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IMPLICIT STRATEGIES OF ELEMENTARY GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Glenda C. Catacutan[1]
[1]*Student, Graduate School, The Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.*

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ABSTRACT

General Education teachers don't have exceedingly specialized capabilities in special education. We don't have much encounters in an inclusive classroom. Not continuously, but regularly, it appears that teachers feel unequal to the errand of educating students with special needs. This study used a phenomenological approach, which explains how people interpret their lived experiences with a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2020). The objective of a phenomenological investigation is to understand and explain an event from the point of view of the participants. Many professionals in the literature express concerns about whether full inclusion is appropriate for all students with disabilities and emphasize the importance of maintaining a continuum of services. Supporters for a continuum of services for students with disabilities cite two main reasons. First, they believe there is an inadequate research base to advocate such a drastic change to the current educational system believes, the research evidence on the relative efficacy of one special education service delivery model over another is scarce, methodologically flawed, and inconclusive. A number of recommendations for future studies emerged from the data. This study was restricted to fifteen elementary general education classroom teachers from Davao City The first recommendation would be to expand this study's sample size and the geographic area of the participants. Another recommendation would be to study the perspectives of participants not included in this study: middle and high school teachers, specials teachers, and special education teachers.

KEYWORDS: *Implicit Strategies, Elementary General Education Teachers, Inclusive Classrooms, A Phenomenological Study*

INTRODUCTION

General Education teachers don't have exceedingly specialized capabilities in special education. We don't have much encounters in an inclusive classroom. Not continuously, but regularly, it appears that teachers feel unequal to the errand of educating students with special needs. It may be a characteristic of the calling that General Education teachers need certainty with such understudies, and feel incapable since we think we lack the skills. This can be something of a myth to be refuted. But teachers know more than they think they know. The challenge is getting these students to appreciate, engage, and keep them on task as much as possible without ruining the usual flow of the classes.

In the United States of America, the evolution of inclusion with emphasis on the general education teacher and instruction in the general education classroom during the pandemic is very evident. That is the reason why this study wanted to explore and analyze how general education teachers describe and interpret the instructional strategies that they use in their inclusive classrooms when teaching students with disabilities. The supports and barriers teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities were also examined (Magiera, 2019).

For thirty years the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been a controversial issue in the public schools. Despite numerous studies over the past three decades, the literature on the effectiveness of full inclusion versus pullout special education programs is inconclusive. The practice of inclusion continues to grow in the public schools despite teachers' lack of preparation, training, and support for inclusion (King-Sears, 2020).

Recently, it has become evident that it is not the placement in the general education classroom, but the instructional strategies used by the general education teacher that makes the difference for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Even with an abundant amount of effective instructional strategies in the literature, studies continue to find that teachers minimally change their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms (Baker, et. al., 2020).

It is evident research based instructional methods are important to the success of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, but we have not extensively explored or studied general education teachers' perspectives and experiences with incorporating these instructional practices into their regular classroom instruction. Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have revealed there is a gap between the research on effective instruction and actual classroom practice, but few studies have explored the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities.

Mercer (2021) has a very little experience about how general education teachers adapt the ways they plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms. This study responded to this gap in the literature by exploring how general education teachers describe their instructional planning, strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with disabilities. This study also investigated what supports and barriers general education teachers describe when planning and implementing instruction for students with disabilities.

Many researchers believe a lack of teachers prepared to provide quality inclusive services to students with disabilities is one of the primary barriers to serving students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Evans, et. al., 2021). Proponents of inclusion have advocated for drastic changes in the responsibilities of general education teachers without seeing if general education teachers are prepared or if they support teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Kauffman, et. al., 2019).
In the last two decades, considerable progress had been made in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective interventions for students with learning disabilities (Gersten, 2018). A number of studies have focused specifically on the best instructional strategies for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Kame'enui & Simmons, 2020). In addition, several meta-analyses and research syntheses studies regarding intervention strategies for students with learning disabilities were completed with support from the U.S Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and with the National Center for Learning Disabilities, which have further added to the body of literature on effective instruction for students with disabilities (Elbaum, et. al., 2021).

After reviewing this comprehensive body of literature regarding the instruction of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, a number of instructional themes emerged. These instructional themes for inclusion will be described and examined thoroughly in Chapter II in order to develop a lens through which to view this study through. These themes include: teacher directed instruction, instructional grouping, and collaboration. The key to success for students with disabilities in the general education classrooms is the general education teacher (Keogh, 2020).

Despite the overabundance of effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities, numerous researchers and practitioners have found that few strategies are systematically and frequently implemented in inclusive classrooms by general education teachers (Malouf & Schiller, 2020). Individualized instruction typically does not occur in the general education classroom and many teachers make few or no adaptations for students with disabilities (Baker & Zigmond, 2020). Regular education tends to be dominated by instructional practices that are designed to teach to the "average" student instead of a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds and characteristics (Stainback & Stainback, 2018).

General education teachers minimally change their instructional methods when students with disabilities are placed in their classrooms (Vaughn & Schumm, 2023). A major problem with the inclusion movement is the limited attention devoted to planning and preparing general education teachers for inclusion (Simpson & Myles, 2020). Numerous studies have found that regular education teachers perceive themselves to be unprepared to teach children with disabilities (Salvia & Munson, 2019). Most states require general education teachers to take only one introductory course in special education in order to receive a teaching degree (Peterson & Beloin, 2021).

Usually, this course provides an overview on the different disabilities, but lacks in teaching a variety of instructional strategies for teaching students with disabilities (Reiff, et. al., 2021). Also, the reauthorization of IDEIA stresses the use of scientific based interventions in the general education classroom to ensure students' learning difficulties are not due to a lack of adequate instruction.

In the Philippines, Ecoben (2019), concluded that public-school teachers in the Department Education have not fully embraced the inclusive education due to the following reasons: Teachers were more aware of the need for updated special education training that would equip them in handling pupils' behavior and would provide them teaching strategies in imparting lessons to the mainstream pupils; Teachers were having difficulty in collaborating with the special education teachers since the latter did not monitor or evaluate the progress of the mainstream pupils; Teachers were skilled on a personal level. However, Teachers needed teaching strategies in handling the mainstream pupils.

Inclusion has already penetrated private education in the Philippines, but whether high-quality IE is implemented in Quezon City is an entirely different matter. The participants in his study believed that they practiced or are involved in IE, but they admit that they operate only within the scope of their limited and very general knowledge of inclusion. It has been observed that the participants are worried about the lack of IE knowledge and training among many teachers of inclusive schools, (Muega 2019). The lack of IE training among general education teachers is indicated by their admission that they are wanting in competence to facilitate high level inclusion of CSN. The malaise they have registered regarding this admission is not without reason, for even the best-equipped inclusive education system in the world finds real challenge in its own practice of inclusion.

Inclusion in Davao City, as cited by Gomez 2022, inclusive education is not clear and not well grasped by teachers in school districts of Davao City and Digos City, (Ignacio & Jawati 2018). In their study, it was recommended that teachers should be oriented on their roles in an inclusive education setting. Furthermore, collaboration between the school and families of children with special needs should be done and implemented.

Orogo (2019) in her study proved that the Davao City schools division has only partially implemented the inclusive education because of their limited access to school facilities such as ramps to accommodate students on wheelchair. Moreover, it was found out that teachers have positive attitude about inclusive education.

Research Questions

Few studies have explored the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities. Very little is known about what effective instructional strategies general education teachers use or how they plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms. This study examined these issues through the following research questions:

1. What are the strategies used by general education teachers to facilitate SPED learners?
2. How do general education teachers cater the needs of SPED learners in an inclusive classroom?
3. What are the interventions used by the teachers in order to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The specifics of the research methods will be explained in the next part so that researchers in the future might extrapolate the findings of this study to different contexts. Transferability, the qualitative equivalent of external validity in postpositivist research, will be developed by detailed and meticulous discussions of the study's time, place, environment, and culture (Mertens, 2005) as cited in Foster, et. al., (2018). This section will address the following topics: (a) the interview technique; (b) the researcher's function; and (c) the sample strategy and ethical issues.

Participants and Sampling

Fifteen participants who are all Elementary Teachers in both public and private schools in Davao City are the focused in this study. The said participants are chosen through random sampling; eight from private school (four males and four females) and seven from public schools (three males and four females). All of them are licensed teachers and has experience teaching for almost two years to learners with disabilities.

Participant 1 is a licensed professional teacher in a private school in Davao City. She is an experienced teacher for almost 14 years and she taught general education subjects among learners with disabilities. Currently, she is pursuing her Masters Degree in Educational Management (thesis writing).

Participant 2 is a male teacher in one of the private schools in Davao City. He is a licensed professional teacher. He experienced teaching for almost two years and he taught general education subjects among learners with disabilities. He is currently enrolled in his Master's Degree in Educational Management.
Participant 3 is considered as a mother of learners with disabilities. A teacher for almost fifteen years handling general education subjects under special education program. Some of her students are deaf, mute and blind. She obtained her Masters Degree in Guidance and Counselling three years ago.

Participant 4 is a female licensed teacher from private school in Davao City. She is currently teaching general education subjects to learners with disabilities such as deaf and mute. She is currently pursuing her MA in education specializing guidance and counselling.

Participant 5 is a male licensed teacher from private school teaching for almost three years in the elementary program handling general education subjects to learners with disabilities. Currently, he is pursuing his Master's Degree in Education Management.

Participant 6 is a licensed professional teacher. She obtained her Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education two-years ago. Currently, she is handling general education subjects in the elementary program in one of the private schools in Davao City.

Participant 7 is a male licensed teacher from private school in Davao City. He is currently teaching general education subjects to learners with disabilities such as deaf and mute. He is currently pursuing his MA in education specializing guidance and counselling.

Participant 8 is a male teacher in one of the private schools in Davao City. He is a licensed professional teacher. He experienced teaching for almost six years and he taught general education subjects among learners with disabilities. He is currently enrolled in his Master's Degree in Educational Management.

Participant 9 is a licensed professional teacher in a public school in Davao City. She is an experienced teacher for almost 5 years and she taught general education subjects among learners with disabilities. Currently, she is pursuing her Master's Degree in Educational Management.

Participant 10 is a licensed professional teacher. She obtained her Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education two-years ago. Currently, she is handling general education subjects in the elementary program in one of the public schools in Davao City.

Participant 11 is a female licensed teacher from public school in Davao City. She is currently teaching general education subjects to learners with disabilities such as deaf and mute. She is currently pursuing her MA in education specializing guidance and counselling.
Participant 12 is a male licensed teacher from public school teaching for almost three years in the elementary program handling general education subjects to learners with disabilities. Currently, he is pursuing his Master's Degree in Education Management.

Participant 13 is a female teacher in one of the public schools in Davao City. She is a licensed professional teacher. He experienced teaching for almost six years and he taught general education subjects among learners with disabilities. She is currently enrolled in his Master's Degree in Educational Management.

Participant 14 is a licensed professional teacher. He obtained her Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education one-year ago. Currently, he is handling general education subjects in the elementary program in one of the public schools in Davao City.

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Participant 15 is a licensed professional teacher in a public school in Davao City. He is an experienced teacher for almost 5 years and she taught general education subjects among learners with disabilities. Currently, he is pursuing her Master's Degree in Educational Management.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis begins with the process of organizing, reducing, and describing the collected data (Schwandt, 2021). Unlike quantitative analysis there are no prescribed formulas for qualitative analysis. It reminds researchers that qualitative analysis does not proceed in a linear fashion and it is not neat. However, good practice and procedures enhance the credibility of qualitative research. In this last section, the data analysis procedures will be explained and the steps taken to ensure the results from this study are credible, transferable, dependable, and authentic will be thoroughly described. To guide the data analysis, the researcher used the seven phases of data analysis as a means to reduce data, create manageable pieces, allow for interpretation, and find meaning in the words of the participants. The seven phases included; organizing the data; immersion in the data; generating categories and themes; coding the data; offering interpretations through analytic memos; and searching for alternative understandings.

Data analysis first begins with organizing the data. Organization of the data involved keeping information provided by each participant separate and in sequence with the order of the interviews. The process of organizing the data allowed it to remain manageable, easily accessible, and readily available. The digital audio files from the interviews were carefully transcribed into written form. Electronic folders were established to create organization for the data collected from each individual participant.

Next, the researcher became familiar with the data through extensive reading of the interviews to gain an understanding of the content. This involved reading through the interviews at least three times. Following Hatch's (2022) recommendations for qualitative analysis, the researcher created a sheet of notes for each participant. The summary sheets were a quick way to refer back to the original data as the data analysis continued.

After the initial readings, Hatch (2022) recommends researchers read data through completely with one typology in mind. They define typologies as classification systems made up of categories that divide some aspect of the world into parts. Typologies are generated from the theory, common sense, or research objectives. For this study, the researcher used the typologies or themes from the literature review as the constructs through which to view the data.

After reading through the data with each construct or typology in mind, the researcher coded the data into five categories from the literature by taking excerpts of text from the data and identifying it within a particular category.

After everything was coded, the researcher read through the data again while writing analytic memos on her thoughts and insights and began the process of offering interpretations. During this stage the researcher began to interpret the data to find significance and meaning in the teachers' instructional experiences through pulling salient themes, reoccurring ideas, and patterns of belief that resonated collectively throughout the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Maximizing the participation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been a continuous theme in the field of education under K12 curriculum. Although well intended, some studies found mainstreaming had a number of negative effects on children. Sometimes students were stigmatized when placed in special education placements that separated them from their normally achieving classmates.

Implications

Through inclusion, general education teachers take more responsibility for students with disabilities instead of sending them to resource rooms. Students with disabilities enjoy increased instruction time due to inclusion, because students are no longer traveling to the resource room for instruction and missing key content in the general education classroom. Studies have found that students with learning disabilities can be supported in the general education settings for the entire school day with academic achievement at least as high, if not higher than those achieved in separate class settings.

Many professionals in the literature express concerns about whether full inclusion is appropriate for all students with disabilities and emphasize the importance of maintaining a continuum of services. Supporters for a continuum of services for students with disabilities cite two main reasons. First, they believe there is an inadequate research base to advocate such a drastic change to the current educational system believes, the research evidence on the relative efficacy of one special education service delivery model over another is scarce, methodologically flawed, and inconclusive. Some studies support positive trends with inclusion programs; however, others have reported disappointing or unsatisfactory academic and social achievement through inclusion models.

Secondly, many students with learning disabilities need individualized teaching and explicit instruction, which some professionals believe is extremely complex and difficult to provide in the general education most especially conducting classes using different online platforms. Advocates of a continuum of services believe inclusion ignores the notion of individual planning and that students with disabilities need more intensive instruction then can be provided in a general classroom. Full inclusion threatens the varied and intense service delivery options that advocates have spent years obtaining for students with disabilities. The availability of a continuum of services has been mandated in the law and reflects the wishes of many parents, educators, and legislators and the loss of these service options would violate the civil rights of students with disabilities.

The different inclusion philosophies have overwhelmingly been disputed and discussed by leading researchers in the field through numerous books, journals, and position papers. It is evident that a division still exists between supporters of full inclusion. However, teachers can be better served the learners with disabilities by using different strategies.

No intervention eliminates the impact of having a disability and there is not one placement or program model that is effective for all students with disabilities. The placement or setting is not a treatment, but it is what goes on in that setting for student with disabilities that is important. The one thing that makes the difference for students with disabilities is the level and quality of instruction. It is not the placement in the general education classroom, but the instructional strategies used by the general education teacher that makes the difference for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

The key to success for students with disabilities in the general education classrooms is the general education teacher. Despite the overabundance of effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities in this time of pandemic, numerous researchers and practitioners have found that few strategies are systematically and frequently implemented in inclusive classrooms by general education teachers. Individualized instruction typically does not occur in the general education classroom and many teachers make few or no adaptations for students with disabilities. Regular education tends to be dominated by instructional practices that are designed to teach to the “average” student instead of a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds. With a holistic approach to support children’s early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and encourages them to explore their surrounding world and environment.

Future Directions

A number of recommendations for future studies emerged from the data. This study was restricted to fifteen elementary general education classroom teachers from Davao City The first recommendation would be to expand this study’s sample size and the geographic area of the participants. Another recommendation would be to study the perspectives of participants not included in this study: middle and high school teachers, specials teachers, and special education teachers. In order to collect more data on the lived experiences of general education teachers, follow-up classroom observations are recommended.

Studying the instructional strategies for inclusion as described by the participants using a quantitative approach would also be beneficial. One of the findings from this study was the lack of collaboration between the general education and special education teachers. Further research is recommended to explore what type of co-teaching and alternative school program models increase the collaboration between general education and special education teachers and better serve students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Moreover, educators, parents and individual students assess each student’s situation and discuss adjustments needed for remote learning. Some examples include using alternatives to print, such as audio or other formats in instruction, as well as pictures, flexible scheduling and deadlines, and assistive technology.

Learning in a remote setting may differ from mainstream, classroom-based environments. This includes expectations for students and course methodology. Curricula must often be adjusted. For example, homework can be simplified, allowing students to dictate rather than type, and audio materials can be provided for reading assignments during online class.

Finally, more time and resources are required for students with disabilities to actively participate in learning. This includes equipment, internet access and specially designed materials and support.

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