

# Overcoming Barriers: The Struggles of Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Needs

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to assess the struggles of teachers in handling learners with special needs in Tuba District. The respondents were key stage 1 teachers in Tuba District. This study used descriptive research design which sought to describe analyze and interpret the data gathered on the barriers encountered by teachers in handling learners with special needs. The questionnaire was the main instrument used in gathering data needed in the study. The findings of the study were the following: the barriers encountered by the teachers in handling learners with special needs were moderately manifested; the barriers encountered by teachers in teaching learners with special needs were serious; and the remedial measures to further improve the teaching learning process were very applicable. Based on the findings, the following conclusions were made: Teachers encounter behavioral and emotional regulation issues, specifically non-compliance, tantrums and repetitive behaviors of learners with special needs; Teachers do not have special education units, seminars on special needs education and with insufficient technical assistance from higher ups; and Teachers recognized the different strategies as highly effective in addressing learning barriers in promoting better education outcomes.

**Keywords:** learning barriers, repetitive behaviors, intervention programs, professional development, teaching approaches

## INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, the education of learners with special needs has gained increasing attention. Learners with special needs in the Philippines refers to children with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, sensory impairments, physical disabilities emotional and behavioral disorders and specific learning disabilities. This learners often required specialized instructional strategies, appropriate learning environments and additional support services to help them reach their full potential. According to Dep-Ed data as of mid-March-2023, there were 126, 598 learners with disabilities enrolled in DepEd schools for School Year 2021-2022. This was 65% lower than the 360,879 recorded for SY 2019-2020 (Philippine Institute for Development Studies. Dec 9, 2022). In the Philippines, the effective

implementation of inclusive education depends heavily on the competence and readiness of teachers. The study conducted by Dioso, Iglesia, and Ramiro (2022) disclosed that in terms of classroom instruction, assessment of students' performance, and evaluating and monitoring students' progress the respondents reported to be 'highly ready'. However, in terms of curricular content, the respondents disclosed to be only 'moderately ready'. Additionally, according to study conducted by Benjamin Adu Gyamfi, and Abraham Yeboah in the Adansi North District Ghana, teachers' perceptions of educating learners with special needs as a highly personalized and specialized process recommended that normal education teachers should be familiar with diverse approaches for handling individuals with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Based also from the study of Felly C. Allam (2020), most teachers teaching children with learning disabilities did not receive any special needs education training from the school, they feel that they are not qualified to teach the children with learning disability. Moreover, teachers assigned in SPED classes lack strategies in dealing with learners with disabilities. Second, Allams' study revealed that the classrooms for children with learning disabilities in Division of Ilagan at large have poor learning environment to support the SPED such as lack of budget, curriculum guide, Instructional Materials (IMs) and even school facilities. It could be concluded that placement of learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom with ordinary learners is not enough with no proper support. Learners with disability did not receive all the necessary support and services for accessing the curriculum facilities. Fifth, stakeholder's supports are very minimal to support the needs of the students enrolled in SPED classes. On the other hand, issues and problems were solved technically to sustain the positive working environment among school heads, teachers and stakeholders.

In the study of Jennifer A. Mandabon (2023), by focusing on improving readiness and efficacy through targeted training and continuous professional development, educators can provide a more inclusive and effective learning experience for all students. These results emphasize the importance of investing in teacher training and development programs that enhance readiness to handle learners with special needs. By improving teachers' readiness, educational institutions can positively impact their efficacy in supporting these students. An integrated approach that combines enhancing both readiness and efficacy is crucial. Training programs should focus on equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively handle learners with special educational needs, thus boosting their overall efficacy. Implementing ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers can help sustain and enhance both readiness and efficacy over time. It is essential to provide continuous support and learning experiences that keep educators updated with best practices and new strategies. Policymakers should consider these findings when shaping policies related to teacher training, educational reforms, and resource allocation to ensure that teachers receive adequate support and training to effectively handle learners with special needs.

Studies have revealed that while many teachers support the idea of inclusive education or inclusion of SPED learners to regular class, they often feel overwhelmed by the practical challenges. Furthermore, teachers expressed the need for more professional development opportunities focused on inclusive teaching strategies and classroom management techniques.

The Key stage 1 Teachers of San Pascual Elementary School have learners with learning disabilities (Dep-Ed-Learners Information System). The teachers have struggles handling those learners since they do not have Special Education course units. Some struggles are on the different activities that should be given to the learners, classroom routines and classroom management.

Therefore, it is worth to know the challenges and strategies on how to deal learners with disabilities for the educators to create a learning space where every student feels valued, supported and capable to educational access. This also helps in improving teaching strategies, enhancing support system, reducing teacher burnout, improving student outcomes and advocating for policy making.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As the access to education increases, many countries find that the percentage of children with special needs is increasing yearly. According to a new report released by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in January 2022, titled: Seeing, Counting, Including Using Data to Reveal the Well-Being of Children with Disabilities, the number of children with disabilities is estimated to be close to 240 million worldwide, or one child for every ten children worldwide. With this vast number, the education issue for children with special needs is pressing (Yuan 2023).

According to the World Health Organization, on December 2, 2022, an estimated 1.3 billion people (or one in six people worldwide) have a severe disability, and the number is growing. Based on this data, people can see that particular populations are already a part of every country that cannot be ignored. With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adoption, Member States committed to leaving no one behind, including persons with disabilities. The World Health Organization (WHO) works with other United Nations (UN) agencies, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), and broader civil society to help Member States achieve their national goals and embrace disability in all sectors. In today's rapidly changing technology, the relationship between special people and the general population will become closer and closer, according to WHO and the goals advocated by countries worldwide. In today's increasingly aging world, special populations will also be an indispensable workforce for countries in the future. If the typical person needs to use education to change their life, the special populations need it even more. The biggest problem for special populations is known as weak learning self-control. In a study by Thomas Dee and Hans Henrik Sievertsen, researchers at Stanford University found that children whose parents waited to put them in kindergarten before age 6 scored significantly higher on self-control tests at ages 7 and 11. It shows that the easiest time in a person's life to change themselves is as a child. Therefore, if people want to improve the quality of life of special populations, they should start education from childhood. Australia, for instance, ranks lowest among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations in terms of the relative income of individuals with disabilities. The average employment rate for those with disabilities is around 54 percent, compared to 83 percent for people without impairments. Australia is a developed country. The fact that people with special needs in developed countries are treated this way proves that people with special needs in other countries lagging are facing an even more difficult situation. The above makes it relatively tricky for exceptional people to integrate into society. The best time for people with special needs to

incorporate into ordinary people and to improve their problems is during childhood (Yuan. Volume 10. 2023).

The expanding and ubiquitous shortage of special education teachers threatens the quality of education for children with disabilities. The issue of teachers' salaries is a significant issue that demotivates teachers. Because each country's economic power varies from region to region, schools invest different amounts of money and need the means to provide a good learning environment. Take the United States and China, for example, both countries have better economic development in the eastern part of the country. The school is more professional than other areas regarding equipment and teachers (Yuan 2023).

The number of students in special education in the United States has doubled over the past four decades, creating a rising share of public-school kids who need special education services. That is according to the Pew Research Center, which collected data from the National Center for Education Statistics for a report on students in special education for Disability Pride Month, which is celebrated each year in July. The total number of students in special education went to almost 7.3 million in 2021-22. These students now make up 15 percent of the K-12 student population across the country, nearly double what it was in the late 1970s.

The main problem is that more and more children with special needs are now entering regular classrooms. In the past decade, the particular education model known as the inclusion or mainstreaming has become increasingly common, with over 60% of students with disabilities now spending 80% or more of their day in regular classrooms. But in reality, many teachers in regular classes need to understand the needs of exceptional students or even have a foundation for such students. Also, because of the unique nature of children with special needs, one teacher cannot accommodate both regular and special needs students, and schools do not usually have two or more teachers. In addition, American law mandates instructors to customize the curriculum to an excessive degree, which places a significant amount of burden on educators. Additionally, children with disabilities face various challenges in the traditional classroom. Because children with special needs have many learning problems for their reasons, the loss of instructional time increases the likelihood of repeating a grade and dropping out of school among kids with disabilities. This data suggests that countries have tried to educate children with special needs; however, the prevalence of children with exceptionalities has increased. The presence of children with exceptionalities in regular classrooms is increasing. Problems that special needs could have solved are slowly becoming more complex (Yuan. Volume 10. 2023).

The globe has taken note of this issue, and several big nations have taken action. In the United States, for instance, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established expressly for unique populations. The federal statute in the United States called to ensure that the educational needs of children with disabilities are met in public schools, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was created. After a legal review and finding that a child is eligible for special education services, the Act mandates that parents collaborate with school personnel to prepare an individualized education plan (IEP). The bill also states that children with special needs can be evaluated and placed in regular classrooms to better integrate into society. Therefore, all teachers in the United States are required to learn a certain amount about special education (Yuan. Volume 10. 2023).

The Intersectionality Theory in Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) (Tefera, 2023) examines how multiple social identities (such as race, gender, socioeconomic status and disability) interact to shape an individual's educational experience and access to resources. Instead of viewing learning disabilities in isolation, this perspective considers how systematic inequalities and discrimination affect student with SLD. This work highlights how learning disabilities intersect with race, culture and socioeconomic factors challenging the traditional deficit-based models that treat SLD as purely neurological or cognitive conditions.

The AI-Based Psychometric Assessment Framework (Hu, 2024) is a conceptual model that leverages Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve the assessment and support of students with learning difficulties and special needs. The framework integrates AI-driven psychometric testing, adaptive learning system and personalize interventions to create a dynamic, student-centered approach to education. The key components of the framework are AI-Driven Psychometric Assessments which uses machine learning algorithms to analyze cognitive, emotional and behavioral factors. Another one is the Personalize Learning Plans which is an AI generates individual learning path based on assessment results and student performance. The Multimodal Data collection which incorporates eye-tracking, facial recognition and brainwave analysis to detect cognitive load and engagement.

The Disability and Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) (Annamma, 2018) is a framework that examines how race and disability intersect to shape experience of oppression, particularly in education, law and society. It critiques the way that both race and disability are socially constructed and used to justify inequities. DisCrit challenges the idea that race and disability exist as separate categories and instead they function together to marginalize certain groups. Both race and disability are shaped by history and social factors rather than being purely biological. These categories are often used to justify exclusion and marginalization.

Piaget's theory on children's intelligence asserts that changes undergo while they grow. Children's cognitive development is not simply about learning knowledge; they also need to build or develop a mental model of their surroundings (Miller, 2011). This hypothesis established the importance of cognitive learning processes and concept development in the young child. This theory laid the groundwork for recognizing the importance of cognitive learning processes and concept formation in the young child. The idea also emphasized the need of creating an atmosphere favorable to learning the requisite skills.

The Neurodiversity Theory by Thomas Armstrong (2010) is the idea that neurological differences such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia and other cognitive variations are natural and valuable aspects of human diversity rather than disorders to be fixed. Armstrong argues that society should move away from a deficit-based model of these conditions (which focuses on disabilities and dysfunctions) and instead adopt a strength-based approach that recognizes the unique talents and abilities of neurodivergent individuals. The key points of Armstrong's Neurodiversity Theory are the strength-based perspective, social and environmental factor, education and workplace inclusion, biological and evolutionary validity and refraining diagnosis.

With regards to the coping mechanisms of teachers, the Coping-Competence Context (3C) Theory of Teacher Stress (Herman et al., 2020) highlights three critical interconnected pathways to teacher stress: Coping, Competence, and Context. The 3C theory builds upon the transactional theory, stress mindset theory, and the prosocial classroom model by integrating the theories to provide a new framework for understanding teacher stress and coping

associated with student and teacher outcomes and intervention. The incorporation of the 3C Theory of Teacher Stress, which recognizes the interplay between coping, competence, and context, offers a valuable framework for comprehending the specific challenges experienced by Kindergarten teachers in relation to stress and coping mechanisms. By integrating this theory into the study, the aim is to develop a contextualized teaching model that considers the intricate dynamics of teacher stress, enabling teachers to better manage stress and foster positive outcomes for both learners and teachers.

### METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design to know the needs and strategies of Key Sage 1 teachers in teaching learners with special needs. Data were gathered through constructed questionnaire to gather the information and data to address and answer the issues raised in the study. This study was conducted with Key Stage 1 teachers at Tuba District, Benguet Division. These methods were chosen to describe a phenomenon, situation or population without manipulating variables.

In answering the questionnaires, teachers were encouraged to respond with honesty and careful reflection basing from actual classroom experiences in teaching learners with special needs. They should read each item thoroughly and provide accurate and complete responses to ensure reliability of the data gathered. Teachers were also expected to maintain professionalism and objectivity, avoid biased or emotionally driven answers and uphold confidentiality by refraining from disclosing any identifying information.

The questionnaires were designed to gather relevant and reliable data directly from the respondents on how handle learners with special needs. The methodology served as an efficient and consistent tool allowing the researcher to reach a larger number within a limited time.

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a complex understanding of how key Stage 1 teachers in Tuba District handle learners with special needs. Through questionnaires, problems in the support system and strategies emerged. Teachers experience moderate challenges when handling learners with special needs. This means that the barriers of difficulties are present but manageable, not to severe but minimal. The result highlights the needs for continuous professional development and adequate support system to help teachers effectively address of learners with special needs. Furthermore, school administrators and policymakers should strengthen existing programs and interventions to reduce these barriers and promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. According to the case study of Nurhidaya, & Purwanta, E. (2025), the research emphasizes the critical importance of recognizing and understanding these behavioral expressions as part of the student's unique needs. Furthermore, it highlights the effectiveness of implementing tailored behavioral interventions and support strategies aimed at reducing the frequency and intensity of tantrums. By addressing these behaviors proactively, educators can better support the learner's emotional regulation and promote a more positive and inclusive learning environment.

The barriers faced by teachers in teaching learners with special needs are serious in nature. This indicates that teachers are dealing with considerable challenges that may affect

the quality of instruction and the overall effectiveness of inclusive education. The seriousness of this barrier underscores the urgent need of stronger institutional support, adequate resources and continuous professional development for teachers. Furthermore, education authorities and policy makers should prioritize addressing these issues to ensure that learners with special needs receive equitable and effective learning opportunities. The study by Vergara et al. (2025) found that teachers generally feel confident and capable of managing inclusive classrooms, but their knowledge about inclusive education is only moderate. While they show strengths in using inclusive practices and are willing to adapt to diverse learners, many struggle with implementing strategies like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), using assistive technologies, and developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

The remedial measures implemented to enhance the teaching-learning process were very applicable. This suggests that teachers recognize these strategies as highly effective in addressing learning barriers in promoting better education outcomes. The result highlights the importance of continuing the strengthening the measures as they significantly contribute to the improvement of classroom instruction and learner performance. Furthermore, school administrators and curriculum planners should consider adopting and expanding these practices to ensure consistent and effective teaching approaches across learning environments. The study of Nuryanti Nuryanti and Bayu Pamungkas, (2025) explores how teacher-parent collaboration supports children with speech delays. The study highlights the importance of regular communication, joint strategy development, and parental involvement in school programs to create a responsive learning environment. Supporting factors include open communication, shared commitment, and policy support, while obstacles involve limited teacher training, insufficient learning media, and lack of access to speech therapy specialists.

The findings of the study revealed that teachers experience moderate challenges in handling learners with special needs. Although the barriers are not severe, they still pose difficulties that can affect the quality of instruction and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the remedial measures adopted by teachers are found to be highly applicable and effective in addressing learning barriers. These strategies significantly to improving classroom instruction, learners' engagement and overall academic performance. The findings emphasize the continuous professional growth, adequate institutional support and strong collaboration among teachers, administrators and policy makers to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education.

Moreover, the findings of the study implies that remedial measures play a vital role in improving the teaching-learning process, particularly in addressing learning barriers and enhancing learner performance. Despite the moderate challenges faced by the teachers in handling learners with, the effectiveness of the implemented strategies indicates that these difficulties can be managed through appropriate instructional support. The results further suggest that continuous strengthening and consistent application of remedial measures are essential for sustaining effective classroom instruction. Moreover, the study highlights the need for school administrators and curriculum planners to support, adopt and expand these practices to promote inclusive, responsive and effective teaching approaches across various learning environments.

## CONCLUSION

Teachers encounter behavioral and emotional regulation issues, specifically, non-compliance, tantrums and repetitive behaviors of learners with special needs. These challenges often affect classroom management and the overall teaching-learning process. The findings indicate that many teachers feel inadequately prepared to address these concerns due to limited training, insufficient seminars and lack of specialized preparation in Special Education (SPED). Despite the limitations, teachers have demonstrated adaptability by implementing different instructional and behavioral strategies. Teachers rely on the personal experience and self-developed strategies to manage learners' behaviors and learning difficulties. The effectiveness of these strategies suggest that learner difficulties can be managed through appropriate instructional support, consistent application of interventions and positive learning environment.

## RECOMMENDATION

Teachers and school administrators should implement early intervention programs, behavioral management training, individualize interventions and inclusive classroom practices to support learners with special needs effectively. Teachers are encouraged to have professional development and join trainings focused on classroom management and handling behavioral challenges. School administrators and curriculum planners should consider adopting, integrating into the schools and expanding the different strategies applied by teachers to ensure consistent and effective teaching approaches across learning environments.

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