



The Journey of Filipino Differently-Abled School Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is frequently viewed as an honorable and rewarding job in the contemporary educational environment. Nonetheless, the demands placed on educators to manage diverse classrooms, deliver high-quality instruction, and meet administrative responsibilities have led to an increasingly demanding career. The experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of Filipino differently-abled school teachers—visually impaired, orthopedic, and psychosocial disability—are investigated in this study. Three Davao City differently-abled school teachers were the participants in in-depth interviews carried out using a qualitative phenomenological research design. The findings reveal significant barriers, including accessibility issues and societal discrimination, as well as the resilience and determination these educators exhibit in overcoming obstacles. The study evaluates the need for inclusive policies, professional development programs, and advocacy efforts to support differently-abled teachers. The implications for educational policy and practice, professional development, community perceptions, and future research are discussed to promote a more inclusive educational environment.

Keywords: Differently-abled Filipino teachers, PWD teachers, inclusive education, phenomenology, educational policy

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession has historically held a place of high regard, seen as a noble calling dedicated to shaping young minds (Hargreaves, 2000). However, contemporary educators face a significantly transformed landscape. Increased class sizes, diverse student needs, and heightened accountability standards all contribute to a more demanding reality (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These challenges are further amplified for teachers with disabilities, who encounter additional barriers within a school system that often lacks accessibility.

According to the American Federation of Teachers' 2017 Educator Quality of Life Survey, 61% of educators and school employees say their jobs are "always" or "often" stressful, compared to 30% of the general public. Further, the study by Steiner et al. (2023) revealed that most teachers report feeling overworked in the academic year 2022–2023; teachers put in 53 hours per week on average, which is more than the 46 hours of working adults. As a result, teachers with a heavy workload often experience significant levels of stress and

burnout, with many expressing overburdened and underappreciated. This may affect them in a hostile workplace where their contributions are not valued and where they are unable to advance professionally.

Internationally, there is a growing body of literature on the inclusion of persons with disability individuals in the teaching profession. Studies from countries like England and Ecuador provide valuable insights into the experiences, challenges, and strategies of Persons with Disability (PWD) teachers. For example, research by Ware et al. (2021) mentioned that the majority of teachers with disability have encountered severe obstacles and discrimination at work. Similarly, a study by Armijos Robles et.al (2022) findings demonstrated that the limitations towards teachers with disabilities are several both in the region and worldwide, given that it is still common to identify dynamics of discrimination and ableism.

The Department of Education (DepEd) states that among the challenges faced by Filipino educators include big class sizes, scarce resources, and the requirement to adjust to the varied requirements of their students (DepEd, 2020). These difficulties are far more severe for differently-abled school teachers or teachers with disability (visually impaired, orthopedic disability, and psychosocial disability). The institutional and physical obstacles they face might be intimidating for these teachers, additional obstacles are frequently caused by accessibility concerns, a lack of suitable support services, and societal attitudes (UNESCO, 2019). Even with laws like the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (Republic Act No. 7277), which are designed to encourage inclusivity, the actual situation frequently falls short of these goals. Moreover, Elmido (2022) highlights the challenges faced by teachers with disabilities, including bullying, lack of self-confidence, and difficulty in their situation.

While international research explores the experiences of teachers with disabilities (Ware et al., 2021; Armijos Robles et al., 2022), a gap exists in understanding the specific challenges faced by Filipino educators in this category. Existing research highlights the general difficulties encountered by teachers in the Philippines, including large class sizes, limited resources, and catering to diverse student needs (DepEd, 2020). However, the specific impact of these challenges on Filipino teachers with disabilities remains understudied. This study aims to deepen our understanding of the experiences of differently-abled school teachers, including those with visual impairments, orthopedic disabilities, and psychosocial disabilities. By focusing on the unique challenges, coping strategies, and insights of these educators, the study seeks to inform the development of specialized support systems and interventions to address their specific needs. Additionally, this research may contribute to broader discussions on inclusivity within the Philippine education system, ultimately advancing inclusive education and employment initiatives in the Philippines.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of Filipino differently-abled school teachers?
2. What challenges or barriers have the differently abled school teachers encountered?
3. What are the coping strategies of the differently abled school teachers to direct these challenges in their day-to-day teaching practice?
4. What are their insights from the experience?

Theoretical Lens

Social Identity Theory, proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1970), posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. This theory suggests that individuals categorize themselves and others into various social groups, and their sense of self-esteem and belonging is influenced by the status and characteristics of those groups. Furthermore, Social Identity Theory proposes that individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity by favorably comparing their ingroup (the group they belong to) with outgroups (other groups). According to Hogg (2016), the Social Identity Theory is a thorough framework that clarifies the part that social ideas and self-concept play in group dynamics and intergroup

relations. It has now undergone additional development to include several sub-theories, such as those concerning group behavior, leadership, and social influence.

Social Identity Theory to the experiences of Filipino differently abled school teachers, one can explore how their identity as individuals with disabilities (visually impaired, orthopedic disability and psychosocial disability) intersects with their professional identity as educators. This perspective allows for an examination of how differently abled school teachers or teachers with disabilities (visually impaired, orthopedic disability and psychosocial disability) perceive themselves in both the larger disability community and the teaching profession.

A sub-theory is the Resilience Theory. Resilience, according to Garmezy(1991) is the capacity to bounce back and carry on with adaptive functioning following an initial period of stress. He stated resilience is demonstrated by "functional adequacy (the maintenance of effective performance in the face of disruptive emotions) as a test of resilient behavior under stress. People can positively adapt in the face of major pressures and adversity.

Garmezy (1991) proposed resilience theory, which is critical to understanding the experiences of Filipino differently-abled teachers. The approach focuses on the ability to recover from hardship and continue successful functioning. In the context of the study, it helps to explain how differently-abled school teachers, despite various obstacles have developed coping mechanisms to prosper in their field. The study can discover factors that contribute to resilience by analyzing their adaptation techniques, support systems, and positive attitudes. This knowledge can help shape targeted support programs and policies that improve the well-being and effectiveness of these dedicated educators.

Ryan's (2015) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that intrinsic motivation, which is driven by innate desire and satisfaction, is required for optimal motivation. Supporting essential psychological needs generates intrinsic motivation, which has been connected to effective educational achievements (Ryan, 2020). While extrinsic motivation is frequently regarded as undesirable, Luria (2022) argues for its possible advantages. This emphasizes the importance of a balanced motivational strategy that takes into account both internal and external forces.

In the context of the study, SDT can shed light on how differently-abled instructors are motivated to pursue their careers. The study can shed light on the causes that drive their dedication to the profession by delving into their fundamental motives, such as a love of teaching or a desire to make a difference. Furthermore, the study can look into how external factors such as societal expectations, financial incentives, or institutional support affect their motivation. Understanding the interaction of inner and extrinsic incentives might provide useful insights into the aspects that contribute to these teachers' performance and well-being.

Research Design

The experiences of differently abled school teachers were examined through a qualitative phenomenological approach, emphasizing how they interpreted important life events. This approach, which is in line with Creswell and Poth (2018) and Pazurek and Koseoglu (2022), places a strong emphasis on using in-depth participant interactions to study human experiences within their social contexts. It concentrates on the similarities among life experiences within a certain population. Reaching a description of the nature of the specific phenomena is the approach's main objective (Creswell & Poth 2018).

Research Materials

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with Filipino differently-abled school teachers to gain a better understanding of their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights. Open-ended questions were developed to inspire participants to tell their own stories. Participants provided informed consent forms to ensure transparency and voluntary participation. With their permission, audio recordings were created to capture the details of their experiences. The interview guide had the following main questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Filipino differently abled school teachers?

- 1.1 What is your journey into the teaching profession as a differently abled person?
 - 1.1.1. What motivated you to become a teacher despite facing challenges associated with your disability?
- 1.2. What are some of the challenges or barriers you have encountered as a differently abled teacher?
 - 1.2.1. What specific examples of situations where your disability posed challenges in your teaching role?
- 1.3. How do you navigate these challenges in your day-to-day teaching practice?
 - 1.3.1. What support or accommodations from your school or colleagues to address these challenges? Any instances?
- 1.4. What are some of the successes or accomplishments you have experienced as a differently abled teacher?
 - 1.4.1. What memories or experiences were your disability positively influenced your teaching or student interactions?
- 1.5. How do societal attitudes and perceptions towards disability impact your experiences as a differently abled teacher?
 - 1.5.1. What experiences have you had with discrimination or stigma whether in the workplace or within the broader community?

Research Participants and Locale

The study participants were three licensed professional teachers with Persons with Disability (PWD) ID in the category of visual impairment, orthopedic disability, and psychosocial disability) currently employed in both public and private schools within Davao City.

Davao City was chosen as the study site due to its accessibility, diverse educational landscape, and growing emphasis on inclusive education. The city's well-developed infrastructure, diverse range of schools, and commitment to inclusivity provide a conducive environment for conducting research on the experiences of differently-abled teachers. This strategic choice allows for efficient data collection, access to a varied participant pool, and the exploration of relevant educational contexts.

Participant's Profile

To ensure the selection of appropriate participants, the researcher established specific criteria. Potential participants were required to be licensed professional teachers with a valid PWD ID, be at least 18 years old, and reside in Davao City. This criterion ensured that the participants were qualified educators with firsthand experiences of navigating the challenges and opportunities of the teaching profession as individuals with disabilities. The researcher continues to interview participants until data saturation is reached, meaning that no new insights or themes emerge from subsequent interviews. This point a sample size of three can be sufficient for a phenomenological study, particularly when the focus is on in-depth exploration of lived experiences, especially when participants are highly reflective and articulate.

P1. Participant 1 has been teaching for 29 years, 26 in the private school and 3 years in the public school. He's been blind since birth with a visually impaired disability PWD ID. According to him, he had taken the licensure exam at the civil service office, the last batch of the PBET takers or Philippine Board Examination for Teachers last 1996.

P2. Participant 2 has been teaching for 27 years in public school. She was diagnosed with breast cancer with psychosocial disability PWD ID and is a licensed professional teacher.

P3. Participant 3 is a dentist, a clinical instructor at a medical school in Davao. Also, a proprietor of a clinic in the city where she resides. According to her, she was diagnosed with AVM a spinal Arteriovenous Malformation with club foot since birth. Her PWD ID is a physical-orthopedic disability.

Data Collection

To ensure ethical research practices, informed consent was obtained from potential participants who met the specific criteria: they were licensed professional teachers with a PWD ID, aged 18 or older, and residents of Davao City.

In-depth interviews were conducted to gather rich, qualitative data about the participants' experiences. To accommodate diverse needs, interviews were conducted both in-person and online (via Google Meet). The researcher established a rapport with each participant, creating a comfortable and supportive environment. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy and facilitate transcription.

The duration of each interview varied, typically lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. This duration allowed for in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies.

After the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, ensuring the preservation of the participants' voices and perspectives. The transcripts were then anonymized to protect participant confidentiality and organized for thematic analysis.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was employed. This involved sharing the preliminary findings with the participants to validate their accuracy and completeness. By incorporating their feedback, the researcher aimed to ensure the authenticity and credibility of the study.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the gathered information, this qualitative study on the Journey of Filipino Differently-abled School Teachers : A Phenomenological study involves systematically examining interview transcripts to identify themes, patterns, and insights. Creswell (2014) described a systematic process for coding data in which specific statements are analyzed and categorized into themes that represent the phenomenon of interest. The researcher followed the gradual steps. Then, the researcher systematically analyzed the qualitative data collected from interviews with differently abled teachers, providing valuable insights into their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms and insights contributing to the advancement of inclusive education research and practice.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research study on the differently abled teacher experiences, the researcher adhered to the requirements due to the potential consequences of breaking her ethical commitments. The researcher further assured that adhered to moral standards and did not engage in any actions that would violate the PAP (Psychological Association of the Philippines) or the APA's (American Psychological Association) Code of Ethics. For the study to be significant and reputable, the researcher also put in professional effort, being truthful and equitable, especially when it comes to presenting the results of the investigation. Additionally, the researcher exhibited respect for the participants, the length of the study, and the surroundings.

Social Value. The real procedure of conducting served as the foundation for this study. It will undergo a scientific process that is relevant to current challenges, especially those about education. Additionally, it helped the academic program spread what the student needed to know. The experiences of differently abled teachers in the Philippines. This study provided insights into the challenges and other perspectives of a differently abled teacher's experience as a teacher. Additionally, not much research has been done on differently-abled teachers in the Philippines. Research on the nature of this phenomenon is still necessary.

Informed Consent. Informed consent involves providing participants with clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits, and obtaining their voluntary agreement to participate (Creswell

& Creswell, 2017). Researchers ensured that participants understood their rights, including the option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences (Patton, 2015).

Risk, Benefits, and Safety. Researchers should carefully assess potential risks to participants, such as emotional distress or breach of confidentiality, and take measures to minimize harm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). They must also consider the potential benefits of the research to participants and society, ensuring that the benefits outweigh the risks (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. The researcher must protect the participant's personal information and make sure that data are anonymized and stored securely, researchers may respect participants' right to privacy and secrecy. The conduct of the research is by the guidelines set forth by the Data Privacy Act of 2012, guaranteeing that all supplied information was treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for educational objectives.

Justice. Even though this used convenient sampling, the researcher made sure that participant anonymity and fairness of treatment were strictly adhered to. To guarantee equal opportunity for all participants, the inclusion and exclusion criteria should be specified in the research protocol and adhered to. Participants were chosen according to the research participants' criteria. Researchers should strive to promote fairness and equity in participant selection, ensuring that all eligible individuals have an equal opportunity to participate in the study (Patton, 2015). They should also consider the potential impact of their research on vulnerable or marginalized populations and take steps to mitigate any disparities or inequalities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The scientific method was utilized in conducting this investigation. It covers what is currently being investigated as well as what is necessary. Fairness, suitable methods, and the absence of bias all be upheld in the conduct of this study, especially regarding the results and conclusions.

Transparency. Researchers should maintain transparency throughout the research process by providing clear and accurate information to participants, stakeholders, and the wider community (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Any conflicts of interest, biases, or study constraints that might compromise the study's reliability and validity should be disclosed.

Qualification of Researcher. Researchers should possess the necessary qualifications, expertise, and training to conduct the study ethically and competently (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Only researchers with the necessary training, expertise, and resources can ethically perform qualitative research. Without a thorough understanding of the specifics of qualitative techniques, it is difficult to think through, depict, or resolve the ethical difficulties unique to qualitative study design. Researchers are expected to demonstrate their research abilities, and ethical review boards are expected to render a decision. The researcher is currently enrolled in the first-year level, subject 204 Qualitative Research pursuing the degree of PhD in Counseling at the University of Immaculate Conception under the supervision of Dr. Henry E. Lemana II. Nevertheless, the researcher is also being guided by her internal and external advisers in conducting the study. Thus, have a duty to render for an assessment and ethical review.

Community Involvement. The researchers should engage with the community and relevant stakeholders throughout the research process, including study design, data collection, and dissemination of findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). They should seek input and feedback from community members to ensure that the research is culturally sensitive, relevant, and beneficial to the community (Patton, 2015). Legitimate care has been taken to avoid prejudices against race, religion, and culture when drawing up the questionnaires and collecting data. Validators aided in the examination of the questionnaires' linguistic structure. This includes reminding participants of their freedom to participate or not and the right to withdraw in participation of the research at any moment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the experiences of differently-abled school teachers organized by themes. Through in-depth interviews, guided by the main research question—"What are the experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights of Filipino differently-abled school teachers?"—three teachers with disabilities shared their responses. To help readers understand the highlighted and quoted participant experiences, their

responses from the interviews are discussed. Additionally, this chapter provides the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the study's results, supported by a review of related literature and studies conducted by other scholars.

The Experiences of Filipino Differently Abled School Teachers

Two major themes are extracted from the study regarding the experiences of differently abled school teachers and their motivations. These aspire to inspire and empower through teaching. These themes illustrate the profound impact and dedication of differently-abled teachers, who overcome personal challenges and inspire and empower their students through their resilience and passion for teaching.

ASPIRE TO INSPIRE

This theme reflects the lived experiences and motivations of differently-abled teachers who are driven by a profound passion for teaching. Their goal is to demonstrate that with determination and support, anything is possible. By aspiring to inspire, they seek to advocate for inclusivity, break barriers, and challenge preconceived notions about disabilities.

Participant 2's statement,

"I'm passionate about breaking barriers... allows me to inspire others, advocate for inclusivity, and make a positive impact in the lives of my students."
~P2

Similarly, Participant 3's words,

"...your passion or your calling or you want to help or share to your students of your knowledge go for it...Platform to inspire."~P3

further emphasize the role of personal passion in motivating their teaching careers.

These participants experience teaching not just as a profession but as a mission imbued with personal significance. Their disabilities become a source of strength, allowing them to connect deeply with their students and foster an environment of empathy and resilience. This lived experience of aspiring to inspire is both a personal journey and a collective call to action for greater inclusivity in education.

Social Identity Theory, proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1970), posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. Differently-abled teachers' identity as individuals with disabilities intersects with their professional identity as educators. This dual identity influences how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others.

Participants in the study, such as Participant 2 and Participant 3, demonstrate that their identity as differently-abled individuals is not just a personal attribute but a powerful motivator for their teaching careers. Their passion for breaking barriers and advocating for inclusivity aligns with Social Identity Theory's assertion that individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity. By positioning themselves as role models and sources of inspiration, these teachers challenge the negative stereotypes often associated with disabilities, thereby enhancing their own self-esteem and fostering a positive social identity within their professional group.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TEACHING

The theme of empowerment through teaching encapsulates the significant accomplishments and

recognition differently-abled teachers receive from their students and colleagues. This respect and acknowledgment are not just professional accolades but are deeply intertwined with their personal experiences of overcoming challenges. By sharing their stories, they foster an environment of empathy, resilience, and inclusivity among their students.

Participant 1's reflection,

“...I won their respect... I am highly respected by my students... I was asked by the chairman to help for the support...asked help from my former students. I created a community they joined me on that quest... I presented myself na mag train sa mga players... As a teacher I can say that it was a great achievement....” ~P1

illustrates how earning respect and building a supportive community are significant achievements that reinforce their sense of purpose and identity as educators.

The respect and recognition that differently-abled teachers receive from students and colleagues reinforce their social identity as competent and influential educators. Participant 1's experience of garnering respect and creating a supportive community among students exemplifies how their professional identity is validated and strengthened through positive social interactions. This aligns with Social Identity Theory's premise that individuals seek to favorably compare their ingroup with outgroups to enhance their self-concept. In this case, the ingroup is the community of differently-abled teachers who, through their achievements, demonstrate their value and capabilities.

The ability of differently-abled teachers to garner respect and recognition is also an indicator of their resilience. Participant 1's creation of a supportive community.

Participant 2 and Participant 3 further exemplify how their personal experiences with disability empower their teaching.

“I've learned to adapt and find creative solutions to overcome these obstacles...enabling me to effectively carry out my teaching responsibilities...showing that anything is possible with determination...” ~P2

Participant 2's adaptation to teaching challenges reflects their resilience in maintaining effective performance despite facing disruptive emotions and external barriers. This resilience not only empowers them personally but also positively impacts their students, who learn about overcoming adversity through their teachers' examples.

“I have a AVM orthopedic disability... it is not a hindrance to my teaching career...so I told the students I will check them upstairs, so I am willing to go upstairs...there was one time during lecture I asked myself, what if I will give my students a pep talk?...”~P3

Participant 3's determination to go the extra mile despite physical challenges showcases their resilience and commitment. Their stories, such as Participant 3's willingness to give pep talks during lectures despite her AVM orthopedic disability, highlight how their personal journeys inspire and empower their students.

Teachers' ability to gain respect and recognition despite obstacles showcases their resilience. Participant 3's willingness to go the extra mile despite physical challenges is a testament to their resilience and adaptive strategies. This aligns with Garmezy's (1991) definition of resilience as maintaining effective performance despite stress and adversity.

Resilience Theory, as described by Garmezy (1991), emphasizes the capacity to bounce back and maintain functional adequacy in the face of adversity. Differently-abled teachers exhibit resilience by using their

personal experiences of overcoming challenges as a source of strength and inspiration.

These experiences of empowerment through teaching are not merely professional successes but are deeply rooted in the participants' lived experiences and personal triumphs. Their ability to inspire respect and recognition stems from their authenticity and resilience, which in turn fosters a transformative educational environment.

Research shows that robust inclusivity and diversity programs are necessary to support PWD teachers (Brito, 2020; Hartley, 2015). The participants' experiences highlight the positive impact of such initiatives, as their ability to inspire and empower students reflects the benefits of a supportive and inclusive educational environment. However, the underrepresentation of PWD teachers (Souza et al., 2020) suggests that more comprehensive diversity initiatives and effective support systems are still needed.

Studies indicate that PWD teachers play a crucial role in motivating and inspiring their students (San Jose et al., 2022). The participants' experiences of using their personal challenges as teaching tools align with this literature, demonstrating the significant influence that role modeling and intrinsic motivation have on student engagement and inclusivity.

The challenges PWD teachers face, such as social perceptions and institutional barriers (Ware et al., 2021), are evident in the participants' experiences. Their resilience and adaptive strategies highlight the importance of professional development and specialized support to help them succeed. This is consistent with the literature emphasizing the need for systematic assistance for PWD teachers (Dispenza, 2019).

The Challenges of Filipino Differently Abled School Teachers

The study identifies two major themes concerning the challenges or barriers faced by differently-abled school teachers: the plight of differently-abled school teachers and facing the giants in a judgmental world.

PLIGHT OF DIFFERENTLY ABLED SCHOOL TEACHERS

Differently-abled teachers encounter discrimination from educational institutions, which prioritize maintaining standards, navigating physical spaces, managing classroom materials, and addressing accessibility issues.

Participant 1's account highlights the prejudice and discrimination faced by differently-abled teachers from educational institutions concerned with maintaining perceived standards. The administration's fear of parental backlash and concerns about a blind teacher affecting the school's standards reflect deep-seated biases and stigmas. This discrimination impacts the teacher's sense of belonging and professional identity, as their abilities and qualifications are overshadowed by their disability.

“...can lower their standard that they will accept the same as me...they cannot answer the questions to the parents about how high their tuition is and then teach their children a blind and it was not yet asked by the parents it was just a contention, threats by the part of the admin...” ~P1

This experience of discrimination is not just an external challenge but an internalized struggle that affects the teacher's self-concept and motivation. The feeling of being judged and undervalued by the administration reveals a conflict between the teacher's self-perception and how they are perceived by others in their professional environment.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1970) explains that individuals derive their self-concept from group memberships, influencing self-esteem and belonging. Differently-abled teachers, like Participant 1, experience discrimination from educational institutions, undermining their professional identity. Hogg (2016) emphasizes that group dynamics shape self-concept, explaining why exclusion impacts these teachers' self-esteem.

SDT (Ryan, 2015) posits that intrinsic motivation, driven by fulfilling psychological needs, leads to optimal outcomes. Despite facing discrimination, differently-abled teachers are motivated by their passion for teaching. This aligns with Luria (2022), who notes that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are beneficial.

Participant 2 and 3 both struggled with physical accessibility in school buildings and managing classroom materials.

“...challenges in my teaching role, such as accessing certain areas of the school building, managing classroom materials.” ~P2

“...It's a bit far so I can't walk, so I just try to ride a tricycle there, even though it's far...I said no because there are many classrooms that are more on the upstairs.” ~P3

Participants 2 and 3 describe their difficulties in navigating physical spaces within the school and managing classroom materials. These challenges include accessing certain areas of the school building and dealing with logistical issues, such as reaching classrooms on upper floors.

These physical barriers create a daily struggle for differently-abled teachers, affecting their ability to perform their duties and participate fully in the school community. The need to find alternative ways to navigate the school environment, such as riding a tricycle, set the lack of adequate accommodations and the extra effort required to overcome these barriers.

These accessibility challenges are more than practical issues; they represent an ongoing negotiation of their professional roles and identities. The teachers' efforts to adapt to their environments highlight their resilience but also the persistent inequalities and lack of support they face.

The findings are reinforcing the statement of (Gómez-Puerta et al., (2021) inclusive employment practices and proactive school administration are essential to overcome these barriers.

Garmezy's Resilience Theory (1991) highlights the ability to maintain performance despite stress. Differently-abled teachers demonstrate resilience by overcoming discrimination and physical accessibility challenges, as Participants 2 and 3 described. This theory marks the importance of coping strategies and support systems for these teachers to thrive.

SDT (Ryan, 2015) posits that intrinsic motivation, driven by fulfilling psychological needs, leads to optimal outcomes. Despite facing discrimination, differently-abled teachers are motivated by their passion for teaching. This aligns with Luria (2022), who notes that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are beneficial.

Research indicates that discrimination and stigma hinder the inclusion of persons with disabilities (Heera & Devi, 2016). Differently-abled teachers face similar barriers, highlighting the need for inclusive employment practices and supportive mechanisms.

Studies emphasize the need for laws and professional development to support inclusion in education (Hartley, 2015). Despite initiatives, the underrepresentation of PWD teachers persists, highlighting the need for more effective support systems (Souza et al., 2020).

PWD teachers face challenges in hiring, professional growth, and navigating educational environments (Fisher-Ari, 2018). Participants' experiences emphasize the need for systematic assistance and specialized education to support their development.

PWD teachers serve as role models, demonstrating perseverance despite challenges (San Jose et al., 2022). Their commitment to teaching highlights the importance of professional development and support for PWD teachers (Dispenza, 2019).

Resilience significantly influences PWD teachers' careers and well-being. Studies highlight the importance of purpose, social support, and coping skills (Drew & Sosnowski, 2019). Participants' experiences reflect the need for supportive mechanisms to thrive in inclusive contexts (Banat et al., 2017).

FACING THE GIANTS IN A JUDGEMENTAL WORLD

Differently-abled teachers face societal stigma and negative perceptions, which impact their confidence and opportunities.

Participant 1 encountered intellectual battles with students who doubted his capabilities and faced rejection from a head despite a principal's recommendation.

“...felt insulted that the blind was teaching them...I don't know if they don't trust me. They don't give me auxiliaries...the head didn't accept me, though recommended by the principal.” ~P1

Participant 1's experience reveals the intellectual and social battles differently-abled teachers face. Despite being recommended by the principal, he faced rejection from a head, highlighting institutional bias. Additionally, his students' doubts about his capabilities were intellectually and emotionally challenging, affecting his confidence and sense of professional validation.

Participant 2 experienced societal stigma, misconceptions about her abilities, and exclusion from opportunities.

“I've faced misconceptions about my abilities and assumptions about what I can or cannot do due to my disability...excluded from certain opportunities or activities because of preconceived notions about disabilities.” ~P2

Participant 2's experiences underscore the pervasive nature of societal stigma. She faced misconceptions about her abilities, leading to exclusion from opportunities. These preconceived notions limited her professional growth and reinforced feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Her experience illustrates the emotional toll of continuously proving her competence in a judgmental environment.

Participant 3 faced bullying through labeling, particularly about her foot problem, which made her feel uncomfortable and reduced to her disability.

“...you can doc according to the CI who has a foot problem?... Labeling is a bit off. I don't want to be identified as like "there's something wrong with the foot.”~P3

Participant 3's experience with bullying and labeling reveals the harmful impact of reducing individuals to their disabilities. Being identified solely by her foot problem made her feel uncomfortable and diminished her sense of identity. This labeling not only affected her self-esteem but also highlighted the broader issue of societal insensitivity and lack of awareness about the complexities of living with a disability.

The theme "Facing the Giants in a Judgmental World" explores the experiences of differently-abled teachers dealing with societal stigma and negative perceptions. This phenomenological interpretation points to how these experiences shape their professional lives, self-concept, and emotional well-being.

Differently-abled teachers face significant challenges due to societal stigma and negative perceptions. Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1970) explains how this marginalization impacts their self-concept

and professional identity. Despite these challenges, these teachers demonstrate resilience, as highlighted by Garmezy's Resilience Theory (1991). Their intrinsic motivation, as described by Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, 2015), drives them to overcome obstacles.

Research by Heera and Devi (2016) and Erickson et al. (2014) supports the notion that societal stigma hinders the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. These teachers, as role models, challenge these perceptions and advocate for inclusivity (San Jose et al., 2022). However, they also experience stress and low self-esteem due to societal barriers and institutional limitations (Ware et al., 2021; San Jose et al., 2022).

The Coping Strategies of Filipino Differently Abled School Teachers

Two major themes are extracted from the study when it comes to the differently abled school teachers coping strategies. These are resilient teachers overcoming challenges through resourcefulness and breaking barriers and leveraging a strong support system can help overcome any obstacle life throws at us.

RESILIENT TEACHERS OVERCOMING CHALLENGES THROUGH RESOURCEFULNESS

The theme "Resilient Teachers Overcoming Challenges Through Resourcefulness" points into the lived experiences of differently-abled teachers who demonstrate resilience by employing adaptive strategies and creative problem-solving to overcome educational barriers. This phenomenological interpretation captures the essence of their resourcefulness and the impact of their determination on their professional lives.

Participant 1's experience emphasizes the importance of rigorous preparation and the use of assistive technologies to overcome the challenges associated with visual impairment. His reliance on braille and the necessity to be fully equipped reflect a proactive approach to overcoming educational barriers. This experience highlights his resilience and resourcefulness in ensuring he can fulfill his teaching responsibilities effectively despite his disability, visual impairment:

"I have to be prepared because at that time my access as visually impaired is solely braille...I must be fully equipped..." ~P1

Participants 2 and 3 face physical and logistical barriers, such as maneuvering through school buildings and managing classroom materials. Despite these obstacles, they have learned to adapt and find creative solutions to ensure effective communication and teaching:

...effectively communicating with students. However, I've learned to adapt and find creative solutions..." ~P2

"...It's a bit far, so I can't walk, so I just try to ride a tricycle there, even though it's far...I said no because there are many classrooms that are more on the upstairs."~P3

Participant 3's statement illustrates the physical challenges of maneuvering through school buildings, particularly those with multiple floors. Despite these logistical difficulties, she finds ways to adapt, such as using alternative transportation methods like riding a tricycle. Her determination to overcome these barriers highlights her resilience and resourcefulness in ensuring she can fulfill her teaching duties effectively.

Differently-abled teachers face a myriad of challenges, including physical and societal barriers. Participant 3's experiences highlight the physical challenges of navigating school buildings, particularly those with multiple floors. Despite these obstacles, these teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. Garmezy's Resilience Theory (1991) explains how they adapt to challenges, employ creative solutions, and utilize assistive technologies. Additionally, their intrinsic motivation, as described by Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2015), drives them to overcome obstacles and excel in their profession.

To address the challenges faced by differently-abled teachers, systemic changes are needed. Research by Heera & Devi (2016) and Erickson et al. (2014) highlights the need for inclusive employment practices and supportive work environments. These teachers, as role models, demonstrate perseverance and resilience, inspiring others. To further support their professional growth and effectiveness, comprehensive support systems, including specialized training and inclusive policies, are crucial (Ware et al., 2021; San Jose et al., 2022).

BREAKING BARRIERS AND LEVERAGING A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM CAN HELP OVERCOME ANY OBSTACLE LIFE THROWS AT US

The theme "Breaking Barriers and Leveraging a Strong Support System Can Help Overcome Any Obstacle Life Throws at Us" focuses on the lived experiences of differently-abled teachers who, through the support of students, colleagues, and institutional accommodations, are able to navigate and overcome the barriers posed by their disabilities. This phenomenological interpretation captures the essence of how a robust support system enables these teachers to thrive in their professional environments despite significant challenges.

Participant 1 recounts how students assist with tasks like transcribing forms and managing grades, reducing the difficulty of their workload:

“...I read to them their grades, they were the ones who transcribed some forms, they were the ones who filled in the forms, I just need to take the grade in print, it was not so difficult for me.” ~P1

Participant 1 describes how students assist with tasks such as transcribing forms and managing grades, significantly reducing his workload. This experience marks the crucial role of student support in alleviating the practical challenges faced by differently-abled teachers. The reliance on students for these tasks highlights the collaborative and supportive environment that helps mitigate the difficulties associated with his disability.

Another teacher acknowledges the support and modifications made by their school, such as providing an accessible classroom and altering physical features to improve accessibility:

“...fortunate to receive support and accommodations from my school and colleagues...my school provided me with a designated accessible classroom and modified certain physical features of the building to improve accessibility.” ~P2

Participant 2 acknowledges the support and accommodations provided by her school, such as an accessible classroom and modifications to physical features of the building. This experience illustrates the importance of institutional support in creating an inclusive environment. The accommodations not only facilitate her ability to teach effectively but also reflect a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility within the school.

A colleague's willingness to help by taking over tasks that involve navigating difficult physical spaces highlights the importance of a considerate and supportive work environment:

“...said "Where are you going?"... " don't go upstairs anymore, I'll be the one to check". So he offered to check so that I wouldn't have to go upstairs. People around me are just considerate.” ~P3

Participant 3 recounts a colleague's willingness to help by taking over tasks that involve navigating difficult physical spaces. This act of consideration emphasizes the significance of a supportive and empathetic work environment. The colleague's readiness to assist showcases the importance of teamwork and mutual support in overcoming physical barriers, allowing Participant 3 to focus on her teaching responsibilities without the added strain of navigating inaccessible areas.

According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, 2015), intrinsic motivation is driven by the fulfillment of psychological needs. The participants' adaptive measures and resourcefulness contribute to their sense of competence and autonomy, fostering intrinsic motivation and enhancing job satisfaction.

Research indicates that inclusive employment practices are crucial for enabling differently-abled teachers to overcome barriers (Heera & Devi, 2016; Erickson et al., 2014). The participants' experiences of adaptation and resourcefulness underscore the importance of such practices in supporting their professional roles.

Differently-abled teachers serve as role models by demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness (San Jose et al., 2022). Their ability to adapt and find creative solutions inspires students and colleagues, promoting a culture of inclusivity and support within the educational community.

Studies highlight the need for systematic support and specialized training for differently-abled teachers (Ware et al., 2021; San Jose et al., 2022). The participants' experiences illustrate how personal adaptation and resourcefulness are essential for overcoming physical and logistical challenges in their teaching roles.

The Insights of Filipino Differently Abled School Teachers

The study identifies two major themes regarding the insights of differently-abled school teachers: promoting inclusivity and resilience, and the power of sharing their triumphant endeavors.

ADVOCATING INCLUSIVITY AND RESILIENCE

The theme "Advocating Inclusivity and Resilience" captures the lived experiences of differently-abled teachers who actively promote inclusivity and demonstrate resilience in their professional and personal lives. This phenomenological approach explores how these teachers advocate for the capabilities of individuals with disabilities and embody resilience in their teaching roles.

Participant 1 is a focal person promoting inclusivity, particularly advocating for the capabilities of visually impaired individuals. He conducts school seminars to educate others on handling disabilities, emphasizing that blind individuals are fully capable. He believes inclusive education is already integrated in public settings. His advocacy for inclusive education highlights his commitment to creating a more accepting and supportive environment.

"...I will give a seminar in the school in handling...I could tell them that the blind are capable...Inclusive education is there. In public it is already mixed..." ~P1

Participant 2 is an advocate for inclusivity and resilience. She emphasizes that determination makes anything possible and uses her role to inspire others, advocate for inclusivity, and positively impact her students' lives.

"...anything is possible with determination...allows me to inspire others, advocate for inclusivity, and make a positive impact in the lives of my students." ~P2

Participant 2 emphasizes the power of determination and uses her role to inspire others and advocate for inclusivity. Her belief that "anything is possible with determination" reflects her resilience and dedication to positively impacting her students' lives. She actively works to break down barriers and foster a more inclusive educational environment.

Participant 3 demonstrates resilience and feels included by her co-teachers. Her colleagues make accommodations for her, such as not assigning her to upper-level classes and showing understanding and support. She believes passion, calling, and the desire to help or share knowledge are not hindered by her disability.

"...they considered it, that I won't be given subjects that are located upstairs...so they also understand...I'm sure if it's your passion or your calling

or you want to help or share your knowledge, you go for it. It is not a hindrance basically your students will just listen..." ~P3

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1970) posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. The advocacy and resilience demonstrated by these participants enhance their professional identity and foster a positive self-concept within the educational community, counteracting societal stigma.

Garmezy's Resilience Theory (1991) focuses on the ability to maintain effective performance under stress. The participants' experiences illustrate resilience through their advocacy efforts and determination to overcome barriers. Their actions exemplify how resilience is essential for managing and succeeding in challenging educational environments.

According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, 2015), intrinsic motivation is driven by the fulfillment of psychological needs. The participants' advocacy and resilience contribute to their sense of competence and autonomy, fostering intrinsic motivation and enhancing job satisfaction.

Research marks the importance of inclusive employment practices for enabling differently-abled teachers to overcome barriers (Heera & Devi, 2016; Erickson et al., 2014). The participants' advocacy and resilience highlight the need for such practices to support their professional roles effectively.

Differently-abled teachers serve as role models by demonstrating resilience and advocating for inclusivity (San Jose et al., 2022). Their efforts inspire students and colleagues, promoting a culture of support and acceptance within the educational community.

Studies highlight the necessity of systematic support and specialized training for differently-abled teachers (Ware et al., 2021; San Jose et al., 2022). The participants' experiences illustrate how advocacy and resilience are essential for overcoming physical and logistical challenges in their teaching roles.

THE POWER OF SHARING TRIUMPHANT ENDEAVORS

The theme "The Power of Sharing Triumphant Endeavors" highlights how differently-abled teachers impact their communities by sharing their personal achievements and overcoming challenges. This phenomenological approach explores how these teachers use their experiences to inspire, educate, and foster inclusivity among their students and colleagues.

Participant 1 positively influences the education system by conducting seminars and training sessions for public school teachers, focusing on handling visually impaired students. His role as a focal person in the Davao Region demonstrates his commitment to improving educational practices and advocating for the capabilities of visually impaired individuals.

"... I am now giving seminar for public school teachers as focal person...In handling visually impaired in Davao Region. I can give." ~P1

Participant 2 fosters empathy, resilience, and inclusivity among her students by sharing her personal experiences of overcoming disability-related challenges. Her willingness to discuss her journey during class discussions about diversity and inclusion provides a powerful example for her students, helping them understand and appreciate the value of resilience and inclusivity.

"During a class discussion about diversity and inclusion, I shared my personal experiences of overcoming challenges related to my disability."~P2

Participant 3 inspires and positively influences her students' perspectives on diversity and ability by sharing her personal triumphs. Her stories of overcoming physical challenges motivate and encourage her students, demonstrating that success is possible regardless of physical limitations.

“...I said, see how I can walk. I ended like if I can do it, you can do it...the other student there thought "I struggled already...The impact of giving them inspiration is positive. If I can they could also.”~P3

According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1970), individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. By sharing their triumphs, these teachers enhance their professional identity and foster a positive self-concept within the educational community. Their actions help to break down stereotypes and promote a more inclusive environment.

Garmezy's Resilience Theory (1991) emphasizes the capacity to maintain effective performance under stress. The participants' experiences illustrate resilience as they use their personal challenges and triumphs to inspire and educate others. Their stories of overcoming adversity serve as powerful examples of resilient behavior in the face of obstacles.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, 2015) posits that intrinsic motivation is driven by the fulfillment of psychological needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The participants' actions demonstrate their competence and autonomy, fostering intrinsic motivation and enhancing their sense of purpose and job satisfaction.

Research indicates that differently-abled teachers serve as role models by sharing their experiences and demonstrating resilience (San Jose et al., 2022). Their stories inspire students and colleagues, promoting a culture of support and acceptance within the educational community.

Studies highlight the importance of inclusive employment practices to support differently-abled teachers (Heera & Devi, 2016; Erickson et al., 2014). The participants' efforts to share their triumphs contribute to a more inclusive and supportive work environment, helping to overcome barriers and promote equality.

Research marks the necessity of systematic support and specialized training for differently-abled teachers (Ware et al., 2021; San Jose et al., 2022). The participants' experiences illustrate how sharing their personal achievements can help others understand the importance of resilience and adaptability in overcoming challenges.

FINDINGS

The study explored the lived experiences of Filipino differently-abled school teachers. Key findings included:

1. **Aspiring to Inspire:** Differently-abled teachers view teaching as a mission to inspire, advocating for inclusivity and challenging societal norms about disabilities.
2. **Empowerment through Teaching:** Teachers derive a sense of accomplishment and validation through the respect and recognition they receive from students and colleagues.

3. Challenges Faced:

The Plight of Differently-Abled Teachers: Teachers encounter discrimination, physical accessibility issues, and societal stigma. Facing Giants in a Judgmental World: They struggle against stereotypes, misconceptions, and institutional barriers.

4. Coping Strategies:

Resilience and Resourcefulness: Teachers adapt to barriers using creative strategies.

Leveraging Support Systems: Institutional and interpersonal support enables them to thrive.

5. Insights:

Promoting Inclusivity and Resilience: Teachers advocate for inclusive practices and embody resilience.

Sharing Triumphs: The differently-abled teachers sharing personal stories, teachers inspire empathy and foster inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

The study delved into the lived experiences of Filipino differently-abled school teachers, revealing a multifaceted narrative. Key findings illuminate their aspirations to inspire and empower students, their experiences of empowerment through teaching, and the challenges they face, including discrimination, physical barriers, and societal stigma. The study also highlights their resilience and resourcefulness in overcoming obstacles, as well as the crucial role of support systems in their success. Moreover, the teachers' insights underscore their commitment to promoting inclusivity, advocating for the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, and inspiring others through their personal triumphs. These findings shed light on the unique experiences and contributions of differently-abled teachers, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive and supportive educational environments.

IMPLICATIONS

For Educational Institutions: The necessity to establish inclusive policies and provide physical accommodations to create equitable teaching environments. Also, training programs for administrators and peers to foster understanding and respect for differently-abled educators.

For Society: Shifting perceptions to recognize the value and contributions of differently-abled professionals. Advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about inclusivity in the workforce.

For Differently-Abled Individuals: Highlighting the importance of resilience and community support in overcoming barriers and achieving success. Encouraging empowerment through education and advocacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Future Researchers:

Conduct comparative studies across various educational contexts to understand the challenges and coping mechanisms of differently-abled teachers globally.

Explore the experiences of students taught by differently-abled teachers to assess the broader impact on inclusivity.

Investigate the long-term effects of inclusive employment practices on differently-abled professionals.

2. For Policymakers:

Develop laws mandating accessible infrastructure and inclusive hiring practices in educational institutions.

Establish grants and scholarships to encourage differently-abled individuals to pursue teaching.

3. For Educators:

Implement professional development programs focused on inclusive pedagogy.

Foster mentorship programs where experienced differently-abled teachers guide new educators facing similar challenges.

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