

# Demystifying the Lived Experiences of Teachers as Stewards of Learners in Handling Learners with Special Educational Needs in an Inclusive Classroom: A Phenomenology

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## Abstract

This qualitative study employed specifically a phenomenological design to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the public-school teachers handling learners with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. These teachers were chosen purposively and qualified in the inclusion and exclusion criteria set to become my participants for the in-depth interview (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD). Thematic analysis was utilized to extract the essential themes from the responses of the participants. From the lived experiences of the teachers in the classroom, three essential themes emerged such as keeping informed of ongoing societal issues and problems, realizing the moral obligation of the teaching profession towards learners, and being concerned with the holistic development of the learner. On coping mechanisms of teachers handling learners with disability in an inclusive classroom, the themes included practicing psychosocial, moral, and religious support and provision of organized development programs for teachers and learners. While on the insights shared by the teachers dealing with the learners, two themes surfaced such as teachers as role models for the youth and upholding a sense of accountability.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; lived experiences; teachers; learners; phenomenology

## 1. Introduction

The basic mission of the Department of Education is to cater to every kind of learner to basic education and develop their full potential. Regardless of their abilities and capabilities, the department has now on its way to accommodate learners in the school and the classroom. This scenario has been through a lot of arguments and statements but it is on how it is being implemented.

The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use, and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school. Salamanca Framework for Action, 1994.

Inclusive education allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side, to the benefit of all. Inclusion has had an impact on educational systems with, for example, the introduction of disability anti-discrimination legislation in the USA, Australia, the UK, and elsewhere, and inclusion policies and an emphasis on how schools respond to 'diversity' in many countries. However, in many cases inclusion has been reduced mainly to a change of language rather than of practice, and the more the language of inclusion is used in practice the more evasive it becomes. (Armstrong, 2019).

At the school level, teachers must be trained, buildings must be refurbished and students must receive accessible learning materials. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Teachers usually neglect and are also equally unaware of the procedures to handle this group of children, and most especially, face difficulties managing such cases (Hodgkinson & Baginsky, 2000).

Furthermore, the teacher's inefficiency in terms of handling learners with special needs within their classrooms also was found in UK studies (Hodgkinson & Baginsky, 2000; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005;

Rossato & Brackenridge, 2009), wherein they suggested that if the approach to a child is not consistent, educators feel concerned and anxious about their roles.

Moreover, in Spain, the regular education teachers' perceptions of inclusion in elementary and secondary schools differ depending on teaching experience, skills, and the availability of resources and support. In a sample draw a representative sample of 336 general education teachers (68 kindergarten, 133 elementary, and 135 secondary teachers) from the province of Alicante. The results indicated the acceptance of the principles of inclusion, although teacher skills, time, material resources, and personal support for inclusion were deemed insufficient. Kindergarten and elementary teachers showed more positive perceptions of inclusion than secondary education teachers, and so did teachers with more personal support and material resources than those with fewer supports and resources. The implication of the result of the study was used for practice to promote more inclusive classrooms in Spain. (Chiner & Cardona, 2012).

In Beijing, China, a study aims to explore the perspectives of resource room teachers (RRTs) on their role transformation from regular education teachers to special educators and its influencing factors. This study found that the RRTs have experienced three stages of role transformation moving from confusion by the new job to conflict among multiple expectations and then to being professionalized as special educators with self-determination. They struggled with multiple roles, felt marginalized and professionalized, and were dominated by a categorical perspective serving students with special educational needs. Moreover, authorized full-time positions, professionalization, administrative support, and attitudes toward inclusive education were found to be key determinants in RRTs' successful role transformation. The present study concludes that RRTs should be empowered with clear expectations of their roles and responsibilities to lead inclusive education practices in schools and guarantee a stable professional status via sustainable training. Xie, Deng & Zhu, 2021.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) aims to guarantee every child learner's special protection from all forms of abuse and exploitation and care as these are essential for the child's well-being, considering the principal rights and duties of parents or legal guardians (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012). Preventive measures suggest that school personnel, pupils, and parents should attend training and seminars, including positive peer relationships and enhancement of social and emotional competence.

As mentioned by Velayo (2006), learners with disability are among the most common concerns that third-world countries, such as the Philippines, continue to face. He noted that the failure of relevant institutions, to have a clear definition contributes to why there are cases that are overlooked and longer tagged.

### 1.1 Review of Related Literature

#### **Overview of learners with special needs.**

UNESCO 2022 defines Education deals signed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods to participate and meet learning objectives in an educational program. Reasons may include (but are not limited to) disadvantages in physical, behavioral, intellectual, emotional, and social capacities. Educational programs in special needs education may follow a similar curriculum as that offered in the parallel regular education system, however, they take individuals' particular needs into account by providing specific resources (e.g. specially trained personnel, equipment, or space) and, if appropriate, modified educational content or learning objectives. These programs can be offered for individual students within already existing educational programs or be offered as a separate class in the same or separate educational institutions.

#### **Training/Seminars for SPED teachers in handling learners with disability.**

The training programs of teachers are essential to upgrade teachers' skills, knowledge, and performance. This will also enable them to be more effective teachers. According to Davis and Davis (1998), a teacher-training program is a process through which skills are developed, information is provided, and attitudes are nurtured, to help teachers, become more efficient in their work. Hence, training will serve as a solution to the lack of performance of the teachers or when there is a need to effect change in the way things have been done (Mathekg, 2004). Furthermore, training programs also play a crucial role since this will change the skills and attitudes of teachers for their betterment. It is of vital importance to teachers and governments to pass on the latest innovations in teaching methods/strategies and new curricula (David, 2001).

Teachers often obtain pre-service training or during in-service training. Teachers in pre-service training often have to attend compulsory courses as required by the curriculum to get a diploma or degree. This training is provided by formal education institutes, which prepare future professionals for the job (Carroll et al., 2003).

As the teacher becomes hired and is now practicing his/her profession, there are necessary things that a teacher must learn that were not introduced during the pre-service training. Hence, a teacher must undergo in-service training.

In-service training programs are an important aspect of a profession because this will reorient the teacher to new goals and values. These programs also help teachers develop their work thoroughly. They become more conscious of strategies for curriculum change and development especially since teachers enter the teaching profession without having received sufficient in-service training (Carl, 1995; Conco, 2004; Al-Zoubi et al., 2010). This is very evident in developing countries especially in handling students with disability. The field of special education in Jordan is still short of well-trained educational staff that possesses the necessary teaching skills and competencies. The majority of teachers working with children with special needs

in Jordan have never received the appropriate training in special education during their pre-service training programs (Hadidi, 1990, 1993). As a result, there is a great need for skilled and qualified staff to help children with learning disabilities, and to keep up with the fast pace of development in the field of special education, especially with the increasing numbers of children joining the various special education centers, and the increasing demand on special education services for students of learning disabilities, using the resource room as an educational alternative.

Most special education teachers in Jordan never received appropriate pre-service training which focused on the practicum site (Hadidi, 1993, 1990). Besides, all in-service training programs adopted and conducted by the Jordanian Ministry of Education are designed for teachers in general, whether they teach students with special needs or normal students. This is very crucial because if teachers are not trained and qualified to handle children with learning disabilities then much more in handling children with disability.

On the contrary, the Philippines has a much better condition in SPED than Jordan though there are very few schools that accept children with disabilities because of a lack of school facilities and appropriately trained teachers. As a continuing effort of the government, the Department of Education (DepEd) has started implementing new programs to strengthen teachers' capabilities to better respond to children with special needs.

Aside from the ongoing training given to teachers of children with disabilities, DepEd has been providing additional enrichment courses to educators handling children with learning and multiple disabilities. These enrichment programs allow the participating teachers to initially take eighteen (18) units of specialized courses that may lead to a graduate degree. Also, the DepEd is already urging the House of Representatives to finally endorse the Special Education Act of 2010 which proposes the establishment of SPED centers in all school divisions so that services will now be accessible for children with special needs. This act also proposed continuing education and assistance for teachers handling SPED through scholarships, training grants, and the like. This shows that at present, the main concern of the government is on providing SPED schools and providing training programs for teachers so that services become accessible to all types of learners. This means that SPED teachers in the country are not yet geared toward improving their teaching skills in handling specific types of LSENs.

However, wealthy nations like the US have made some progress in the area of special education. For instance, nearly 600,000 kids with disabilities are now being educated in the US by an estimated 39,000 special education teachers (Smith, McLeskey, Tyler, & Saunders, 2002). Many of these special education workers lack "the most fundamental preparedness to conduct their duties," according to Smith et al. (2002). To obtain their licenses, general education instructors must pass one or more special education-related courses. The fact that 76% of public school instructors work with pupils who require special education assistance makes the problem urgent (Education Week, 2004b, p. 7). However, this information does not explicitly apply to LSENs.

#### Definitions of Competency

The term competency has different meanings depending on its orientation. For instance, McLagan (1983) described competency as the trait and knowledge of a worker that works as the base of effective performance. Competency can be also sometimes confused with the word competence wherein these are used interchangeably.

Competency can have a different approach depending on the location. For instance, the American approach considers competency as an input. In this case, competency may refer to the personal characteristics of a person. On the other hand, other authors have described competence as an output. This is what is termed the British approach which reflects the job requirement of that individual.

Competency can also be defined as the individual's characteristics that they need to have to perform well in their job. On the other hand, competence is used to describe the job requirements that the individual needs to know or to have to be able to perform a task required by a specific occupation. This refers to the ability of an individual to perform a required task in their job. Thornton (1992) illustrated that competency is a collective characteristic of behavior that relates to work performance. These characteristics were categorized as aptitudes, abilities, and knowledge, which all can be improved or enhanced by education and experience. Similarly, Le Boterf, (2000) stated that competency is an action that results from the combination of personal resources such as knowledge, and environmental resources such as technology. For the study, competency would only focus on the aspect of skills and knowledge that a teacher possesses to make him/her perform his/her task.

#### Dimensions of Competencies for SPED teachers working with LWDs.

Presently, several states in the US have already established a list of competencies for SPED teachers working with LWDs. For instance, the Virginia Autism Council (2010) has developed skills competencies for all LWDs service providers ranging from paraprofessionals to advance service providers. These competencies are said to be based on the best and most promising practices which have been identified through consistent findings of the research. These results have provided several evidence-based strategies that are effective in treating, educating, and supporting individuals with autism in school and community-based settings. [www.tjrp.org](http://www.tjrp.org)

Since competencies require that professionals like SPED teachers have particular knowledge unique in serving LWDs and require specialized skills that must be able demonstrated in practice, the developed list of competencies is defined according to two specific dimensions namely knowledge and skills. These

competencies focus specifically on assessing individual needs and program planning rather than on diagnosing individuals with autism.

According to Virginia Autism Council (2010), SPED teachers should be competent in eight areas namely: general autism, environmental structure, and visual supports, comprehensive instructional programming, communication, social skills, behavior, sensory-motor development, and independence and aptitude. They emphasized that no competency area is believed to be more important than another area however, it is imperative that the competencies be considered as a whole and that all competencies are given equal weight when designing programs for teaching paraprofessionals and professionals about autism. Each statement includes many strategies and identifies many characteristics of LWDs but since the characteristics of LWDs are very broad and overlapping, these strategies and characteristics are not exhaustive and may not be appropriate to every individual with autism. Nevertheless, SPED teachers who serve individuals with autism should be competent in all areas.

Aside from Virginia Autism Council, the state of Minnesota also developed competencies for SPED teachers working with LWDs. It is similar to Virginia in the sense that the proposed LWDs teacher competencies are based on promising practices however, it is organized using the model for professional standards established by the Council of Exceptional Children. Unlike Virginia wherein competencies are developed for all levels of LWDs providers ranging from paraprofessionals to expert teachers with certificates, the competencies developed by Minnesota Autism Project are specially built upon the "Common Core" competencies for beginning teachers (Minnesota Autism Project, 2003). Hence, this list of competencies is appropriate for the present study.

Minnesota Autism Project (2003) believed that LSENs SPED teacher must not only be competent in what he/she knows but must also be competent to transcend what he/she knows into practice. Hence, SPED teachers must be competent in both knowledge and skills dimensions.

Contrary to the previous competencies discussed, the competencies of the Minnesota Autism Project are not comprehensive which is probably because this state does not have a license specific to LSENs and these competencies are not a requirement. According to this project, the common core competencies should include knowledge and skills in ten (10) dimensions namely: foundations of education of LSENs, development, and characteristics of LSENs, individual learning differences in the area of LSENs, instructional strategies for LSENs, learning environment and social interactions for LSENs, language/communication in the education of LSENs, instructional planning for LSENs, assessment of LSENs, professional and ethical practices in the education of LSENs, and collaboration in the education of LSENs.

#### **Training/Seminars for SPED teachers and Competency Level**

Training programs for SPED teachers prepare and provide the necessary competencies for achieving success in their work. This is similar to the concept of Competency-Based Teacher Education (CBTE) in the field of Special Education. This movement enormously affected preparing teachers for teaching children with special needs (Wendel, 1982).

Training programs may be designed using competency-based teacher education. For instance, Borich (1977) categorizes teacher training programs based on Competency-Based Teacher Education (CBTE) into three types: (i) knowledge competencies (where a knowledge competency means a cognitive understanding derived from the instruction process or subject-matter content that the teacher is expected to demonstrate); (ii) performance competencies (which are the behaviors the teachers demonstrate in the classroom, especially, according to Borich, ongoing teaching behaviors); and (iii) consequence competencies (which are the outcome of the teaching and learning process between the teacher and his students).

According to the study conducted by Alainati, AlShawi, and Al-Karaghoul (2009), training programs just like education affect competency. A similar study conducted in Jordan found that training modules improve the knowledge competencies of SPED teachers. Training programs also have effects on both teachers' knowledge of the characteristics and needs of students with learning disabilities and their acceptance of including these students in their classroom (Khrais, 2005). Hence, training cannot only improve the competency of SPED teachers in the aspect of basic SPED principles but awareness and acceptance of LSENs as well.

#### **Inclusive Education**

(UNESCO,2022) defines inclusive education as a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve Education for All. As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. (Source: UNESCO 2009). Inclusive schools are based upon a child-centered pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disadvantages and disabilities. The merit of such schools is not only that they are capable of providing quality education to all children; their establishment is a crucial step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities in developing an inclusive society.

At this writing, over 140 governments have formally expressed their support for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) for the implementation of inclusion policies. IE has become the goal of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and other similar organizations (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). UNESCO continues to push for the institutionalization of inclusionary practices in more countries with the publication of, the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion. Inclusion International also joined the movement toward inclusion by publishing Better Education for All: A Global



Report. Since the promotion of IE in various countries, scholars who have studied its implementation have found that not many school personnel consider this a purely positive development. While the practice of IE is predominantly cognizant of the learners' differences, inclusive school personnel, together with the parents of LSENs and other professionals, are expected to prepare individualized education programs (IEPs) that suit the unique needs of LSENs in a general education school. The whole process of IEP preparation poses a gargantuan challenge to the major stakeholders. Even if the school administration does not go through the whole process of creating standardized and procedural IE and IEPs, the possible failure of students in the context of general education is often blamed on the teacher. And this usually leads to tension among various stakeholders including teachers, administrators, parents, and children, in those without special needs. Whether the teacher is accountable for the failure of LWD in the general education setting remains unresolved. Other related disagreements over such concerns continue to generate studies that are inconsistent, if not contradictory, explanations, theories, and proposed remedies. Consequently, questions such as, "Which proposed solutions to adopt?", "In what context?", and "Why?", become stubborn issues that saddle the practice of educational inclusion.

Despite issues brought about by the practice of IE, new educational approaches by the principle of education for all were implemented. Such approaches started to evolve in the wake of the institutionalization of inclusion policies. Measures were taken, tested, and revised to address the identified inadequacies of IE approaches. IE in many countries that have long opened the doors of general education to LSENs has evolved and has become more responsive to the demands or requirements of high-quality IE. In this study, high-quality IE is defined as the procedural practice of expecting maximum learning among LSENs within the general education setting. The notion of high-quality IE may be illustrated by examining the way IE is practiced in the United States. Inclusive American schools have a relatively uniform way of addressing the needs of students with learning problems (Kritzer, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

The approach is commonly referred to as the "Special Education Process". It begins with the classroom teacher's attempt to help the student address his or her learning difficulties. If the teacher's solutions fail, the matter is brought to a team that will likewise try to address the student's learning difficulties. The team—referred to as the "Student Study Team", "Child Study Team", or "Student Success Team"—consists of the following: school principal or a representative; teacher of a student with a learning problem; parent of the same student; special education expert; school psychologist; nurse; and other professionals, if necessary. The team studies evidence of the student's problems (i.e., a sample of student work) before ordering solutions. If the proposed solutions later prove to be ineffective, the LSENs is recommended for assessment to determine if he or she is eligible for special education services. If the student is eligible, a one-year Individualized Educational Program (IEP) is prepared and this is modified whenever necessary. Parents then are notified of the learning progress of their child, who will then be re-assessed every three years to determine if he or she is still in need of continued special education services.

In the Philippines, what every schoolchild must learn and why it must be learned, regardless of his or her abilities or lack thereof, are issues that have yet to undergo intense debate. Rich and sustained argumentative discussions surrounding IE and special education in the Philippines must be encouraged to discern what is best for all Filipino schoolchildren. Whether the Philippines should adopt the inclusion policy and specific approaches to IE practiced in other countries and which adjustments to make according to the demands of the country's own cultural, economic, and social realities—these are serious matters that need immediate attention, for high-quality education is an entitlement all school-aged Filipino children must enjoy, regardless of what they have or lack. Some Problems of IE Here and Overseas IE movement encourages inclusive schools to establish a continuum of support and services to match the needs of children who require special attention (Salamanca Statement, 1994). Since the institutionalization of IE in different countries, nearly all public schools have been morally or legally stripped of their option to turn away exceptional. To fully satisfy the needs of diverse learners, especially those with developmental disorders or learning disabilities, a government needs to require that high standards of inclusion be met in schools. Inadequate preparation for IE may stand in the way of high-quality inclusion. Significance of the Study At present, the entire Philippine education system is lacking in the knowledge and resources required for high-quality inclusion. This research presents an evidence-based picture of how IE is practiced in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, to give stakeholders in IE an idea of how inclusion is conceptualized and practiced in the Philippines. Since this study identifies important challenges to IE as practiced in Quezon City, knowing such problems can help IE stakeholders, especially in similar developing countries, to decide where to begin and which specific practices to promote and make available if they wish to facilitate the development of a just and durable IE. This study gives the parents of LWD a broader and deeper picture of where a developing country such as the Philippines might be in terms of IE practice. Such vital information is crucial in aiding parents in their attempt to maximize the learning opportunities of their LWD despite the limited external support system for IE. General education teachers will likewise benefit from this study in that the research suggests inclusionary procedures that may be implemented in the Philippines, even if a significant majority of these schools are burdened with very limited resources. Findings from this study can also be used to inform those tasked to revise Philippine Senate Bill 3002 or to institutionalize inclusionary procedures in schools throughout the country

To understand deeply the lived experiences of the teachers who are handling learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom, I relied on the questions stated below which helped me in gathering the needed information.

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers in handling learners with disability in an inclusive classroom?
2. How do these teachers cope with the challenges encountered in doing their responsibilities in dealing with these groups of learners?
3. What insights can be shared with the academe and the community?

### 1.3 Theoretical lens

This study was seen through the lens of the General Systems Theory founded by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1940s. Accordingly, understanding the parts is not enough. It is also important to understand relationships among the parts. At this stage, a system can be described as a series of interrelated and interdependent parts, such that the interaction or interplay of any of the subsystems affects the whole. It is very clear that for a program or policy, like “Inclusive Education”, to be well implemented in a particular setting, all the interrelated agencies involved like the institution, DepEd, the government, school administrators, and teachers have a clearer collaboration and direction in its implementation.

Added on, it was noted that Kuhn (1974), later developed a different paradigm following Bertalanffy's theory. According to him, there is one common element of all systems. Knowing one part of a system enables us to know something about another part. The information content of a piece of information is proportional to the amount of information that can be inferred from the information systems and can be either controlled or uncontrolled. In controlled systems, information is sensed, and changes are affected in response to the information. The author refers to this as the detector, selector, and effector functions of the system. The detector is concerned with the communication of information between systems. The selector is defined by the rules that the system uses to make decisions, and the effector is how transactions are made between systems. Communication and transaction are the only intersystem interactions. Communication is the exchange of information, while a transaction involves the exchange of matter-energy. All organizational and social interactions involve communication and, or transaction.

The detectors in this study are the students with their respective families and the government and NGO intervention plans that they have received. It also includes the profile of the teachers, their teaching background, and their training before they were assigned to handle inclusive education. The selectors are the DepEd Memorandum that dictates the roles and responsibilities of the teachers toward their learners. And lastly, the effectors are the lived experiences of the teachers as a product of their interaction with these learners.

## 2. Methods

This chapter includes a presentation of the research design, research participants, role of the researcher, the data sources, data collection procedure, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical consideration.

### 2.1 Research Design

This research used a qualitative design. I used qualitative research, which, according to Creswell (2014), is a type of research that is primarily used to describe, investigate, and comprehend how generally people feel about a certain occurrence or social issue. Additionally, focus groups, interviews, records, papers, and notes were used in the data collection and analysis process for this technique. It served as a means of gathering and analyzing ideas concerning people's research questions (Hameed, 2020). To better understand non-numerical data, qualitative research focused particularly on interpretation. Thus, qualitative research particularly dealt with interpretation and convene non-numerical data in understanding the situation of persons and the social environment (Adedoyin, 2020). This study used a qualitative research approach for it aimed to explore and understand the experiences of teachers in handling learners with disability in an inclusive classroom. Further, this study gathered non-numerical data through interviews, group discussions, recordings, and notes. This was participated by 14 untrained grade 1 public elementary teachers from Tagum City wherein seven (7) teachers for virtual IDI and another seven (7) for FGD. It was to gather the data and responses from the participants about their standpoints, challenges, experiences, and coping mechanism toward the problem of implementing MFAT. Moreover, Creswell (2013) defined phenomenology as an approach to qualitative study that concentrates on the commonality of a lived experience within a specific group. The basic aim of the method was to arrive at a definition of the essence of the phenomenon. It was supported by Waters (2017) who stated that phenomenological research is a study that attempts to understand people's perspectives and understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon. Furthermore, this kind of research design allowed the participants to express their insights, experiences, opinions, and subjectivity

toward the phenomenon during the interview. Also, it gave importance to the participants' perceptions and interpretations. Hence, a phenomenological research design was useful for knowing in-depth problems and

for discovering the hidden concerns and voices of the persons involved (Pathak, 2017).

In this study, a phenomenological design was employed to understand and describe the standpoints of the actual experiences of teachers handling learners with disability in an inclusive classroom. It aimed to gather direct information from the participants about their experiences through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher conducted IDI and FGD through online platforms like Zoom or Google Meet due to our present situation at this moment. The questions that were asked during IDI and FGD were based on research questions which were about the experiences, standpoints, insights, and coping mechanisms of the participants toward the problem., this approach enabled the researcher to gather reliable and relevant data and responses from the participants. The data gathered were treated, analyzed, and thematized to come up with substantial results and formulate interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations. Thus, the researcher used the phenomenological research design because it was the appropriate method to gather information on the experiences of teachers in handling learners with disability in an inclusive classroom.

## 2.2 Research Participants

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study conducted with a heterogeneous group should have a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 15 individuals. In this study, the respondents were coming from the identified schools that have handled inclusive education, the 10 respondents were identified to have catered to learners with disability. The participants were recruited online by sending a letter of permission to ask them to be the participants in this research study. Then, the objectives and the methodology of this study were explained to them so that they were guided during the interview. I employed purposive sampling in determining my participants.

Purposive sampling involved selecting from a wide range related to the subject of the research. This method of sampling was useful when not taking a random sample (Etikan, 2016). I selected participants who know the phenomenon and qualified for the selection criteria of the study. The pre-inclusion criteria of this study were based on the following dimensions: (1) They are learners with disability in the public. Also, (2) the participants had two-year of experience in implementing inclusive education. Lastly, (3) participants haven't experienced teaching learners with disability.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

This qualitative phenomenological research data was examined using coding and thematic analysis. According to Smith and Davies (2010) as cited by Theron (2015) coding is a method to organize the data so that underlying messages portrayed by the data may become clearer to the researcher. Also, Charmaz (2006) defined coding as a significant connection between gathering and explaining the meaning of the data or information. Researchers use code as a descriptive concept or label to get the main content or meaning of the data.

In the study, the data were gathered for transcription and analysis after IDI and FGD. The data were analyzed by reading the participants' transcription responses. Then, from the transcribed data, coding was utilized to organize and group the common terms from participants' responses. Also, this served as the basis for identifying and formulating core ideas and major themes that emerged from the participants' experiences in handling learners with disability. By doing so, the results were easily summarized by the researcher and the readers can understand the study.

**Thematic analysis** is a method for the systematic identification, arrangement, and insight of meaning patterns (themes) through a dataset. The thematic analysis helped the researcher to see and make sense of collective or mutual meanings and experiences by focusing on the context in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Then, a thematic analysis was done in identifying the different major themes from the core ideas of the participants' responses that emerge from the four main questions and sub-questions of the study. The interpretation was done afterward. The results of data analysis were the basis for formulating the conclusion, recommendation, and implications of this research study.

**Trustworthiness of the Study.** The four criteria that should be considered and employed in qualitative research in pursuit of a trustworthy study were credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited by Shenton, 2004).

**Credibility** is considered an important factor in establishing trustworthiness. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited by Shenton, 2004). According to Merriam (1995), credibility deals with the congruency of findings with the realities. To establish credibility in this study, the following concrete measures were employed: iterative questioning, triangulation of methodology, and member checking (Shenton, 2004). Iterative questioning is utilized by the researchers to ask probing and rephrased questions related to the research study to gather and extract detailed and rich data (Shenton, 2004). It was supported by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who stated that iterative questioning refers to the systematic and repetitive process of asking questions. Iterative questioning was employed in this research study by asking probing and rephrasing

questions to the participants to have them elaborate on their answers and gain more ideas. In this manner, the purpose of the study was attained by gathering comprehensive and detailed data from them during the virtual interview.

However, before the interview, the participants were informed that I would ask questions about their experiences in handling learners with disability in an inclusive setting. With that, the participants had ideas as to what the interview was all about.

**Triangulation of Methodology** is used wherein different methods are present in the study like focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IGD) to attain more wide range and comprehensive information (Patton, 1999 as cited by Carter et al., 2014). To reduce biases, ensure validity, and achieve significant results, triangulation is employed with the involvement of different participants from various organizations or sources (Shenton, 2004).

In this study, I utilized the triangulation of methods such as focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interviews (IDI). The data gathered were triangulated to attain a deeper understanding, of relevant and reliable data regarding the experiences of the participants in implementing SBPP in teaching learners. Out of 10 participants, I had seven (7) participants for in-depth interviews and the remaining seven (3) were for FGD or focus group discussion. The IDI and FGD were conducted via online platforms like Google Meet or Zoom.

Member checking is considered a significant provision that is utilized to strengthen a study's credibility. Participants may also be asked to read the transcript of dialogues in which they have taken part (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited by Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Also, Merriam (1995) further elaborates that not only about taking data collected from the study participants but also the tentative interpretations of these data are returned to the individuals from whom they were derived and to inquire whether the interpretations are plausible.

Member checking was done in this research study. We informed the participants that they could read, assess, disapprove, modify, or check the transcripts of dialogues and the results. We sent back to them the transcriptions to verify whether the transcribed statements were correct and may suggest changes if there were misreported statements.

**Dependability** ensures that the findings of a research study are consistent and reliable. The processes of the research study are documented and allow other persons from outside of the study to audit, follow, check, and validate (Sandelowski, 1986, Polit et al., 2006, Streubert, 2007 as cited by Moon et al., 2016). The provision of detailed processes of the study enables the future researcher to use it as their reference/repeat the work.

To establish dependability, we employed the following concrete measures: overlapping methods/triangulation, in-depth methodological description, and audit trail (Shenton, 2004). Overlapping methods use carefully planned methodological triangulation or multiple data-gathering procedures such as in-depth interviews, group discussions, and questionnaires. It is used to create overlapping data to check its validity (Brown, 2005). Also, it is used to ensure that the findings generated from the data collected using the different methods are consistent. (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

To address the dependability of the study, we employed overlapping methods such as in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) using. During that time, I used an interview guide to triangulate and ensured the consistency of the responses of the participants. Using IDI and FGD, reduced the subjectivity of the result and made sure that the findings were from the outcomes and based on the experiences and responses of the participants. The group discussion and interviews were conducted via Google Meet or Zoom. The audio or video recordings were utilized to retrieve information from the responses of the learners with disabilities. The methodological description helps the readers to check and assess the extent of the practices of the research. Moreover, it allows them to check the effectiveness and have a detailed understanding of the methods used. The research design, its implication, and the details of gathering the data are included and presented (Shenton, 2004).

In this study, we established well the dependability by providing an in-depth methodological description that could give a clear presentation of the study conducted. In Chapter 3 of this research, I explained thoroughly the data-gathering procedures and the research design. Also, the strategies used and all research practices like virtual interviews were reported in detail by ensuring audio or video recordings. Through that, readers could understand well and adapt the study's research methods and practices to their corresponding settings. Audit trails are performed to keep a record of the processes used in a study. The research steps from the beginning of the study to the reporting of the results are described and presented clearly through an audit trail (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Also, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that an audit trail allows the readers to know the step-by-step of the research through the description of the procedures and the decisions made.

We utilized the audit trail in this study to emphasize the steps of data analysis in making the decisions for this study. We ensured that all the recordings of the responses and narrations of the participants



taken during the virtual interview via Google Meet or Zoom were transcribed and translated carefully.

The findings were taken from the participants' answers and not from the biases of the researcher. Also, all the recordings were kept and checked to ensure that the results were based on legitimate sources. Everything in my study was analyzed, assessed, and evaluated thoroughly by my thesis adviser who was an expert in this field. Confirmability refers to the objectivity, the similarity of statements taken from two or more individuals that confirms the precision, validity, and significance of the results (Elo et al., 2014). The results must be proven by the researchers that they are related to the conclusions, can be observed, and repeated as a process (Moon et al., 2016). Also, confirmability assures that the findings of the inquiry are supported well by the gathered data.

To establish the confirmability of the study, an in-depth methodological description and audit trail are employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited by Shenton, 2004). This study established confirmability by providing an in-depth methodological description. It allows the results of the research to be scrutinized. The researcher must present the steps and procedures of the study to ensure that the results are based on the experiences and preferences of the research participants rather than those of the researcher (Moon et al., 2016). I kept the recordings from Google Meet or Zoom during the virtual interview to use them as legitimate sources wherein the research panel and adviser could scrutinize and verify if the interpretations and conclusions were accurate and based on participants' experiences and answers and not merely from the researcher's preferences and biases. Also, the data, tools, documentation, and written notes were readily available for checking and validating the findings and results to establish the confirmability of this research study. Furthermore, I employed the audit trail to establish well the confirmability of this research study. I presented the research steps taken during the conduct of the study. The data gathered during the virtual interviews and discussions were transcribed and translated carefully. Only the recorded responses and answers of the participants, not the biases of the researcher, were the basis for formulating results and interpretation of the study. All the data were checked, verified, and analyzed thoroughly by my adviser, who is an expert in this field. Then, the results and processes were presented using the tables.

**Transferability** as stated by Merriam (1998) cited by Pandey and Patnaik (2014) emphasized that the findings of the study can be transferred and applied to other settings or wider populations. This is supported by Suter (2014) who stated that transferability refers to the degree to which the findings and the problems described in the study apply to other contexts and practices. Furthermore, the researcher's responsibility is to ensure that adequate contextual information on the research work is presented well to address the transferability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited by Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). To establish transferability in this study, I employed the following concrete measures: a thick description of the research processes for ease of transfer and a detailed description of the phenomenon (Shenton, 2004).

Thick description is described as a way of measuring the validity of the study by describing the phenomenon comprehensively and in detail. Also, the conclusions drawn in the study should be transferable to other situations, settings, individuals, and contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited by Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Then, the strategies for collecting the data and analysis must be presented thoroughly to provide a clear and accurate view of the methods used in this study (Creswell, 2014).

To address transferability in the study, we provided a thick description of the research processes in which the methods and the results of the data were presented and explained thoroughly. The other details such as the audit trail were included in the appendices so that readers could evaluate, able to transfer the data to other contexts, and serve as their reference for future research. The researcher kept soft copies of the documents in the study.

To strengthen well the transferability of a study, the researcher must provide a clear and detailed description of the context or the phenomenon, the selection method, the experiences of the participants, and the collection of data and analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004 as cited by Moon et al., 2016). By doing that, readers would have a proper understanding of the study (Shenton, 2004). Besides, we provided a clear detailed description of the lived experiences of learners with disability in the school-based preparedness program, their contexts, and processes of data collection and analysis. The transcribed responses of the participants were presented in the study. With that, the readers could understand the phenomenon being studied and the challenges, issues, and standpoints of the participants. Through the presentation of the findings, readers could understand well the study, relate, and compare it to their situations. Also, other researchers could transfer the data for future reference.

**Ethical Consideration** is one of the important aspects of conducting research and it requires that the researchers must protect the right and dignity of the participants (Akaranga et al., 1994). To establish ethical consideration, we followed the ethical standards stated in the Belmont Report (1979) as cited by Orb et al. (2019) which were respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

The first principle is respect for persons. This principle gives serious consideration and acknowledges the participants as autonomous people who are capable of expressing their ideas, and experiences, and making their own decisions. Also, some of the aspects of this principle are the inclusion of

informed consent during the conduct of the study and the confidentiality of the data. Generally, researchers are expected to obtain an agreement for the study from the participants (Pelling, 2019). To establish the principle of respect for persons in a study, researchers must utilize the informed consent form during the conduct of the research. Informed consent forms are those that participants sign before they engage in research. This form acknowledges that participants' rights will be protected during data collection (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, we asked the participants to sign the informed consent form wherein it consisted of a certificate of consent and a participation information sheet. The form served as proof of their voluntary participation. It was sent online through an e-mail or google drive link wherein they could download it. Then, we asked them to send it back to me through e-mail. The participants had affixed their e-signatures in ICF and received a personal copy of it. Since there is a pandemic, the conduct of IDI and FGD was via Google Meet or Zoom. We asked permission before the interview to record our whole conversation. It was one way of showing respect to the participants since they had a choice whether they permitted it or not. The permission for the recording was included already in ICF to inform them ahead about the conditions of their participation during virtual interviews and group discussions. Moreover, I ensured the privacy of the participants during virtual IDI and FGD. I encouraged them to use headphones and be alone at their respective venues to ensure that nobody could hear our conversation except us. The interview was conducted only during their preferred time and date to ensure that there was no conflict in their schedule. More so, we established rapport to stimulate a good discussion, and they could express their thoughts freely and comprehensively about the topic. We ethically treated them and respected their answers. Besides, we assured that the narrations and personal opinions of the participants were taken with respect and treated following only the purpose of the study. Afterward, we sent back the transcription for them to verify whether the transcribed statements were correct and they may suggest changes if there were misreported statements. Another way to establish respect for persons is by informing the participants about their right to withdraw from the study. They should be informed by the researcher that they have the right to discontinue their participation in the study. Then, they should not be required to disclose any explanation to the researcher (Shenton, 2004). In this study, we informed the participants about their right to withdraw from participating in the study. Further, no coercion or begging happened if the participants decided to withdraw.

**Confidentiality** refers to modifying or changing the participants' personal information in the data. It is to protect the privacy of the participants while collecting and analyzing the data (Allen, 2017). In connection to that, confidentiality is also related to data protection. Data protection aims to guarantee the right of individuals to privacy. It ensures that the personal data of participants are safe from unforeseen and unintended use. It includes measuring collection, access to data, communication, and usage of data (Wilms, 2012). To establish confidentiality and data protection in the study, we encouraged the participants before the virtual interview to change their account names or make a new e-mail address with a code name. It was to avoid exposing their information during video recording that may harm them. Further, I ensured anonymity in all their transcribe narratives and answers by using code names. Also, any of their information in the form was hidden. The second principle is beneficence. This principle requires the researchers not to give unnecessary harm but to ensure doing good to the research participant (Pelling, 2019). It is supported by Orb et al. (2019) statement that a second ethical principle closely linked with research is beneficence—doing good for others and preventing harm. Hence, it addressed not harm and the need to maximize well-being.

To establish the beneficence, I assured the participants that their identities were protected and hidden to avoid the minimal risk of participating in this study like being afraid, ashamed, and embarrassed. We encouraged them to change their account name to a code name or alias so that during the recording their identity was not exposed. Hence, this study allowed the participants to express their ideas and insights on how to change or improve the program and find solutions to the issues that arose in their respective schools. As a researcher, we ensured that my participants were treated with the utmost care and protection by conducting our interviews online to ensure their safety during this pandemic time. Further, the results were informed to them. Also, it was presented comprehensively in the study, so other researchers and readers would know the outcome, then may use it as a reference for future research.

To ensure the beneficence of the study, we made sure that the participants were informed about the result of the study. All the findings and results were disseminated to them after the data analysis. I directly sent a copy of their transcribed responses to their respective e-mail. Lastly, I ensured that throughout the process of sharing and disseminating the information, their rights were protected and accommodated properly.

The gathered data would be kept for three (3) years after the completion of the research study. After that, the researcher would destroy it to prevent unauthorized persons to access the data. The third principle is justice. This principle aims to have a fair distribution of benefits and burdens to the individuals involved in the research. The responsibility of the researchers is to make sure that the means used to select research participants are equitable. The participants who can benefit from the study must not be excluded without reasonable reasons (Pelling, 2019). To address justice, it is made sure that in selecting participants, it was fair, justifiable, and no bias. Also, it was assured that those identified participants were qualified based on the selection criteria of the study. They decided on the time and date of our interview which was done via Google Meet or Zoom Meeting. Furthermore, the participants were given due credit for all their contributions to the conduct of the study. Also, there is no money spent on our virtual interview. If the participants had no stable

internet connection, I gave them enough load for them to have data. Aside from that, I gave a token to the participants as a sign of recognition for their efforts in the study. The questions that I asked during our virtual interview and group discussion were relevant and anchored to the purpose and research questions of the study. After transcribing the data gathered, I sent a copy of the transcriptions through e-mail to the participants for them to validate and modify their answers. Also, I would inform them about the outcome of the study.

Lastly, the principle of data privacy, advocated by Bryan and Bell (2007), emphasized that participants should be treated with care and no harm, prioritized their dignity, ask for consent before the conduct of the study, protect their privacy, ensure anonymity, participants should participate according to the conditions stated on the informed consent, no exercise of coercion or pressure and adherence of Data Privacy Act (R.A. 10173). To establish the principle of data privacy, we made sure that the participants received and signed the informed consent form before the virtual interview as proof of their voluntary participation. The signing of the consent form was done through e-mail by sending a scanned or soft copy to the participants. Moreover, we informed them that they have a right to withdraw from participating in the study at any stage. Besides, they participated based on consent. Their identities were maintained confidentially by using code names in the statements. Hence, the above-cited steps and concrete measures in the trustworthiness and ethical consideration were treated and addressed properly throughout the conduct of the study.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the profile, the lived experiences, the coping mechanisms, and the insights of the participants. The data collected, recorded, and analyzed using thematic analysis are presented in a descriptive and tabular manner.

**3.1 Lived Experiences of Teachers handling LWD.** Various insights into the lived experiences of the participants were gathered through the conduct of the FGD and IDI. Their responses were transcribed for coding. The core ideas were then processed wherein three essential themes were drawn, namely: keeping informed of ongoing societal issues and problems; realizing the moral obligation of the teaching profession towards learners; and holistic development of a learner.

**3.2 Keeping Informed of Ongoing Societal Issues and Problems.** The respondents said that while they knew of the student's history, it did not adequately prepare them for what to expect inside the classroom. They had a vague sense of what this unique set of students went through, and they had a limited comprehension of it. They claimed it was crucial to do their jobs and that they were aware of the pertinent societal issues and other associated worries regarding youngsters who had experienced abuse.

It was confirmed by the insights of Schultz (2015) who emphasized the importance of knowing the students individually. Accordingly, this will help the teachers in providing a learning environment that is inclusive, accepting, and respectful. By doing so, they will eventually develop the courage to open up and ask for support). Teachers must know their students since this will guide them on how to teach them better, especially in a manner that they will learn. Likewise, knowing their students means that the teachers are aware of who they are as a person. The teachers likewise learned about the kind of learners they have as well as the effects of these on them, only when they began their engagement with them.

**3.3.** This finding supports the General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1940), wherein it underscored the importance of looking into the relationship between different parts. Hence, there is a need for teachers to learn about their learner's abilities and capabilities to understand them further. The violence or abuse that these children went through can be tagged as the detectors, which Kuhn (1974) referred to in the General Systems Theory, as the process of communicating the available information within the system. Therefore, it can be said that constant communication and engagement of teachers with their students is crucial in developing a positive relationship.

Further, Crosson-Tower (2003) stated that since students spend a long time in school than in any other facilities, educators have greater access to them. Moreover, he explained that even if the main purpose of education is for children to learn, there are instances when teachers have to do things beyond this duty. Thus, the barriers that hinder their ability to learn have to be removed whenever necessary. When this is done successfully, trust will flourish between the educator and learner.

This finding substantiates the results of the study by Radhakrishnan (2021) which revealed that some LWD experiences abuse, no matter what form it is and has various negative effects on children, which can be lifelong. These may be manifested in their physical and mental health such as injuries and mood disorders, including anxiety and depression. Brain development is also affected which results in several cognitive inabilities, particularly in absorbing knowledge and understanding their school lessons. Further, behavioral changes and issues can be observed.

Moreover, it was found that while teachers continued their engagement with the students at school, they got the chance to experience various things, which are their bases for forming the insights they shared during the FGD and IDI. This supports the study of Haselhuhn et al. (2012) which concluded that personal experiences can cause long-term changes in how people behave.

Realizing the moral obligation of the teaching profession towards learners. The study found that the participants were aware that as teachers, they must teach without discrimination. They knew that they are

bound to carry out the responsibilities that their profession comes with.

This finding validates the study of McConnell (2017), which noted that the profession requires so much sacrifice, which makes sense to say that not everyone is a good fit for the said profession. He shared that a noble profession like teaching demands utmost commitment and attention, which greatly intervenes in the teachers' responsibilities toward their families. Most of the time, teachers tend to not enjoy their vacation because of continuously thinking of ways how to improve their way of delivering their lessons. Accordingly, teaching does not stop in school since even outside the facility, teachers continue to perform their tasks. This is, therefore, a calling for those who have the stamina to perform their responsibilities well and display love and pride at the same time.

Accordingly, the sense of fulfillment they get knowing that they are instrumental in the students' development makes them grateful beyond measure. These self-sacrifices can be categorized into choice-sacrifice wherein they recognize the need to do so in the line of duty; a conditioned sacrifice which has the semblance of the previous type but this is more of giving extra consistently; and obligated sacrifice which means that there is an over-extension of everything, from the work to the number of hours spent each time (Carr, 2019).

It can be observed in the responses of the study participants that they were committed to embracing their moral obligation as teachers. They were vocal about their commitment to teaching and helping the LWD. This confirms the results presented in a study by Altun (2017). He concluded that the level of commitment required by the teaching profession is a motivational force among teachers to do more for their students. They exert more effort, especially in terms of energy and time, to teach their students. Once they stay committed to their responsibility as teachers, they help the learners succeed but it can be achieved only with the latter's engagement in the process.

Despite their unquestionable commitment, the study participants admitted that there were instances when they considered the idea of leaving and quitting in handling the LWD. They later realized, though, that they have a moral obligation towards their learners. Hence, they did not pursue such a thought. This confirms the thoughts of Minahan (2019), who explained this phenomenon by pointing out that teachers are sympathetic in nature, that even if they are affected by their students' problems, they still care.

Furthermore, the results of this study demonstrated that the participants acquired empathy to comprehend their students' actions and how they affected them. Empathy is essential when dealing with youngsters from varied backgrounds. Empathy training in the classroom can have certain advantages. It aids in creating a supportive environment where students get along and have great teacher-student interactions. Since the children will spread the excellent school climate outside of school, it could boost the community. It is a step in the direction of developing future leaders who show genuine concern and are aware of others' needs. so serving as their training place is the classroom (Owen, 2015).

The finding of this study strengthens Altun's (2017) statement which claimed that with empathy, teachers show one of the greatest attributes expected of them, being passionate. By saying so, they care for their students immensely and look at them as important individuals in the practice of their profession.

**3.4 Concerned with the Holistic Development of a Learner.** The results of the study revealed that the participants were expected to promote holistic development among the LSENs. Holistic education is defined as a multi-faceted system that allows students to learn more or beyond academics. They are taught other skills in terms of developing their physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual capacities (Owen, 2015). As educators, they need to take part in the holistic development of children, which is a prevalent condition imposed on them (O'Flaherty & McCormack, 2019).

In the case of LSENs, the development of cognitive skills could be different because of their disability. Their condition, together with their senses and thoughts, could have resulted in distortions among them. These observations strengthen the results of the study of Jantz (2020), that while a healthy and positive mindset is encouraged in cognitive development, the thoughts of the LSENs are distinct. This is when cognitive healing must be reinforced by reassuring them that they are not bad and worthless, among other positive thoughts.

In the meantime, what the teachers did, particularly in deciding to stay and continue with their assignment, confirms the study (Anderson et al., 2003). The previous researchers concluded that educators also have a role in the development of the social, psychological, and emotional skills of the students. Social deficiency is said to be the defining characteristic related to the observed behavioral and emotional disorders of children. They tend to fail in building relationships and in interacting with other children. If left unaddressed, this may lead to personality-related risk factors, including depression.

The role of teachers handling LSENs in an inclusive adds stress to their daily living. They were required to do so many things that they had to undergo various challenges and struggles, including the difficulty of motivating the learners to participate in class since they are of different abilities.

The educators were obliged to give more with less support yet they never got the appreciation they deserve. Teaching is not only a noble job but also a challenging one since so much is expected of them. She further noted that having the capacity to bring a huge impact on students comes with numerous challenges that they have to address. These range from possessing the ideal skills to keeping themselves abreast of the latest teaching methods and technologies. Nevertheless, they should rise to the challenges no matter how tough these could be (Tadas, 2019).

There are endless responsibilities and roles they have to take on; thus, being a teacher has already



become overwhelming. With the changing world, including the available technologies that the academe may adopt to improve the educational system, teachers are forced to adapt. As a result, their plate is already overflowing since nothing is removed every time something new is added. Too much workload leads them to consider the idea of leaving their job, a scenario presented by Schukei (2020).

The results of this study further revealed how exhausting the teaching profession can be for the educators assigned in handling LWD in an inclusive classroom. However, knowing that they helped the LWD in a way made the entire experience lighter. To summarize, teaching LWD was both challenging and fulfilling for the study participants. This was captured in the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries definition of challenging wherein it refers to it as something difficult but interesting since it tests someone's ability. Therefore, amid the challenges that the profession entails, teaching remains a fulfilling job, especially for the teachers handling abused learners at the CIC.

This finding conforms with the study of Falken (2012) which noted that it is among the best choices for a regular job because for certain reasons which include an opportunity to influence the students, teachers get to mold the youngsters for the future, and a way to impart new knowledge and make students learn different insights.

**3.5 Coping Mechanisms of Teachers Handling LSEs.** With the challenges that the teaching profession involves, educators have to decide whether to just let themselves sink or do better by deciding to swim. Hence, coping mechanisms are employed to continue with their responsibilities as teachers. However, the options they take could be more of a harm than making their workload lighter. When they opt to use their weekends and off days to work on their lesson plans or other requirements just to align their schedule, this could become a stressor rather than a helpful strategy (Mutereko & Chitakunye, 2014). The participants of this study shared the respective coping mechanisms that made them stay and continue working to teach the learners. They never allowed the struggles they had to influence their decision to do something for the benefit of the learners.

After transcribing the responses of the participants during the FGD and IDI, I coded the core ideas and came up with two themes. One theme is practicing idealized influence and relational transparency and adaptability which revolved around the personal adjustments and strategies that the study participants employed to cope with exhaustion, and, the provision of organized development programs for teachers and learners, which focused on the training interventions that were responsible institutions must have implemented.

**3.6 Practicing idealized influence and relational transparency and adaptability.** It was confirmed in the statement of Bromley (2021), that the changing world and the varying needs and strengths of learners require teachers to adjust accordingly. Children learn at different paces: some are quick to absorb the learning goal while others need more time to understand each lesson. Their experiences may also come in the way while trying to learn in school. By being adaptive, they can support the students during each stage of development. These are exactly what the participants did to ensure that they were able to extend a helping hand to their learners.

The teachers showed more commitment through their adaptability, which was manifested by their willingness to embrace certain technologies introduced to them to become more effective at the work they do. This confirms the insights of Schukei (2020) which highlighted adaptability as a significant aspect of the teaching profession.

The results of this study revealed that communication was an integral part of the participants' coping mechanisms. This is among the main strategies they adopted to overcome the challenges while handling the learners at the school. This helped a lot in winning the trust of their learners as they were able to validate the teachers' presence.

The finding validates the statement of (Khan et al., 2017) who concluded that communication plays a vital role in the success of students academically. In short, the effectiveness of teaching does not rely on the knowledge of teachers solely. The manner of teaching, as well as the skills in communicating the lessons, are important factors, too, towards the academic success of students. For learners with disabilities, giving their trust to anyone is one of the hardest things to do. The participants, therefore, did everything they can to win their trust and help the learners more. This finding supports the study of Preston (2017) which cited that it takes seven years on average for them to speak up and share their experience. Hence, educators must prove that they are attentive listeners who are willing to lend an ear whenever their learners need someone to talk to. Holding on to their faith was likewise proven effective in coping with their situation at the school they were assigned to teach. This can be compared to the findings of a previous study conducted by Coleman (2006) which found that the same number of men and women participants used prayer as a coping mechanism and in managing their anxiety.

Another common strategy that the participants of this study employed was practicing empathy, which they said, was a critical factor to achieve inclusive education. This supports the statement of Makoele (2019) who shared that aside from being responsible for imparting knowledge-based information to their students, teachers are also expected to show empathy and reach out to students with no biases. Inclusive education is a system wherein all students, no matter who and what they are, can learn because education is open to all. Hence, no discrimination is ever entertained since there is no prejudice on the background and characteristics of the learners.

In a past study by Basch (2012), it was observed that the trust built between teachers and students, or what is referred to as relational trust, may imply the latter's success. However, the findings indicated that the

relational trust's correlation with the school achievement of the participant was not significant. This is contrary to the results of the study of Tschannen-Moran (2004) which emphasized that the trust among different role groups in school correlated. These include the faculty's trust in their principals, co-teachers, and clients; parents' trust in schools; and the students' trust in their teachers. Accordingly, all of these are interrelated.

Further, the trust of teachers towards the school, as well as the trust of students in their teachers were found to be strongly related. Research by the State Support Team (2020) validated the study done by Quin (2016), that a positive relationship between teachers and students can help improve the academic performance of the latter. This is not only reflected in the grades they get in their subjects but as well as in their class attendance and behavior. In the meantime, a study conducted by Pride Surveys (2016) claimed that by building a good relationship with their students, teachers can help in avoiding behavior-related problems among the students.

Added on, four factors help build relational trust between educators and their learners. These are respected, which can be shown by listening to the students genuinely; personal regard or the willingness to help the students beyond their role as teachers; competence or the ability to carry out the formal responsibilities and integrity which means that the person is consistent both in words and actions (EL Education, 2022). All of these were embraced by the teachers handling learners at school. They shared that the moment they observed that their students were more relaxed around them and even opened up about their thoughts and experiences was the very time they concluded that trust was already there. They said that they understood the students well since they were aware that they had histories of abuse. Although they did not have any idea yet about the types of abuse the students underwent before their assignment at the center, they knew that it was hard. According to them, gaining their trust was never easy because the learners were hesitant to talk about themselves. But when they finally started opening up, the teachers could not explain the happiness they felt. They felt that it was already the initial gain of the relational trust they were trying to build from the start.

Provision of organized development programs for teachers and learners. Another essential theme identified under the coping mechanisms of teachers handling children was the provision of organized development programs for them and the learners. Based on the findings of this study, the participants were not accorded the capacity-building interventions which they deemed necessary to fully prepare them for their deployment at the school. They noted that they were not equipped to take on the responsibility of handling students with histories of abuse. They were not aware of the things they should do for every challenge they encountered while trying their best to perform their job as educators in a setting unfamiliar to them. This finding supports the study of Timpe (2012), which emphasized that the training interventions must be done both before the deployment and during their stint in a particular school. The result of this study further supports the study of Omar (2014), which stated that in-service training programs will help improve the performance of teachers while practicing the profession. These will enhance their ability, efficiency, knowledge, and even their level of motivation.

Proper interventions must be given to the victims (Al Odhayani, 2013). As such, teachers, who are handling learners with a disability, are advised to undergo intensive sessions on special education training to increase their understanding of the subject matter. Likewise, this can help them in improving their effectiveness as educators since they will learn about the available instructional techniques when dealing with their students who have histories of abuse. The participants thus rallied for proper preparation and training interventions.

Likewise, Tadas (2019) explained that trauma and anxiety are among the reasons why learners tend to display an attitude that somehow tests the teachers' boundaries. This is when proper training programs for teachers must be in place. Constant skills upgrading interventions are vital to improving their capacity and ability to teach more effectively. So, these must be prioritized. These two sets of thoughts supported the participants' strong lobbying for the implementation of relevant capacity development training initiatives. This study further found that there was an inadequacy in terms of their awareness of the existing laws related to their rights as teachers and those of their students. They underscored that alongside the training needs for professional growth, legal education is also a highly important factor when preparing them to teach and handle LSENs.

The finding substantiates the results of the study by Matthews (2011) that pre-service development Interventions for teachers must include legal education to prepare them further when engaging with LSENs. This will protect them and the school from legal liabilities at the same time. Meanwhile, Article IV, section 3 of the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers states that every teacher shall participate in the Continuing Professional Education (CPE) program of the Professional Regulation Commission, and shall pursue such other studies as will improve his efficiency, enhance the prestige of the profession, and strengthen his competence, virtues, and productivity to be nationally and internationally competitive.

More so, the rules and policies that the DepEd and other concerned government agencies have implemented can be attributed to the selectors in the General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1940), in the operation of elementary and secondary schools, as well as, the professional practice of teachers. The existing policies are reviewed, and at the same time, the implementation is also assessed. This would help in the identification of possible failures and loopholes which may have impeded achieving the expected outputs of a program.

**2.6 Insights Shared with the Academe and Community.** The responses to the questions related to the insights shared by teachers were processed and coded. After this, the categories were organized to identify the dominant codes. Based on the results, two essential themes emerged, namely: good characteristics of teachers as role models to the youth and upholding a sense of accountability.

**Good Characteristics of Teachers as Role Models to the Youth.** The participants of this study displayed admirable characteristics that helped them get through the obstacles they encountered with their responsibilities at the school. This finding confirms the study of Gagnon (2019) stating the required traits that educators must have in handling learners who are victims of abuse. These include the following: a strong communicator, good listener, focuses on the needed collaboration, is adaptable, engaging, empathetic, patient, values real-world learning, imparts best practices to others, and considers learning as a lifelong process

The findings showed that the teachers assigned at the school exhibited several pleasing traits that would describe them as role models. With their constant interaction and engagement with the learners, they developed humility and perseverance that made them endure the challenges they experienced inside the facility. As committed teachers, they understood that the act of service, as well as the sacrifices they made, were not just a semblance of love but the kind that is in its highest form.

It was further found that by reassuring students consistently that there are still people who love them and care for them, it is possible to break the wall they built around them. The participants of this study were able to prove this as they eventually won the trust of the learners who became confident in sharing their thoughts and feelings with their educators (Matthews, 2011).

**Upholding Sense of Accountability.** The results of this study revealed that some parents of the learners had neglected their responsibility to their children. After what happened to them inside their homes, these learners continued to experience neglect even until they were put under school care. Thus, the participants emphasized parental responsibility towards their children.

This finding confirms a legal requirement stipulated in the second paragraph of Article 220 of the Family Code of the Philippines, which clearly states that part of exercising parental authority on children is to give them love and affection.

On the contrary, their teachers at the facility showed them how it is to be taken care of and heard. Based on the findings of this study, the participants did not stop educating them academically. They looked for ways and even made certain adjustments to handle these children with histories of abuse in a manner they knew would result in positive changes among the learners. Their efforts were not wasted since the compassion they demonstrated towards their students was translated into academic and behavioral improvements.

This finding aligns with the study of Nishioka (2019) that a good relationship with teachers has a positive impact on students, including their academic performance. The implications of this can result in the development of students socially and academically. These learners are said to perform better than those who have not built a good relationship with their teachers. Nevertheless, it must be noted that while this can contribute to their development, other factors must be considered, too, to approach a holistic manner of injecting learning into them (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilo, 2015).

More so the teachers' role in bringing out improvements in their students cannot be undermined. Thus, the intentional effort they pour into knowing the learners more is crucial since this can make the latter feel that they belong to the group and have a connection to the school. By reinforcing this sense of belongingness, the teachers create a foundation for their success in their academic requirements (Nishioka, 2019).

For the participants, the positive changes manifested in their learner's behavior and school performance was the biggest reward they ever received. These results made them most happy because they knew that their efforts finally gained positive results.

The findings support the General Systems Theory which highlighted the effectors or the transactions within the system. In this study, the effectors are the lived experiences of the teachers, which spell out the transactions they had with the learners with disability. Their individual experiences gave a clear picture of why such responsibility is challenging yet rewarding at the same time.

**3.7 Implications for Educational Practice.** The themes that emerged from this study provided a picture of how the teachers of learners with disability inside a school where they are enrolled viewed their lived experiences while performing their job. Their constant engagement with this special set of learners made them realize that it takes the utmost commitment to practice the teaching profession in an environment that is far from an ideal setting. Amid their challenges and struggles, the teachers learned to cope by adopting applicable mechanisms. However, the lack of support from the concerned government entities and school officials is making things difficult for the teachers, from the financial burden, they had to endure to the absence of professional development and training on interventions. Hence, it is about time that changes in the deployment system for teachers assigned at the facility be instituted; making sure that they are equipped psychologically and emotionally, with their pedagogical skills and properly trained before carrying out their duties toward handling learners with disability.

## Reflections

The results of this study emphasized that no matter how indifferent a learner with special educational needs is towards others, this can still be changed if their teachers commit to performing their duty beyond the academic subjects. I believed that by consistently showing compassion and love towards the learners, building

relational trust is not far from happening.

When I took up education in college, I was determined to become a role model by staying committed to my oath to do my duties in the best way I can. However, my services were called to teach in an inclusive classroom, I could not explain how I felt because I was aware that things could be different from a regular school.

I realized that there is indeed so much reason to be proud of the teaching profession. The sacrifices it entails are enough to say that being a teacher is not a walk in the park. It takes a big heart to deal with the LSENs constantly. Amid the unending struggles that the teaching profession is facing, my sense of accountability and commitment will always prevail.

With my firm belief in God, I will persevere in instilling good values in my students, especially those who have special needs. I feel so motivated and inspired to be their guardian. I will continue to express my loyalty to the LSENs, I am expected to serve while being committed to my chosen career.

#### 4. Recommendations

This study only covered the 10 teachers assigned to handle learners with disability in Caraga region. Their insights, as well as their opinions, may not represent the entire population of teachers in the region. Likewise, the interviews only involved the participating teachers and no validation was made with the concerned officials of DepEd and the heads of the facilities. Therefore the following recommendations are being presented:

Future-related research on a larger population and several centers may be considered as well as looking into the perspectives of the DepEd and school officials. These can probably give a deeper explanation of why the challenges cited by the participants were commonly experienced by them. There can be a bigger picture to this situation where the government agency and the school officials can expound by citing specific details and scenarios. The upcoming researchers may look into the available programs and interventions that possibly had problems in the implementation phase. Indicators such as budgetary constraints or manpower shortage could be the specific variables to include.

Future studies may consider looking into the most relevant training programs and interventions that can be offered to the teachers before their deployment and while being assigned. These could be in the areas of psychology and legal education which can help in preparing them as they embark on a new challenge in their profession.

Moreover, a study on the most viable deployment plan or strategy could be another field of interest for future researchers. There may be a mechanism or tool that would greatly improve the way teachers are chosen and prepared for their assignments in the facility. Once considered, the results of the recommended studies may assist in improving the overall operation of inclusive education in schools and the effectiveness of teachers in handling LSENs, which is the core objective of such a program on child development.

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