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Experiences of Elementary School Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs

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Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on elementary teachers' experiences in handling learners with special needs, where teachers encountered different types of learners with special needs, their preparations in handling them, accommodations, time allocation, challenges, and ways of coping with them. Using the Meriam 1998 model, interviews were conducted with seven elementary teachers, one principal, and two selected parents to gain insights into their experiences. This study utilized the social learning theory by Albert Bandura, which emphasizes the importance of observational learning. Findings reveal that the teachers encountered different types of learners with special needs: global developmental delay, autism, and selective mutism. Their ways of preparing them are identifying the needs of the learners, preparing specialized activities, and attending seminars and training. They work to create a positive learning environment, provide additional attention, and incorporate differentiated instruction to accommodate learners with special needs. Teachers also manage their time by adjusting time schedules and time blocking accordingly. Despite their preparations, teachers often need help due to their time, learners' short attention spans, and inadequate teacher training. However, they can cope with prioritizing time management, making individualized educational plans (IEPs), and engaging in reflection and further research. Based on the findings, recommendations provide continuous support and resources, such as teaching guides, that will be available to deliver adequate educational support to learners with special needs.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Elementary Teachers, Inclusive Education, Special Needs Learners.

Abstrak

Studi kualitatif ini berfokus pada pengalaman guru sekolah dasar dalam menangani peserta didik berkebutuhan khusus, di mana guru menghadapi berbagai tipe peserta didik berkebutuhan khusus, persiapan mereka dalam menangani mereka, akomodasi, alokasi waktu, tantangan, dan cara mengatasinya. Dengan menggunakan model Meriam 1998, wawancara dilakukan dengan tujuh guru sekolah dasar, satu kepala sekolah, dan dua orang tua terpilih untuk mendapatkan wawasan tentang pengalaman mereka. Studi ini menggunakan teori pembelajaran sosial oleh Albert Bandura, yang menekankan pentingnya pembelajaran observasional. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa para guru menghadapi berbagai tipe peserta didik berkebutuhan khusus: keterlambatan perkembangan global, autisme, dan mutisme selektif. Cara mereka mempersiapkan mereka adalah dengan mengidentifikasi kebutuhan peserta didik, menyiapkan kegiatan khusus, dan menghadiri seminar dan pelatihan. Mereka bekerja untuk menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang positif, memberikan perhatian tambahan, dan menerapkan

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instruksi yang berbeda untuk mengakomodasi peserta didik berkebutuhan khusus. Guru juga mengatur waktu mereka dengan menyesuaikan jadwal waktu dan pembagian waktu yang sesuai. Meskipun telah mempersiapkan diri dengan baik, guru sering kali membutuhkan bantuan karena keterbatasan waktu, rentang perhatian siswa yang pendek, dan pelatihan guru yang tidak memadai. Namun, mereka dapat mengatasinya dengan memprioritaskan manajemen waktu, menyusun rencana pendidikan individual (IEP), serta melakukan refleksi dan penelitian lebih lanjut. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, rekomendasi yang diberikan berupa dukungan dan sumber daya berkelanjutan, seperti panduan pengajaran, yang akan tersedia untuk memberikan dukungan pendidikan yang memadai bagi siswa berkebutuhan khusus.

Kata Kunci: Guru Sekolah Dasar, Pendidikan Inklusi, Siswa Berkebutuhan Khusus, Strategi Koping.

INTRODUCTION

The inclusive education (IE) concept, where everyone has meaningful participation and access, is acknowledged by people worldwide for people with special needs (Nations, 2017; Reid et al., 2018). Inclusive Education aims to allow all learners to learn together, regardless of their differences. A significant aspect of this strategy is how to effectively support them, ensuring they receive the specialized attention and resources they require to succeed. Children with special needs require additional support and specialized services (Anastasiou et al., 2024).

They will have unique goals and need extra assistance in achieving academic, social, emotional, and, at times, medical milestones. Individuals with special needs may require lifelong guidance and support in managing everyday matters like housing, employment, social interactions, and finances. For children with special needs, early intervention is an essential step toward helping the child fulfill their full academic, emotional, and social potential.

In other countries, like South Africa, they constitutionalized Section 29(1) (a), which ensures that everyone, including children with severe disabilities, has the right to primary and adult basic education (McConnachie et al., 2017). Sections 9 (3) and 9 (4) prohibit both the state and individuals from unfairly discriminating against anyone based on disability (Khumalo & Hodgson, 2017), while Section 28 (2) asserts that "a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child (McConnachie et al., 2017)." Following the political changes 1994, South Africans had every reason to expect this new era to fulfill all learners' guaranteed educational rights (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Mtwesi, 2023; NPC, 2021).

At the practical level, there are dynamics in implementing inclusive education. These dynamics can be categorized into two categories: challenges and best practices.

First, some findings assessed that Eswatini's primary schools were not ready to implement inclusive education, thus recommending the establishment of pilot inclusive schools supported by strengthening human resources, supporting infrastructure, and collaboration between the government and schools (Mpofu & Mkhatshwa, 2024; Shongwe, 2021).

Similarly, higher education in Eswatini remains limited in resources and government support for inclusive education (Madlela, 2022). Meanwhile, in Nigeria, challenges to inclusive education practice lie in the lack of stakeholder participation and the neglected role of NGOs (Oluwatosin, 2024). Second, in other contexts, such as Zambia, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon, best practices in inclusive education have successfully overcome various challenges. This success stems from adopting a holistic and integrative perspective involving the roles of children, families, schools, and communities. This success is driven by principals and special educators who act as champions and collaborate (Banlanjo et al., 2025). Similarly, in the southwest region of Cameroon**,** Mbua confirmed the crucial role of principal leadership as a key promoter of inclusive education in secondary schools. That is achieved by establishing new meanings of diversity, attitudes, commitment, and collaboration that support inclusive education (Mbua, 2023).

Existing research often focuses on general strategies or administrative policies rather than day-to-day challenges, emotional impacts, and professional development needs specific to elementary teachers. Although some related studies have examined the teachers' handling of learners with special needs, they only focus on Special Education (SPED) teachers' experiences (Gilson & Biggs, 2024; Magallanes et al., 2025). Regardless of the difficulties, Special Education (SPED) teachers of Biñan City, Laguna, encounter accommodating them by providing the best possible strategies for their learning needs. Teachers were challenged in instruction, preparation, and strategy, so they dealt with these difficulties using coping techniques (Mercado & Regencia, 2023). Including students with special needs in the general education classroom requires teachers to adapt their teaching approaches to reach all learners' needs. However, general education teachers cannot serve special populations (Byrd & Alexander, 2020).

In the Philippines, learners with special needs are protected under Republic Act No. 11650. This law ensures that no learner with a disability is deprived of the right to an inclusive, equitable, and quality education. It mandates that all public or private schools provide equitable access to education for every learner with a disability. Additionally, services and reasonable accommodation based on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be provided (Lawson, 2023). Laws governing special education play an important role

in ensuring that children with special needs receive the assistance and accommodations they are entitled to. However, to effectively implement these rules, educators must also be well-prepared. Further training should be emphasized in handling students with special needs in an inclusive setting. Educational support, resources, and opportunities are needed to increase teachers' readiness for inclusive education. The Department of Education needs to continue fully implementing inclusive education in all schools, with the SPED Center implementing full action in the call for inclusive special education (Mayo-Dosayla et al., 2022).

Teacher training should involve learners with various needs and interests in structuring lessons. Besides, it is essential to engage the school principal, general education teachers, and regular teachers about the importance of their collaborative role. Furthermore, educating teachers to identify and apply relevant and appropriate learning strategies and assessments in inclusive education is significant (Ecoben, 2019). This research aims to determine the extent of elementary teachers' experiences handling learners with special needs. It discusses the various types of students with special needs teachers have encountered, examines how elementary teachers prepare to support them, and analyzes the accommodations used in inclusive classrooms. It also explains their time management in inclusive teaching, challenges they have faced, and coping strategies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach, specifically a case study (Merriam, 1998) in one of the elementary schools in Pagadian City in the school year 2023-2024. Seven (7) public school elementary teachers were chosen through purposive sampling. To ensure accuracy, the interviews also included two parents and one principal. The main instrument in this study is the researchers themselves, aided by an interview guide. An interview guide included a list of questions written out in full to prompt the interviewer to dig deeper and ask probing questions during the interview. The participants' responses served as preliminary data subject to analysis and interpretation.

The instrument focused on the participants' experiences regarding the specific questions that led the researchers to obtain the primary data on elementary teachers' experiences handling special needs learners. The researchers observed the following steps to gather the data needed. They received permission to write a letter for conduct approval from the school principal; the letter was presented to the school principal and signed with their approval; the researchers took time to ask the target participants, one of the

respondents in this study. The researchers conducted one-on-one interviews using the given interview schedule.

The data was analyzed using Merriam's method. Merriam viewed analysis as dismantling information and perceptions and assigning significance to the components. To make finding meaning easier, Merriam's categorical aggregation clustered data into classes or categories. That allowed for data analysis by identifying categories and patterns that arose from conversations. As a result, the researchers located patterns and connections using thematic analysis to analyze the data. After the data was complete, the study began to uncover concepts, finding data that could address the research questions (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The study used shared information from Brittain et al. to observe ethical considerations when conducting research (Brittain et al., 2020). The following parameters will need to be included in the study. Firstly, the communication was sent to the individuals who decided to participate in the study. Secondly, all responses of the participants are for the research only. Thirdly, the researchers respect their participants' autonomy and choose whether to be involved in the study. Lastly, the researchers act in the best interests of their participants by assessing the possible harm and benefits of the research to the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A comprehensive examination of the transcripts revealed the underlying meanings behind the responses of the participating teachers. The researchers identified several emerging categories of elementary teachers' experiences in handling learners with special needs. The data presented below focused on the types of learners with special needs encountered by elementary teachers, the preparations of elementary teachers in handling learners with special needs, their way of accommodating the unique needs of the learners in the classroom, their time management in teaching an inclusive classroom, challenges they encountered in handling learners with special needs, and their coping mechanisms.

Types of Special Needs Learners Encountered by the Elementary Teachers

A condition that involves reduced intellectual ability and difficulty. The researchers asked the elementary teachers about the types of learners they had encountered, and three categories emerged: Learners with Global Developmental Delay, Learners with Autism, and Learners with Selective Mutism. The category of Global Developmental Delay refers

to a significant delay in two or more domains of development. The research participants indicated that she has a pupil who is diagnosed with a Global Developmental Delay (GDD). This is evident in the following statement:

> "*Sa akoang na experience sa pag handle ani nga learner is globally delayed, kay mostly hinay kaayo siya mo sulat and if mag ask ko niya is few words lang. Sa iyahang other classmates murag ang nahitabo ani is makasabay-sabay sa iyang classmates in terms sa iyang studies. Naa puy parts nga mo excel siya sa academics og naa puy uban nga mag lisod siya. Pero in terms of kanang test papers kay same ra sa iyang ubang classmates*." [In my experience handling this globally delayed learner, he often writes very slowly and only uses a few words when I ask him questions. Compared to his other classmates, he can keep up with them in terms of their studies. Sometimes, he can excel academically, but sometimes finds it very difficult. However, test papers are similar to those of his other classmates.] -T6.

Based on narratives, it is evident that teachers encounter globally delayed learners in their classroom who exhibit delays in psychomotor and cognitive skills, such as writing, locomotion, verbal expression, and the ability to assimilate new lessons or information material. When working with students with developmental delays, it is crucial to understand that their learning goals go beyond academic success. Students with developmental delays may exhibit symptoms of inattention, aggression, and a lack of social skills, even though those things are essential (Mirsaleh et al., 2023). Another category is learners with autism, which refers to a lifelong condition that includes problems with communication and behavior. This is evident in the following statement:

> "I was teaching Grade 1 pupils, and one of the special learners I encountered was a pupil with autism. This child is easily irritated, it is hard to talk to him, and he cannot have a proper conversation, especially if his focus is on something else; he cannot have eye-to-eye contact."-T4.

The research participants shared their observations with a learner with autism. These learners share the common trait of struggling with proper conversation and requiring special attention. From a teacher's perspective, the learner easily gets irritated, is difficult to approach, and avoids eye-to-eye conversation. Regular teachers assume an essential role in an educational environment, for they are responsible for ensuring an adequate learning environment for children with autism who are in inclusive school programs. Suppose the regular teachers' views and acceptance fail to reflect a deepened understanding of the disability. They believe they are responsible for ensuring a supportive learning environment for children with autism and other students in inclusive settings.

As a result, the experiences of inclusive education teachers handling other disability types are recommended (Cruz, 2020). Another category is learners with selective mutism,

which refers to an anxiety disorder where a person is unable to speak in some social situations, such as with classmates at school or with relatives they do not see very often. This is evident in the following statement:

> "I have encountered a pupil who is selectively mute. When you are going to talk or ask him, he will not answer and will stare at you, and even have a conversation with his classmate; he is not responding or has limitations with his voice. I also approached the parents of this pupil, and their child is not that mute inside their home."-T3.

Based on their response, the learners do not engage in daily conversation inside the classroom and exhibit limitations in responding to their classmates, which do not apply at home. A similar result has been presented in another study, indicating that selective mutism (SM) is an anxiety disorder where a child cannot speak in certain situations, such as school, where a learner can speak well in their home (Poole et al., 2021).

Preparations of Elementary Teachers in Handling Special Needs Learners

It refers to the various preparations, including interventions, training, seminars, and fostering positive relationships with the parents. The researchers asked the elementary teachers how they handle learners with special needs, and three categories emerged. These categories include identifying learners' needs, preparing specialized activities, and attending seminars and training. Identifying the needs of the learners refers to determining the specific educational, emotional, and developmental requirements of students to ensure they receive appropriate instruction and support.

> "Based on my experience, addressing the needs of pupils with special needs begins with comprehensively grasping their strengths, difficulties, preferences, and academic objectives."-T3.

Based on the narrative, the teachers first ask the parents about certain behaviors of their child. Then, they search for possible interventions to implement in the classroom, which are also appropriate activities tailored to the child's unique needs. To deepen the understanding, comprehensively grasp the child's strengths, difficulties, preferences, and academic objectives.

A similar result has been presented in another study, which indicates that this system is structured to support autonomous learning tailored to the learner's current level and goals by identifying strengths and weaknesses based on the learner's learning history. We can identify the essential foundations for constructing a user-tailored learning system and effectively develop a system architecture to support personalized learning (Choe et al.,

2024). Another category is preparing specialized activities, which refers to designing and organizing tailored educational tasks and exercises that cater to learners' unique needs and abilities with specific requirements. This is evident in the following statements:

> "When preparing to teach learners with special needs, it is essential to take a thoughtful and individualized approach to address their unique needs and learning styles. Furthermore, it is essential to tailor instructional methods, materials, and tasks to accommodate the varying needs of learners with special needs."-T3.

Most research participants shared standard practices for providing specialized activities for their learners with special needs. Typically, teachers prepare a particular activity that is right for the learners but correlates with the intended standard. One also mentions that they add additional time for their learners regarding writing. In this context, differentiated learning has quickly developed to address the varied and diverse needs of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

It involves adapting and tailoring instruction to ensure all students in school have access to the general education curriculum, which is at the heart of inclusive education (Strogilos, 2018). Another category is attending seminars and training, which refers to participating in organized sessions or workshops designed to enhance knowledge, skills, and competencies in a specific area. This is evident in the following statements:

> "*Naa me mga seminars for this, pero overview lang sya og unsaon namo paghandle incase makaencounter me ani nga inani nga pupil inside sa classroom. Like magplan sa amoang mga strategies and lesson planning nga makacater sa ilahang needs*." [We do have seminars for this, but just an overview of how we can handle it if we encounter these learners inside the classroom. Like planning some strategies and lesson plans to cater to their needs.]-T7

Most teachers share common responses about their training for handling special needs learners in an inclusive classroom. Unfortunately, they only receive an overview of their training, such as lesson planning and teaching strategies. A similar result has been presented in another study, indicating that the pre-service teacher practicum will require exposing pre-service teachers to an inclusive classroom setting. Therefore, teacher training institutions should prioritize teacher educators' training and develop specialized courses on inclusive education (Makoelle & Burmistrova, 2020, 2025).

Elementary Teachers' Way of Accommodating the Unique Needs of the Learners in the Classroom

Elementary teachers' accommodations for handling learners with special needs involve adjusting instruction, materials, and the learning environment to support these

learners' diverse needs. Based on the results, three categories emerged: providing a positive learning environment, providing additional attention, and incorporating differentiated instructions. The category of providing a positive learning environment refers to promoting a positive learning environment that creates an atmosphere that fosters acceptance, encouragement, and support. This environment encourages confidence, independence, and a sense of belonging in its learners regarding their abilities or challenges. This is evident in the following statements:

> "I encourage them to participate in activities that provide a safe and non-judgemental classroom environment where pupils feel comfortable expressing themselves verbally. I offer prompts, cues, and opportunities for them to contribute their thoughts and ideas; after that, a teacher should also use a word of appreciation or positive responses."– T3.

Most research participants shared standard practices in promoting a positive learning environment. Typically, teachers establish a comfortable and safe environment with equal treatment for all learners inside the classroom. A similar result has been presented in another study, which indicates that a form of equity and an embodiment of education with no judgment are inclusive schools, where special needs children and other children can get equal education opportunities. Inclusive education is an exceptional service requiring all special needs children to receive an equal education in ordinary classes with their age friends (Minsih et al., 2018).

It has been supported by some researchers, who claimed that inclusive education is an education that places the fulfillment of children's right to obtain the same education for all children, both regular and children with special needs, according to their needs (Asres, 2025; Ducarre, 2024; Nations, 2017; Rothstein & Johnson, 2025; Woolfson, 2025). Another category is providing additional attention, which involves regularly assessing their progress, giving individual instructions, and offering accommodation or modifications as necessary. It is evident in the following statements:

> "*By giving of convenient time and space, and to ensure that this pupil or this learner requires special time and attention, so I will just give time at the end of our class, probably remedial time to talk to him or her, no or kumusta siya, kung unsa bay mga parts saakong gihatag sa exam or sa activities na naglisod siya, for me also to be aware kung unsay mga kinahanglan usbon or unsay kinahanglan dungagan pa*." [By giving convenient time and space and ensuring that this pupil or this learner needs special time and attention. I will give you time at the end of our class. Probably for remedial time, to talk to him about how they are doing, what parts of the exam or activities they found difficult for me, I would be aware of what needs to be improved or added.]– T4.

Based on narratives, it is evident that teachers regularly assess their learners' progress by providing convenient time and space to ensure their advancement. One aspect is that the teacher checks their learners to see if they are struggling with the lessons or in the classroom. A similar result has been presented in another study, which indicates that every student is given the same amount of attention and instruction from the teacher, and they are all treated similarly (Woodcock et al., 2022).

Special education teachers must be extra careful and attentive to the needs of each student. Special needs children should attend special education classes taught by professionals who have received the necessary training (Allam & Martin, 2021; Al-Rashaida & Massouti, 2024; Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). Being patient, polite, and having excellent communication skills is admirable because the youngsters they work with have more significant challenges than typical kids (Cardoz, 2020).

That has been supported by Wan, who claimed that a case study in a multigrade school in the Maldives found that the activities and learning materials were targeted at different levels of students' interests and academic standards and that, with the means of re-teaching and continuous instructional coaching, lots of scaffolding was taking place for individual students (Wan, 2020). Another category is incorporating differentiated instructions, which refers to tailoring materials, teaching methods, and activities to accommodate individual students' diverse learning styles, abilities, and needs. The following statement demonstrates this.

> "To accommodate the needs of these learners in the classroom, I give differentiated instruction, which means adapting my teaching to meet my students' diverse needs and preferences. You can differentiate your instruction by modifying the content, the process, the product, or the environment of your lessons."– T7.

Based on narratives, it is evident that the teacher used differentiated instructions to cater to the diverse learning needs of their students. They adapt teaching by modifying the content and process to meet their learners' diverse needs and preferences. A similar result has been presented in another study, which indicates that teachers can differentiate through content, process, teaching outcome, or learning environment, referring to students' readiness, interests, and learning profile (Tomlinson et al., 2003). It has been supported by Roberts & Inman, who claimed that little research has examined how differentiated instruction is understood and used in classrooms over the past ten years. General education teachers have a favorable attitude and possess the ability to put differentiated instruction techniques into effect (Roberts & Inman, 2023).

Elementary Teachers' Time Management in Teaching an Inclusive Classroom

The researchers asked the elementary teachers about their time management in an inclusive classroom, and two categories emerged. These categories are Adjusting Time Schedules and Time Blocking. Adjusting the schedule refers to changing or modifying the planned time allocation. This is evident in the following statement:

> "*I really ensure that dili nako mu stick sa kung unsay gihatag nga class schedule saamong head I really ensure talaga na. Somehow, I would change the schedule by giving this learner at least 30 minutes daily right after dismissal or right after lunch break.*" [I ensured that I would not stick with the class schedule given by our head. Somehow, I would change the schedule by providing this learner at least 30 minutes daily after dismissal or after the lunch break.*]*-T4.

Based on narratives, it is evident that the teachers often extend their time and do not strictly follow the given class schedule to follow up on the learners' learning, helping them catch up with the lessons, and ensuring they understand the material covered each day. Another study presented a similar result, which indicates that investigating the reasons for students' low achievement in this zone is necessary to assess the effectiveness of remedial teaching or recommend possible actions for improvement (Selvarajan, 2022). Another category is time blocking, which refers to dividing your day into blocks dedicated to specific tasks or activities. The following statements demonstrate this.

> "In dealing with diverse learners, I give them basic activities, assessments, or exercises, then another activity the next day to minimize overload. It takes much time to ensure that it is safe, appropriate, efficient, and effective for the learners with special needs."-T7.

Most teachers share common responses regarding dedicating time to plan for their learners' needs. They organize their lessons into blocks of varying difficulty levels. They typically provide an essential activity for the day and a more advanced one for later. To prevent burnout and overload, they effectively schedule breaks and rest periods after the activity, followed by another set of activities for the following day. Any teacher who has struggled with the day-to-day challenges of the classroom will find abundant proven techniques for creating an orderly, efficient environment, and caring that supports successful teaching and learning (Sutherland et al., 2022).

Challenges Elementary Teachers Encounter in Handling Special Needs Learners

The researchers asked the elementary teachers about their challenges in handling learners with special needs, and three categories emerged: time-consuming, learners' short attention span, and inadequate teacher training. The time-consuming category refers to

using or taking up much time. The research participants answered that their first challenge in handling learners' unique needs is time-consuming, as evident in the following statements.

> "*Makahurot siyag time because dili na siya parehas sa uban, you need to extend your time para saiyaha kay dapat biya walay mabiyaan, ug unsay ma learn sa isa dapat ma learn sab niya*." [It consumes much time because he is not like the others; you need to extend your time for him because no one should be left behind, so he must also learn what others learned.]-T5.

The statement highlights that teachers spend significant time handling learners with special needs in the inclusive classroom. They give special attention to these learners to ensure they are included and follow up on their needs while also catering to the needs of all the learners in the classroom. Teachers frequently take more time and effort to teach pupils with special needs. It is a result of their customization of training to each student's unique needs, which includes offering extra help and accommodations as needed. They put much effort into ensuring every student can succeed, whether by customizing lesson plans, offering one-on-one support, or producing specific learning resources (Bryant, 2019).

Another study also indicates that teachers did not feel supported by their profession, which hurt their overall quality of life, thereby contributing to feelings of burnout (Hester et al., 2020). Another category is the learners' short attention span, which refers to the limited time a person can focus and maintain concentration on a task, activity, or information before becoming distracted or losing interest (Jacob et al., 2021; Mitsea et al., 2022). The following statements demonstrate this.

> "*Usahay kay mas need man niya og more attention, so ang nahitabo ani usahay kay lisod na e balance. Lisod kaayo Magbalance kung naka focus ko sa iyang attention ug sa ubang pupils. Although nga makasabay2 siya sa uban, pero sensitive and fragile siya nga bata. Dali ra siya masaktan ug very emotional siya nga bata*." [Sometimes, it isn't easy to balance because he needs more attention. It is challenging to balance focusing on his attention and the other pupils. Although he can keep up with others academically, he is a sensitive and fragile child. He gets hurt easily and is very emotional.*]*-T6.

Based on the narrative, one of the biggest challenges for teachers is capturing the attention of the learners who struggle with concentration in the classroom. Learners with special needs often hinder their learning process due to their behaviors, such as being overly sensitive, fragile kids, or exhibiting excitement that interrupts class discussions. An interpretative phenomenological analysis of data obtained through interviews with 22 primary education teachers in European countries revealed that their students showed

negative emotions and behavior. Children diagnosed with autism and learning disabilities have difficulties focusing in class (Bachtsis et al., 2024).

The last category is inadequate teacher training. It refers to a situation in which educators need sufficient preparation, instructions, or ongoing professional development to fulfill their roles and responsibilities in the classroom effectively (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Lindner et al., 2023; Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024). The following statements demonstrate this.

> "The challenge in handling/teaching with special needs is inadequate teacher training because we have undergone training, but not specifically for special education, more like an overview of handling an inclusive classroom."-T7.

Based on narratives, it is evident that teachers often need to prepare more due to inadequate teacher training. While they may have attended seminars or training sessions, these opportunities must be improved and come late in their careers. Moreover, the training provided is often more of an overview than comprehensive guidance on effectively handling learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom. That can also be a reason that can hinder the ability to support learners with special needs effectively.

Teachers who receive appropriate training regarding teaching learners with special needs experience a change in perception and gain the ability to promote inclusion in their classrooms. Teachers who receive training regarding teaching learners with special needs also see a significant improvement in their students' learning outcomes. Understanding and learning how to teach learners with special needs in inclusive education is necessary, as this enables them to develop strategic plans for handling and accommodating the specific individual learning needs of the learner (Ambarin et al., 2023).

Elementary Teachers' Way of Coping with the Challenges

The researchers asked the elementary teachers about their ways of dealing with the challenges, and three categories emerged: time management, meeting the learner's needs, and reflecting and doing research. One way they cope with challenges is through time management, which refers to planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks and activities to effectively allocate time toward achieving specific goals or objectives. The following statements demonstrate this.

> "Addressing the challenges I face when teaching learners with special needs is maintaining flexibility in my methods, understanding that the needs of these learners will require extra hours that can change over time. This may include

> offering different levels of assistance, alternative tasks, or assessment methods."-T3.
> "I need to develop a daily schedule that will not stick to my usual schedule; I will insert the time for remedial classes or tutoring for these learners"-T5.

Based on narratives, it is evident that teachers often need to maintain flexibility in their time and do not strictly adhere to the given class schedule to provide assistance and alternative tasks for learners. They may also mention remedial classes or tutoring sessions to ensure and monitor the learning needs of learners with special needs. Another study presented a similar result, which indicates that prioritization, systematically making schedules, and allotting certain time limits for several tasks will help students work more efficiently.

In such situations, teachers should give their students full attention. Therefore, time management and assignments must be emphasized (Samsuddin et al., 2021). Another category is making an individualized educational plan, which refers to creating personalized instructional strategies and support plans tailored to meet the diverse learning needs of learners (Benigno et al., 2025; Rashid & Wong, 2023). The following statements demonstrate this.

> "*Maghimo Kog's individual educational plan is to handle their differences, including the learner's short attention span. Using hands-on learning materials or manipulative devices ma control ila mood or behavior*." [I create an Individualized educational plan to handle their differences, including the learner's short attention span. Using learning materials or manipulative devices controls their mood or behavior.]-T4.
> "*Para ma-cater ang diverse needs sa akoa students, i make sure nga naa koy IEP para mahandle sila despite sa ila lahi2 nga behavior*." [To cater to the diverse needs of my learners, I make sure I have an Individualized lesson plan (IEP) to handle various behaviors.]-T2.

The statements highlight the importance of individualized educational plans to handle learners' differences, including short attention spans. They also mention using learning materials or manipulative devices to control certain moods or behaviors. A similar result has been presented in another study, which indicates that educators and families develop individualized education programs (IEPs) to address the unique needs of individual students with disabilities. Addressing all students' needs is critical to ensuring students receive a free and appropriate public education (Kurth et al., 2025). The last category does reflect, and research refers to situations in which educators engage in self-reflection and undertake research activities to compensate for gaps in their current training or continuing professional development. This is evident in the following statements.

> "Since elementary teachers like me are not experts in handling learners with special needs because we did not major in special education, I did some research. I research and study how to help or assist them. Moreover, based on my experience, teaching pupils like them should not be in a fast phase."-T7.
> "I reflected and did some research; as much as possible, I should deal with breaking tasks into smaller steps. Do not try to teach everything at once. Present information in ways they can best adapt, Create an Inclusive Learning Environment, be open to the parents about their kids' development and challenging behaviors of pupils, expectations, and parental issues, dealing with multiple disabilities"-T1

The statement highlights the importance of conducting research and reflection by elementary teachers, which is not specific to special education. Teachers are researching and studying how to assist their learners' needs effectively. They also require patience in breaking tasks into smaller steps and presenting information in ways that cater to each learning style. Additionally, it is essential to create an inclusive learning environment and maintain open communication with parents regarding their child's development. By reflecting on their experiences and implementing strategies through research, teachers support their learners' holistic growth and learning needs.

Teachers must continuously review and analyze their pedagogical approaches to provide special education services to students. The secret to satisfying their students' various needs is to evaluate what is effective routinely and requires development. If you are thinking about it, observe the children's behavior, make notes, and monitor progress reports (Francisco et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The researcher concluded that the participants mostly encounter learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom, such as those with global developmental delay, autism, and selective mutism. To prepare for handling these learners, elementary teachers engage in specialized instruction, attend seminars, and identify individual needs to cater to them effectively. They work to create a positive learning environment, offer additional attention, and incorporate differentiated instruction to accommodate special needs. Teachers also manage their time by adjusting time schedules outside of class and time blocking to break lessons accordingly. Despite their preparations, teachers often need help with time-consuming tasks, have short attention spans, and need more training. However, they cope by prioritizing time management, making individualized educational plans, and engaging in reflection and further research. That emphasizes the importance of continuous

support and resources for elementary teachers to better cater to the diverse needs of their learners and foster inclusive learning environments.

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