

Empowering Diversity: A Novice PE Teacher's Journey in Inclusive Pedagogy

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of novice physical education (PE) teachers, particularly in teaching students with disabilities or special needs. Specifically, how they navigate challenges as they teach students with disability. The study utilized a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of the novice PE teachers in a phenomenon. The participant of this study involves five novice PE teachers who qualified the inclusion criteria and undergone in-depth interview through in person or in virtual platform. The findings reveal the dual nature of teaching students with disabilities, with participants expressing both challenges and reward inherent in this endeavor. Key themes emerge, including the challenges in effective communication, engagement issues, creating adaptive activities, instruction, and teaching strategies. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of continuous personal and professional development, and the ongoing support from colleagues, administrators, and parents to ensure equitable learning opportunities for the students regardless of their abilities.

Keywords: Physical Education, Inclusive, Adaptive Physical Activities

1.0 Introduction

Physical Education is an integral part of the educational curriculum as it promotes not only physical fitness but also the social, emotional, and the cognitive aspect of a person. In recent years, the landscape of education has witnessed a significant transformation towards inclusivity, highlighting quality education and appropriate action to make education accessible to all ^[29] and in accordance with the Philippine Republic Act 11650 that aims to recognize, protect, and promote the rights of all learners with disabilities, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or linguistic background, or indigenous origin ^[25].

Inclusive education means that everyone's needs are considered, and all students learn and succeed together, and it recognizes that every child is unique and can learn, no matter their differences ^[26]. This inclusion simply means that despite of the disabilities, learners must receive equal opportunities received by the regular students including the opportunity to join and participate in a physical activity. The inclusion of students with disabilities in physical education classes reflecting a broader societal shift towards inclusive education ^[6,14]. However, this will have a significant implication for physical education teachers, particularly those who are novice educators. While inclusive education has been shown to have numerous benefits for students with disabilities, it also presents unique challenges for teachers who are new in the field.

In Bhutan, challenges in implementing inclusive education includes inadequate teacher training, lack of experience educators, and limited access to quality professional development, as noted by Chhetri (2019)

[10]. The inability of teachers to create and implement inclusive teaching is influenced by the lack of specialized training. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, a significant number of educators lack the necessary qualifications and trainings for inclusive teaching, which affect the ability of teacher to implement inclusive teaching effectively [2]. In addition, Nanayakkara (2022) [17] state that Sri Lanka PE teachers often lack confidence in teaching students with disability. In Portugal, teachers find difficulties in teaching students with special needs despite of the trainings attended, this is due to mismatch between training and practical realities, insufficient resources, and support [8]. These challenges underscore the importance of targeted trainings and support to enable teachers to effectively accommodate diverse students' need and foster inclusive environment.

Furthermore, teachers in the Philippines highlights the importance of support and trainings for professional development for ensuring quality education for all despite disabilities as documented by Agati and Caballes (2023) [1]. In addition, teachers show dedication by seeking guidance from experienced colleagues, conducting research, and connecting with parents to support students with disabilities [19]. Despite this, there is still a need for comprehensive training to effectively implement inclusive practices in classrooms, specifically among novice PE teachers.

Mostly of the research regarding inclusive education focuses on general education and not on PE. The work of PE teachers offers a unique challenge specifically in teaching inclusive as they must find ways to adapt and ensure that all students have participated and benefit in physical activity. Thus, there is still a gap concerning the lived experiences of novice PE teachers as Sakai (2022) [22] mentioned that there is a scarcity of studies exploring the experiences of novice teachers in adapted PE during their initial years of teaching. This research gap highlights the need for further comprehensive investigation to understand and address challenges, opportunities, and pedagogy related to inclusive classroom. By delving into the journey of novice PE teachers in inclusive pedagogy, the researchers can determine specific challenges and offer insights and best practices to overcome challenges. The result of this study is vital for planning a specialized training, implementing programs, establishing support structure, and advancing inclusive practices in PE.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of novice PE teachers in teaching students with disability or special needs. Specifically, the study sought to understand the challenges experienced by novice PE teachers, how they overcome those challenges, and what insights they can share to other novice PE teachers who have experienced the same difficulty. By investigating the lived experiences of novice PE teachers in inclusive pedagogy, the study aimed to provide significant insights that can inform the development of effective support system, training programs, and educational practices to improve the quality of inclusive PE for all students.

1.2 Research Question

1. How do PE teachers describe their experiences in teaching Physical Education to learners with disabilities?
2. How do novice PE teachers navigate challenges in handling learners with disabilities?
3. What insights the novice PE teachers can share to other PE teachers in teaching learners with disabilities?

1.3 Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is grounded in Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy (1994) [5], which emphasizes individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to achieve desired outcomes through their actions. In the context of novice

physical education teachers in inclusive settings, self-efficacy significantly influences how teachers perceive their ability to effectively teach and support students. Novice teachers with strong self-efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of challenges, seek resources, and adapt teaching strategies to meet diverse student needs. Bandura's theory provides a robust framework for understanding how novice PE teachers' beliefs about their strengths, experiences, instructional approaches, and interactions with students shape their experiences in inclusive physical education environments.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study will utilize a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach. This type of research design center on understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of participants in a phenomenon ^[12]. The study will conduct an in-depth interview on the live experiences of the novice physical education teachers, specifically their challenges experienced and how they overcome those challenges. Thus, phenomenological qualitative approach is suitable or appropriate approach.

2.2 Research Site and Participants

The participants of this study will be the Novice Physical Education Teachers who have experienced teaching in an inclusive set up within in Northern Mindanao Region 10 whether a full-time or a parttime teacher, with a maximum of 5 years teaching experience.

Furthermore, in-depth interview will be utilized to gather the necessary data. Five novice PE teachers will be invited to participate in the study. According to Creswell (2013) ^[10] the reasonable sample size for a phenomenological study may range 3-25 participants. Thus, the selection of five novice PE teachers aligns with the recommended sample size for phenomenological studies, as outlined by Creswell.

The researcher chooses participants using a purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2013) ^[10] purposive sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or group that are knowledgeable and have experienced the phenomenon of interest. With this, the researcher determine possible participants through inclusion criteria as follows: (1) Must be a physical Education Teacher; (2) With maximum of 5 years teaching experience in physical education; (3) Have experience teaching physical education with students with disabilities or special needs; (4) with or without master's degree; (5) teaching physical education either in high school or college.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

A step-by-step process will be followed by the researcher to achieve reliable result throughout the investigation. First, the researcher will submit the paper to the school REC and obtain necessary permit to conduct the data gathering. Next is the researcher will write a letter to the different school head and invite their novice physical education teacher who qualify on the set inclusion criteria. Another letter will be given to the participants attaching the informed consent and explain to them the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw their participation.

Following the completion of the required documents, the researcher will ask the participants to sign the Informed Consent Form (IFC) and set up an-depth interview face to face or virtual set up depending on the availability and comfortability of the respondents. To ensure the data confidentiality and protection of the participants, the researcher will utilize exclusive meetings for virtual and a private room or place to conduct the interview. In addition, file protected with password will be used for save securing of the data gathered.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study will employ thematic analysis to gain insight and understanding of the data collected. The researcher will read and understand the responses and deeply familiarize with the data. Next is the researcher will create a code to categorize reoccurring ideas and experiences. Finally, the code will be group to determine themes and refine it to ensure it will accurately reflect the experience of the novice PE teachers.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The researcher will receive a comprehensive and critical examination by the University of the Immaculate Conception-Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) to ensure that the research will adhere to the relevant ethical guidelines. The researcher will ensure the following ethical criteria and considerations will be met during the duration of the study.

2.5 Informed Consent.

This Research will ensure ethical standard by distributing informed consent form approved by the UIC-REC. Participants will receive comprehensive information about the study requirements, the use of their data, and potential consequences. The participants will be encouraged to ask questions or clarification regarding the study, they will be informed that their participation is purely voluntary, and they have the freedom to withdraw their participation any time if they decided to do so before signing the ICF. This study also protects the right to privacy and anonymity of the participants by using of codes (IDI-0001, IDI-0002, IDI-0003, etc..) to protect their identity as part of the researcher adherence to Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participants will be explicitly informed, actively engaged, and required to sign an agreement to confirm their willingness to participate.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the comprehensive findings of the study, focusing on the lived experiences of a novice Physical Education (PE) teacher in an inclusive educational setting. The study sought to understand the challenges and adaptations of a new teacher working to include students of all abilities in PE classes. The findings are meticulously organized into thematic categories and core ideas, reflecting the sequence of the research questions posed. The chapter uses quotes from in-depth interviews to give a detailed and honest account of the teacher's experiences. This section systematically examines, describes, and explains the collected data, offering insights into the real-world application and impact of inclusive teaching practices.

3.1 Novice P.E Teachers' Live Experiences Teaching Learners with Disabilities

Based on the transcribe live experiences of a novice PE teachers teaching in an inclusive as they describe their experiences, there were three themes formulated, namely: challenging but fulfilling, experienced communication and engagement issues, and diverse learning needs and strategies.

Challenging but fulfilling Experience. The dual nature of teaching students with disabilities is a prominent theme among novice physical education (PE) teachers. Many teachers find this experience both challenging and deeply rewarding. The complexity of providing suitable activities for students with varied levels of abilities often demands creative and adaptive teaching strategies. However, the successful engagement of these students in physical activities offers a significant sense of accomplishment.

This was supported Allam, et al. (2020)^[3] stating that there are teachers who find fulfillment in teaching students with learning disabilities. Recognizing and understanding these disabilities or challenges that might hinder a student's learning ability is crucial for creating an optimal classroom environment. Students

with learning disabilities possess intelligence equal to that of their peers and often need only minor accommodations to enhance their learning experience.

Having communication and engagement issues. A major challenge for novice PE teachers is effective communication and maintaining student engagement. Teachers frequently encounter difficulties in conveying instructions and keeping the attention of students with disabilities, particularly when these students are easily distracted or uninterested. This issue is compounded when working with students who have special needs or are on the autism spectrum.

Communication is very important specially in teaching learners with disability as this would affect their engagement towards the subject. According to the University of Washington (2024) ^[27] effective communication plays an important role in the learning process for all students, especially those with disability. Thus, clear, inclusive, and supportive interactions between teachers and students help ensure that every student understands the material and feels involved in their education.

Diverse learning needs and strategies Management. Managing and accommodating the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities requires tailored instructional strategies. Teachers often need to address a range of disabilities, including mental disabilities and physical injuries, and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. This can involve repeated instructions, the use of visual cues, and creating alternative activities to ensure all students can participate effectively.

According to Vats & Dey (2022) ^[28] teachers can provide help to students with disability or special needs in many ways by providing different efficient and effective strategies to reduce struggles experience by them. However, it is challenging for the novice PE teachers specially that they lack experience and knowledge in handling this kind of learners.

3.2 Navigating and Addressing Challenges in Teaching Learners with Disabilities

Based on the gathered data through in-depth interviews of a novice PE teachers teaching student with disabilities or special needs, there were four themes emerged namely: seek guidance and assistance, adaptation and personalized support, differentiated instruction strategies and positive support, and professional development and continuous learning.

Seek guidance and assistance. Novice physical education (PE) teachers frequently seek guidance and assistance from various sources to navigate the challenges of teaching learners with disabilities. Experienced colleagues, special education teachers, principals, guidance counselors, and curriculum implementers provide crucial support and insights.

Guidance and support from colleagues, administrators, and parents are crucial for novice PE teachers teaching students with disabilities. This support plays an important role for the novice PE teachers to overcome challenges in teaching this type of students and address the needs of the students effectively. According to Omoso & Villarente ^[19] teachers who seek guidance and support from experienced individual can gain valuable insights and practical strategies to address the needs of the students with disabilities.

Adaptation and personalized support. To meet the needs and physical limitation of the students and provide personalized support, novice PE teachers create an alternative and modified traditional games and exercises.

The concept of creating alternatives and modifying physical activities was supported by Myers (2023) ^[17] emphasizing the importance of adaptive teaching in PE which involves adjusting physical activities, teaching techniques, and curricula to meet the diverse need of students with disabilities.

Creating differentiated instruction and positive support. This is crucial for effective teaching students with disability. Novice PE teachers adapt instructions to students' level of understanding, extend patience

and perseverance, and acknowledge students' efforts were some of techniques implemented by the mentioned teachers.

Differentiated instruction and positive support plays a significant role in teaching students with disabilities effectively. This approach includes tailoring instruction and physical activities to meet the diverse need of students, fostering a supportive classroom environment, and recognizing effort and progress of the student. This technique was highlighted by Chard (2022) ^[9] emphasizing that differentiated instruction is essential for students with disability as it helps them access the general education meaningfully and develop their knowledge and skills.

Professional development and continuous learning. Continuous professional development is essential for PE teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge in teaching learners with disabilities. Engaging in workshops, conferences, and personal research are common practices among these teachers.

Teachers handling students with disability believe that professional development can enhance their knowledge about teaching students with learning disabilities and would help them offer support to such students in the classroom^[4]. This idea was also supported by Carrol (2019) ^[7] that teachers who have undergone specialized training provide different types of support to students with learning disabilities compared to those who have not received such training.

3.3 Valuable Insights from Novice PE Teachers on Educating Learners with Disabilities

Based on the transcribe data from the novice PE teachers, there were four themes emerged from the study namely: Seek help and guidance, personal and professional development, adapt and be compassionate, and ensure inclusive and quality education.

Seek help and guidance. The first theme that emerged from the responses of novice PE teachers is the importance of seeking help and guidance from experienced professionals. Engaging with colleagues, school principals, or guidance counselors can provide valuable support and practical tips for managing learners with disabilities.

Implementing inclusive education that ensure all students receive equal learning opportunities regardless of abilities present a unique^[4] set of challenges. However, this challenge can be overcome by seeking guidance and support from parents, experienced colleagues, and administrators ^[19].

Personal and professional development. To effectively teach and support students with disabilities, novice PE teachers must seek continuous personal and professional development by actively attending trainings and seminar related to teaching inclusive.

According to Morrison & Gleddie (2019) ^[16] there must be a need to develop and implement trainings for teaching inclusive PE. Thus, despite of commitment to professional development, if there is no offered specialized trainings and seminars, there will be no improvement for novice teachers. The lack of opportunity to join trainings and seminars exclusive for teachers teaching in inclusive add up to the challenges and difficulties experience by the novice teachers. Teachers are willing to join trainings and seminars if given an opportunity.

Adapt and be compassionate. Constructing an alternative activities and adapting teaching methodologies to meet the varied needs of students is essential in implementing inclusivity. PE teacher should possess and demonstrate patience and compassion by giving learners enough time they need to accomplished activities and process information.

Teacher must create and modify physical activities and instruction to meet and address the needs of the students and create an environment that is conducive to success ^[11, 24]. Furthermore, another technique was introduced by Schipper, et al. (2020) ^[23] called Lesson Study (LS) it is a collaborative approach that

aimed to improve students learning. In this approach, the teacher will collaborate by planning, teaching and observing series of lesson.

Ensure inclusive and quality education. The result of this study highlights the importance of ensuring that all students despite of abilities can participate and benefit from the physical activity. In a addition, to ensure inclusive and quality education for all, the teacher must be resourceful and create a welcoming and supportive environment.

Roldan, et al. (2021) ^[21] stated that interactive learning environment foster positive social interactions, improve academic achievement, promote sense of belonging, and ensure inclusive and quality education. The main target of inclusive education is to ensure that all students, despite of abilities must be treated fairly and get equal opportunities ^[13, 29, 25]. To implement this effectively, teacher must receive specialized trainings to acquire the essential skills and strategies need for supporting and meeting varied learning styles and abilities of the students ^[20].

4.0 Conclusion

Several challenges encountered by the novice PE teachers have documented in this study. However, despite the challenges encountered, some novice PE teachers find the experience deeply fulfilling. Challenges includes maintaining effective communication, engagement issues, meeting diverse needs of the students, and creating alternatives and modifying activities for students with disability. Moreover, novice PE teachers navigate challenges by seeking guidance and assistance from experienced colleagues, administrators, and specialist, adapt teaching methods and activities to provide personalized support, and provide differentiated instructions to accommodate limitation of the students. Furthermore, suggested continuous personal and professional development to enhance skills and knowledge to effectively support students with disabilities, create a welcoming and supportive environment, and demonstrate patience, compassion, and commit to ensure quality and inclusive education for all.

4.1 Implication for educational practice

Based on the shared experiences of a novice PE teachers, several actionable implications can be derived to improve educational practices for teaching students with disabilities.

First, strengthen the support network through collaborative effort among experienced colleagues, administrators, guidance counselor, and parents. This way, novice PE teachers can gain practical strategies and emotional support which will help them overcome challenges encountered.

Second, programs and specialized trainings tailored to inclusive education should be prioritized. Specialized trainings and seminar that cover techniques on how to best modified physical activities tailored to different disabilities, effective communication, and behavior management techniques can better prepare teachers in teaching in inclusive.

Lastly, provide essential materials needed by the novice PE teachers. Make essential materials for learning accessible to supplement the teaching and learning experience of both student and teacher. By addressing this areas, educational institution can better support and lighten the burden experience by the novice PE teachers, which in turn ensure that all students receive quality and inclusive physical education experience.

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Both authors contributed and work hand in hand in writing, supervising, data analysis and encoding.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest about the publication of this paper.

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