

Lived Experiences of Twelve (12) Filipino J-1 Teachers Implementing Differentiated Instruction (DI) in Elementary Special Education Classrooms in the United States

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of twelve (12) Filipino J-1 teachers implementing Differentiated Instruction (DI) in elementary special education classrooms in the United States. Using Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis, the study examined teachers' lived experiences, challenges encountered, the influence of these challenges on instructional practice, coping strategies, and recommendations for a teacher training program. Findings revealed that participants perceived their experiences as both challenging and rewarding, with difficulties arising from unfamiliarity with the U.S. special education system, Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation, and diverse learner needs. Despite these challenges, teachers adapted by employing differentiated instructional strategies, effective classroom management, collaboration with multidisciplinary teams, and personal coping mechanisms such as self-reflection, time management, and openness to feedback. The challenges ultimately strengthened their instructional practices, leading to greater flexibility, confidence, and professional growth. Based on these findings, the study recommends a structured teacher training program that includes pre-service orientation, mentoring, hands-on special education training, cultural orientation, and behavior management support to better prepare future J-1 teachers for successful implementation of differentiated instruction in U.S. special education settings.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction (DI); J-1 Teachers; Special Education; Individualized Education Program (IEP); Teacher Training Program

