EPRA International Journal of Environmental Economics, Commerce and Educational Management
Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0414 |ISI I.F Value: 0.815|SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.481 ISSN: 2348 – 814X
Volume: 11 | Issue:11 |November 2024

FINDING SILVER LININGS: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY NON-SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE ERA OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra18868
DOI No: 10.36713/epra18868

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to uncover the lived experiences of twelve (12) non-special needs education (non-SNed) teachers at New Corella National High School, focusing on the challenges they faced in the era of inclusive education. Additionally, the study described how these teachers coped with these challenges and the insights they gained from their experiences. In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with twelve (12) participants selected through purposive sampling. Results indicated that non-SNed teachers encountered various challenges, including managing diverse learning needs, lacking proper training and resources, and difficulties with integration and inclusion. Participants coped with these struggles by receiving comprehensive training, creating an inclusive atmosphere, enhancing student engagement and participation, achieving academic progress, and employing flexible learning strategies. The insights drawn from their experiences emphasized the importance of cultivating patience and adaptability, enriching understanding and empathy, navigating professional growth and challenges in inclusive education, and embracing and loving their students. Future researchers should adopt a mixed-methods approach with more participants to comprehensively grasp inclusive education processes.

KEYWORDS- *Non-Special Needs Education Teachers, Lived Experience, Challenges, Inclusive Education, Qualitative, Phenomenology, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

When every student's strength and challenge are recognized in the classroom, it sets the stage for a profound learning experience, especially within special needs education, which occupies a distinctive role in the broader educational spectrum. One of the most important factors in the success of educating children with special needs is the quality of the teacher. It fosters an environment where students with diverse learning needs are nurtured and empowered to reach their full potential. This individualized approach recognizes the unique strengths and challenges of each student, allowing them to thrive in a supportive and inclusive learning environment (Roldán et al., 2021).

However, the implementation of inclusive education presents distinct challenges for non-special education teachers. Differentiating instruction to cater to diverse learning styles, abilities, and developmental levels within a single classroom remains a significant challenge (Ainscow et al., 2019). Managing and supporting students with challenging behaviors alongside typical learners continues to require specialized training and effective strategies, with additional emphasis on social-emotional learning (Villa & Thousand, 2016). Developing targeted solutions empowers teachers to thrive in this crucial role. Specifically, as cited by de Boer et al. (2018), they serve as advocates for students with special needs, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their needs are met within the school community.

In Indonesia, recent research conducted by Woodcock & Hardy (2023), highlights that the majority of non-special needs teachers in Indonesia are facing a moderate level of Professional Self-Efficacy (PSE) within the inclusive education setting. This indicates that many educators are finding it challenging to effectively cater to the diverse needs of students with special needs within mainstream classrooms. The researchers attribute this difficulty primarily to several factors inherent in Indonesia's inclusive education landscape. One significant factor identified is the lack of sufficient resources and support systems for non-special needs teachers within mainstream schools. This includes inadequate training opportunities, limited access to specialized teaching materials, and a shortage of support staff, such as teacher aides or special education coordinators.

In the Philippines, particularly in different areas of Metro Manila, both urban and rural regions, public schools often face a shortage of resources. Many educators in the country lack confidence in their ability to effectively teach in an inclusive classroom setting. They find it challenging to support students with special needs while also managing a large class, requiring careful planning of multiple lesson plans. The current approach of conducting weekend, week-long, or month-long workshop-seminars is insufficient in adequately preparing teachers, school leaders, and parents

of children with special needs for the demands of inclusive education. This lack of readiness may hinder the quality of inclusion by not equipping stakeholders with the essential skills and knowledge needed for successful implementation (Muega, 2019).

In New Corella National High School, the challenges encountered by non-special needs teachers within the era of inclusive education demand thorough investigation, particularly in the local setting. These educators face significant obstacles in effectively fulfilling their roles within the inclusive education framework, impacting their ability to provide optimal support for students with diverse learning needs. Non-special needs teachers at New Corella National High School are confronted with various challenges stemming from the absence of proper training and support. According to Cosmeño (February 19, 2024), one critical issue is the lack of adequate training for receiving teachers in accommodation and acceptance of students with special needs. This deficiency in comprehensive training significantly impedes educators' ability to effectively integrate learners with diverse needs into regular classrooms.

Moreover, fostering acceptance among students and peers is a significant challenge for non-special needs teachers at New Corella National High School. Without a supportive and inclusive environment, students with special needs may face barriers to their learning and social integration, further hindering their educational experiences. The recent review of research by Kefallinou et al. (2020a) educational inclusion proven positive effects on the academic outcomes of students with special needs, and its positive impact on the subsequent social inclusion of people with special needs in terms of further academic opportunities and qualifications, access to employment and developing personal relationships within the community.

Numerous studies have explored the real-life experiences of special education teachers working in inclusive education environments. Villegas and Tabañag (2023) notably conducted a meta-synthesis of Filipino teachers' encounters with inclusive education in the Philippines. Their study combined insights from 15 initial research projects, highlighting recurring themes like teachers' professional development, adherence to inclusion policies, and innovative teaching methods. While there were positive aspects, teachers also faced challenges such as inadequate training in special education, limited educational resources, and the influence of social factors on teaching. Despite the valuable insights provided by these studies, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific difficulties encountered by non-special education teachers in the era of inclusive education. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by focusing on the distinct challenges that non-special education teachers face in today's inclusive education landscape. It specifically aims to explore the obstacles that impede their ability to effectively implement inclusive education strategies and support students with diverse needs. By examining the particular challenges experienced by non-special education teachers, this study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the factors that impact their work and the support systems necessary to enhance inclusive education practices.

The significance of addressing the challenges faced by non-special needs teachers will shed light on the perspectives of educators working with students with diverse learning needs, enabling the development of strategies to overcome obstacles and enhance support systems. By identifying these challenges, the researchers can better equip non-special needs education teachers to provide tailored education and support, ultimately fostering the academic and personal growth of students with special needs. Furthermore, exploring the challenges faced by non-special needs teachers will illuminate the impact of inclusive education on employment opportunities for students with diverse learning needs. Aligned with the Department of Education's "MATATAG" program agenda, this study addresses three critical components: firstly, it sheds light on the impediments hindering the effective delivery of specialized educational facilities and services, crucial for catering to the unique requirements of students with special needs. Secondly, by examining the day-to-day experiences of non-special education teachers and their impact on student health and academic outcomes, this study contributes to the promotion of learner well-being and inclusivity within the educational system. Lastly, it serves as a catalyst for supporting non-special education teachers by identifying key areas where additional resources, training, and professional development are needed to enhance their teaching efficacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In addressing the complexities encountered by mainstream preschool educators when integrating inclusive education practices, it's crucial to underscore the multifaceted nature of the hurdles they face. Beyond the inherent difficulties within the classroom, factors such as insufficient opportunities for professional development and restricted access to resources play pivotal roles in impeding the seamless support of children with disabilities (Paradowska, 2020). These challenges ripple throughout the educational system, revealing systemic inadequacies that undermine the overall quality and efficacy of inclusive education initiatives.

Various studies have highlighted the significant hurdles encountered by educators in inclusive education settings, particularly those who are not specifically trained in special needs education. Sánchez et al. (2023) underscored that the absence of adequate initial teacher training stands out as a major obstacle to effective inclusion practices. This deficiency in training directly impacts the ability of teachers to cater to the diverse needs of students within mainstream classrooms.

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Silva (2023) further elucidated the challenges faced by early childhood educators, citing a notable gap in teacher training, a lack of incentives, and struggles in delivering high-quality teaching that fosters genuine inclusion. Additionally, Triviño-Amigo et al. (2022) observed that educators at both primary and secondary levels often feel ill-equipped to manage student diversity, with many expressing dissatisfaction with their initial training. Nonetheless, there is a willingness among educators to engage in continuous professional development, particularly in the realm of inclusive education, with primary school teachers exhibiting a more positive disposition towards further training compared to their secondary counterparts.

Furthermore, when considering the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools, it becomes evident that a multifaceted approach is necessary to address the various barriers encountered by educators and students alike. For instance, enhancing teacher knowledge and skills in catering to students with special educational needs remains a crucial aspect of promoting inclusive practices (Ediyanto et al., 2023a). This includes providing comprehensive training sessions that focus on effective instructional strategies, behavior management techniques, and individualized support plans tailored to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Moreover, the significance of school facilities in facilitating inclusive education cannot be overlooked. It is imperative to ensure that school environments are physically accessible and equipped with necessary accommodations and assistive technologies to create an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for students with disabilities (Ediyanto et al., 2023b; Mangope et al., 2020). By improving the infrastructure of educational settings, educators can better cater to the diverse needs of their students and promote an inclusive and supportive learning environment that fosters growth and development for all learners.

Additionally, fostering positive student attitudes towards inclusivity and diversity is essential for creating a harmonious and accepting school community that values the unique contributions of each individual. Encouraging empathy, understanding, and mutual respect among students can significantly enhance the social and emotional well-being of all learners, promoting a culture of inclusivity and belonging within the school setting.

Collaboration with various stakeholders, including parents, community members, and external support agencies, also plays a pivotal role in promoting successful inclusive education initiatives. By establishing effective partnerships and communication channels with these stakeholders, educators can access additional resources, expertise, and support systems that are essential for meeting the diverse needs of students with disabilities and ensuring their academic and social inclusion within the school community.

Research Questions

This study seeks to examine the difficulties faced by teachers in special education when implementing inclusive education. The research will use a systematic method for gathering and analyzing data, with a focus on three key questions to better understand the experiences of special education teachers.

1. What were the experiences of non-SNed teachers in handling students with diverse needs in the era of inclusive education?
2. How do non-SNed teachers cope with the challenges in teaching students with diverse needs in the era of inclusive education?
3. What insights could be drawn from the experiences and challenges faced by the non-SNed teachers in handling students with diverse needs in the era of inclusive education?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology, specifically employing a phenomenological approach, to explore the experiences and challenges faced by non-Special Needs Education (non-SNed) teachers in managing mainstream classrooms within the context of inclusive education. The phenomenological method is particularly suited to understanding the deep, subjective experiences of individuals in educational settings, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the complexities inherent in teaching diverse student populations.

Phenomenology serves as a powerful theoretical framework in educational research by facilitating a detailed examination of the lived experiences of educators, thereby enriching our understanding of their daily challenges and coping mechanisms in inclusive settings (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). By engaging with the personal narratives of non-SNed teachers, this study aimed to unearth the thematic elements that characterized their experiences, which include the strategies they employed and the obstacles they encountered.

Data collection for this study involved in-depth interviews with non-SNed teachers from New Corella National High School who have managed mainstream classrooms comprising of both typical and special needs students. The prerequisite criteria specify that these teachers must have had at least two students with special needs in such settings during the academic years 2022-2023. This criterion was based on preliminary findings suggesting that teachers with this level of experience provide richer, more insightful data regarding the integration of SNed students in mainstream environments (Cullen et al, 2020).

The phenomenological analysis was accomplished by transcribing, coding, and thematically analyzing the interview data. This process helped identify significant patterns and themes in the teachers' experiences, guided by the theoretical perspectives outlined by Barrell (2020), who emphasized the importance of understanding the "lived space" within educational practice.

Overall, this research design was chosen because it effectively captures the complex realities and challenges faced by teachers in inclusive educational contexts, contributing to the broader discourse on educational inclusivity and providing practical insights for policy and practice in similar settings. The findings are expected to offer valuable implications for teacher training, classroom management strategies, and policy development aimed at enhancing inclusive education practices.

Research Participants

The subjects of this phenomenological investigation comprised non-Special Needs Education teachers, selected randomly, who have encountered numerous difficulties in managing mainstream classrooms within the context of inclusive education. Twelve non-Special Needs Education teachers, each responsible for instructing two or more Special Needs students within their classrooms, were selected to participate in the In-Depth Interviews. Phenomenological research typically includes sample sizes ranging from five to twenty-five participants, as recommended by Bartholomew et al. (2021).

Research Instruments

The interview guide for the IDIs was developed by the researchers and validated by the validator to ensure its accuracy. While the questions in the guide were originally formulated in English, participants were encouraged to respond in their preferred language to facilitate a more organic and smooth flow of information.

In qualitative research, In-depth interviews (IDI) frequently serve as a cornerstone for comprehending human behaviors and experiences. These discussions are intimate and comprehensive, aiming to reveal an individual's experiences, viewpoints, and feelings (Politz, 2024).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis emerges as a vital approach for uncovering, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative datasets. Braun and Clarke (2022a) emphasize its systematic nature, providing a structured methodology for coding data and extracting overarching themes that surpass surface-level scrutiny. In this study, the investigators embraced thematic analysis as the guiding framework, adhering to Braun and Clarke's recommended six-step process to navigate the data analysis journey.

The exploration of data began with a comprehensive immersion in the dataset, where the researchers acquainted themselves with its intricacies and underlying narratives. This initial step involved thorough reading and scanning to grasp the dataset's holistic story. Subsequently, meticulous organization and preparation laid the foundation for coding, akin to systematically labeling data segments to encapsulate essential concepts and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were analyzed in this chapter, and the conclusions drawn from them were presented. The implications for educational practice were also discussed considering the investigations findings.

Managing Diverse Learning Needs

Adjusting learning in diverse classrooms can match curriculum goals and boost student interest and involvement. However, it needs a customized approach that fits the class and student needs. With different students come different needs, so it's crucial to recognize and cater to them. Teachers adapt curriculum goals based on students' development stages. To meet diverse student needs, teachers must implement differentiated learning, which means tailoring the learning process to match students' readiness, interests, and profiles identified through diagnostic assessments (Zulaikha & Laeli, 2023).

The experiences shared by educators in the interviews shed light on the multifaceted challenges inherent in managing diverse learning needs in inclusive classrooms. Firstly, IDI_01 and IDI_10 both acknowledge the reality of varying attention and focus levels among students, which can pose significant challenges for teachers, particularly during activities that require engagement. Additionally, IDI_02 underscores the difficulty of dealing with mischievous and difficult students, highlighting the crucial role of effective classroom management strategies in maintaining order and facilitating learning.

The need for differentiated instruction is emphasized by IDI_05 and IDI_07, who discuss the necessity of providing ndividualized attention and utilizing tailored teaching strategies to accommodate students with diverse abilities and learning styles. This underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique needs of each student to promote engagement and academic success.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of managing students with special needs in inclusive schools is often hampered by insufficient communication and collaboration among teachers, special needs coordinators, and parents. Implementing effective strategies for managing behavior in the classroom can improve the behavior of students with special needs. However, teachers may need to experiment with different approaches before identifying the most suitable ones for their individual students (Martínez et al., 2020; Forlin & Chambers, 2020).

Lacking Proper Training and Resources

The drive towards inclusive education represents a significant advancement in fostering equitable learning environments globally. Despite this progress, educators face considerable hurdles primarily due to gaps in teacher training and resource allocation. As seen in the varied experiences of educators IDI_12, IDI_10, IDI_06, and IDI_08, insufficient training and inadequate resources significantly hamper the effectiveness of inclusive teaching practices.

The necessity of comprehensive training for educators in inclusive settings cannot be overstated. Specialized training enhances educators' ability to handle diverse learning needs and manage classroom dynamics effectively. Research indicates that well-trained teachers exhibit more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs and demonstrate a higher competency in implementing effective teaching strategies (Guillemot, 2022). For instance, IDI_12 encounters difficulties in crafting and executing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) due to limited training, which affects her ability to cater to students requiring personalized attention effectively.

Similarly, IDI_10 and IDI_06 highlight the struggles faced during their initial encounters with students with special educational needs, pointing to a significant gap in preparatory training. Without foundational training, teachers like IDI_10 find themselves unable to prioritize the needs of all students equally, often to the detriment of those with special needs. Furthermore, IDI_08's experience underscores a lack of training in specialized communication skills such as sign language, which is essential for effectively engaging with students who rely on alternative communication methods.

Integrating and Inclusion Challenges

Educators across various settings are confronted with the complex task of integrating and including students with diverse needs into mainstream classrooms. This necessitates not only adjustments in teaching methods but also in classroom dynamics and the educational environment to foster effective participation and learning for all students. As highlighted by several educators, the integration of students with special needs presents both practical and emotional challenges that demand thoughtful strategies and adaptations.

One critical aspect of inclusive education is adjusting physical and instructional arrangements to cater to students with special needs. IDI_03 shares an instance of having to modify the typical seating arrangement to accommodate a student with vision disabilities, underscoring the need for flexible classroom settings. Such adaptations are essential not only for accessibility but also for ensuring that these students can participate effectively in the learning process (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This practice supports the idea that educational inclusivity involves more than just physical integration; it requires a responsive approach to the unique learning needs of each student.

The necessity for tailored teaching methods is another significant challenge in inclusive education. IDI_04 and IDI_08 both emphasize the need to adapt teaching strategies to accommodate different behaviors and learning capacities. For example, modifying lesson delivery for a student who is hard of hearing involves ensuring that the student can see the teacher's lips to facilitate lip-reading (Maheady et al., 2019). Such individualized strategies not only help in addressing specific learning barriers but also promote a sense of belonging and equality among all students.

The emotional and practical complexities of teaching in inclusive settings cannot be overlooked. IDI_09 and IDI_11 discuss the mix of excitement and frustration that comes with handling students from diverse backgrounds and with special educational needs. These emotions are part of the day-to-day realities of implementing inclusive education, reflecting the unpredictable and often challenging nature of teaching diverse groups of students (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Furthermore, as IDI_07 points out, managing classroom dynamics and allocating time effectively between students with varying needs can complicate teaching schedules and impact the learning of both special needs and regular students.

Needing comprehensive training

High-quality training for teachers is critical to inclusive teaching. Lack of preparedness for inclusive teaching may result from gaps in teachers' knowledge about pedagogies and other aspects of inclusion. Teacher education can address issues ranging from instructional techniques and classroom management to multi-professional teams and learning assessment (UNESCO, 2020).

Moreover, educational institutions are responsible for providing professional training to teachers in various subjects. In Nigeria, Faculties/Institutes of Education oversee teacher training at all levels of schooling. This training includes a foundation in general education and specialized preparation in areas such as child psychology, teaching techniques, and educational history. Teacher education plays a key role in implementing inclusive education in

Nigeria by equipping teachers with the necessary competencies. Inclusive education emphasizes three key aspects for teachers: Equality, which ensures equal opportunities for all students; Quality, which focuses on meaningful learning experiences; and Equity, which addresses special educational needs. To effectively support all students, teachers must receive training in inclusive education during their initial education and ongoing professional development throughout their careers, rather than just attending isolated training sessions. Embracing inclusive education in teacher training is essential for creating learning environments and curricula that cater to the needs of all students (Ibeagha & Ulochukwu, 2019). Absolutely, the insights provided by IDI_01 and IDI_11 underscore the invaluable role of training in equipping educators with the strategies essential for meeting the diverse needs of students with special requirements. These accounts emphasize the pivotal role of ongoing learning and skill development in fostering inclusive environments where every student can thrive.

Creating an Inclusive Atmosphere

Inclusion in schools is not just about providing additional support to children with special educational needs. It is about creating a learning environment that works for all pupils, whether they have a disability or find it harder to learn and achieve for other reasons (Shingleton, 2023).

Moreover, Inclusive classrooms are crucial for promoting student success, social and emotional well-being, and a positive school community. An inclusive classroom is where all students feel welcome, valued, and supported, with diversity acknowledged, celebrated, and integrated into the learning experience. According to a study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology, students in inclusive classrooms had better academic outcomes than those in non-inclusive classrooms. The study found that inclusive classrooms were associated with higher achievement in reading and math, as well as improved social skills (Kyriazi & Kyriazi, 2024). The testimonies of IDI_01, IDI_03, IDI_04, IDI_07, and IDI_09 collectively illuminate the paramount importance of fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere, particularly for students with special needs or disabilities (SNEDs).

Furthermore, ensuring an inclusive atmosphere for students with special needs is imperative for promoting their academic success, well-being, and social integration within educational settings. Research highlights the significance of creating environments that accommodate diverse needs and foster a sense of belonging for all students. Inclusive education involves recognizing and valuing the unique abilities and contributions of students with special needs, while also providing appropriate support and accommodations to facilitate their learning. By embracing inclusive practices, schools can create a culture of acceptance and respect, where all students feel empowered to participate fully in academic and social activities (Akbar et al., 2023b).

Enhancing Student Engagement and Participation

Student engagement denotes the level of focus, inquisitiveness, enthusiasm, positivity, and dedication exhibited by students during their learning experiences, encompassing their intrinsic motivation to advance and excel in their educational journey (Bernstein, 2023). Active involvement and participation of students with special needs play a pivotal role in their educational journey. It promotes dynamic learning, customized teaching methods, heightened motivation, improved social interactions, self-assurance, autonomy, and the establishment of an inclusive atmosphere. As evidenced by the accounts provided by IDI_04, IDI_05, and IDI_09, the most significant achievement lies in the active involvement and participation of their students with special needs in any given activities.

Furthermore, engaging these students actively not only deepens their comprehension and memory retention but also fosters a sense of belonging, empowerment, and competence, paving the way for their academic, social, and emotional success. By adapting instructional approaches to their unique requirements and facilitating opportunities for engagement and cooperation, educators can empower special needs students to acquire the skills, confidence, and autonomy essential for thriving in academic environments and broader societal contexts.

Having academic progress and achievement

Monitoring student progress constitutes a crucial aspect of education, and it's not limited to the students alone. Consistent formal and informal evaluations offer teachers significant insights into their students' advancements and accomplishments. Moreover, tracking student progress allows educators to introspect on their teaching methods and evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional approaches (Victoria, 2022). It is crucial for teachers that students with special needs make progress and achieve success in their educational path. Apart from meeting professional and legal responsibilities, it involves creating inclusive settings conducive to the success of all students. Assessing their advancement enables instructors to customize teaching methods, ensuring that each student receives the necessary assistance to maximize their capabilities. As highlighted by IDI_03 and IDI_07, it is considered a success when students with special needs advance to the next academic level and progress beyond their current grade level.

Ultimately, nurturing an inclusive environment where each student's unique abilities are recognized and supported not only fosters academic achievement but also cultivates empathy, understanding, and a sense of community among all learners.

Flexibility in Learning Strategies

Teachers must accommodate their students because each learner possesses distinct characteristics, encompassing diverse backgrounds, capabilities, learning modalities, and requirements. Through modifying their instructional techniques, resources, and methodologies, educators can more effectively address the specific needs of every student, fostering deeper comprehension and facilitating enriching learning encounters. This adaptability enables the creation of inclusive settings where all students perceive themselves as respected, assisted, and empowered to thrive. Moreover, adjusting to students cultivates stronger bonds between teachers and learners, improves communication, and cultivates a favorable learning ambiance, thereby leading to enhanced academic achievements and overall student welfare.

According to Noon (2024), Recognizing variations among students, such as their diverse levels of preexisting knowledge and potential learning obstacles, constitutes a fundamental aspect of effective teaching. Adjusting teaching methods responsively, which may involve offering tailored assistance to students facing difficulties, is likely to enhance student achievement. As mentioned by IDI_04, IDI_09, IDI_10, and IDI_12, teachers should integrate alternative approaches and teaching strategies for students with special needs.

Cultivating Patience and Adaptability

Teaching students with special needs (SNed) demands unique skills, including patience and adaptability. Non-SNed teachers often experience growth and understanding, recognizing that patience is a cornerstone of effective instruction. Teacher patience was a significant positive predictor of student knot success (Jandrić et al., 2020c), this is also seen in the testimonies of (IDI_09) who shared that always prioritize patience because students rely on us. According to Jandrić et al. (2020d), referred to a patient person as one who not only understands the shortcomings of others, but also that one's own personal desires are not more or less important than the needs of others.

Non-SNed teachers must be adaptable to meet the unique needs of SNed students, constantly reassessing and modifying their teaching approaches. This includes incorporating sensory-friendly materials, adjusting communication methods, and providing additional support to ensure personalized instruction tailored to individual requirements. The capacity to adapt in order to effectively manage is crucial for teachers' work in the classroom, staff room, and beyond (Collie & Martin, 2016). This seen in the testimonies of (IDI_03) who shared that teachers must have patience and be adaptable to children's needs.

The Cultivating patience and adaptability demonstrated by non-SNed teachers when teaching SNed students not only enriches the educational experience but also promotes inclusivity and equity in the classroom. Through their dedication and willingness to embrace the diverse needs of all learners, these educators play a pivotal role in fostering an environment where every student can thrive and reach their full potential.

Enriching Understanding and Empathy

In the era of inclusive education, fostering a culture of understanding and empathy towards students is not only crucial but fundamental. Relatedness support refers to an open, honest and caring attitude that leads to the development of a mutually positive relationship between student and teachers (Aldrup et al., 2022), this seen in the testimonies of (IDI_08) shared that compassion is essential for connecting and assisting others, you do not necessarily need to be a teacher to show concern. (Korpershoek et al., 2019). Relatedness support refers to an open, honest and caring attitude that leads to the development of a mutually positive relationship between student and teachers. In practice, relatedness support, for example, translates into individualized teacher−student conversations.

The experience of teaching SNed students empowers non-SNed teachers to become more empathetic and understanding educators. Teachers experienced recurring obstacles such as insufficient preparedness and expertise for special education, a lack of educational services, and general social contexts that substantially impact teacher teaching. However, professionalism and perseverance in adjusting inclusion justify the teacher's responsibility to sustain resilience and inventiveness for their students in a challenging educational environment. (Macabenta et al., 2023), this seen in the testimonies of (IDI_04) shared that teaching is more than just a job—it is a heartfelt calling, a profound commitment that goes beyond mere profession.

Navigating Professional growth and Challenges in Inclusive Education

In the realm of inclusive education, non-Special Needs Education (SNed) teachers encounter a dynamic landscape that fosters both professional growth and challenges. Inclusive education poses a transformative journey for educators as they navigate classroom complexities. From initial feelings of apprehension to the emergence of a profound sense of purpose, teachers undergo a process of adaptation and skill development aimed at meeting the diverse needs of all students. Amidst the challenges posed by time constraints and varying student abilities, educators find themselves propelled towards continuous learning and innovation in their pedagogical approaches.

According to Smith (2023), inclusive education fosters professional growth in non-SNed teachers by encouraging them to develop new skills and approaches to reach all learners. As evidenced by the accounts provided by IDI_01, IDI_02, and IDI_09, inclusive education empowers non-SNed teachers to embrace challenges, develop new skills, adapt their teaching methods, and continually grow professionally to meet the diverse needs of all students, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Embracing and Loving Students

Embracing and loving students for who they are is at the heart of effective teaching in the era of inclusive education. Non-special needs education teachers face unique challenges in catering to diverse learning needs while ensuring each student feels valued and supported. This involves fostering a classroom environment that celebrates differences, promotes empathy, and cultivates a deep understanding of each student's strengths and areas for growth. By embracing this ethos, teachers can navigate the complexities of inclusive education with resilience and compassion, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all students.

As stated by Hiles (2021), teachers should prioritize love, care, understanding, and acceptance of their students. This approach emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment where students feel valued and respected, ultimately fostering their academic and personal growth. Non-SNed teachers, as echoed by IDI_01, IDI_02, IDI_04, IDI_08, and IDI_12, should prioritize building genuine connections with their students, fostering empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging in the classroom. These relationships lay the groundwork for effective teaching and student development in inclusive educational settings. Positive student relationships, as highlighted by MS (2024), are foundational for academic success, fostering student engagement in learning and leading to enhanced academic outcomes. Ultimately, the bond between educators and students forms the cornerstone of a successful educational journey, paving the way for holistic growth and achievement.

Implication for Educational Practice

This study explored the challenges faced by non-special needs education (non-SNed) teachers in the era of inclusive education. The factors influencing these teachers have significant implications for institutional practices, educational caretakers, and stakeholders, highlighting the need for enhanced support for teachers.

The results of this qualitative exploration, while insightful, are based solely on the experiences of selected non-SNed teachers from New Corella National High School, located in the New Corella District of the Division of Davao del Norte. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to non-SNed teachers in other schools across the Philippines. The challenges identified at the research site may not reflect the experiences of non-SNed teachers in different contexts.

To gain more extensive insights and validate the findings, future researchers should consider employing a mixed-methods research design that includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Involving a larger number of participants and expanding the study to district or division levels would provide a broader understanding of the challenges faced by non-SNed teachers and ensure a more comprehensive analysis.

In educational practice, while teachers are expected to be proficient and knowledgeable in their teaching methods and capable of handling heterogeneous student populations, they should also receive more comprehensive training. Such training should equip them with the necessary information and strategies to effectively address the challenges of inclusive education. Collaborating with special needs education (SNed) teachers and coordinators can provide non-SNed teachers with valuable advice and practical tips. This collaboration is crucial in fostering a supportive environment where all teachers feel prepared to meet the diverse needs of their students.

High schools should intensify the implementation and development of SNed programs to create conducive learning environments for students with special needs transitioning from elementary to high school. This involves not only the construction of appropriate facilities but also the integration of inclusive practices within the school's curriculum and culture.

Additionally, teaching values should be organized regularly to motivate both teachers and students to embrace inclusion in all aspects of school life. SNed coordinators should administer and interpret assessment tests for students with special needs. The results of these tests can guide teachers and the school administration in developing specific plans and actions to support these students effectively.

There should be increased support for inclusive education, as emphasized in the Department of Education's MATATAG agenda. This agenda underscores the importance of inclusive education and calls for a collaborative effort to ensure that all students, regardless of their needs, receive a quality education. By adhering to this agenda, schools can promote a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

In summary, the findings of this study highlight the need for improved training, collaboration, and support for non-SNed teachers. By addressing these needs, educational institutions can better equip teachers to handle the complexities of inclusive education, ultimately benefiting all students.

CONCLUSION

Numerous studies have extensively examined the challenges encountered by special needs education (SNed) teachers within the framework of inclusive education across various nations. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding the experiences of non-SNed teachers who instruct students with special needs in inclusive classrooms and how they navigate and adapt to this dynamic educational landscape. By addressing this gap, the proposed study aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the specific challenges faced by non-SNed teachers in

the era of inclusive education. This research endeavor holds the potential to enhance our understanding of the complexities inherent in inclusive educational settings and offer valuable insights into supporting and empowering all teachers to effectively meet the diverse needs of their students.

Previous research has provided compelling evidence that non-SNed teachers encounter various challenges when addressing the needs of students with special needs in the context of inclusive education. Among these challenges is the struggle to effectively manage diverse learning needs within the classroom. Negotiating these diverse needs can lead to feelings of frustration, particularly when contending with disruptive behaviors. However, it's important to note that in the face of these challenges, teachers often develop invaluable skills such as patience and adaptability, which are essential for creating an inclusive learning environment. Additionally, another significant challenge faced by non-SNed teachers is the lack of adequate training in special education practices. This deficit in training can hinder their ability to effectively integrate and include students with special needs in their classrooms, further exacerbating the challenges they encounter. Addressing these challenges through targeted training and support mechanisms is crucial for facilitating the successful inclusion of all students in the educational process.

In coping with the challenges faced by non-SNed teachers in the era of inclusive education, these teachers have been seeking out training programs and support from designated coordinators to better address the diverse needs of their students. These teachers encounter various challenges in their classrooms, ranging from accommodating different learning styles to effectively supporting students with diverse needs. To meet these challenges head-on, they are engaging in training sessions, specialized programs, and seeking guidance from coordinators who serve as resources for navigating the intricacies of inclusive education. By actively seeking out these opportunities and leveraging the support available, non-SNed teachers are equipping themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to create inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive academically and socially.
The experiences of non-SNed teachers in the era of inclusive education reveal valuable insights into their professional development. One prominent insight is the cultivation of increasing patience and adaptability. As non-SNed teachers navigate the diverse learning needs of their students, they often encounter situations that demand flexibility and resilience. Another significant insight gleaned from the experiences of non-SNed teachers is the profound impact of enhancing understanding and empathy within the classroom and broader professional context. Engaging in an inclusive environment prompts teachers to deepen their understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences. This heightened awareness fosters empathy, enabling teachers to better connect with their students and colleagues. As a result, teachers experience personal and professional growth, expanding their capacity for effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving.

The study recommends for the implementation of targeted training programs, workshops, and other forms of support for teachers who lack specialized training in Special Needs education. Such initiatives are crucial for ensuring that all students, including those with diverse needs, receive inclusive and successful education. In addition to professional development opportunities, the study suggests the creation of specialized programs or activities tailored specifically for students with special needs within the framework of inclusive education. Building on the example of the Special Program for Arts (SPA), schools could develop similar initiatives designed to cater to the unique interests, talents, and needs of students with special needs. Moreover, these programs offer opportunities for socialization and peer interaction, promoting inclusive attitudes and relationships among students of all abilities.

The Department of Education (DepEd) can play a crucial role in supporting non-Special Needs education teachers by offering tailored training programs and seminars, such as those outlined in the four components of the Department's "MATATAG" program. By organizing these initiatives, DepEd can ensure that teachers receive comprehensive guidance on addressing the diverse needs of students in their classrooms. Additionally, DepEd can extend its support by ensuring that every school has professional special needs education teachers, rather than solely relying on regular teachers to handle these students. These components likely cover essential aspects such as understanding special needs, implementing inclusive teaching strategies, fostering positive classroom environments, and promoting collaboration among educators, parents, and other stakeholders. The results of this study, paired with this program, will empower teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively support students with diverse needs, ultimately fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments across schools nationwide.

Acknowledgement
The researchers extend their heartfelt gratitude and deep appreciation to everyone who has contributed in any way through their support, professional advice, words of inspiration, encouragement, and, most importantly, prayers for the successful completion of this study:
To our research adviser, Ma'am Mharla B. Abenoja, for her expertise, patience, and unwavering support have guided us throughout this journey, from the initial crafting of the title to the final stages of publication. Her insightful feedback, attention to detail, and dedication to our success have been invaluable in shaping this study.

To our co-researchers and contributors namely: Kris Charlotte Ihalas, Vanessa Kate Legaspi, Caren Grace Lumanip, Erjie Mabalatan, Prince Laurence Macoto, Deanna Laurice Magallon, Ronnielyn Mamolo, and Princess Mae Manera, whose hard work, commitment, and unwavering support have been instrumental in every phase of this research, we are immensely thankful. Their dedication to our shared vision has brought depth and clarity to our findings.

To our Principal, Ma'am Raquel G. Tagalinao, for her steadfast support and kindness. Her leadership and encouragement have provided us with the strength to persevere;

To our esteemed panel members, Sir Bryan Benegian, Ma'am Nikki Paye Javinez, Sir Jester Alejan, Ma'am Carjoline Delima, Sir Cee Jae Darunday and Ma'am Orlanie Moring, for their valuable suggestions, constructive criticisms, and expert advice. Their contributions have been crucial in refining our research.

To Ma'am Jeane Fe Nanual, our Senior High School Coordinator, for her immense support and dedication to all the activities of the Senior High School Department. Her encouragement and guidance have greatly facilitated our research efforts;

To our friends and classmates, for their words of support, prayers, and assistance with our extracurricular activities. Their camaraderie and solidarity have made this journey more meaningful and memorable;

To our parents and siblings, for their unwavering love, boundless support, patience, and sacrifices—both emotional and financial. Their faith in us and their endless encouragement have provided us with the strength and motivation to persevere;

Most importantly, to our Heavenly Father, whose unwavering faith and boundless grace have been our guiding light. We are grateful for His sustaining force and divine intervention that have seen us through this journey.
With deepest gratitude and reverence, we give all honor and glory to God!

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