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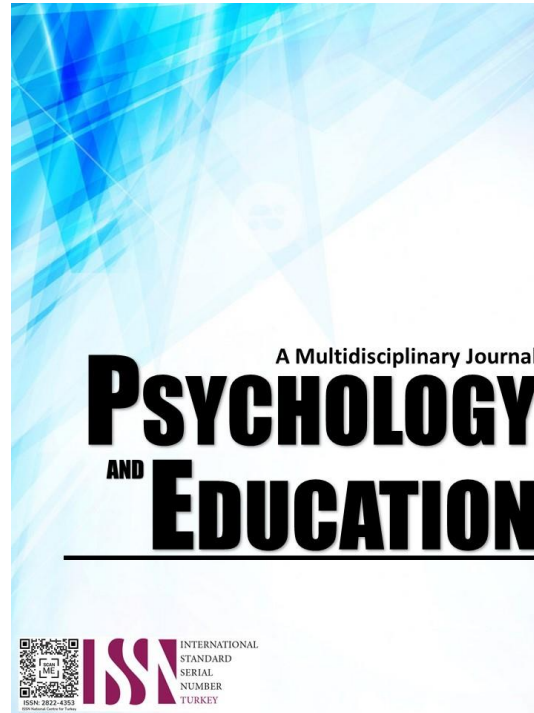
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# **THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY SPED TEACHERS AMIDST THE NEW NORMAL OF EDUCATION**



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## The Lived Experiences and Challenges Faced by SPED Teachers Amidst the New Normal of Education

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### Abstract

This qualitative study explores the experiences and challenges SPED teachers face amidst the new normal of education. Employing Heideggerian Phenomenology and Interpretative Phenomenology analysis, findings suggest that the SPED teachers can't enjoy their life outside work because of a lack of support from the government, physically and financially; thus, they experience burnout. Also, the salary they earn is not even enough to raise a family, and the fact that they almost shoulder the learning resources in the class makes it worse. Moreover, the participants need practical training to adapt to the needs of their students amidst the challenges of the new learning modality.

**Keywords:** *lived experiences, challenges, special education, public school teachers, new normal of education*

### Introduction

The innovative development of teaching strategy from all instruction paraphernalia for a child with a learning difference and exceptionality defines the meaning of Special Education (SPED). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018), ensuring that each kid realizes their full potential will enable them to develop into a capable, self-reliant, and purposeful person who can fully participate in society and plan and manage their own lives.

Numerous educators working with students with exceptional needs faced a problematic struggle even before the pandemic hit. However, when the pandemic struck, their difficulties multiplied. Hence, institutions are not an exception, as they work to develop a novel strategy to carry out crucial academic activities and keep schools open despite a persistent threat (Sadia, 2020). According to Darling (2020), state and district leaders will need to consider several crucial health factors to restore schools safely and reduce the spread of disease. Schools use virtual technologies and services to undertake remote learning, with online learning being the most common. However, the situation is more difficult for SPED teachers because remote learning is more difficult to manage (Sadia, 2020).

Additionally, adjusting to these changes is hard for SPED teachers in the Philippines. Educating kids with special needs is extremely different from teaching ordinary students (Magsambol et al., 2020). Only

SPED teachers can provide the specialized care these students need. As a result, SPED teachers' difficulties have been considerably more apparent when using these online learning systems. According to Andrade et al. (2022), despite being around for 113 years, SPED requirements and needs have stayed the same. Despite the government giving it much support, the program still needs to handle the demand it needs.

Moreover, According to Share et al. (2022), there are problems with the SPED's scant to non-existent budget. This announcement shocked a lot of individuals, especially those who think our country desperately needs a proper SPED. Despite this terrible news, most SPED teachers are still eager to enter the field—not because they have no other options but because they care so much about children with special needs (Department of Education [DEPED], 2022).

Moreover, most of the researchers should have conveyed the real challenges and experiences of an individual SPED teacher; the data is not enough and always revolves around the equipment, facilities, and even the teaching techniques. This phenomenological study explores the challenges and experiences of a SPED teacher, especially amidst the new normal of education. The essential value of this paper is that it seeks to educate readers on the real challenges a SPED teacher encounters, particularly during this pandemic. Researchers are optimistic that they will be able to accomplish this research's true purpose with this study's assistance.

## Research Questions

This study explores SPED teachers' experiences and challenges amidst the new normal of education. Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of SPED teachers amidst the new normal of education?
2. What challenges SPED teachers face amidst the new normal of education?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of SPED teachers amidst the new normal of education?

## Methodology

This study employed Heideggerian phenomenology to explore the participant's lived experiences.

### Participants of the Study

This study's participants were fifteen (15) SPED teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants who met the following inclusion criteria intentionally:

1. Special Education teacher;
2. Working in a public school;
3. The age range of 30-60 years old; and
4. Those interested in participating in the study and signing informed consent.

### Instrument of the Study

The researcher created an interview guide that was approved and validated by the validators that our research advisers recommended; the direction and questionnaire were organized with their specific questions and gist for the researcher and the participant to have a mutual atmosphere while having the session, but before the interview process begins, the participant is oriented with the heart of the question for their mind to be ready and for them not to say any unnecessary data that will make the process long. The participants were asked the same questions and were therefore consistent.

### Data Collection Process

To achieve the target data of the researchers, the questionnaire has twenty-eighth (28) total questions

that are already validated. The field of the participants is an institution, so the researchers have to present a letter that the research adviser creates. The letters were addressed in a letter asking for approval to conduct the study. A sample interview guide was also included in the letter for the administrators to review, and the research is open to approval or alteration. It is clearly stated that the interview is confidential and requires voluntary response only.

According to the study of Bhandori (2021), all research participants must voluntarily participate to avoid coercion or pressure. Every participant is free to stop participating in the study at any time without feeling obligated to do so. There is no requirement that participants give a justification for abandoning the research.

### Data Analysis Procedure

This study utilized the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), developed on the modified Van Kaam technique made well-known by Moustakas. This type of analysis is also suitable, especially in a study wherein the researchers examine detailed responses from the participants, including their lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. The transcripts of the interview, which contain participants' actual words or verbatim, will be carefully reviewed and analyzed. Furthermore, data saturation will be met when no new information is found through data analysis; when that happens, it alerts researchers that they may need to stop collecting data (Hancock et al., 2016).

## Results and Discussion

The following section presents the analysis of data gathered after following an intricate procedure. Based on the data collected, the following themes were identified in this study; namely, (1) The Committed, (2) The Implementer, and (3) The Resilient. Likewise, the following subthemes were identified from the data-gathering based on their perspectives.

### The Committed

Every commitment has a significant reason; it has something to do with their principles and values in life; in the answers of the Participants, two things are very relevant and noteworthy, which are their drive, their desire (Desire to make a mark), and their dream for their students (Their dream is my dream)

## Desire to make a mark

This is when the interviewer asked the participant how they see themselves as SPED teachers and any question related to their Lived experience.

*“ah kasi nandoon yung desire ko mag turo, so I think it’s a challenge pa nga na maturuan at matulungan ang mga children with special needs.”* Participant 3 said that with a proud voice, pertaining on her drive towards his commitment that shows her values in life.

Participant 4 said that her sudden placement on the SPED field makes her overwhelmed at first *“Nung dumating ako dito nilagay ako sa sped kahit wala kong knowledge pagkatapos unti -unti makakapag adjust ka bibigyan ka ng idea kung pano ihandle ang sped hanggang sa machallenge ka mag aadjust ka ngayon sa sarili mo. within 4 months na adopt ko na yung sarili ko sa kanila hanggang sa nagustuhan ko na, inakap ko na ang pagiging sped teacher kung kinaya nung dalawalang teacher makakaya ko rin, kung kaya nila magmahal ng special children, makakaya ko rin iadjust sarili para mahalin yung special children, hanggang sa dumating yung pagkakataon na naibagay ko na ng buo yung sarili ko na ah dito na talaga ko di na ko aalis dito.”* Based on her words, she loved it when she became used to the SPED field. The words accommodation and adaptation are frequently interchanged with the word adjustment (Monroe, 2007). According to the study of Robinson (2009) It serves to underline how hard it is for the person to survive in their physical and social circumstances. They also noted that the process of adjustment is how a person tries to deal with stress, anxiety, avoid conflict and satisfy their demands. The person makes efforts to maintain harmony throughout this process, connections to the environment, The environment and the individual are the two most important components in adjustment.

Participant 5 is a visually impaired person, and it is a challenge for her to do daily activities, but *“Bilang sped teacher, nakikita ko yung sarili ko na ako bilang visual impaired I is a visual impaired so ah my work as a sped teacher based from my experiences.”* She is sharing her knowledge and a desire of her to be a help to her fellow impaired students to strive for more in life.

According to Pao (2019), commitment comes into play when we are committed to achieving our objective. Moving in the direction of our goal requires a

cognitive behavioral decision. Different motivations do not necessarily imply obligation. Many of us want to change, but we must be more dedicated to doing it.

## Their Dream is My Dream

As a teacher, seeing your students achieve their dreams is heart-warming and fulfilling; it is very evident in the statements of the participants we interview.

*“Patuloy ako hanggang sa kaya ko hangga;t sa abutin ako ng retirement period na isang araw naniniwala ako na yung mga tinuruan kong bata hindi man sila magaling sa larangan ng edukasyon ay uunlad sila sa ibang bagay at magbago ang kanilang buhay. Kaya maglilingkod parin ako hangga’t kaya ko.”* Participant 5 wants to do her best to help her students for them to have a good life.

*“Is because this is really my dream to be a teacher and yung kagustuhan ko ba na makatulong sa mga bata na tinuturuan ko na may kapansanan sa paningin na para maalis yung kaisipan ng mga tao na pag ang may kapansanan lalo na mga bulag nasa bahay lang. Gusto ko magkaroon ng pagbabago sa mga kaisipan ng tao na yun na maipakita sa kanila na hindi porket may kapansanan nasa bahay lang may mararating sila atleast the way na marunong silang maka survive at maging independent sila at may marating yung mga bata.”* Participant 5 said that it is really her dream to help and to achieve that, she takes on being a SPED teacher even she is an exceptional one too.

According to the study by Gallop (2022), children's disabilities are frequently discussed, not their unique talents. "... Rushing continues, "Many students are 'twice exceptional' so qualify as both gifted and eligible for special education or services. There are frequently stereotypes about people with disabilities not being 'smart enough' for gifted or accelerated courses, but several disabilities enhance creativity and academic performance.

Another relevant reason that is stated by participant 7 is *“Ang reason ko ay gusto ko makita ang mga bata na hawak ko mula ngayon hanggang sa susunod na araw na kahit papano nabago ko yung buhay nila, hindi naman habang panahon sila ganyan e meron mga bata na nagkakaran ng improvement sa kanilang buhay.”* She really wants to see her students to improve their

life, to break the stigma of disabled children, for them to be not “disabled”.

Another connection to what participant 7 said is *"Yung kagustuhan ko ba na makatulong sa mga bata na tinuturuan ko na may kapansanan sa paningin na para maalis yung kaisipan ng mga tao na pag ang may kapansanan lalo na mga bulag nasa bahay lang. Gusto ko magkaroon ng pagbabago sa mga kaisipan ng tao na yun na maipakita sa kanila na hindi porket may kapansanan nasa bahay lang may mararating sila atleast the way na marunong silang maka survive at maging independent sila."*

Participant 13 said this with her proud voice, desire, and dreams for the students she teaches. They want to break the stigma.

### The Implementer

The SPED teachers have their unique way of implementing their knowledge and policies to their students; based on the answers given by the participants, two sub-themes were formed, the (1) Psychitioner and (2) conditioning the child.

### Grounded strategy on Psychology

Participant 1 pins out her voice about the relevance of a psychology major in the field of SPED *"Kumbaga best practice ng best psychology theory kasi sakanila mo talaga maia-apply yung mga knowledge mo, yung reward reinforcement. Actually, gamit na gamit ko yung teorya kasi kitang kita mo yung effect eh kung baga eh somehow mina-manipulate mo yung negative behavior nila magagamit mo ma reinforce mo into positive behaviour"*

Based on the article published on the site (UTPB.EDU, 2022), educational psychology has profoundly transformed the landscape of special education. Unlike in the past, when children with disabilities were separated from the general student body, educators now realize that the majority of kids with disabilities are capable of meeting the same academic standards as their peers without impairments. To succeed academically, however, every kid with a disability must have their requirements considered and completed.

Some participants voiced out about the difference of Normal class and inclusive class *"Kasi sa totoo lang pag sped teacher ka[hindi katulad siya sa regular na isang buong klase ay bibigyan mo sya ng isang lesson*

*or kumbaga sa special education kung halimbawa lima yung handle mong isang ah bata"*

Inclusive classrooms are set up in age-appropriate general education settings so that children with special needs, disabilities, or impairments can learn alongside peers who may or may not have similar requirements, as stated by the University of Texas (2020).

Participant 2 stated some of her methods in handling her students; *"limang bata ang handle mo sa isang oras yung lima na yun may individual needs, may individual instruction at iba't ibang preparation ang inere-ready mo sa araw-araw kumbaga may iba't iba silang pangangailangan kaya hindi pare parehas ang kanilang lesson"*.

According to the article of Nebraska Autism Spectrum Network (2020), for their surroundings to remain predictable and help them feel safer, many students with autism rely on norms and routines.

Participant 3 says his method of routine for her students with ASD *"As you can see. As my kids enter my classroom, you will see the stations. I have station 1; I have station 2, station 3, station 4, and station 5. In station one, there's a triage area. Also, my inspection chart in their attendance will they get their picture and put them in the corner over there, then station 2; after that, they will do station 2 and station 2 the reading, the writing, and the activities are done here and then the of course if they... ah they have to finish station-two to get in their favorites spot the station 3 which is the ahh play area and then after that the reading area the reading corner and then the fifth one is our reward which is the tv or other things that they want to do, like the activities, puzzles, and those ahh black sheep, toys okay they can do that after they finish everything that's the five stations. So, I mean, ahm, it's a routine activity ahh; you know children with autism love to have routine so that they will be no case inside the classroom, and I am being consistent too. If I said yes, it's yes if I said no, it's no."*

Additionally, rules and routines are crucial for people with autism, and educators and parents must recognize this and use it in various contexts. Applying norms and practices at home and school enable autistic students to participate in activities more successfully and reduces problem behavior. Routines make a place more productive and save time. Students can do daily tasks more quickly when they are familiar with patterns.



## Ruling oneself

The children are not the only one who needs implementation; the teachers need it too; for them to accomplish their task on the field, different self-discipline and rules are implemented on their selves.

According to the study's findings of Tweed (2013), educators who felt they could the implementation of reform had a greater positive influence on student achievement.

Participant 2 doesn't want her students to be left out so she implements some disciplinary action on herself. *"Ang time namin sa family walang oras kahit hating-gabi siguro may time na matutulog ako ng 11 (or) 12 gigising ako ng 3 (or) 4 (AM) para mag print ng module, gumawa ng reports kasi pag nasa school hindi namin kayang gawin dahil ang bata... hands on kami sa bata hindi namin pwede mapabayaang ang bata na walang ginagawa, dahil nga hands on sila kailangan nila ng 1 on 1 instruction kaya hindi kami makagawa ng report."* As much as possible [I avoid something with them you know maybe ..... already so I tried myself to control myself as much as possible and I'm so calm every time that they are doing tantrums]

"I see that I, you know, I'll calm myself because they can feel that. If you are calm ahm soonest they will calm they self too. But if you are wild and angry, and you are mad, and you show you know anger, and you are shouting, they will not stop. Yeah, so you just be calm, you just calm and consistent."

According to the study of Bandura (1977) that is cited by (Barni et al. 2019), this phrase describes a teacher's confidence in their capacity to successfully manage the responsibilities, tasks, and challenges associated with their professional role (e.g., managing discipline issues in the classroom) (Caprara et al., 2006).

*"Ayan. siguro a lot of preparation ayan kasi pag hindi ka prepared everyday sa lesson, sa activities mag tatantrums yang mga yan so kailangan talaga yung work and activities naka set tayo dyan, worksheet naka prepared na ahead of time para maging okay yung routines tsaka flow nung activities. di maiwasan yon as a teacher. Akala mo natatapos lang kami inside the four corners of the room? Hind, iuuwi mo yan. Yung mga instructional materials iuuwi mo yan kasi you have to prepare ahead of time, yung lesson plan yung grades, sa sped ang kelangan diyan yung ano mo, yung tinatawag namin na, yung naka summary talaga, yung nakalimutan ko yung tawag yung para ide-*

*describe mo, narrative report, yan nakalagay talaga lahat diyan, yung learning areas niya mula sa self-health, yung reading, mathematical, lahat yon ipe-prepare mo. So yun yung medyo talagang takes time and crucial."*

## The Resilient

For us to survive the environment that we are in, we need resilience, and SPED teacher's answers have a different perspective to it that formed three sub-themes which are (1) Adapting to the study field, (2) We control the time and (3) We are the masters of emotions.

### Adapting to the study field

Participant 6 describes the true essence of work at SPED field *"Sa work ang challenge talaga doon is paano ko maco-combat yung pagod ng hindi ko na co-compromise yung mga needs ng mga students ko, talagang hindi ako pwede mag kamali sa pag weigh kung ano ang dapat, pati yun nga hindi lahat kayang i-provide ng school kaya lalabas at lalabas talaga yung sarili mong pera para lang makapag turo ka ng maayos at maganda."*

Apparently they have their physical pains to as participant 6 added this words *"Physical siguro yung sakit ng katawan ko lalo na nung face to face pa, kasi pag nag tantrums yung bata hindi mo pwedeng pabayaang lang dahil makasakit ng iba or baka saktan yung sarili so kelangan mo talaga sila aluin o kargahin syempre dahil may physical contact ka sa kanya chances are ikaw ang sasalo nung pag hawi niya or yung mga unintentional na pag hampas nung kamay niya, minsan nga may kasama pang sipa, sa mental naman"* [wala akong ibang kalaban diyan kundi exhaustion, I'm physically and mentally exhausted.]

According to Ancheta et al. (2021), burnout leads to the appearance of adverse effects on the physical and mental health of employees.

*"Kaya ahm panibagong motivation na naman kung papaano namin sila mai-maiaano sa curriculum na dapat natutunan na nila dati naistop na naman balik na naman sa simula kaya maraming challenges including the behavior yun ano pinaka ano behavior ng bata may mga behavior kaming, may mga bata kami na yung pag-uugali nila mas ano mas naging*

worst because of the ah learning gap.” After all, the teacher must develop sufficient knowledge of the curriculum's goals and requirements, teaching abilities, interests, and ideals. He must work hard to guide kids or pupils into a life that is expansive, full, engaging, and fulfilling. Barberos et al. (2020).

[but I tried my best to... you know to keep on adjusting myself with this standard setting and I know that with my, you know, little knowledge and love and care for my kids, i will pass, surpass everything....]

“Ako isa talaga sa ginawa kong pamamaraan ngayon new normal ginawa kong equip yung sarili ko sa technology before kasi di ako mahusay gumamit ng computer and laptop. Kaya ngayong new normal talagang nagpaturo ako sa mga kaibigan ko na blind then para lang maging bihasa ako sa paggamit ng computer. pag may reading materials ineencode ko siya at habang binabasa sa computer pwede ko na masundan. Isa pa sa ginawa ko Mag join sa mga seminar at webinar para ma enhance pa yung mga kaalaman ko.”

Participant 6 adjusted herself to adopt technology and improve on it more because their teaching styles require the use of computers.

According to Andoh (2012), ICT integration with the concept of wholeness is when all system elements are connected to become a whole. For instance, the two essential elements of teaching and learning, content and pedagogy, must be joined when technology is used in the lesson.

But even with their efforts to make their life easier with technology, some problems will keep rising as participant 7 raises her concern about her problems “Internet problem. May internet si teacher walang internet yung mga bata so pano kami mag oonline class. siguro pag nag oonline class kami papasok dalawa tapos may ppt pa yun ahm ako nag pprepare tapos yung mga bata ko dalawa lang kaya. Kaya more on module kami tapos mag provide ka ng copy ng module tapos sila naman yung hindi kukuha yun siguro yung ano namin yung internet connection tapos yung way ng magulang kung pano kukuhanin module tsaks pano makikipag communicate samin na teacher.”

### **We control the time!**

Participant 2 emphasizes that "time management lang talaga, may mga pag kakataon na kakailanganin mo

talaga na maging strikto sa oras mo kasi kung hindi masasayang lang, lalo ka walang magagawa time management, time management, and asking help na from your colleagues.”

According to Aeon (2021), their findings indicate a moderate relationship between time management and well-being, academic success, and work performance. Distress and time management have a moderately unfavorable association.

“tinutulungan nalang ako ng mag aama ko kumbaga sa mga gawaing bahay tapos sa pag mamange ng time hindi ko hindi na ko yung tipo na ahh hindi ako yung tipo nang ahh ina na tao na nakikipag kapitbahay wala na akong time sa social... oo wala nakong ganon maski yung pag b'browse ng fb hindi rin ako pala” This shows that even the with the support of your family, being a SPED teacher really eats their time so they really implement time management on their selves.

Additionally, a form of decision-making used by individuals to structure, safeguard, and adjust their time to changing conditions" is how time management is defined. This means that time management consists of three elements: time organization, time protection, and time adaptation.

### **We are masters of emotions!**

According to Innes (2002), emotion and rational thought are mutually exclusive. This may be the cause of why, up until recently, learning and emotion had got little consideration when educational and instructional frameworks were being developed.

“Halo-halo yung emosyon ko eh pero at the end of the day I feel complete and happy kasi alam ko na naturuan ko sila at may baon silang bagong knowledge and dahil yun sa tulong ko” Based on the words of Participant 6, the mixed-up emotions what makes them human and motivated in work

Additionally, to implement innovation in education, they need emotions, and continue to treat students as little more than detached intellectuals would be to overlook an important factor that affects education.

This is very relavant to the words of participants 8, “nung unang beses ko mag turo, na takot talaga ako kasi syempre hindi ako confident na magiging maayos akong teacher kasi syempre hindi naman talaga ito yung gusto ko, then habang tumatagal nag gi-gain na





*ako ng confidence hanggang sa nararamdaman ko na yung true happiness bilang teacher ka pag nakikita ko na may na a-achieve sila even the smallest thing pero may times na hindi ko maiwasan na maawa sakanila kasi sa totoo lang kung hindi naming sila tutulongan wala naman ibang tutulong sakanila”*

## Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the following conclusion was discussed: SPED teachers can't enjoy their life outside work because of lack of support from the government, physically and financially, that's why they experience burnout even though they are passionate about the child's well-being. They are passionate about their work. However, their salary is not even enough to raise a family, and the fact that they almost shoulder the equipment in the class makes it worse. Most SPED teachers aren't knowledgeable about technology, yet the higher-ups demand them to conduct an online course even if their students are modular.

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