

Doing Things-Out-Of-Love: Rearing Children with Special Needs from the Lens of their Parents

Jessa Vezz Soriano Sawey

Administrative Officer II, Ambalayat Integrated School, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur, Philippines

Abstract

Owing to the importance of parents as partners of teachers in Special Education (SPED) institutions, various scientific explorations were conducted to understand the parents' experiences in dealing with their children with special needs. Among these, there is a dearth of studies that unveiled the experiences of parents in the upland municipalities of the Philippines towards the development of responsive interventions tailored to the parents' needs. This prompted the investigation in Rosario Elementary School - Special Education Center, Cervantes District to determine the parents' challenges in dealing with their children with special needs and their coping as insights in the development of a practical intervention.

This endeavor utilized the Qualitative Method with Case Study as its design. It considered total enumeration to comprehensively depict the picture of the parents' experiences. Using an interview protocol, data were gathered and analyzed thematically.

After the analyses of the transcripts, the study revealed that parents face emotional stress, financial constraints, communication obstacles, and a lack of methods to employ for their children's acquisition of academic skills and basic life skills. They cope by being optimistic, empathetic, resourceful, and hardworking. A SPED – Based Parental Convergence Program was developed tailored to the findings.

Through parents' kind hearts, they thrive every day despite the challenges they encounter. However, they need to be armed with various supports from a pool of experts, concerned authorities, and their fellow parents for them to be more productive. Further, studies may be conducted to validate the study's findings.

Keywords: Special Education, Cervantes, Philippines, Challenges, Coping, SPED – Based Parental Convergence Program

1. Introduction

Inclusivity serves as a fundamental element within both academic and non-academic institutions. This prevailing trend means that all institutions recognize that every individual, irrespective of their differences, holds essential significance. It affirms the universal entitlement to respect, compassion, and care for all. The essence of inclusivity lies in the recognition that everyone deserves not only the freedom to express themselves but also the right to quality education, among others.

The principle of inclusivity is embroidered into the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education). This profound connection has led to a transformative shift,

rendering education inherently inclusive. In the Philippine context, inclusive education is one of the foundational pillars of its K to 12 Program, a strategic initiative enacted through Republic Act 10533, widely recognized as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Carlsen & Bruggemann; 2022; Molomolo, 2018). Inclusive education, as underscored by this framework, champions the inherent right of every child to access quality education and learning, extending its reach to encompass children with special needs (Johnstone, 2020; Republic of the Philippines, 2013).

Children with special needs require dedicated attention that differ from those needed by their peers. Due to their vulnerability, the state provides additional safeguards for their well-being (Kagan, 2023; Toseeb et al., 2020). To ensure comprehensive protection in various aspects of life, particularly in education, several exclusive laws and programs have been implemented. Key initiatives, such as Republic Act 11650, known as the Inclusive Education Act, and RA 7277, the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, highlight the commitment to their welfare.

The unique existence of these individuals have attracted a significant number of international and local researchers, exploring their cases within the context of special education (SpEd) and learning. These research endeavors contribute to the continuous improvement of existing SPED programs (e.g., Tsikinas & Xinogalos, 2021; Armstrong, 2020; Asbury et al., 2021; Tohara, 2021; Rumrill, 2020).

Furthermore, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) continuously enhance their curricula and instruction to successfully prepare effective future SPED teachers prepared to teach effectively in the field (Commission on Higher Education, 2017). In the Department of Education, ongoing efforts involve organizing a series of seminars and training sessions aimed at refining the skills of SPED teachers and even parents are initiated to address the unique challenges associated with this group of learners, and alleviating the concerns of educators and parents in the field (Crispel & Ronen, 2021; Tristani & Bassett-Gunter, 2022; Rodriguez – Oramas et al., 2021; Llego, 2022). This comprehensive approach signifies a continuous commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment for children with special needs.

In the bounds of special education, the roles of parents are vital, positioning them as the closest collaborators of SPED teachers. This assertion finds support in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Allam & Martin, 2021; Rotter, 2021), which posits the overarching influence of parents and other social factors in a child's learning journey. A substantial body of research supports the positive impact of parental involvement on a child's learning outcomes (Lawrence & Fakaude, 2021; Tan et al., 2020; Novianti & Garzia, 2020).

Nevertheless, parallel to SPED teachers grappling with challenges ranging from limited knowledge and skills in inclusive pedagogies to resource constraints and curricular changes beyond their control, parents, too, as found by international studies face an array of challenges that impede the excellent execution of their roles (Allam & Martin, 2021; Pocaan, 2022; Hester et al., 2020). To further illustrate, Chen et al. (2020) of China revealed that parents experience mental health issues due to their children's behavioral issues and the psychological demands placed on the parents themselves. Specifically, parents of children with special needs were found to grapple with parent-child dysfunctional interactions and heightened parenting distress. Recognizing the significance of parents' mental well-being, it becomes imperative to address their needs through increased social and family support while alleviating parenting pressures.

Additionally, the study by Hosseinpour et al. (2022) identified three primary needs of parents caring for children with special needs: Firstly, issues pertaining to diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation,

encompassing challenges such as diagnosis-related problems, treatment-related concerns, and insufficient therapeutic support. Secondly, challenges related to parents themselves, including lack of knowledge about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), inadequate life skills, daily parenting problems, and familial and marital issues. Lastly, parents face financial, cultural, and social issues, including financial problems and broader social and cultural challenges.

Similarly, findings from Ren et al. (2020) highlighted the mental and behavioral challenges faced by parents of children with special needs, examining the interplay of parenting stress and social support, influencing their state anxiety. These insights are particularly relevant for developing targeted psychological interventions to enhance the mental health of vulnerable groups, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Correspondingly, Mikolajczak and Roskam (2020) found parents' burnout, characterized by intense exhaustion related to parenting, emotional distancing from their children, and a loss of parental fulfillment. The collective evidence underscores the necessity for comprehensive support mechanisms and interventions to address the multifaceted challenges faced by parents in the context of special education.

In the context of the Philippines, local studies have revealed consistent challenges faced by parents in addressing the needs of their children with special needs. For instance, Toquero's research in 2021 identified that parents often grapple with anxiety when it comes to instructing their children with special needs. Consequently, educators extend support to parents by employing various methods, including online communication, homeschooling, fostering parental engagement, ensuring psychological safety, and employing empathetic language strategies.

In the same context, a study conducted by Chepngetich et al. in 2022 shed light on another significant issue, indicating that teachers lack adequate knowledge in effectively managing children with special needs, particularly those with autism. In alignment with this finding, it becomes crucial for healthcare professionals, such as nurses, and other providers to concentrate on establishing therapeutic relationships with parents who have children with autism. This approach aims to facilitate open channels for interaction and the sharing of crucial information, emphasizing the collaborative effort required to address the unique challenges faced by families in such situations.

Upon scrutinizing existing studies within the scope of this research, a predominant focus emerges on the encountered challenges and the coping mechanism of SPED teachers (Allam & Martin, 2021; Pocaan, 2022; Toquero, 2021; Hester et al., 2020; Valerie et al., 2022; Chepngetich et al., 2022). However, there is a notable scarcity of studies delving into the challenges and coping strategies of parents of children with special needs. Among the limited available studies, most were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing insights specific to that time frame. Additionally, the majority of these studies primarily focus on identifying challenges, with only a small fraction shedding light on practical coping mechanisms and the development of responsive interventions to address the encountered challenges. Recognizing these literature gaps, the study was conceived to systematically explore and understand the challenges faced by parents and their coping mechanisms towards a responsive intervention relevant to the unique needs of the parents.

Framework of the study

The study is greatly anchored on the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1977) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. These provide a clear understanding on the study's endeavors.

Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1977). In exploring the dynamics of motivation and cognitive development within the educational context, the Social Learning Theory (SLT) proposed by Bandura

(1977) emerges as a pivotal framework. Rumjaun and Narod's (2020) characterization of SLT as an intermediary link between behaviorism and cognitive theory underscores its relevance. While behaviorism emphasizes external behavior modification through reinforcement and repetition, and cognitive theory delves into mental processes, SLT acts as a bridge, offering a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between behavior and cognitive processes.

The imperative to delve into the Social Learning Theory gains particular significance in the context of understanding the influential role of parents in motivating their children. Acknowledging parents as the primary educators and the most influential figures in their children's lives underscores their crucial contribution to fostering intrinsic motivation in educational pursuits. As the initial educators, parents significantly shape the foundation of a child's learning journey (Corpuz et al., 2018).

Furthermore, SLT emphasizes the pivotal role of parents in the cognitive development of their children. The theory posits that what children learn at home is reinforced in the educational setting (Corpuz et al., 2018). Therefore, recognizing and addressing parents' concerns becomes paramount for effective knowledge acquisition. The assertion that parents act as a reinforcing link between home and school aligns with the need to consider their perspectives in the educational framework.

The connection between SLT and the influential role of parents not only underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation but also emphasizes the interaction between home and school environments. Acknowledging this, their involvement should be actively solicited and addressed in the educational discourse. This realization, among other compelling reasons, prompted the researcher to venture into a scientific exploration aimed at comprehensively understanding the experiences of parents of children with special needs. Through this endeavor, the researcher aspires to develop a practical intervention that can empower parents in their roles as the first teachers of their children. This research aims to bridge the theoretical understanding of SLT with practical strategies, fostering a collaborative and supportive educational environment for children with special needs and their families.

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping posits that an individual's ability to navigate challenges and adapt is intricately linked to ongoing interactions with their environment. This model recognizes the inevitability of challenges in people's lives and underscores their potential to cope, a capacity significantly influenced by environmental factors.

Existing research highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by parents of children with special needs, encompassing issues like burnout, anxiety arising from their children's behavioral issues, limited understanding of their children's cases and behavioral needs, inadequate life skills, everyday parenting difficulties, and familial and marital concerns (Chen et al., 2020; Hosseinpour et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2020; Mikolajczak and Roskam, 2020). Notably, a limited number of studies have delved into how these parents cope with these challenges (Ren et al., 2020), prompting a gap in understanding. Motivated by these gaps, the researcher aims to explore the coping mechanisms employed by parents of children with special needs in the specific context of Cervantes District, Cervantes, Ilocos Sur.

Furthermore, the Transactional Model emphasizes that how well a person manages stress and deals with problems is a result of the dynamic exchanges and responses between them and the various factors in their surroundings. This model emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environment in shaping stress and coping mechanisms. Drawing from this view, the study believes that developing a responsive intervention for parents of children with special needs is essential as this may help them effectively cope with the challenges inherent to their roles.

Statement of the Problem

The study endeavored to establish the challenges encountered by parents of children with special needs and their coping mechanisms which served as inputs to a responsive intervention for parents. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do parents encounter in dealing with their children who have special needs?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of parents in dealing with their difficulties?
3. What intervention can be developed and proposed?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative case study design, as defined by Creswell (2002) as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 485). The choice of this design is deemed relevant as it aligns with the study's focus on understanding the challenges faced by parents in dealing with their children with special needs and their coping strategies that will inform the development of a relevant intervention for parents.

The participants of the study were the 11 parents of children with special needs who are enrolled at Rosario Elementary School SPED Center for the school year 2023-2024. The total enumeration technique was utilized to comprehensively capture the case of parents within the study's locale. This method ensures a thorough understanding of the cases at hand, making the subsequent intervention development highly relevant to the specific needs of the parents in the study.

Interview Protocol was the main tool to gather the needed data for the study. To ensure its validity, it was subjected to validation by experts. During the interview, the parents' vernacular was considered to avoid a communication barrier; hence, parents can freely express themselves.

Permission to conduct the study was sought from concerned authorities. Upon approval, the consent of the participants was sought through an Informed Consent Form detailing the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, confidentiality, and how they will be informed of the study's results. After securing their consent, face – to – face interview was conducted. The interview was audio – recorded. Field notes were likewise considered to note significant codes that arose during the interview.

After the interviews, the extended texts were transcribed and translated, if necessary. The researcher's adviser checked the accuracy of the translation of the initial transcripts. This was made to assure that the thoughts of the verbatim are not change.

After translations, the transcripts were carefully read and analyzed for manual coding. An exchange of thoughts between the researcher and her adviser was done to ensure accurate analysis. After which, the coding was done carefully. The codes that surfaced were further reviewed, then revisions were made, when necessary. The codes were categorized into groups to determine patterns' potential for themes. Then, meanings were given to each theme for the discussion. After the themes are formulated, a checking member procedure was conducted among the participants. This is to ensure the accuracy and validity of the transcriptions. Finally, the themes were discussed and interpreted. Translated direct quotations were used to provide stronger justifications; however, codes instead of their real names were used for anonymity.

Thematic Analysis was used in identifying important sub-themes, codes, and patterns from the transcripts. Upon identifying and analyzing the codes and patterns based on the objectives of the study, the sub-themes were formulated. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), Thematic Analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across data set to identify, analyze and report repeated

pattern. It is a method of describing data but also involves interpretation in the processes of selecting codes and constructing themes.

In undertaking this research, ethical considerations were paramount to ensure the well-being, privacy, and rights of all involved parties. Firstly, informed consent was diligently sought from all participants, providing clear and comprehensive information about the nature, purpose, and potential implications of the study.

Confidentiality was rigorously maintained throughout the research process. All collected data were anonymized, and any identifiable information were handled with the utmost care to prevent unauthorized access. Moreover, explicit measures were implemented to safeguard the privacy of participants, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics.

The research adhered to ethical guidelines, respecting the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. Efforts were made to ensure that the research process does not cause harm or distress to participants. Additionally, the findings were presented with accuracy and fairness, avoiding misrepresentation or manipulation of information.

Lastly, the research involved transparent communication with participants, providing them with feedback on the overall study outcomes and, if desired, sharing the final research results with them. This commitment to ethical standards aims to uphold the integrity of the research process and contribute to the overall advancement of knowledge responsibly and respectfully.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the best government programs to openly advocate for diversity in education is special education (e.g., Hernandez Mendoza, 2022; Hasson et al., 2024; Forlin & Chambers, 2020). Owing to this, the experiences of educators and parents in providing support for children with special needs have been the focal subject of several studies (e.g., Allam & Martin, 2021; Pocaan, 2022; Hester et al., 2020; Crispel & Ronen, 2021; Tristani & Bassett-Gunter, 2022; Rodriguez – Oramas et al., 2021; Llego, 2022). Among these studies, there remains a significant gap in the development of responsive intervention materials that are specifically designed to address the unique difficulties faced by parents of children with special needs in the Philippines' highland districts, especially the Cervantes District. It is for this reason that this study has endeavored.

In the subsequent sections, the findings will elucidate the myriad challenges parents face when raising children with special needs, as well as the strategies they employ to navigate these obstacles. It likewise presents the responsive outputs of the study that are tailored to the needs of the parents.

On challenges of parents

Comprehensive analyses of the transcripts reveal that parents encounter difficulties in dealing with their children with special needs. Their challenges are subtheme as (1) Emotional Strain, (2) Skill acquisition Concerns, (3) Poor learning support methods, (4) Communication Obstacles, and (5) Financial limitations. Each subtheme is further presented and discussed in the succeeding sections. The order of presentation of the themes does not, in any way, relate to their degree of seriousness.

Emotional Strain. Most of the participants shared that they are challenged by the emotional stress they experience while ensuring the well-being of their children with special needs. More than the thinking of having children with special needs, their emotional stress is exacerbated by the misbehaviors of their children, which range from using profanity, threats of violence, disobedience, expression of wishes for harm and death, and argumentative behavior that may contribute to the unpredictable home

environment, where conflicts and high tensions can happen. These misbehaviors are attested in the following verbatim:

"...He exhibits violent tendencies ... During his tantrums, he resorts to using profanity, such as "Hey! Mother Fucker. I will kill you. Do you want me to report you to the DSWD...? He even tells me, 'I wish you would die, so I could pocket the money people would donate for you.... (P1)

"...He also responds defiantly, `uttering phrases such as, 'you shouldn't have cared for me so well; I'd rather be dead..." (P4)

"...when I ask her for something, she shouts back at me in her loud voice. She talks back and argues with me for no reason..." (P7)

These misbehaviors cause emotional stress among parents which is another layer of complexity to their caregiving responsibilities. Despite their understanding of the underlying challenges their children face, parents still grapple with intense emotions such as sadness, fear, and exhaustion, as shared:

"It hurts my feelings. When he's angry, I prefer to stay silent." (P1)

"...Occasionally, he presents me with a knife, pleading for me to end his life. I'm relieved he never inflicts harm upon himself; that's my greatest fear... (P4)

"I feel tired and drained...I just keep quiet and wait for him to calm down..."

The study's findings are similar to the findings of Chen et al. (2020) in China revealed that parents experience mental health issues due to their children's behavioral issues and the psychological demands placed on the parents themselves. Specifically, parents of children with special needs were found to grapple with parent-child dysfunctional interactions and heightened parenting distress. Similarly, the study by Ren et al. (2020) found that parents experience mental and behavioral challenges.

The findings at hand, validated by existing research, illustrate the prevalence of emotional stress of parents while they are securing the well-being of their children with special needs. Given the multifaceted roles parents play within the family, the challenges they encounter may adversely affect their usual performance. Similarly, this may exacerbate the child-parent relationship, thereby impacting parental care and concern for their children. Consequently, it is imperative to offer support and resources to assist parents in effectively managing these challenges and maintaining their well-being while caring for their children. Additionally, concerned agencies can provide practical support, emotional validation, and access to appropriate services and interventions.

Skill acquisition concerns. Some parents are likewise challenged in their children's acquisition of basic life skills. This is manifested in the following accounts:

"At times, he's capable in the kitchen but frequently neglects to switch off the LPG. When boiling water, he often loses track of the cooking process, posing potential dangers..." (P1)

"Ah, well, he's a whiz with noodles, but when it comes to grilling or frying, let's just say it's not his forte. Every attempt ends up a bit, um, charred. Remember when we were in Vigan? He gave frying a shot, but the dish ended up a tad too crispy, almost resembling charcoal!" (P2)

"She knows how to clean the house, but she doesn't know how to cook..." (P3)

"...He knows how to eat independently, but he doesn't know how to take a bath, so I bathe him..." (P4)

"At times, I need to pop in while she's in the shower to remind her to scrub her back and those hard-to-reach places like her armpits. And when things get hectic around the house, I'll let her join her siblings for a bath, multitasking at its finest while I tackle household chores...Occasionally, he tends to heap his plate with more food than he can handle. When he finds himself unable to polish it off, he's good about returning the leftovers to the communal dish..." (P5)

"She's quite diligent about dental hygiene, often brushing her teeth more than necessary, using up the entire tube of toothpaste in the process." (P6)

"She's a bit resistant to instruction, making it challenging for me to impart even the most basic life skills, like combing her hair. Whenever I offer assistance, her go-to response is always, 'I know. I'm done.' Despite her lack of attention, I consistently remind her about the importance of tidying up her hair. Occasionally, I'm blunt about the state of her hair in hopes that she'll take notice and make an effort to improve, but alas, she rarely ever bothers to comb it...She's lost touch with washing her undergarments. In her youth, she used to meticulously clean dishes, but now, she's become rather lax. Bathing is also a challenge; she's averse to it. Even when I offer assistance, she declines. During her showers, it seems only her hair gets attention; the rest of her body is neglected. I've even considered installing a bathtub, thinking it might encourage her, as she refuses to use the shower. After bathing, I remind her to wash her underwear, but it falls on deaf ears." (P7)

The accounts provided shed light on the challenges parents face in helping their children acquire basic life skills. From cooking to personal hygiene, these skills are essential for independent living and doing everyday tasks. However, the narratives illustrate various difficulties encountered by parents in teaching and supporting their children in these areas.

In the kitchen, for instance, parents express concerns about their children's safety and ability to handle cooking tasks responsibly. Instances of neglecting to switch off the gas or losing track of cooking processes highlight the potential dangers associated with inadequate supervision or understanding of kitchen practices. Similarly, struggles with specific cooking techniques, such as grilling or frying, underscore the need for children's guidance and skill development.

Personal hygiene is another area where challenges arise. While some children may excel in certain aspects, such as dental hygiene, they may struggle with others, such as bathing or hair care. Resistance to instruction and hate for certain tasks can make it challenging for parents to impart essential skills effectively. Despite reminders and attempts to encourage improvement, some children continue to struggle with basic hygiene routines, leading to concerns about their well-being and independence.

The findings are validated by various existing studies, such as the research conducted by Greenway and Thomas (2020), who found that parents experience difficulties in mentoring their children with special needs in basic life skills due to their children's aggressiveness and misbehaviors. Similarly, Papadopoulos (2021) claimed that parents experience emotional stress when dealing with their students' misbehavior while attempting to teach them basic life skills.

Various studies claim the possibility and the importance of teaching children with special needs (e.g., Peter et al., 2022; Llego, 2022; Francisco et al., 2020). To further illustrate, Peter et al. (2022), claimed that children with special needs are the paramount task of mastering life skills. Life skills act as stepping stones, helping individuals cross the river of challenges on their journey through life. These skills, crucial for everyday challenges, include practical competencies. Taking off from these claims, parents must take the role of reinforcing at home the skills they acquire from school. To be able to do this effectively, parents may be trained by the proper authorities on basic yet effective strategies to help their children effectively acquire these skills. Relevant and easy-to-use learning materials may be given to teachers to aid them in mentoring their children.

Poor learning support methods. Some parents have expressed that their children with special needs are reluctant to learn essential academic skills such as writing and reading. Despite the parents' desire to

teach their children, they are often met with resistance, leading to feelings of disappointment. This sentiment is evident in the following statements:

"I'm finding it challenging to teach him how to write due to his visual impairment. Whenever I offer assistance, he refuses." (P2)

"He struggles with writing his name; his stubbornness makes it challenging to teach him. While he excels at household tasks, he lacks interest in academic pursuits." (P3)

"What I only want is for her to learn how to read and write..." (P4)

"Acquiring academic skills has proven to be quite challenging for him. During our tutoring sessions, I found it necessary to resort to expressing frustration or using discipline methods like spanking to encourage focus. However, despite repeated attempts, these methods have not proven effective in aiding his learning." (P6)

"She's struggling with writing the letters D and Y. It seems if she encounters difficulty, she's quick to switch tasks, finding other activities to occupy her time. Interestingly, I've noticed she tends to seek guidance from others rather than me. When working with them, she's shown progress in naming colors..." (P9)

From the verbatim, it can be deduced that parents of these children with special needs are persistent in helping their children at home with academics such as reading and writing; however, they have difficulty in hooking their children's attention as they are resistant to help which often leads parents to feelings of disappointment and concerns. Such feelings mixed with their desire to improve their children's academic endeavors often lead to inappropriate actions such as spanking, which is against the children's human rights.

As shared by the parents, the misbehaviors of their children such as their stubbornness and their very short attention span are usually their concerns whenever they tend to tutor their children at home. These accounts justify the limited knowledge and skills of parents on the tutorial strategies that are relevant to the disability of their child. This may be due to the absence of collaboration with professionals and experts.

The results support the assertion made by Grigorenko et al. (2020) that children with special needs do face challenges in their academic pursuits, including difficulties with specific word reading, reading comprehension, mathematics, and written expression. These challenges are classified as spectrum disorders and affect 5% to 15% of school-age individuals. People with special learning disabilities (SLDs) frequently experience worse long-term social and vocational results in addition to an increased risk of academic inadequacies and associated functioning social, emotional, and behavioral issues. Effective prevention, surveillance, and treatment systems involving professionals from various disciplines trained to minimize risk and maximize protective factors for SLDs are crucial given the high prevalence of SLDs and their lifelong negative impact on functioning if left untreated.

Owing to the earlier statements, the paper acknowledges collaboration with educators, therapists, or peers as one of the most relevant initiatives to help them be provided with valuable resources and strategies to enhance a child's academic progress. According to the systematic review of Malone et al. (2019), children and special needs are capable of learning academic skills across the different learning disciplines with necessary and relevant instructions from experts blended with excellent routine activities.

Communication Obstacles. Some of the participants accounted that one of their greatest challenges is communication barriers. This impacts their ability to effectively respond to the basic needs of their

children. Such barriers lead to feelings of confusion, frustration, and even aggression. This is justified in the following verbatim:

"Sometimes, what makes her violent is when her needs are not given... It is difficult to understand what she means." (P6)

"I am of difficulty understanding his language..." (P3)

"He displays bullying behavior and has been physically aggressive towards his peers, with incidents including altercations with his brother. When his needs are not provided, he has even resorted to throwing chairs outside." (4)

"At times, it's challenging to grasp her intentions, particularly when I'm overwhelmed with various tasks, leading to frustration on my part. When my frustration boils over, she responds by staring at me, tears welling up in her eyes." (8)

Based on the accounts, the participants have trouble understanding their children's language and communication clues due to the incapability of their children to express themselves clearly and concisely. In times when their children are misunderstood and when their wants are not granted due to communication misunderstandings, they often resort to frustrations and physical aggressions, which are further exacerbated by their aggressive and challenging behaviors.

The misbehaviors of these children with special needs which are triggered by communication barriers are a threat to the safety and well-being of both family members and themselves. Additionally, these misbehaviors pose an unsafe home environment and trigger emotional stress among family members which may worsen effective communication

There are substantial studies that claim that the issue in communication between parents and teachers, and children with special needs is overwhelmingly a concern adversely affecting children's attitude toward others and poor academic performance (e.g., Damayanti, 2019; Marvanti et al., 2021; Mirzajonova & Parpiyeva, 2022; Narzisi, 2020). To illustrate further, the existing study by Damayanti (2019) claimed that parents of children with special needs typically encounter communication barriers, particularly while their children are in elementary school. Children's limited vocabulary makes it difficult for parents to understand and communicate with their children. Furthermore, the study by Marvanti et al. (2021) claimed that the common concern of teachers and parents among children with special needs is communication skills. This is found to be one of the greatest factors that negatively affect their academic performance.

Clear and effective communication between family members and children with special needs is one of the vital factors in ensuring a healthy relationship within the family. Despite the complicated process of addressing communication barriers, patience, understanding, and interventions from among the family members over the cases of their children with special needs are essential. In doing so, the adverse effects of this communication barrier on both the parents and the children such as emotional strains and physical harm will be lessened; hence, harmony within the household may be possible (Karaca & Efiltili, 2020).

Based on the claims of the existing studies and the paper's findings, the communication barrier between parents and their children is among the most challenging issues for parents in the spectrum of children with special needs. This requires not only desirable attitudes from parents such as patience, but also proactive interventions such as speech therapists or behavioral specialists who can provide guidance and strategies to improve communication skills. Additionally, creating a supportive and nurturing environment at home, where the child feels valued and understood, can foster trust and enhance communication interactions.

Financial Limitations. Some of the participants are faced with financial constraints, which adversely affect their access to the basic needs of their children, as accounted:

"My child receives a government allowance, but it's only enough to cover his daily needs. It falls short when it comes to covering his medication and consultation expenses..."(P1)

"If only we could afford regular consultations, I believe my child's condition wouldn't be as severe as it is now..." (P3)

"We haven't received any financial support, although we have our PWD Identification Cards." (P6)

"My child doesn't receive any benefits from the government..." (P7)

The narratives show that some of the parents who are enrolled in the Special Education of Cervantes District are not registered as recipients of the PWD allowances from the Department of Social Work and Development. As a result, most of them are experiencing financial constraints that do not enable them to provide the basic needs of their children such as medication and therapies among others, which, according to them, could have made the case of their children better.

Republic Act No. 10754 otherwise known as Magna Carta for Persons with Disability mandates a two-thousand monthly disability allowance allotted per PWD recipient and shall be entitled to at least twenty percent (20%) discount on the purchase of medicines in all drugstores, on medical and dental services including diagnostic and laboratory fees, on medical and dental services, on fare for domestic air and sea travel, and actual fare for land transportation travel, among others.

Considering the issues being raised by the parents in this study which are validated by existing scientific investigations (such as Ren et al., 2020; Patrick et al., 2020), the paper sees the need for concerned agencies to re-evaluate their systems in the selection of qualified beneficiaries. A mechanism may likewise be done to proactively inform the parents of their children and be given service assistance, if needed, on the processes they need to undertake to be included in the program. By doing so, parents' emotional strain and financial constraints may be lessened. More so, the well-being of their children will be taken good care of.

Future researchers can use these findings to identify effective interventions and support mechanisms for families with children with special needs. Understanding the challenges faced by parents and children can inform the development of targeted programs aimed at improving outcomes and enhancing the quality of life for individuals with special needs and their families.

Research findings can contribute to policy recommendations aimed at improving support systems for families of children with special needs. Advocating for policy changes to address financial constraints, improve access to healthcare and education, and promote inclusive practices that can benefit the community.

Coping Mechanisms. Upon thorough examination of the transcripts, it becomes evident that parents employ limited mechanisms including (1) Being optimistic, (2) giving constant reminders, (3) being emphatic, and (4) being thrifty and working hard. These mechanisms are themed as **kindness**. Each subtheme is presented and discussed in the succeeding sections.

Being optimistic. The participants acknowledged that, despite their emotional strain from raising misbehaving children with special needs, they are powerless to change their children's circumstances rather than withdrawing and waiting for their anxiety to increase. This can be seen in the following verbatim:

"Sometimes, overthinking about our children's future will worsen the situation... I just accept the fact that my child's life is different compared to his siblings..." (P1)

“..Rather than stressing myself thinking of the case of my child, I try to see him as a gift from heaven...” (P3)

“I just accept the way he is, otherwise will be stressed forever...” (P6)

Parents choose to maintain their optimism to carry on with their lives despite the emotional strain they encounter daily. They sincerely acknowledge their children's situation and give them their full attention. Their emotional tension decreases as a result of doing this. This demonstrates the unmatched love that parents have for their children, which is a great sign of a positive view on self-improvement to increase their knowledge and abilities in raising them. The study by Latzer et al. (2021) claims that, along with creative resourceful problem-solving orientation, having a positive outlook is the key to effective coping.

Various emotional stress interventions were recommended by various studies such as parenting-focused mindfulness intervention, socialization, parental regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and self-compassion as emotion regulation strategies, and psycho-educational intervention, among others (Hajai & Palkey, 2020; Chaplin et al., 2021; Preuss et al., 2021). The Children's Health Council (2023) recommended various effective measures to manage and reduce stress related to special needs parenting. Such measures include recognizing and addressing grief and guilt, managing the workload, finding respite care, prioritizing self-care, seeking support, connecting with your child, and finding joy.

Giving constant reminders. Most of the parents claim that giving constant reminds to their children with special needs is the most common mechanism they employ to ensure their children's successful acquisition of basic life and academic skills, as accounted:

“...I always remind her to comb her hair...”

“...I always tell her to wash her underwear after taking a bath...”

“We always remind him to always come home after his work...”

“We keep on reminding her to use the comfort room when urinating...”

The findings imply that parents lack knowledge and skills in methods or strategies to reinforce learning at home. The Social Learning Theory recognizes the importance of parents in the education of their child, particularly in the spectrum of children with special needs (Corpuz et al., 2018). Considering this theory and the study's findings necessitates the importance of capacitating the parents on the basic learning reinforcement strategies that are relevant to the needs of their children.

Various studies explored effective strategies to improve the basic life and learning skills of children with special needs such as digital learning strategies, individualized instruction, strong motivation, and routine or repetitive activities (Tohara, 2021; Pocaan, 2022; Campado, 2023; Grigorenko, 2020).

Being emphatic. Parents and family members are emphatic. Despite the frustrations and physical aggressions shown by children whenever they are misunderstood or misinterpreted, parents and family members, most of the time, choose to be patient as they have fully accepted the cases of their children. They fully understand that their children have needs and wants like humans but have difficulty communicating these. As accounted:

“When he needs something and we don't get what he means. He becomes violent...I'd rather stay silent whenever he becomes violent...” (P1)

“She is of difficulty in expressing her desires...I always try to understand her...” (P4)

“I ask him to translate it into action because I cannot understand his statements...” (P6)

As the stories demonstrate, parents choose to defuse tension and keep a safe atmosphere for themselves and their special needs children by remaining cool and collected when their children act out when they

are misunderstood. Some attentively hear what their kids are saying and try to interpret it. Some ask their kids to put their words into action. These practical ways suggest that parents respect and take into account their children's needs.

Being thrifty and working hard. While the majority of participants do not acknowledge that their children are receiving support from the DSWD, a small number do. Among them, they carefully manage their allowances, as stated in the account, *"His medicines are expensive...His allowances are only for his medications,"* in light of their children's serious conditions and their significant financial needs for drugs and check-ups (P3). Those who were not eligible for the PWD grant, however, were solely dependent on their daily wages. This is one of the greatest factors why they cannot sustain the treatment of their children.

The case of parents dealing with their children with special needs is further illustrated in Figure 2 dubbed Simulacrum of the Experiences of



Parents of SPED Learners in Cervantes District.

The difficulties parents face when raising children with special needs are summed up in the figure, along with the accompanying strategies. Kindness, the main theme of the parents' coping mechanisms, is the core of the image, or the circle at its center. Parents' kindnesses enable them to consistently get through each day with their kids safe and sound. From their kind hearts, parents emanate optimism, empathy, resourcefulness, and a never-ending reminder to assist their kids get the fundamental academic and life skills they need. These often-used strategies help parents confront the difficult situations they face in their day-to-day battles.

Proposed intervention: Special Education-Based Parental Convergence Program. In the context of Special Education (SPED), parents are the primary partners of SPED teachers in educating children with special needs. The Social Learning Theory acknowledges this fact. However, like SPED teachers, parents who lack knowledge and training in handling SPED learners, are faced with various challenges

like burnout, anxiety arising from their children's behavioral issues, limited understanding of their children's cases and behavioral needs, inadequate life skills, everyday parenting difficulties, and familial and marital concerns (Chen et al., 2020; Hosseinpour et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2020; Mikolajczak and Roskam, 2020). This scenario is likewise felt by parents of Cervantes District, whose children are enrolled at the SPED Center of Rosario Elementary School, Cervantes, Ilocos Sur, hence this intervention is proposed.



Figure 3: Special Education-based Parental Convergence Program Components

The Special Education-based Parental Convergence Program attempts to equip parents with the fundamental know-how and abilities needed to effectively deal with children who have special needs. This enjoins parents, DSWD staff, LGU of Cervantes officials, and SPED professionals and specialists. The coverage of the activity is illustrated in Figure 3.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the Cervantes District, parents of children with special needs struggle with emotional stress, communication breakdowns, limited resources, and appropriate pedagogies to help their children develop fundamental academic and life skills. But because of their kind souls, they are overcoming these struggles in life by being optimistic, emphatic, resourceful, and hardworking. Increased support from specialists and experts may be given to them to help them thrive to the fullest and enjoy life like other parents around them.

Acknowledging the roles of parents as the greatest partners of SPED schools, the SPED-Based Parental Convergence Program may be implemented following its thorough validation by experts. By doing so, parents may be empowered to take responsibility for their children with special needs. They may become more productive in their everyday lives. Considering the limitation of the study which includes a

limited number of participants and its methods, further investigations may further be conducted on a larger scale of participants employing hybrid research approaches.

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