

Collaboration and Conflict: Exploring the Dynamics Between Receiving and Special Education Teachers

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Abstract

This study, utilizing a phenomenological qualitative approach, delves into the dynamics between general and special education teachers in Davao City's public schools, focusing on collaboration and conflict. Conducted through detailed interviews and group discussions with six educators, the research highlights essential elements for effective cooperation and resolving disputes, such as open communication, role clarity, and transparency. It also identifies obstacles like differing teaching methods and communication issues that impede seamless collaboration. Moreover, the investigation looks into the strategies teachers adopt to navigate these challenges, underscoring the critical role of support from school administration, ongoing professional development, and designated times for collaborative efforts. The findings suggest that creating a culture of mutual respect and shared duties is vital for improving educational results for students requiring special education. The study offers practical suggestions for teachers, school leaders, and policymakers to craft policies that encourage an inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere.

Keywords: partnership; resolving disagreement; general education teachers; receiving teacher; special education

1. Introduction

Effective collaboration and conflict resolution between receiving and special education teachers are paramount for delivering high-quality education to learners with special needs. This partnership is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment where diverse educational approaches can coexist to meet the varied needs of learners. Collaborative teachers can share expertise, strategies, and resources, fostering a holistic approach to education that benefits all learners. However, conflicts may arise due to differing instructional philosophies, communication styles, and workload pressures. Addressing these conflicts through effective resolution strategies enhances teacher relationships and directly impacts learner outcomes. By promoting a culture of collaboration and open dialogue, educators can better support learners with special needs, ensuring they receive the tailored assistance necessary for their academic and personal growth.

The significance of professional development in enhancing teacher collaboration is underscored by Darling-Hammond, Newton, and Wei (2010), who emphasize the importance of targeted training in communication, problem-solving, and cultural sensitivity. Such training equips teachers with the essential tools for successful collaboration and conflict resolution, fostering an environment where teachers can share expertise and strategies.

Additionally, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2008) highlight the critical role of cooperative learning strategies in promoting effective teamwork among educators. Their research indicates that structured cooperative learning approaches can enhance communication and mutual support, contributing to more productive and harmonious working relationships. By implementing these strategies, teachers can create a collaborative atmosphere that benefits all students, especially those with diverse learning needs.

Moreover, Matson (2019) identifies current and emerging trends in special education, emphasizing the necessity for adaptable and collaborative approaches to meet evolving educational demands. This adaptability is essential as educators navigate an increasingly diverse classroom landscape. A study by Mitchell and Sutherland (2020) provides evidence-based insights into effective teaching strategies for inclusive education. It stresses the importance of robust collaboration between special education and receiving teachers to ensure that all students receive tailored support. Further, Healey (2020) discusses the importance of collaborative planning in fragmented educational settings, offering valuable perspectives on how structured planning can help overcome barriers to effective teamwork. By integrating these insights, educators can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, benefiting all students and enhancing educational outcomes.

In the Philippine educational context, effective leadership and conflict management are crucial for enhancing collaboration between receiving and special education teachers, directly impacting school performance. The study by Mangulabnan, Dela Rosa, and Vargas (2022) examines how various leadership styles influence school conflict management strategies. Their findings highlight that transformational and participative leadership styles are particularly effective in fostering teacher collaboration. Transformational leaders inspire educators and create a culture of mutual support, while participative leaders involve teachers in decision-making, enhancing their commitment and sense of ownership. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of conflict management strategies, such as open communication and mediation, in addressing misunderstandings and building trust among educators. These strategies are vital for promoting teamwork and collaboration, particularly in special education settings, where teachers must navigate differing instructional approaches to support students with special needs.

Despite extensive research highlighting the importance of collaboration and conflict resolution in education, there remains to be a significant gap in understanding how these dynamics uniquely influence the interaction between receiving and special education teachers. While previous studies have provided valuable insights, educators' specific challenges in managing conflicts and fostering effective collaboration within diverse educational settings warrant further investigation. This study is motivated by the ongoing need to address these challenges and explore innovative strategies to enhance academic outcomes for students with special needs and promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

1.1 Review of Related Literature

Factors Contributing to Successful Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

Successful collaboration between receiving and special education teachers is paramount for delivering high-quality education to students with special needs. This partnership is essential for ensuring students receive individualized support and accommodations to thrive in the classroom. Effective teamwork is influenced by several key factors, beginning with mutual respect and open communication. When teachers feel valued and respected, they are more likely to engage in productive dialogues, reducing misunderstandings and promoting a supportive atmosphere (Matson, 2019). Open communication channels help to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas, ensuring that all stakeholders are on the same page.

Another critical element is the establishment of shared goals and a common vision. When educators align their efforts toward unified objectives, they foster teamwork and create a sense of purpose. Collaborative planning sessions can help to ensure that all teachers work together to support their students' diverse needs (Healey, 2020). Professional development is vital in equipping teachers with the skills to navigate challenges and foster positive interactions (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Regular communication, problem-solving, and cultural sensitivity training enhances their ability to interact effectively and address the unique needs of students with special needs.

Additionally, Strong leadership support is crucial for cultivating a collaborative culture within the school. School leaders who promote respect, professional growth, and a positive school climate can significantly impact teacher dynamics (Healey, 2020), encouraging meaningful partnerships and collaboration. Adequate time for collaboration, access to necessary resources, and well-defined roles can help to facilitate effective teamwork and prevent misunderstandings. Despite these supportive elements, challenges like differing instructional approaches and communication breakdowns can arise (Matson, 2019). To address these challenges, teachers can employ coping mechanisms such as active listening, conflict resolution techniques, and seeking support from colleagues or administrators.

In conclusion, enhancing collaboration between receiving and special education teachers involves fostering respect, shared goals, professional development, strong leadership, and effective organizational practices. By addressing challenges and implementing strategic approaches, schools can create a more supportive and effective learning environment for learners with special needs.

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Fostering Effective Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

Despite the numerous benefits of collaboration between receiving and special education teachers, several challenges can impede their efforts. Common barriers include workload and time constraints, making it difficult for teachers to collaborate effectively. With multiple responsibilities—such as lesson planning, grading, and meeting individual student needs—teachers often struggle to prioritize collaborative efforts (Matson, 2019). Additionally, differing instructional approaches can create tension. Each educator may have unique teaching philosophies and strategies, leading to disagreements on how best to support students with

special needs. This divergence complicates cohesive teamwork, especially when there is no shared framework for inclusive practices.

Interpersonal dynamics such as lack of trust, communication breakdowns, and power imbalances can further hinder collaboration (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). Trust is foundational in collaborative relationships; without it, teachers may hesitate to share insights or accept feedback. Communication issues often stem from misunderstandings or insufficient channels for dialogue, exacerbating tensions. Power imbalances can arise when one teacher feels undervalued, complicating the collaborative process. To cope with these challenges, teachers can employ several effective strategies. Practical communication skills are crucial for addressing misunderstandings and fostering open dialogue. Active listening builds trust and encourages meaningful interactions (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Additionally, teachers can use conflict resolution techniques to handle disputes constructively, ensuring that conflicts do not detract from student support. Seeking assistance from colleagues, administrators, or professional development providers can also be beneficial. Peer collaboration and participation in professional learning communities allow teachers to share experiences and strategies, creating a supportive network that enhances collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

In conclusion, although collaboration between receiving and special education teachers offers substantial benefits for student support, various challenges can impede teamwork. Workload, time constraints, differing instructional approaches, and interpersonal issues like trust and communication breakdowns create roadblocks. However, effective communication skills, active listening, and conflict-resolution techniques can help teachers navigate these challenges. Additionally, seeking colleague support and professional development opportunities can foster a collaborative culture. Ultimately, overcoming these barriers and strengthening collaboration are essential for creating a supportive environment that empowers educators and learners with special needs.

1.2 Research Objective

1. Identify the factors contributing to successful collaboration and conflict resolution between receiving and special education teachers.
2. To explore the challenges and coping mechanisms received and special education teachers employ in fostering effective collaboration and conflict resolution.
3. To unearth strategies and interventions to promote effective collaboration and conflict resolution between receiving and special education teachers.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the intricate dynamics between receiving and special education teachers, focusing on factors that facilitate successful collaboration and conflict resolution. By examining challenges such as differing instructional approaches, communication barriers, and interpersonal issues, the research seeks to uncover effective strategies for overcoming obstacles and improving collaborative efforts. The insights gained from this study will be beneficial to various stakeholders within the educational system, including:

Department of Education Officials. This study offers valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of overseeing teachers who work with diverse learners. Insights from the research can aid in developing impactful policies and strategies to enhance the quality of education in schools.

School Heads. By examining the experiences and viewpoints of school heads regarding the management of teachers who handle diverse learners through differentiated instruction, this study provides valuable insights that can assist in formulating practical approaches to support these educators and elevate the overall standard of education in schools.

Teachers. The study's exploration of the experiences of receiving teachers in managing learners with diverse learning needs can yield important observations. These insights will contribute to the development of effective strategies to support these teachers and improve the overall quality of education in schools.

Students. Finally, the study can provide valuable perspectives on addressing students' needs. These insights can help develop effective strategies that enhance the quality of education and improve student outcomes in schools.

1.4 Theoretical Lens

Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), provides a framework for understanding the dynamics between receiving and special education teachers. This theory suggests that individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating others, particularly role models. In the context of teacher collaboration, this means that teachers can learn positive or negative behaviors from each other. For example, if a special education teacher is seen effectively collaborating with a receiving teacher, other teachers may be more likely to adopt similar strategies. Conversely, negative behaviors such as blaming or avoiding conflict can also be learned through observation.

Additionally, Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of self-efficacy, which is an individual's belief in their ability to succeed. Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to engage in positive collaboration and conflict resolution behaviors. Cognitive processes, such as thoughts and beliefs, also play a significant role. Teachers who hold negative stereotypes about each other may be more prone to conflict. By applying Social Learning Theory, this study can provide valuable insights into how teachers learn and adopt behaviors related to collaboration and conflict resolution. This information can be used to develop interventions and strategies to promote positive interactions and reduce conflict within schools.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study will employ a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of both receiving and special education teachers in the context of their collaboration and conflict resolution. According to Dangal, M., & Joshi, R. (2020), phenomenology is a philosophical approach that seeks to understand the subjective experiences of individuals. In this study, the phenomenological approach will allow for a deep understanding of the factors that contribute to successful collaboration, challenges faced, and strategies for overcoming conflicts between receiving and special education teachers.

2.2 Participants of the Study

The participants of this study will include six (6) teachers: three (3) receiving teachers and three special education teachers from public schools within a district of Davao City. Three (3) participants will be involved in In-Depth Interviews (IDI), and three will participate in Focus Group Discussions (FGD). A purposive sampling technique will be used to select participants who have significant experience working with each other. This approach was chosen because it allowed for recruiting individuals with in-depth knowledge and understanding of the issues being investigated (Hossan et al., 2023). While purposive sampling provides a rich and detailed understanding of the selected cases, it is important to acknowledge that the findings may not be generalizable to the entire population. The final sample size will be determined based on the saturation point, where no new themes or insights emerge from the data.

2.3 Research Instrument

A Semi-Structured Interview Guide will be used in this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), an interview guide is a structured set of open-ended questions or prompts designed to facilitate a focused conversation with a participant about a specific topic or research question. The interview guide for this study will be developed based on the research objectives and will include questions related to participants with experience in collaboration and conflict between receiving and special education teachers. The interview guides should be designed to elicit rich, detailed data relevant to the research question and flexible enough to allow for unexpected insights and themes to emerge.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study will establish ethical aspects in research by following the DOST Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) mandate. Before the start of the study, participants' complete agreement will be obtained, and the confidentiality or restriction of participants' personal information will be ensured. Therefore, any arising conflict of interest from financial, familial, or proprietary considerations at the study

site will be dealt with accordingly. The researcher will observe complete ethical standards in the study in adherence to the global protection of human rights.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

According to Brinkmann (2020), data gathering often results in substantial information. Various methods exist to document this information during an in-depth interview, such as taking handwritten notes or using audio and video recordings. I conducted in-depth interviews with key informants to gather data for this study. Brinkmann (2020) further emphasized that audio or video recordings should be transcribed verbatim before beginning data analysis if these methods were used for data collection. After conducting the in-depth interviews and completing the transcripts, I validated the accuracy of the participants' responses by allowing them to cross-check the written transcripts.

Before Data Collection. Before gathering data, the researcher obtained permission from the Public Schools District Supervisor, the school head, and the participants. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was provided, giving participants enough time to review and decide whether to participate.

During Data Collection. A semi-structured interview guide with probing questions was used to gather detailed responses. Participants consented to audio recordings and photos while the researcher took notes as a backup. All responses were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings for accuracy.

After Data Collection. A transcription matrix organized the data, aligning responses with the study's objectives and questions. Participants reviewed their transcripts and were free to reject any information they disagreed with, which was removed from both the transcript and recordings.

3. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What factors contribute to successful collaboration between receiving and special education teachers?

Theme 1: Open Communication as the Foundation for Collaboration

Interviewees and focus group participants frequently emphasized the need of candid communication in promoting productive teamwork. As stressed by Receiving Teacher 1 (RT1):

"For me, open communication is key. When we discuss each student's needs thoroughly, I notice that our plans align better, and we can provide more comprehensive support." IDI-RT1:

This supports the findings of Vangrieken et al. (2020), who pointed out that good communication is essential to cooperative learning methods in the classroom. Likewise, the Special Education Teacher (SNED1) stated:

"Mutual understanding of roles is important. When receiving teachers understand the unique needs of my students, and I understand their classroom structure, collaboration becomes smoother." IDI-SNED1,

It concludes that open communication about students and teaching methods is essential to understanding each other's roles, highlighting the necessity of constant discussion.

Theme 2: Transparency in Conflict Resolution

It became clear that transparency was essential to conflict resolution. SNED1 emphasized that "transparency is key" when resolving conflicts because candidly discussing problems results in speedier outcomes. In support of this, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD 2) participants said, *"I've noticed that when the school leadership encourages collaboration, it improves how we work together. Support from administration makes a huge difference."* This suggests that cultivating a culture of transparency improves communication and positively impacts conflict management.

Teachers are more inclined to concentrate on finding answers during conversations when they perceive that their administration is on their side and encourages them to talk candidly about their difficulties. This is consistent with studies by McNair et al. (2021), which discovered that open communication among educators promotes trust and efficient dispute resolution.

Therefore, open and honest communication is essential to cooperation and dispute resolution. Teachers are more likely to have productive conversations and enhance teamwork and student learning outcomes when they feel free to voice their concerns without worrying about the consequences.

Research Question 2: What challenges do receiving and special education teachers encounter in fostering effective collaboration?

Theme 1: Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities

According to Receiving Teacher 2's (RT2) responses, "aligning goals" is essential to productive teamwork. According to RT2, academics while special education teachers emphasize life skill, making collaboration challenging.

Conflicts may result from this mismatch, as was mentioned in FGD 1, where SNED2 observed that *"receiving teachers don't fully understand how to modify the curriculum."* Smith et al.'s research from 2023 confirms this, showing that unclear roles can impede productive teamwork and affect student learning. Achieving cooperative objectives requires that everyone have a standard knowledge of their roles.

Theme 2: Differing Approaches and Challenges

The disparity in teaching approaches was a common subject. Collaboration is complex because receiving and special education teachers have different teaching philosophies, according to RT3 in FGD 2. SNED4 repeated this, explaining that while tailored learning is essential in special education, it can be challenging to apply in larger, regular classroom settings.

According to research by Shaddock et al. (2022), teamwork can be hampered by disparate educational philosophies. Therefore, successful collaboration requires a shared understanding of objectives, frequently hindered by different priorities (e.g., academic skills vs. life skills).

Research Question 3: What coping mechanisms do receiving and special education teachers employ when addressing collaboration and conflict resolution challenges?

Theme 1: Administrative and Institutional Support

Several participants stated that institutional support is essential to promoting collaboration. SNED2 discussed the value of school leadership in fostering collaboration in FGD 1, saying that *"support from administration makes a huge difference."* This suggests that when leadership actively promotes collaboration, teachers feel more empowered to do so.

This result aligns with Lee et al.'s (2020) research, which emphasized the value of administrative assistance in creating cooperative learning settings. Effective leadership can establish a culture that values teamwork and gives teachers the tools they need to succeed.

Theme 2: Time and Resource Constraints

One common topic that emerged as a significant barrier to collaboration was time restrictions. According to RT1, the "limited interaction" between receiving and SNED teachers makes it hard to coordinate their efforts. According to both SNED teachers in FGDs 1 and 2, receiving teachers frequently need more resources or opportunities for professional development, which restricts their capacity to assist kids with special needs.

This supports the findings of Baker et al. (2021), who discovered that insufficient time and resources seriously impede cooperative learning. Facilitating meaningful partnerships requires addressing these limitations.

Theme 3: Training and Professional Development

Joint training sessions are necessary, according to both individual and group respondents. According to RT2, "joint training sessions" between SNED and receiving instructors would improve mutual understanding of roles. SNED3 suggested "peer observations" as a successful intervention to foster collaboration in FGD 1 by giving receiving teachers a chance to observe special education techniques in action.

This aligns with the suggestions made by Parnell et al. (2022), who support collaborative professional development to improve teachers' knowledge and abilities. Schools can better prepare teachers to cooperate and fulfill the varied needs of their pupils by funding collaborative training opportunities.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the central role of communication, clarity of roles and responsibilities, institutional support, and effective coping mechanisms in fostering successful collaboration between receiving and special education (SNED) teachers. Open communication and transparency were identified as essential elements that enhance mutual understanding and reduce conflict, while a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities is critical for aligning instructional goals. Institutional support, mainly through leadership, was shown to facilitate collaboration, though time constraints and limited resources remain significant barriers. Teachers' use of informal coping mechanisms, such as informal conversations and student documentation, reflect their adaptive strategies, though these measures need to be more substitutes for structured collaboration opportunities. Additionally, participants recommended joint professional development, peer observations, and regular collaborative meetings as effective strategies to improve partnership between receiving and SNED teachers. These findings underscore the need for schools to provide formalized support systems and training to enhance collaboration, improve educational outcomes, and better support students with special needs.

5. Recommendation

The researcher presents the following recommendations based on this study's findings and conclusions. These are intended to address critical insights uncovered during the research and offer actionable steps for improving practices, policies, and outcomes in the relevant field, specifically focusing on long-term impact.

Department of Education Officials. To promote improved collaboration, we should set up designated time for receiving and SNED teachers to work together, offer continuous professional development on inclusive education to assist instructors in aligning their teaching methods, and clearly define roles and responsibilities. By instituting these measures, DepEd can establish a long-lasting inclusive education culture. This strategy will raise the standard of education generally, lessen stigma, and improve educational outcomes for students with special needs. These initiatives will eventually lead to a more successful and equitable educational system that can accommodate a range of student demands.

Schools Division. Establish monitoring systems to ensure consistent collaboration between receiving and SNED teachers, provide resources for joint training sessions on inclusive practices, and encourage school administrators to facilitate regular collaboration meetings with clearly defined roles. These measures will create a robust framework for ongoing collaboration and improvement in inclusive education practices. In the

long term, this will lead to more effective resource allocation, improved teacher satisfaction and retention, and consistently better outcomes for students with special needs across the division.

Special Education Teachers. Should actively communicate with receiving teachers by sharing strategies and student progress regularly, engage in collaborative meetings and joint professional development, and proactively offer support and expertise to address the specific needs of students with disabilities. SNED teachers will contribute to a more inclusive school environment by fostering a culture of open communication and shared expertise. This will lead to improved integration of students with special needs, better educational outcomes, and increased capacity for all teachers to support diverse learners over time.

Receiving Teachers. Should seek to understand the needs of students with special needs through regular communication with SNED teachers, participate in training on inclusive practices, and engage in joint planning with SNED teachers. As receiving teachers become more adept at inclusive practices, the overall quality of education for all students will improve. This will reduce stigma, increase social integration, and better academic outcomes for students with special needs. In the long run, this will contribute to a more inclusive society beyond the school environment.

Future Researchers. Could focus on the long-term impact of structured collaboration on student performance, explore specific interventions like co-teaching to provide insights into improving collaboration, and include students' perspectives to give a more comprehensive view of teacher partnerships in inclusive education. Continued research in these areas will provide valuable data to inform policy decisions and best practices in inclusive education. Over time, this will lead to evidence-based improvements in teaching methods, collaboration strategies, and overall educational outcomes for students with special needs. Including student perspectives will ensure that interventions are truly effective and responsive to the needs of those they are designed to serve.

When implemented with a focus on long-term impact, these recommendations can create lasting change in inclusive education. By fostering collaboration, providing ongoing professional development, and conducting further research, stakeholders can work together to build an education system that effectively serves all students, regardless of their individual needs or challenges.

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