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STRUGGLES AND COPING MECHANISMS OF NON-SPED MAJOR DETAILED TEACHERS: BASIS FOR TEACHER ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This research was undertaken to shed light on struggles and coping mechanisms of non-SPED major detailed teachers. A total of 11 informants as total enumeration of the school's population were selected in a study as basis for crafting a teacher enhancement program. It utilized a descriptive qualitative design through face to face in-depth interviews of the two full SPED teachers, observations for 4 weeks and a focus group discussion to all the nine receiving teachers. This specific method explicate the emic teachers' coping mechanisms that arise in the normalcy of everyday life. Findings revealed that the learning environment, socio-economic status, instructional practices, assessment & diagnosis and parental engagement were the identified struggles of these teachers while the appropriateness of strategies and their passion are the attributed coping mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: *Struggles of non-SPED teachers, Coping Mechanisms of non-SPED teachers, Inclusive Education, Program Development for Special Education*

I. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The drive of the Philippine Department of Education for Inclusive Education (IE) presents challenges along with the evolution of the special needs of the learners. In terms of their physical, social, mental, and emotional development, people with special needs differ from their counterparts who have typical development in terms of requirements and traits. For a variety of reasons, people with special needs may deviate markedly from the level expected for their age in terms of personal traits and academic proficiency (Baglama, Serttas and Demirok, 2017).

In part, special education programs in the Philippines started more than a century ago (Camara, 2015). Throughout the years, many models of special education programs have been implemented in the country. Some of these are: special education center, special day school, resource room plan and others. These happened because of progressive development in the Philippine Education System through initiation of reforms such as the Governance of Basic Education Act 2001, Philippine Plan of Action for Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 2003-2012 and Philippine Education for All 2015 National Action Plan, to name a few. These reforms resulted in the Department of Education issuing Department Orders, which led to the enhancement of education centers, provision of an early education program, and teachers' education and training.

Furthermore, curriculum, community and parental involvement, early childhood care and education, and others (DepEd, 2004). These areas defined the main project of the Education Sector-Inclusive Education (IE) project (DepEd, 2009). With the advent of all of those reforms, studies to review existing services are necessary for evaluation. In Philippine Law in the Magna Carta for Persons With Disabilities (1992) and in international law in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities which was ratified in the Philippines in 2008, all children including those with disabilities have a right to education.

On the other hand, in the labor market, skill mismatch is a difficult problem that affects individuals, businesses and communities (Bilan et al. 2020); it is still becoming more significant in light of the current and emerging megatrends such globalization, demographic shift, and technological innovation (Pauceanu et al. 2020).

Moreover, recent technical breakthroughs have brought about significant changes in several domains within the modern world. One of these industries that has been significantly impacted by these advancements is education. Since every student is different and has a wide range of learning styles and capacities, the predominant trend in modern education is to move away from teacher-centered traditional approaches and toward a student-centered approach to teaching (Ozbal & Eski, 2019). One of the fundamental goals of democratic societies is the provision of equal educational opportunities, and it is precisely impossible to do so for students with special needs without special education services (Agha and ELDaou, 2018).

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Albeit to this, in order to include people with special needs in regular learning environments, mainstreaming and inclusion practices have increased. This allows them to spend time and receive education with their peers, feel like a part of the community, and ultimately improve their self-confidence and daily living skills (Dogan and Bengisoy, 2017). Today, every individual with special needs has the right to receive education on par with their peers.

In Sarangani Division, San Felipe Central Elementary School had already implemented the program entitled "Child Find" wherein the non-SPED detailed teachers made a home visitation for the profiling of the learners. It thoroughly made a mark that it is the only school in the Municipality of Maasim that caters the needs of the pupils with disabilities. Implementing inclusive education has been in practice since 2003 in spite of the absence of proper recognition of the efforts of the school and its unaccomplished documentation to formally incorporate in its name the appellation as a special education center. Moreover, detailed teachers are not Sped-major graduates. Instead, they only attended trainings to address issues and concerns in handling these pupils, particularly on the Visual Impairment Training which was spearheaded by the Resources for the Blind Inc. (RBI). This study, then, found out the struggles and coping mechanisms of the detailed non-sped teachers, which eventually led the proponents to craft a teacher enhancement program to address this issue. The objective of inclusive education is noble, yet, the drawbacks are common especially on teachers who have not been trained for the specific disabilities on the learners. This has continually posed a challenge, not just in the locality of San Felipe Central Elementary School but also in the other public schools implementing inclusive education

II. ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was conducted to determine the struggles and coping mechanisms of non-SPED detailed teachers in San Felipe Central Elementary School, Maasim 1 District, Maasim Sarangani Province during the School Year 2023-2024.
Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the struggles of non-SPED detailed teachers?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of non-SPED detailed teachers?
3. Based on the findings, what enhancement program could be crafted?

III. INNOVATION, INTERVENTION, AND STRATEGY

This study aimed to identify the struggles and coping mechanisms of the detailed non-sped teachers. In-depth interviews were conducted and scheduled according to the availability of the three key informants. They were teaching learners with disabilities (i.e. learners with deaf and mute, down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)) in the special education program in San Felipe Central Elementary School. Since the inception of this study, series of clarificatory interviews were done in order to verify the responses of the informants.

This is a four-week action research which started on January 8, 2024. The informants were purposively chosen because they were the ones teaching with learners with disabilities. The informants included were two Master Teachers and the remaining nine informants were receiving teachers of the students who were mainstreamed to be included in a regular class with a total of 11 informants. The proponents and the key informants met twice a week, every Monday and Wednesday, to conduct interviews; observations on their respective classes were also done once a week, every Thursday. To complete the triangulation process, a focus group discussion was also done to the other nine non-sped major teachers who neither have formal trainings nor seminars on special education.

During the first week, the first interview session was conducted with the key informants. The questions revolved on the understanding of the term developmental disability and what were the learners' disabilities present inside the classroom.

On the second week, the proponents asked on the learning strategies and they employed in dealing with these types of learners.
Moreover on the third week, the key informants were asked about the challenges that they have experienced.

On the fourth which served as the final week, they were asked about their coping mechanisms based from the challenges that they have experienced.

Finally, from the data collection, a program was developed to address this issue on the struggles and coping mechanisms of non-SPED detailed teachers in San Felipe Central Elementary School**.** The program plan include the following parts:

Findings – this contains the thematic results of the interview being conducted.

Activities – this part lists down the activities in response to the findings.

Time Frame – denotes the period or time allocation for each activity.

Specific Objectives – these are the specific objectives from the activities identified.

Expected Outcome – the expected outcome of the activity.

Proposed Budget – this entails the budget requirement for the conduct of the study.

Source of Fund – the fund shall be taken from the school's MOOE and other external sources

Person Involved - the focal persons in-charge of the activity

IV. ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This action research identified the various struggles and coping mechanisms of the 11 non-sped major detailed teachers in San Felipe Central Elementary School, Maasim 1 District, Division of Sarangani.

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a. Research Method

This action research utilized purely qualitative research design. Data collection was done through in-depth interviews, series of class observations and triangulation to further validate the gathered data. The data was subjected to thematic analysis in order to identify patterns and meanings.

b. Participants and/or Other Sources of Data and Information

The respondents of this study were 11 non-sped detailed teachers of San Felipe Central Elementary School, Maasim 1 District, Colon Maasim Sarangani Province. Total enumeration was utilized in choosing the respondents since they are only few in school and met the criteria as the subject of this study. Based on their profile, 10 of them were female and only one of them is male, mostly married (n=10) and with an average age of 38 years old (max=56 and min=25). Two of them were full SPED teachers and nine were receiving teachers. Additionally, all of them had finished a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, three had Master's Degrees in Educational Management and three had their on-going Master's Degrees in School Administration.

Table 1
Distribution of Participants of the Study

Non-Sped Detailed Teachers	Length of Service in Teaching SPED
Teacher A	11 years
Teacher B	10 years
Teacher C	11 years
Teacher D	8 years
Teacher E	8 years
Teacher F	7 years
Teacher G	7 years
Teacher H	7 years
Teacher I	8 years
Teacher J	8 years
Teacher K	6 years

c. Data Gathering Method

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative design through face to face in-depth interviews, observations and a focus group discussion. The informants included were two Master Teachers and the remaining nine informants were receiving teachers of the students who were mainstreamed to be included in a regular class. The proponents and the key informants met twice a week, every Monday and Wednesday, to conduct interviews; observations on their respective classes were also done once a week, every Thursday. To complete the triangulation process, a focus group discussion was also done to the other nine non-sped major teachers who neither have formal trainings nor seminars on special education.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather data from the key informants and they were identified through total enumeration. Only 11 providers qualified in the criteria inclusions, i.e. a teacher who is in the school for at least one year to provide a direct service to children with special needs. Each informant was interviewed from 30 minutes to one hour. This method was used to understand more deeply the structure and flow of the service delivery based on the perspective of the providers for further improvement of the service (USAID, 1996). The interview guide has four areas: profiling of teachers, students and services; defining responsibilities of teacher, parents and community; challenges in teaching and instruction, assessment and parents' involvement; and teachers' recommendations.

d. Data Analysis Techniques

This research utilized descriptive technique for data analysis. This process in qualitative data analysis approach was suited as it processed the systematizing descriptive data collected through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and observations and then interpretations all throughout the study.

V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Research Question No. 1: What are the struggles of non-SPED detailed teachers?

Table 2
Themes and Thematic Statements on the struggles of non-SPED major detailed teachers

ESSENTIAL THEMES	THEMATIC STATEMENTS
Physical Condition of the Learning Space	The learning environment features small classroom size wherein students cannot maximize to move considering that they have different disabilities.
	Voices and noises can be heard from the next class because of moveable
	Lack of proper ventilation (ie. Electric fans or air conditioner units)
	Long distance of school from learner's home considering the fact that San Felipe Central Elementary School is the only school in the Municipality of Maasim that offers special education classes
	Lack of equipment/materials to support the needs of the learners

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Socio-Economic Conditions of the Family	Attitude of other learners towards learners with disabilities
	Learners with disabilities are being bullied by their classmates
	Behavioral problems of the learners with disabilities such as their temper and tantrums
	Problems on their social skills because they are not easy to get-along with
	Insufficient financial capacity of their parents to send their child into a recognized SPED center
Teaching and Instruction Practices	Teachers handling these learners are non-SPED major graduates
	Lack of trainings/seminars regarding special education
	Unavailability of teaching and curriculum guides
	Insufficiency of learning materials such as manipulatives and activity sheets
	Lack of instructional materials that can developed their lifelong learning skills (ie. Sewing machine, proper hygiene resources, gardening tools)
Assessment & Diagnosis	Lack of parent's budget to assess their children for proper clinical diagnosis
	Lack of teachers' training in assessing children with special needs
	Inadequate materials for screening and assessing children with special needs
	Parents have negative attitudes about allowing their children to be assessed. They were apprehensive about the result of the diagnosis of their child
Parental Involvement	Lack of support towards their child with disabilities
	Parent's negative attitude towards the educational experience of their child
	Lack of follow-up at home
	Injecting discipline at home

Based from the interview that the researchers conducted, non-SPED major detailed teachers provided their insights into the challenges they had experienced, and these were clustered into five essential themes: Physical Condition of the Learning Space, Socio-Economic Conditions of the Family, Teaching and Instruction Practices, Assessment and Diagnosis and Parental Involvement.

In physical condition, thematic statements fall into the classroom size, the lack proper ventilation, the long distance of the school from their home and the lack of equipment/materials were identified.

"Gamay ang among room ug medyo init kay duha lang ka ceiling fan ang naa, kaya dili maka concentrate among mga estudyante," a direct statement stated by Teacher Lanie (not her real name).

"Medyo saba ang among katapad na room kay mga Grade 1 pupils, usahay dili kaau sila maka concentrate sa among mga lesson," another statement affirmed by Teacher Ana.

Aside from these statements, they also expressed their sentiments to the researchers on their concerns regarding the insufficient learning materials inside the classroom.

We thoroughly lack the needed learning materials for our learners that is why it became one of our problems inside the classroom". That was the exact statement given by Teacher Elsa (not her real name).

In addition, non-SPED detailed teachers also noticed the absences incurred by their learners due to the location of the school from their home.

"Maglisud sila (the parents) ug pa eskwela sa ilang mga anak kay kalas na sa pamasahe ug uban pang mga kailangan sa eskwelahan". Teacher Faye expressed during the interview. This was coherent with the findings of Camara (2015) that most special education centers are located in urban areas. Children living far from schools or urban areas, experience difficulties in accessing educational centers.

On the other hand, in socio-economic status as a theme, the results agree that children in an inclusive classroom setting experienced bullying from classmates. This was coherent with the results of a study in Hong Kong which found that children with developmental problems usually experienced problems with peers (Wong, 2022).

Moreover, the third theme encompasses the teaching and instruction. This theme offers a wide arrays of the actual situation present inside the classroom as the teacher and the learners explores the teaching and learning process.

"*From the preparation of the lessons to be taught, there is an unavailability of the learning resources and materials to be used. It is truly a hard time for us*." Teacher Nikki expresses her experiences to the researchers. It was also affirmed by Teacher Mylene and Teacher Martha during the focus group discussion.

In dealing with the assessment and diagnosis as the fourth theme, the teachers' answers pertained to the financial and economic status of the parents that they have.

"*Sa akung pagpangutana sa mama sa akung estudyante, wala jud daw sila'y ika provide na pamasahe paingun sa Davao ug bayad sa mga Neurodevelopmental Pediatricians kay medyo mahal. Maayo pa ug ila nalang gamiton ang kwarta sa pang adlaw-adlaw nilang panggasto arun mabuhi."* A heart-touching sentiment of Teacher Alice being shared to the group.

Finally, as the moral support of these learners must first come at home, parental involvement comes as the final theme of this action research.

"*As we conducted the Child Find Program to scout and check the situation of our learners at home, the parents are hesitant to welcome us. They are in denial of accepting their child's learning and behavioural disability and contented being uneducated (ie. pertaining to their children)*. " An honest statement of Teacher Fiona (teacher's pseudonym).

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All of the aforementioned statements were the information gathered all through-out the 4-week observation and interview session with the non-SPED detailed teachers.

Research Question No. 2: What are the coping mechanisms of non-SPED detailed teachers?

Table 3

Themes and Thematic Statements on coping mechanisms of non-SPED detailed teachers

ESSENTIAL THEMES	THEMATIC STATEMENTS
Teachers' Teaching Strategies	Application of teachers' knowledge from the trainings being attended
	Teachers varied teaching styles in dealing the learners with disabilities
	Teachers utilized different activity sheets to facilitate learning, such as tracing the lines and connecting the dots to form basic letters.
	One-on-one teaching approach
	One learner every hour method of teaching
	Teachers teaching life skills training in a way that students were trained in basic hygiene practices and communication skills.
Teachers' Attitudes	Teachers' elastic string of patience in handling the learners
	Dedication and commitment to teaching profession
	Teachers' passion for the profession
	Treating the learners as his/her own child
	Teachers' perseverance in handling their tantrums

Results of the conducted interview based from the coping mechanisms of non-SPED detailed teachers emerged two themes: these are all about teachers' teaching strategies and teachers' attitudes.

"*I always strengthen my teaching styles in dealing with them because they further need my assistance in the class. Preparing worksheets through dotted lines and curves to form letters out of their name served as one of my learning activity sheet.*" Teacher Nelly stated.

"*As a passionate teacher in this noble profession, I always see to it that I can provide the materials available through localization and contextualization of the lessons for them. Unavailability of the learning materials is the common problem that we are facing, but with commitment and hardwork we can always make a way*", Teacher Andrew stated.

Research Question No. 3: Based on the findings, what enhancement program could be crafted?

Given the facts presented from the study being conducted, the researchers came out in crafting a teachers' enhancement program in order to fill in the gaps of the non-sped detailed teachers in handling their learners with disabilities in the teaching and learning process.

Teachers' Enhancement Program

Action Plan

Program Plan of Activities							
Findings	**Activities**	**Time Frame**	**Specific Objectives**	**Expected Outcome**	**Proposed Budget**	**Source of Fund**	**Person Involved**
A. Struggles of Non-SPED Major Detailed Teachers							
Budget allocation for building construction	Construction of SPED Building	November 2019 – June 2020	To provide an ideal SPED classroom suited to the needs of our learners with disabilities	New SPED Building	Php 1,300,000.00	Stakeholders Partnership (Public & Private, Internal& External)	School Principal, SPED Teachers, Receiving Teachers, & Stakeholders
Support from the Local Government Unit (LGU) to the parents	Subsidy from the LGU to support food and training of the parents atop of the existing 4P's	November 2019 – June 2020	To have an additional assistance coming from the LGU	Additional assistance given to the parents	Php 1,000.00	Local Government Unit (LGU) subsidy	Parents of SPED Learners LGU
Teachers' training related to Special Education	Training Enhancement Program to Teachers handling pupils with disabilities	November 2019-June 2020	To train teachers to become more effective in handling pupils with disabilities	Teachers gained new insights and skills during training	Php 10,000.00	Stakeholders Partnership (Internal and external stakeholders)	School Principal, SPED Teachers, Receiving Teachers, & Stakeholders

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Network to have access to Clinical Office	Invite sponsors to have access to clinical office	November 2019-June 2020	To strengthen network to have access to clinical office	Strengthened networking within internal and external stakeholders to further access to clinical office	Php 5,000.00	Stakeholders Partnership (Internal and external stakeholders)	Parents of SPED Learners, School Principal, SPED Teachers, Receiving Teachers, & Stakeholders
Parental Involvement of the SPED Parents	Conduct monthly meeting of the SPED Parents	November 2019-June 2020	To intensify the parental involvement of the SPED Parents	100% involvement of the SPED Parents toward the academic and extracurricular activities of their children.	Php 1,000.00	MOOE	Parents of the SPED Learners, School Principal, SPED Teachers, Receiving Teachers, & Stakeholders
B. Coping Mechanisms of Non-SPED Major Detailed Teachers							
Linkages for Partnership in provision of learning materials and other supplies needed	Link with internal and external stakeholders	November 2019-June 2020	To strengthen linkages for partnership	Strengthened linkages within internal and external stakeholders	Php 5,000.00	Stakeholders Partnership (Internal and external stakeholders)	Principal, SPED Teachers, Receiving Teachers, & Stakeholders

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VI. REFLECTION

The findings of this study provides insights of special education programs for children with special needs. The results were particularly intended to improve the service provision of special education not just in San Felipe Central Elementary School but to extend its parameter to its neighboring schools as well. Program related recommendations included: network of linkages to further support the financial and. Assessment of the child's developmental condition should be available to determine what educational outcome was expected. Secondly, participation from the different stakeholders was necessary because it was noted as being one of the success factors in different educational programs in special education. Most importantly, parents should be considered as active partners in delivering special education, and their participation should be highly encouraged. Nevertheless, private sectors and non-government organizations should be consulted in planning for program development in order to mobilize resources, because investments in special education were globally limited and resource mobilization was highly encouraged. Additionally, methodological recommendation includes gaining insight from the parents and the school administrator as well. This will provide different perspectives through triangulation.

Furthermore, it is hereby recommended that further study can be conducted base from the effect of the mainstream learners into ordinary class. This will enrich the program recommendation involving SPED teachers and learners inside the classroom. A longitudinal method of this study can be done to further improve the strategies to be employed of any teachers handling learners with disabilities.

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