



ATTITUDES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TO TEACHING IN THE DIVISION OF CAGAYAN DE ORO DURING THE COVID - 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

As a result of COVID-19's massive disruption to the face-to-face educational settings, special education teachers face various challenges. They experienced difficulty adapting and responding to the academic learning needs of their learners. This article discusses the difficulties, strategies, and prospects for inclusive education faced by SPED teachers during the pandemic. Specifically, this study intended to determine the attitudes of the public special education teachers in the division of Cagayan de Oro in teaching their learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to ascertain the demographic profile of SPED teachers, their attitudes toward their students, and the programs they require for the upcoming school year. The study's outcome was a training program designed to improve their attitudes and skills for the upcoming school year. The study employed a descriptive-quantitative method of data collection, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. For this study, the frequency distribution, percentage, and standard deviation were used as statistical tools. Due to the outbreak, educational, social, and psychological challenges existed that made an impact to teachers' ability to provide pedagogical instruction via emergency remote teaching. Nonetheless, there were strategies that can assist individuals with disabilities in learning. Individuals with disabilities can benefit from online communication, homeschooling, parental engagement, psychological safety, and empathy language, all of which can assist them in continuing their educational pursuits despite the emergency. Schools must be inclusive in their policies and guidelines so that people with disabilities can benefit from the government's educational programs. The government's interventions may take into account the educational needs of disabled children. The welfare of people with disabilities should not be overlooked because they are part of future generations who can improve society. People with developmental disabilities can change the post-pandemic community if given the learning spaces and stakeholder support, they require right now to thrive amid the global crisis. They, like people with disabilities who have changed the world, can reach their full potential.

Keywords: Special Education, Attitudes, Pandemic, Descriptive, Quantitative, Philippines, Asia

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization around March 2020 (WHO). This resulted in a variety of post-intervention outcomes (e.g., non-essential business closures, job losses,

uncertainty about continuing education, and possible lockdown). There has been disruption in the school setting as a result of the Department of Education's unforeseen future for the fourth quarter of School Year 2019-2020. Numerous students worldwide have been forced to adapt their traditional (face-to-face instruction) learning

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methods as a result of continuing education. Since the outbreak, education delivery has shifted dramatically away from face-to-face meetings and toward online learning, modular distance learning, blended learning, radio- and television-based instruction. According to Code, Ralph, and Forde (2020), K-12 school systems worldwide suspended classroom operations as a result of public health officials' emergency declarations. Numerous schools and institutions have embraced the distance learning approach, relying on remote teaching practices to provide education to students worldwide. Embarking on emergency remote teaching, it is critical to understand the distinction between traditional and distance education. To provide additional context for the traditional educational setting, face-to-face instruction receives the highest ratings for usefulness and support from students in two classrooms (Gaskell, 2019). As a result of COVID-19's complexity and the possibility of being unable to meet in person, teachers must opt for distance learning. While teaching online, teachers are also responsible for the behavior and socio-emotional health of their students. With the growth of special education services and their unique needs, as well as distance learning, it is necessary to have a firm grasp on how these needs will be met. As a result, until the post-pandemic world is established, the pandemic exacerbates inequalities (Bei, 2020; Brown, 2020; Dávalos et al., 2020; Hansen & Yracheta, 2019; Poletti & Raballo, 2020), as these groups lack critical support.

Numerous students with disabilities have been housed during COVID-19 and are required to accept online services and other DepEd-provided services in lieu of being unable to attend school. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD, 2020), many school districts are hesitant to offer distance education because they believe the Philippines' disability laws present too many impediments. In reality, schools must provide FAPE in accordance with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities, as well as those who provide them with education,

specialized instruction, and related services, despite many districts' apathy (NCLD, 2020).

DepEd emphasizes the importance of continuing education and the necessity of providing all services for students with disabilities via distance learning. While schools make every effort to accommodate students with disabilities, it is possible that some of the law's provisions will be implemented differently than special educators are accustomed to. It will be discussed how teachers can effectively serve students with individualized education plans (IEPs) and protect these students' rights in the face of school closures caused by the pandemic.

COVID-19 has subdued people's daily routines. Life had changed since the days when people could do whatever they pleased and were not constrained in their interactions with one another. COVID-19 has triggered a global pandemic, resulting in public restrictions, state-wide lockdowns, travel bans, work-from-home policies, and even school closures. While COVID-19 has imposed restrictions on how people interact in society, the educational system must develop new strategies for reaching students globally. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the school environment. Students are no longer able to attend school in the traditional sense (face-to-face interaction), but must instead receive education online. Zaheer and Munir (2020) acknowledge that distance learning efforts lack student-teacher interaction, face-to-face interaction, and teachers' physical absence, making relationship building difficult. Students face dangers from distance learning because they may feel isolated and dejected, and the physical separation between them and their supervisor may cause them to doubt the quality of their work (Zaheer and Munir, 2020). Numerous students have taken on full-time distance learning responsibilities and, hopefully, developed a greater sense of self-confidence in their work. Students hope that their teachers will have enough time to assist them individually during the four-hour period. To complicate matters further, parents are concerned about their children's experiences with online learning.



The Education Trust (2020) reports that parents face insurmountable obstacles when it comes to assisting their children with distance learning. Numerous issues are interconnected with the student's functioning, background, emotional state, ethnic origin, and disability.

This research aimed to investigate Special Education Teachers' attitudes and their self-efficacy beliefs about their learners in the Cagayan de Oro Division of the Department of Education, Misamis Oriental, Philippines.

Additionally, the global pandemic exposed a significant gap in teacher preparation and training for remote emergency teaching. (Trust and Whalen, 2020). Teachers' knowledge, experiences, and attitudes regarding their transitions to non-conventional education settings were revealed in studies (Trust and Whalen, 2020; Yang, 2020; Zhu and Liu, 2020). However, no research has been done on the special education teachers who are in charge of the most vulnerable students during this crisis. Teachers must promote inclusion to reduce educational disparities among students with special needs and developmental disabilities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Attitudes of special education teachers contribute to the DepEd's program's success. The purpose of this study was to ascertain special education teachers' attitudes toward teaching their students during COVID 19 pandemics in the division of Cagayan de Oro. Its objective was to ascertain who was who in terms of special education teachers' demographics and teaching attitudes during the pandemic. The study's outcome is a training program designed to improve the attitudes and skills of these teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The educational age, attainment, teaching position, number of years teaching in the SPED curriculum, and primary education assignment of special education teachers were all included in their demographic profile.

The study employed a descriptive-quantitative research design. The researcher used online surveys and focus group discussions to ascertain special education teachers' attitudes toward teaching their students during the COVID 19 pandemic. The study was conducted in all special education schools in the Cagayan de Oro division. The researcher used purposive sampling. The instrument developed by Ecoben (2018) was modified and used in this study to ascertain SPED teachers' attitudes toward teaching their students during the pandemic. The survey questionnaire was divided into two sections: (1) demographic information about respondents and (2) an assessment of their attitude level. This study used frequency distribution, percentage, and standard deviation as statistical tools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Special Education Teachers' Demographic Profile

The educational age, attainment, teaching position, number of years teaching in the SPED curriculum, and primary education assignment of special education teachers were all included in their demographic profile.

1.1. Age

Table 1
Respondents' Age

Age Range	Frequency	Percent (%)
26 – 30	9	18%
31 – 35	18	36%
36 – 40	8	16%
41 - 45	6	12%
46 – 50	4	8%
51 – 55	2	4%
56 – 60	3	6%
Total	50	100%

It could be observed that more teachers belonged to 31 – 35 years of age. Specifically,



18 (36%) respondents belonged to 31 – 35 years of age. On the other hand, two (4%) respondents belonged to 51 – 55 years of age. This revealed that a greater proportion of special education teachers were between the ages of 31 and 35.

1.2. Education

Table 2
Educational Attainment of Respondents

Attainment in Education	Frequency	Percent (%)
Bachelor's Degree	31	62%
Master's Degree	15	30%
Doctoral Degree	4	8%

As can be seen, majority of the respondents were bachelor degree graduates of special education with 31 or 62%. There were 15 (30%) who had master's degree and four (8%) had doctoral degree.

1.3. Number of Years of Teaching

Table 3
Respondents' Years in Teaching SPED Class

Teaching Years	Frequency	Percent (%)
1-5	31	62%
6-10	9	18%
11-15	6	12%
16-20	1	2%
21 – 25	3	6%

It could be observed that 31 or 62 percent of the respondents have been teaching SPED in less than five years. However, three or six percent of the respondents have been teaching for more than 20 years.

Results revealed that the majority of the respondents, 36 or 72 percent, were teaching at the elementary level. At the same time, only 14 or 28 percent respondents were in the secondary or high school level.

2. Level of Attitudes of SPED teachers

Attitude is made up of three parts: how one thinks, how one feels, and how one intends to act towards students with special needs.

Table 3 illustrates the special education teachers' attitudes. The respondents were found to favor establishing links with various agencies to aid the community during the COVID 19 pandemic. According to Positive (2021), linkages are crucial. It can benefit students, teachers, and other stakeholders in the community. They can help teachers be motivated and share more information with the students. Other organizations related to their field helped them learn as well. The respondents were favorable on the need to coordinate their plans in achieving the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELC) for Special Education (SPED) learners with the school administrators. The DepEd must have a certain quota for every curriculum to succeed by the end of the school year. There were factors like weak internet connection, lack of gadgets, pieces of training, and others that hinder the SPED teachers achieve the curriculum plan during this pandemic. However, face-to-face teaching was fundamental to SPED teaching. Face-to-face instruction is beneficial to both the SPED teachers and their learners (Davis, 2021).

The majority of respondents agreed that in order to deal with the pandemic, all SPED teachers should be provided with training for development and learning technologies in the teaching process, in accordance to their needs. It was a huge challenge to make the module specialized for children with intellectual disabilities as there was no curriculum guides on how to teach online. Similarly, teachers worked with special educational learning needs and disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, and behavioral issues.

1.3. Educational Stage

Table 4
Educational Stage of the Respondents

School Level	Frequency	Percent (%)
Elementary	36	72%
Secondary	14	28%



They believed it is essential to provide these students with an individualized learning approach.

They were highly favorable that they should develop open communication between parents and teachers so that the teachers were made aware of a problem outside of school. According to Diane Levin, Ph.D., (cited in Skooler, 2019), a positive parent-teacher relationship helps the child feel good about school and be successful in school. They were highly favorable that parents of the learners need to attend workshops and seminars to help and guide the learners in answering the Learning Activity Package. Teachers emphasized that parents can socialize with their children while learning at home as homeschool supervisors. Teachers communicate with parents regularly to see how their children (learners) are doing at home. Teachers believe that family supervision enhances learning, so parents should provide learning space at home for children with disabilities to focus on the homeschool activities assigned by their teachers. Students with disabilities can still learn during the pandemic with proper parental supervision.

Accordingly, even when children were required to stay at home with their family, the forced lockdown has given way to a new opportunity for the family to socialize, have time for each other, and learn about each other's individual personalities. This lockdown has somehow created a way for the family members to be closer to one another. This then supports the article of Hart et al. (2020) wherein it was stated that family care and support are critical during a pandemic. During difficult times, parents and children with special educational needs and disabilities can use COVID-19 relationships (Cluver et al., 2020). On the other hand, a family without parental support for their children's education runs the risk of falling behind and widening existing gaps (Thomas & Rogers, 2020), resulting in more significant inequalities among children with disabilities.

They were highly favorable on implementing the Learning Continuity Plan for the learners needs to be seamless. A reflection

on the successful relationship between the teacher and parents, 56.9 percent required proper training on how to use gadgets, and 45.1 percent believed that SPED Teachers complained about a lack of resources when preparing modules. Special education teachers demanded the creation of printable modules and worksheets. Teachers discussed that they were not accustomed to contextualizing the specific education curriculum around the transition to emergency remote teaching, which made it difficult to develop modules. Some teachers can receive training to improve their modules and learning technologies (Daniel, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

3. Training programs

A training matrix that aims to enhance the attitude of all SPED teachers to teaching their learners during the pandemic Teachers' training should include learners, parents, stakeholders with various requirements and interests in structuring lessons. Educating school administrators, special educators, and parents is also critical. Finally, it is important to let teachers know which teaching and learning strategies and assessments to use in inclusive education.

Communication via internet. Educators communicate with parents of children with disabilities regularly to support their children's learning needs. Because parents are also aware of social media, it has provided opportunities for students to reinforce their learning and for better human interaction. However, due to limited internet access and a lack of smartphones, not all parents have access to social media (Alvarez, 2020). Nonetheless, teachers communicate with parents via text messages or social media to give instructions or learn about their children's familial, educational, and health status (Toquero, 2021).

Parental Participation. Teachers emphasized that parents can socialize with their children while learning at home as homeschool supervisors. Teachers communicate with



parents regularly to see how their children (learners) are doing at home. Teachers believe that family supervision enhances learning, so parents should provide learning space at home for children with disabilities to focus on the homeschool activities assigned by their teachers. Students with disabilities can still learn during the pandemic with proper parental supervision. An article (Hart, Turnbull, Oppenheim, & Courtright, 2020) supports this conclusion, stating that family care and support are critical during a pandemic. During tough times, families and those with special needs can strengthen their bonds (Cluver et al., 2020). On the other hand, a family without parental support for their children's education runs the risk of falling behind and widening existing gaps (Thomas & Rogers, 2020), resulting in more significant inequalities among children with disabilities.

Empathy's Language. Parents can meet their children's emotional needs with disabilities, according to the educators. Because of the pandemic's economic realities (Witt et al., 2020), some children with disabilities will be unable to return to traditional school when classes resume. Parents should instead encourage their children to concentrate on their studies at home, according to the teachers. The educators emphasized the importance of first understanding the children's feelings and then explaining them in a language they can understand (Toquero, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. They may design programs and budgets to ensure Special Education teachers have everything they need during the pandemic.
2. They may have a streamlined special education curriculum program, seminars,

and workshops for all special education teachers.

3. To know how long the benefits last, a time series evaluation of special education training effects may be done.
4. To supplement emergency e-inclusion for students with educational needs and developmental disabilities during the pandemic, the school may develop policies and guidelines that are inclusive and specific to them.
5. For the upcoming school year, there are alternative options or modalities: online learning through a learning management system; modular learning/off e-learning through Alternative Delivery Modules; and blended learning; blended delivery – assessment can take place in the classroom or online; face-to-face and modular learning, in which students and teachers report only on specific days; traditional face-to-face instruction, which is only used in schools with very low-risk areas; and home-based learning. Teachers conduct home visits with their students.

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