managing learners with special needs, followed by the large class size, lack of time, and lack of trained teachers to teach learners with special needs.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, inclusive education was strongly suggested to be implemented in all institutions based on the pursuant order of Republic Act 11650 of 2022, also known as the “Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act.” This Act stipulates that all learners, regardless of cultural background, race, identity, gender orientation, and special needs, have the right to receive and experience quality education in private and public institutions. This Act aims to create a learning environment free from discrimination towards students with special needs. In addition, the Department of Education (DepEd) order no. 44, s. 2021 issues the “Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program”. The Department commits that learners with special needs must recognize the rights to inclusive, equitable, relevant, and quality education by providing adequate and efficient educational services that will enable them to become well-rounded, happy, and productive individuals. In like manner, teachers handling learners with special needs should develop a conceptual plan for accommodating students with special needs by implementing different teaching styles, techniques, and approaches. Moreover, the learning environment should also possess inclusivity despite the diverse cultures of individuals inside the school to eliminate discrimination and allow students to acquire equitable and sustainable quality education.

In line with the implementation of inclusive education, Allam & Martin (2021) explained that although a positive working environment and relationship with the stakeholders are highly evident in the schools of the Division of Iligan, several challenges still appear in an inclusive classroom. They emphasized that most teachers who teach students with learning problems believe they need to be fit to educate these students since they still need to complete special needs education training. Additionally, the need for a budget, curriculum guide, instructional materials (IMs), and even school facilities for inclusive education adds to the challenges in promoting inclusive education.

In some schools in Mati City, private and public institutions have already enrolled learners with special needs and are integrated into mainstream classrooms. Understandably, this underlying scenario would be an additional challenge for the teachers. Hence, inclusive education is now highly manifested in some schools in Mati. As a result, a study will be conducted to uncover the lived experiences of the non-sped teachers handling learners with special needs in the regular classroom.

### ***1.1 Research Question***

This study aims to discover the lived experiences of non-special education teachers in the private school of Mati City who teach learners with special needs in a regular classroom.

Specifically, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of non-special education teachers who handle learners with special needs?
2. What are teachers' coping mechanism in handling learners with special needs?
3. What insights can be learned in teaching learners with special needs as a non-sped teacher?

### ***1.2 Review of Related Literature***

Knowledge is one of the most immeasurable things a teacher can impart to the learner to help them achieve their full potential and goals in life. On the other hand, teachers who teach learners with special needs are one of a kind because of their vocation to promote an inclusive learning environment that seeks to bridge the gap between regular students and students with disabilities despite all the challenges they meet along the way in teaching. Meanwhile, this section is intended to review related literature to understand existing studies that are relevant to this research.

#### ***Special Education and Teachers***

Riser-Kositsky (2024) defined special education as programs for students with mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral problems, which included “special education.” In practical terms, special education is defined by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, which requires that children with disabilities get a free and appropriate public education and be educated in the least restrictive environment, which is possible, alongside their classmates without disabilities. Special education is educating

students with special needs and involves recognizing their peculiarities and integrating them as much as possible into their peers' regular classrooms (Ojeda & Carugno, 2022).

The National Center for Education reported that students who received special education and assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ranged in age from 3 to 21, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Specific learning disabilities accounted for the largest share of pupils receiving special education and related services under IDEA, accounting for 32% among all other disabilities. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) reported that about 112,810 children with disabilities enrolled in the school year 2021 out of 444,294 children with disability are recorded as estimated (Romero, 2021). As stated in the sources, it is highly evident in the national and local setting that numerous learners receive quality educational services. The continuous implementation of equitable and accessible education enables learners with special needs to reach their full potential.

Despite the hopes of educating learners with special needs and helping them acquire essential life skills, special education is a salient factor in teacher burnout (Brunstring et al., 2014). Although it is evident that a massive number of learners with disabilities are enrolled and accommodated in a regular classroom, on the contrary, it is also a factor in teacher stress that would lead to adverse outcomes. Moreover, there needs to be more teachers with expertise in teaching special needs to educate learners with special needs (Nasir & Efendi, 2016). In addition, several challenges were also found in teaching special needs education; these include the need for more resources, facilities, readiness, and instructional materials that halt the practical goal of special education teachers. As a result, 21% leave their profession due to dissatisfaction with their teaching career (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

However, various initiatives from educational institutions, stakeholders, and professionals have been proposed to support teachers in teaching learners with special needs by giving them ample training that would also contribute to their professional growth. Teaching training is essential for professionals who teach learners with special needs (Ali, 2020). Understanding and learning how to teach learners with special needs in inclusive education is necessary; this enables them to know how to develop strategic plans for handling and accommodating the specific individual learning needs of the learner (Hehir et al., 2016). Teachers who receive appropriate training regarding teaching learners with special needs experience a change in perception and gain the ability to promote inclusion in their classrooms (Crispel & Kasperski, 2019). With this, providing training regarding teaching strategies for teaching learners with special needs can significantly improve the academic outcome of students (Ambarin et al., 2023)

### ***Challenges in Teaching Students with Special Needs***

Teaching learners with special needs is a big challenge, even though it is the forte of the teacher who teaches learners with special needs or not. The fact is that teaching learners, whether it has special needs or not, takes a lot of work. According to the study of Gam (2018), as cited by Tuvida (2023), the majority of the teachers who teach learners with special needs have encountered challenging and demanding circumstances, such as burnout brought on by a heavy workload, stress, and unfavorable working conditions, which made them have a bad attitude towards their work. Moreover, teachers who have little knowledge or experience in handling learners with a disability will most likely possess a negative attitude toward students with special needs (Thaver & Lim, 2012).

Some factors in teaching and learning in an inclusive classroom hinder the teachers from achieving their goals. The most significant challenges for teachers in teaching learners with special needs are insufficient training in handling learners with disabilities, lack of confidence, preparedness, and little or no professional development, which also serves as a factor that affects effective teaching in an inclusive classroom (Ezeh, 2023). Unfortunately, many teachers leave their jobs because of the high exposure to stress, which leads to burnout and stress in teaching (Gray et al., 2017). Moreover, educators who saw higher levels of student behavior misbehavior reported feeling more emotionally worn out and less motivated to work (Aldrup et al., 2018). On the contrary, teacher burnout can hinder students' motivation and ability to perform well in the classroom (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Teachers' challenges in teaching learners with disability were also revealed in the local context, according to Cerbo (2017). He also expresses that challenges encountered by teachers include dealing with manic and overacting learners, lack of skill and preparation, and lack of parental support, which is essential in managing the behaviors of the learners in an inclusive classroom. Moreover, stakeholders commonly experience challenges in teaching strategies, parental support toward a child's academic success, and students' coping strategies amidst discrimination (Rosales & Rosales, 2019).

### **1.3 Theoretical Lens**

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL), created by Dr. David Rose and Dr. Anne Meyer in 1984, serves as the theoretical underpinning of this study. The concept of the UDL framework has the same shared commonality in today's main point of inclusive education, wherein it establishes an approach for teaching and learning that caters to and gives the same learning opportunity to all learners regardless of their exceptionalities. On the other hand, the goal of UDL is to develop various teaching methods and diversify learning instructions and materials to remove any barriers to learning (Morin, 2023). Thus, the UDL was also designed to support inclusive education, accommodating learners with special needs to acquire the same opportunity to learn while eliminating any forms of stigma and barriers towards learners with special needs.

Understandably, the UDL framework plays a pivotal role in inclusive education. It also emphasizes the importance of creating a harmonious learning environment in which learners with special needs feel valued, respected, and equally capable, especially regarding academic and skills integration. Statistically, there is a significant increase in the population of diverse classrooms, wherein 6% of students with disability are in higher education (Heelan, 2015). This illustrates that the UDL framework positively impacted accommodating learners with special needs. Moreover, as added in their article, the goal of the UDL framework is to minimize the need for additional support and accommodations for students with special needs by incorporating a sufficient variety of teaching and learning styles into every course during the design phase.

## **2. Methodology**

This part discusses the methods that will be used in this study. A research methodology defines the methods and approaches employed to locate and evaluate data about a study subject. It's a method by which researchers plan their investigation to enable them to use the chosen research tools to accomplish their goals. It covers every crucial facet of research, such as the study's overall framework and the methodologies used for data collecting, analysis, and research design (Sreekumar, 2024).

### **2.1 Research Design**

The research will utilize the qualitative phenomenological approach since it is about understanding the lived experiences of non-sped teachers handling learners with special needs. Neubauer et al. (2019) define phenomenology as a type of qualitative study that examines a person's actual experiences in the world. On the other hand, a phenomenology study is a shared interpretation of several individuals of a subject phenomenon based on their personal experiences. Phenomenologists concentrate on understanding the shared experiences of all individuals during a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

### **2.2 Participants and Sampling**

The study will be conducted in a private school in Mati City, where five (5) participants will be selected to participate in this study. Hence, the participants should be non-specialized in special needs education teachers and able to experience in handling or teaching learners with special needs. Moreover, the participant should be an active teacher. A purposive sampling technique will be employed to select the target respondents of this study. Purposive sampling is a collection of non-probability sampling techniques known as "purposeful sampling." It selects units based on the characteristics that you require in your sample. Technically, purposive sampling involves the "on purpose" selection of units (Nikolopoulou, 2023). The information and data needed in this study will be gathered through a face-to-face interview with the respondents, who can freely share their experiences.

### **2.3 Data Collection**

In the data collection process, the researcher will conduct a face-to-face interview with the respondents. Face-to-face interviews are a form of qualitative research interview in which information is gathered through direct conversation between the participants and the researcher (Bhasin, 2023). In the data gathering, the respondents are free to share their experiences in teaching learners with special needs. This will allow the researcher to gather in-depth information regarding their experiences. An audio recorder will be used during the data gathering to record the respondents' responses to the questionnaire.

Moreover, an interview questionnaire will be utilized as the research instrument of this study. A college instructor of Schools, Universities, and Colleges (SUCs) and a graduate of Master of Arts in Education degree validated the interview questionnaire. His expertise allows the researcher to develop a valid and significant interview questionnaire for this study.

### **2.4 Data Analysis**

The gathered interview data will undergo an in-depth analysis to identify common concepts, themes, and patterns using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involves a collection of texts, such as transcripts or interviews, to find recurring themes, topics, concepts, and patterns of meaning, wherein the researcher carefully scrutinizes the data (Caulfield, 2023). Specifically, the researcher will systematically read and understand the data gathered from the respondents, which will be used to extract essential information about the study. The extracted data will generate initial code to formulate meanings sorted into categories, clusters, and themes.

### **2.5 Ethical Consideration**

Per ethical guidelines, the researcher ensured that the study's risks and benefits, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were all carefully considered and adhered to. The researcher had to give written consent to participate in this study, which served as a contract between the researchers and the respondents. The researcher gave the highest level of secrecy of subject data. Pseudonyms were used to secure participants' identities appropriately and deal with the strictest confidentiality regarding the information they provided. It highlighted the affiliation and goal of the participants while emphasizing their voluntary involvement. Moreover, it was apparent that the participants might leave the research without facing any repercussions. The researcher also ensured that the respondents were not harmed in any way. This research's primary goal is to improve societal welfare, and the researchers declared no conflicts of interest.

## **3. Findings and Discussion**

This chapter presents the findings of this research about the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of non-sped teachers who teach and handle learners with special needs. To give answers to the research questions, an in-depth interview with the participants was conducted. Themes were generated from the participants' responses.

### **3.1 Experiences of Non-Sped Teacher Who Handles Learners with Special Needs**

The first question asks about the participants' experiences teaching learners with special needs. Three (3) themes and core ideas emerged and were generated from their responses. The following are the accounts of the participant's responses: overcoming the learner's behavior and determining teaching strategies, teachers adaptation and support, and parent-teacher collaboration.

#### *Overcoming Learner's Behavior and Determining Teaching Strategies*

The participants shared their sentiments about the challenges that they face as non-sped teachers in handling and teaching learners with special needs. They stress out the learner's behavior, which really disrupts

the class by roaming around the classroom, crumpling the classroom's chart and posters, and clapping hands loudly. Other disruptive behavior of the learner also causes intimidation toward other learners. These experiences made it hard for the teachers to address the behavior of the learners and to choose teaching strategies and employ teaching pedagogy that suits the learners' learning needs and also addresses their behavior.

*P1: "There are a lot of difficulties and challenges that I was able to experience, I had a hard time to teach them. I was having a hard time to assess on how to give or to give enough strategies and pedagogy in teaching them. Especially in my grade five class, there is a student who always disrupts my class by clapping his hands loudly, and by that the class will be disturbed."*

*P2: "It was a quiet challenging because as a non-sped teacher, it's very hard for me to..to.. deal with them. Let's say for example, one of my students with ASD gets food from other classmates and it will start commotion. Aside from that, during our lesson, there is this learner who has special needs will crumple all the charts and posters and sometimes they have tantrums during class discussion. So, it's quiet challenging, and I do not know what to do and what are the strategies I can use that suit for them"*

*P3: "As a teacher that is not sped major, at first it was challenging because I don't have knowledge on how to address their behavior or how to handle their behavior inside the classroom. Especially this kid with ASD, during class discussions he likes to walk around, crawl on the floor, and I think that affects my class. On my part, that is not a sped major, I realized that it is not easy."*

*P4: "Teaching learners with special needs as a regular teacher is quiet challenging and also, it is laborious. Laborious in a way that I will create teaching strategies that's suited for their needs. Aside from that, when their tantrums are rough and I would have a hard time to control him, one of my students would be afraid to him because of his severe and profound behavior."*

This was supported by the idea of Thayer & Lim (2012), which states that a teacher with little exposure or experience in teaching learners with special needs will most likely have difficulty dealing with and managing the learners' behavior, which can result in a negative attitude towards learners with special needs. Gam (2018) highlighted that teachers who teach learners with special needs are able to encounter or acquire a high possibility of having stress and burnout in dealing with the behavioral challenges of learners with special needs. This idea indicates that it is essential for a teacher to know teaching strategies for dealing with the behavior and overcoming the condition of learners with special needs.

### *Teachers' Adaptation and Support*

The participants highlighted the importance of accepting and including the learners despite their condition. They acknowledged the uniqueness of the learners with special needs and also expressed the importance of extending their patience and efforts to handle learners with special needs. It is salient to let them feel that they are loved and accepted. Especially during quarterly assessments, the participants are eager to extend their help by giving intervention and setting rewards to motivate the learners to answer their exams. Despite the setbacks, the participants are very resilient in extending their help and patience and encouraging other regular learners to accept their classmates despite their special needs.

*P1: "I have realized that learners with special needs are unique in their ways because some of them, for example, there are students who are not that good in academics, however they are good in creating something. That's why I need to give more time and effort regarding on how and what to teach them because their academic level is not the same with normal kids."*

*P2: “I exerted so much effort just to help them and to let them feel that they are fully accepted and loved. Every time that they have quarterly assessment, one thing that I do, I made sure that my focus only is with them. I really extend my patience and search for appropriate teaching strategies for them to really answer the exams. I also set reward also for them to have motivation to answer because as we all know, learners with or have special needs have only short term in terms of focus.”*

*P3: “My experience in handling learners with special needs especially profound and severe students, it really tests my patience and for me I don’t have anything to do but to really extend my patience and let them feel that they are accepted. As a teacher, it’s my duty and responsibility to meet the needs of my students and I also told my regular students to be more empathic to their classmates who have differences.”*

*P4: “As for my experience, it was during the examination. This specific child who has ASD cannot answer on his own. That’s why I needed to exert more effort to guide him while I am also guiding his classmates. But for him, it’s really an extra effort and extra time. It is also fulfilling every time he is able to follow my instruction.”*

The claim regarding inclusion and support is supported by Ambarin et al. (2023), which shows that there is a high tendency for learners to have significant development in academics if the teachers are able to acquire training regarding teaching strategies for teaching learners with special needs. On the contrary, since it is given that extending effort and patience is part of the teaching strategies, it is understood that accommodating learners with special needs in a regular classroom is also a factor in teacher stress, which leads to antagonistic outcomes. That is why Nasir and Efendi (2016) express that it is important to have teachers who are experts or knowledgeable in educating learners with special needs.

### *Parent-Teacher Collaboration*

The participants expressed gratitude to the learners’ parents, especially during tough times when the learners’ behavior or attitude is challenging. They appreciate the responsive attitude that builds a strong collaboration every time they make a message or call to the parents if the child throws tantrums in the class. The participants are also grateful for the opportunity as they requested the parents to let the child’s OT (Occupational Therapist) come to school to observe the child and also to gain an understanding of how to handle the child better, especially in the times that the child would have tantrums.

*P1: “I have this instances that I really ask the parent for help. It is because the child has an OT. I asked the parents what to do if the child would tantrums and I even requested them to let the child’s OT to come and visit the school so that it can help me if what techniques should I employed to the student if they have tantrums or if they disrupt the class.”*

*P2: “At first, since I don’t know how to address those kinds of behaviors. I ask help from parents. I ask them on what should I do or the specific action that I should do especially if the student will tantrums. I messaged the parents or call them at the exact moment when the child did that attitude.”*

This can be denoted by the insights of Brunstring et al. (2014), wherein being a special education teacher would significantly cause burnout in educating learners with special needs and in helping them acquire essential life skills. Despite these challenges, the families were open to communication to prioritize the welfare of the teacher and address the behavior of the learner. Ali (2020) highlighted the importance of the stakeholders’ initiative to play a part in prioritizing support for teachers in teaching learners with special needs.

### *3.2 Coping Mechanism in Handling Learners with Special Needs*

The second question asks about the participants' coping mechanism in handling the behavior of learners with special needs. Three (3) themes and core ideas emerged and were generated from their responses. The following are the accounts of the participant's responses: acceptance on child's differences, genuine expression of emotion, guidance and support system.

### *Acceptance on Child's Differences*

The participants express the importance of accepting the learners' differences by treating them equally inside the school. Letting them feel loved and accepted like the other regular students enables them to strive for learning development in an inclusive and supportive learning environment. As for them, it is memorable to have an experience with learners with special needs, and it helps them to easily accept those learners if they set their mind that the kids they are handling are the same as others. Being empathic will also help the participants keep going and accept because they are still students.

*P1: "I just put in my mind that they're also the same with other kids... it's just that they have special needs. So that's the thing that I always bare in my mind. This is still my student. This is just the same with other kids even though they have special needs or I need to put extra effort and patience on their behavior and that's it."*

*P2: "It was memorable to have and experience teaching learners with special needs. It really tests my patience, but at the end of the day, you just have to keep going and accept them that they are still your student."*

*P3: "I need to be more empathetic and accept them despite of their differences, by giving more attention and provide them essential learnings that suits to their needs, and also by letting them feel that they are loved and cared inside the classroom."*

This was supported by the study of Gam (2018), in which teachers displayed a negative attitude towards their work as sped teachers because of the heavy workload and stress of dealing with the learners. With this, accepting learners' conditions and accommodating them becomes crucial. Moreover, as stated by Romeo (2021), it is clearly evident that numerous learners are now enrolled in school, which is why accepting and including the learners is salient in their holistic development.

### *Genuine Expression of Emotion*

The participants express their appreciation for their learners with special needs in coping with their stress after a rough day in handling and teaching their class. They shared their unforgettable experience wherein their learners with special needs unexpectedly hugged them, thinking that the learner knew their exhaustion on that specific day. Another participant also shared his encounter with his learner with special needs in which the kid looked at him as his father, which is why the kid loves to have time to play and express his genuine emotions to him. Despite all the stress and burnout of the teacher's tasks and workloads, learners with special needs also contribute to their coping mechanisms by showing their empathetic and genuine emotions to their teacher.

*P1: "One thing that help me endure in teaching and handling them is that they are sweet and genuine. As their teacher and based on my experience, it really helped me in in relieving from the stress every time they hug me unexpectedly. I can really see their genuine emotion every time they do that (hug) me."*

*P2: "I have understood that these kinds of kids are loving, and they are also caring. They love to hug, and even though they don't show emotion on their faces, their love language shows through their action. So,*

*I think those are the things that help me and at some point, it contributes to me especially in coping up from my stress.”*

*P3: “I have this one student whom loves to hug me because that child was only raise by his grandmother. I don’t know but, I think he needs someone to have like a father figure because according to her grandmother he never experiences to have like that, that’s why he loves to hug me and play with me and it somehow help me in coping from my stress.”*

This can be implied in the ideas of Gray et al. (2017), wherein a teacher's stress and burnout can be a factor in why teachers leave their jobs. Understandably, it is not easy to handle learners with special needs regardless of whether the teacher is specialized or non-specialized in special education. The fact is that handling a student takes a lot of preparation and patience. Moreover, Nasir & Efendi (2016) highlighted that preparation and readiness in their daily loads can be a factor in the dragging movement of their lesson. With these challenges, it is also essential for the teachers to appreciate little things done by the learners with special needs to somehow cope with the stress they feel.

### *Guidance and Support*

The participants express their gratitude for helping and guiding them in handling learners with special needs. Their principal's shared ideas and insights help them cope with the time, stress, and effort involved in handling and teaching learners with special needs. The participants also appreciate supportive networks from the institution, like training and advice from their colleagues, which helps them deal with the learners. Despite all the challenges the participants witnessed as teachers, they still exemplified their perseverance in teaching and guiding the learners to attain their goals in life.

*P1: “Since our institution is helping the students with special needs, with the help of our school principal, she was able to guide us on how to address the needs of the students with special needs.”*

*P2: “I’m lucky that the school that I am working with are very supportive. They are supportive when it comes to this program, in teaching children with special needs. So, they are very supportive since it is my first time to teach those kinds of learners, they give me advices on what is the best thing to do in handling learners with special needs.”*

*P3: “So our school provides teacher trainings, especially our school principal who is a master in special education and also who has an experience in dealing with kids who has special needs because she has her own child with special needs. So, at some point, through their guidance, it really helps me to handle learners with special needs.”*

*P4: “The advices of my colleagues and our school principal really helps me on how to deal with learners with special needs. They shared their experiences and the approaches that they do if the student will tantrums and also our principal whom gives us advice like the reward system in which it is very effective in motivating and appreciating the works of my students.”*

This claim regarding teacher support in handling learners with special needs is supported by the ideas of Hehir et al. (2016). According to them, teachers must acquire ideas about the different strategic plans that they can employ in teaching and handling learners with special needs. Moreover, Crispel & Kasperski (2019) express that teachers who can understand and gain a positive perception towards learners with special needs are most likely able to promote inclusion in their classrooms. Meanwhile, Ambarin et al. (2023) explain that there is a significant improvement in the student's learning outcomes if the teacher is well provided with training regarding teaching learners with special needs.

### 3.3 Insights of a Non-Sped Teacher in Teaching Learners with Special Needs

The last question asks about the participants' coping mechanism in handling the behavior of learners with special needs. Two (2) themes and core ideas emerged and were generated from their responses. The following are the accounts of the participant's responses: prioritizing self and professional development, and acquisition of knowledge from trainings.

#### *Prioritizing Self and Professional Development*

The participants expressed their point of view regarding how it enables them to gain self-development as they deal with differences. They also highlighted that they were able to learn more about the learners and their disabilities, which significantly helped them grow professionally to the extent that they could improve their patience and understanding towards them. Moreover, some participants were interested in learning more about becoming a better teacher in which they can also share their knowledge and experience with other teachers

*P1: "Handling learners with special needs help me a lot regarding with teaching them despite of their special needs. By this experience I was able to know them personally and also it contributed a lot regarding how will I teach them or the strategies that needs to be applied in the four corners of the classroom."*

*P2: "The experience, it really contributes to my professional growth because it was my first time handling them. So, I'm thankful also and grateful that I experienced those times when I was with them because I have the knowledge now that I can apply in the future."*

*P3: "It contributes to my professional growth as a teacher in which I can also share those experiences to other teachers who are handling learners with special needs."*

*P4: "It help me to improve myself as a teacher and it also allows me to extent my patience and to be more understanding. It inspires me to learn more and it results me to become a better teacher who wants best for her students. It also enables me to be more passionate in my job and to treat students equally and inclusively."*

This claim can be denoted by Ezeh (2023), wherein teachers with insufficient knowledge of handling learning with a disability will most likely halt the opportunity to develop professionally. In like manner, teachers must acquire knowledge to help them grow in their careers and as educators. This can be done by training and conducting specialized programs for special education. Madigan & Kim (2021) express that teachers may affect students' motivation and ability to perform because of their inability to gain knowledge and understanding in special education.

#### *Acquisition of Knowledge from Trainings*

The participants highlighted the importance of teaching training in handling students with special needs. According to them, the knowledge they acquire from the seminars and training helps them gain more ideas on handling learners accommodated in a regular classroom, which is why they are vocal about workshops and training enhancement programs. Despite all the setbacks, teachers prioritize acquiring knowledge from the training and seminars for teaching special education.

*P1: "For me, teachers training, seminars and workshops for teaching and learning special education should be strongly implemented by the schools and educational sector because it really helps a lot especially in teaching and handling learners with special needs."*

*P2: “The SPED program should enhance teaching training for those non-sped teachers because I believe teachers who are not sped major can also do it with the support of the school and so as to promote inclusive education.”*

*P3: “I think more trainings and experience through observation from different institution that accommodates learners with special needs because I believe this will enable us to gain more idea on how to deal with learners with special needs.”*

This can be implied by the idea of Ali (2020), which expresses that teaching training is essential for special education teachers because they are equipped with knowledge on how to handle learners with special needs. That is why acquiring basic skills and expertise in teaching different learners is salient. Additionally, Crespel & Kasperski (2019) explained that teachers who could obtain training regarding special education may display an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

## **Conclusion**

This research showed the immeasurable experience of a non-sped teacher in teaching and handling learners with special needs. Despite their experiences in overcoming learners' behavior driven by their characteristics, stress, and work burnout, the teachers remained salient in achieving their goals and displaying their perseverance to help the learners who have a disability. Additionally, collaboration and support networks among stakeholders resulted in a learning environment that prioritizes the welfare of both teachers and students. This investigation also highlighted the insights that can be shared with other educators about the importance of self and professional development and acquiring knowledge from training. This equips teachers with essential learning about special education to promote sustainable and inclusive education.

## **Recommendation**

The implication of this research is to offer valuable knowledge to teachers who are not specialized in teaching learners with special needs and to other stakeholders. Since the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Republic Act 11650 suggest all institutions include all learners with special needs to acquire the same quality education, this research may serve as a cross-reference for the teachers. This research will also allow them to better understand the importance of coping with the challenges that may occur while helping the learners achieve their full potential. Moreover, education personnel can use the result to boost the training for the teachers, regardless of whether they are specialized or non-specialized education teachers, to address specific problems regarding teaching and handling learners, advocate inclusion in education, and gain self and professional development. Lastly, this research also offers essential learnings to the whole who are part of the stakeholders in order to prioritize advocacy in promoting inclusive and supportive learning environments.

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