

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS HAVING LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE NEW NORMAL EDUCATION

^aJake P. Villanueva M.A.

^bJulie Vie C. Villanueva

^cRyan L. Jacob

^a*James L. Chiongbian National Trade School, Philippines*

^{bc}*Malalag Central Elementary School-SPED Center, Philippines*

^a*jakepvillanueva0922@gmail.com*

^b*julievievillanueva10@gmail.com*

^c*ryanjacob945@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to find out the lived experiences of the parents of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN's). This study employed a qualitative research design specifically a phenomenological approach. The sample of this study was conducted among the thirty (30) parents of the Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN's) of Malalag Central Elementary School-SPED Center. The investigator used Moustakas (1994) modification of the Stevic-Collazzi-Keen method of analysis to analyze the phenomenological data. The findings show that the parents' capacity to teach has been delimited due to several factors and that clearly implies for the need for immediate and strategic intervention. These include learning materials, resources, and assistive technologies. The contact time is also proved to be pivotal however it cannot be denied that the participants have other things to do like attending to their works and jobs that the bear on their shoulders. Moreover, the provision of skills and trainings are needed taking into consideration as well the strengthening of the emotional and psychological stability of the parents. These findings could serve as a basis to create parents and teachers partnership school program to strengthen the learning continuity of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) concerning the new normal education in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Parents, Learners with Special Educational Needs, New Normal

1. Introduction

Special needs of children are considered as individuals who have significant differences according to their peers in terms of their personal, academic, and developmental characteristics for various reasons (Argyropoulos & Chamonikolaou, 2016). When a child with special needs comes to the world or if the child needs special education due to an accident, illness, etc., the life balance of the parents is disturbed (Soubhi, Lima, Aitdaoud & Talbi, 2016). School closures can have a significant impact on the lives of those with special needs. According to Lee (2020), children with autism spectrum disorder and neurocognitive disabilities can become frustrated due to disruptions in their daily routines. Their regular therapy sessions may get interrupted and they are more likely to show problematic behaviors such as irritability, aggression, and social withdrawal (Bertelli, 2020).

It is for these various reasons that the researcher would want to pursue this study. The researchers want to address the problems that will arise on the experiences of parents having children with special educational needs and to provide their needs of learning amidst the time of Covid-19 pandemic as we are experiencing recently. It aims to convey the strong partnership of parents and teachers as we continue to deliver fully the learning modalities towards our clients, our beloved learners with special educational needs. In line with this, through this research we can assess the state of parents having learners with special educational needs of Malalag Central Elementary School-SPED Center. This could serve as a basis to create parents' and teachers' partnership school program to strengthen the learning continuity of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN's) concerning the new normal education in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.1 Problem Statement/Objective

This qualitative study will explore the experiences encountered by the Parents having Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN's) concerning the new normal education in Malalag Central Elementary School SPED Center. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following grand tour and research questions:

1. How do the participants having learners with special educational needs describe their lived experiences in the new normal education?
2. How do the participants assist in the learning of their children?
3. How do the participants make access in the utilization of the learning resources and materials?
4. How do participants spend their time in assisting their children's learning?
5. How would the parents like to be helped with especially the skills and trainings they needed?
6. How do you feel having a child with special educational needs especially in this time of pandemic?
7. What parents' and teachers' partnership school program can be designed to strengthen the learning continuity of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN's) concerning the new normal education in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.2 Literature Review

Parents of children with disabilities also have to deal with complex issues related to the child's education. Either a private education must be sought or an adequate public or general education must be available. Close parental contact with the school system is vital for the child to receive a proper education. Parents must collaborate with teachers for their child's education to be effective. Teachers and parents have to be partners in the education of the child with a disability (Smith, 2002). According to Schalock and Verdugo-Alonso (2002), the criterion of the quality of life of an individual is related to his/ her family by nature. The importance of family increases for individuals with special needs (Seltzer, Floyd, & Hindes, 2004; Nuri, Akcamete, & Direktor, 2019). The participation of parents in the process is the subject of special education services. This process requires arrangements to determine appropriate services taking into account the needs of both the child and the family. For this effect, it is essential to have data related to the characteristics of the family (Cavkaytar, Batu, Kartal, Cetin, & Gullupınar, 2004). The type of disability, the grade, the socio-economic level of the parents, the age, and the support they receive influence their parents' feelings and behaviors (Aysan & Ozben, 2007; Nuri, 2017).

At the end of 2019, the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in Wuhan of China. Because of the strong concealment and contagiousness, rapid spread, and extremely harmfulness, it quickly swept across other regions of the country. Subsequently, 30 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions nationwide successively initiated the first-level responses to a major public health emergency. To protect the lives and health of the people, the China government has organized a variety of forces to carry out prevention and control and adopted various measures to prevent the epidemic from spreading on a large scale. According to a report published by the New York Times, about 760 million people in China were in a state of confinement. Although the number of children affected by the disease is small, and most of the affected children show only mild symptoms (Qiu H., et al, 2020). The disease and the containment measures are likely to negatively impact the mental health & well-being of children with special educational needs. Even though children all over the world are going to be affected, those with disabilities, living in slums, isolation centers, and conflict zones are going to be at a greater risk.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design specifically a phenomenological approach. A qualitative design as described by Creswell (2013) is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Further, Giorgi (2009) has pointed out phenomenological research as a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the investigator will describe the life experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants. It is recalling the experiences of the participants who will be involved in the study and going deeper into their thoughts, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants through lengthy discussion (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2013). It is an appropriate instrument in this study since the investigator needs to envision and explore the actual experiences of the parents having learners with special educational needs.

The study was conducted among the thirty (30) parents having learners with special educational needs of Malalag Central Elementary School-SPED Center. The participants are selected by the investigators based on some criteria. In terms of the parents' participants, the parents of learners having special educational needs under the SPED program are purposively chosen. The process of selecting the participants will be purposive sampling since the investigator decided on the needs to be known and sets out to find parents who can and are willing to provide information by virtue of knowledge and experience. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or set numbers of participants (Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). The gathering of information will be stopped when the saturation of data will be reached. The investigators made an interview guide questionnaire as a means to give clearance on how the participants engage in such activities and seek for validation from the experts in qualitative studies. Five experts composed of two master teachers, one school principal and two public school district supervisors for validity. It can thus be stated that the data collection tool through interview guide questionnaire is valid and reliable.

In this study, collection protocols as suggested by Creswell (2012) will be used which are as follows: obtaining permission, selecting participants, identifying the data, administering, and recording the data. As suggested by Neuman (2006), data gathering is considered reality as a subjective, personal, and socially constructed in relation to the research participants. The investigators used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Collazzi-Keen method of analysis to analyze the phenomenological data, including the investigators. Thematic analysis followed an inductive process, where data content from participants was analyzed to form general themes (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The themes were identified by following the four-phase theme development process set by Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H. and Snelgrove, S., (2016), namely, initialization, construction, rectification, and finalization. The initialization phase includes reading through the transcripts for coding purposes, which helps in reducing the raw data into meaningful units (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The themes identified through the above-mentioned four-phase process were then used for data analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

The results aspired to summarize the collected data by using Stevick-Collazzi-Keen method of analysis Moustakas' (1994) to analyze the phenomenological data. It presents the different themes obtained from the gathered and analyzed data of the in-depth interview conducted by the investigators. Five main themes emerged from the analysis: Learning Assistance; Learning Resources and Materials; Time Management; Teaching Skills Needed; and Challenges in Handling the Learners with Special Educational Needs of parents.

3.1 Theme Findings

Theme 1. Learning Assistance

This tells about the ways in which the participants teach their children. It also details their individual strategy of being able to teach them relative to their individual differences, impairments, and disability. This reveals that in teaching LSEs, it requires extra assistance since they are not able to understand well what is in the module. The desire of the participants is evident in making sure that their children are still learning by doing some other activities that can arouse their learning interest.

Table 1: Emergent Theme on How Parents Assist their Children’s Learning

Emerging Themes	Statements
Learning Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>“On his module, I read it for him and help him how to answer....if we are not answering the module, I let him draw.... or do coloring what is in the module”.</i> Transcript 6, Lines 24-25 ■ <i>“On his module, I let him trace it...I hold his hand and guide him.....”</i> Transcript 11, Lines 26-27 ■ <i>“Sometimes I also teach, but sometimes if it is wrong I told him that we will ask help to his older brother. Sometimes I cannot say what he would do... so we ask help from his elder brother.”</i> Transcript 7, Lines 8-9

The participants also guide and assist their children especially for the learners with Multiple Disabilities who may possess two or more difficulties in one child such as autism, intellectual difficulties which makes teaching even more difficult. Here, we can see now that the parents are asking the help of the elder siblings and other persons that they can ask for help to teach their child with special needs, mirroring that not all of them are as able as the rest of the participants in teaching. According to Aysan and Ozben (2007) and Nuri (2017), the type of disability, the grade, the socio-economic level of the parents, the age and the support they receive influence their parents' feelings and behaviors. It is necessary to investigate the problems and needs of the parents when determining what support will be given to their children (Natale & Lubniewski, 2018).

Theme 2. Learning Resources and Materials

Provides the learning resources/materials that are currently being used by the participants, the available gadgets in their homes, and the other needs by some participants.

Table 2: Emergent Theme on How Parents Make Access in Utilizing Learning Resources

Emerging Themes	Statements
Learning Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>“On his module, I let him trace it...I hold his hand and guide him.....”</i> Transcript 11, Lines 26-27 ■ <i>“Ah the paper ma’am his paper (Braille) ma’am”.</i> Transcript 27, Line 36 ■ <i>“I let him watch TV. He seems to be more focused and can understand better. He will then follow by acting what he sees”.</i> Transcript 21, Lines 67-69 ■ <i>“Gadget, DVD, cellphone because I don’t have cellphone....it’s because that if there’s something that we don’t understand we can search it in Google and YouTube”.</i> Transcript 15, Lines 50-51, 71-72

These statements imply that the participants are exhausting all available learning materials that will help them in teaching and for the learning of their children. However, they also express some other materials that they really need that will aid them in teaching. According to Cumley, Maro and Stenek (2019), assistive technologies help to facilitate communication for students with special educational needs in different situations and environments.

Theme 3. Time Engagement

This refers to the time spent by the participants in teaching their children. This also refers to the availability of the participants when they are able to teach them.

Table 3: Emergent Theme on How Parents Spend their Time with their Children

Emerging Themes	Statements
Time Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>“Ah the paper ma’am his paper (Braille) ma’am”</i>. Transcript 27, Line 36 ■ <i>“At 8 o’clock in the morning, but not always, sometimes in the afternoon, if that is the time that he likes to be taught...there are also times that he likes but we are busy then...but many of us are helping him.”</i> Transcript 5, Lines 20-23 ■ <i>“Sometimes in the morning, at noon depending if I don’t have any work or job to do.”</i> Transcript 16, Line 40

These statements signify that there is really lack of contact time of parents in teaching their children largely due to their availability since that they are doing household chores, works and jobs. They are also affected with the actual swaying of mood of their children which further delimit them from teaching them more freely. They have to adjust to their children’s readiness to learn. According to Lo (2010) parental involvement for children with special educational needs (SEN) is even more crucial due to the fact that parents have a unique understanding of their child’s needs. Parental involvement is an important contributor to the ‘educational processes and experiences of their children’ (Jeynes, 2005), either in school activities or in school-associated activities at home (Smit, Driessen, Sluiter, & Slegers, 2007).

Theme 4. Skills and Trainings Needed

Indicates the skills needed by the participants that will aid them in teaching their children. In addition, it also includes the necessary training to be an instrument in teaching and for the learning of their children’s appropriate needs.

Table 4: Emergent Theme on Participants’ Skills and Trainings Needs

Emerging Themes	Statements
Skills and Trainings Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>“I really like it Teacher to learn the sign language so that I can also teach my child”</i>. Transcript 13, Lines 77-78 ■ <i>It’s the Braille, for me to learn it and how to do and read it so that I can teach it as well to my child”</i>. Transcript 1, Lines 39-40 ■ <i>“I really like that teacher (what to do) because it is difficult for me to handle him especially when he tantrums, of course the teacher knows more how to handle situations like this.”</i> Transcript 11, Lines 62-64

Knowing that it is really hard for them to take the job of teachers in the learning of their children, yet due to this pandemic they have no choice but to adapt to the situation. Even so, they have expressed their needs in the forms of skills and/or trainings that can help them. While

many parents in this study described challenges with the implementation of special education services, others discussed the successful implementation of special education and related services for their child. Within these descriptions of special education services being implemented, parents often described the presence of positive and strong communication with the school personnel. This finding underscores the importance of communication for creating positive partnerships with parents (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Francis et al., 2016; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013), and it has important implications for teacher preparation.

Theme 5. Teaching Challenges and Sentiments

This expresses the day to day challenges of the participants in teaching their children and how they deal with it. This also contains the sentiments, feelings, and other emotional experiences of the participants.

All of these reflect the day to day challenges and diverse experiences of handling learners with special needs. They have put the maximum effort of being able to make sure that the learning of their children continues and despite all the hardships they still subscribed and believed that they are after all, God's Gifts to them, giving all the love in this world they deserve no less. This is important because regardless of its limitations, every human being has the same right to grow, develop, accept, and perform their role in society. According to Mintari and Widyarini (2015), they say that one of the ideas to be owned by parents who have the disabled children is that by seeking social support for emotional reasons. They said that this idea can be used to avoid having negative thinking for parents with disabled children. Furthermore, Faradina (2016) explains that positive parents' acceptance toward disabled children will lead to the positive development.

Table 5: Emergent Theme on Participants' Teaching Challenges and Sentiments

Emerging Themes	Statements
Teaching Challenges and Sentiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="391 1234 1390 1388">■ <i>"Sometimes he gets angry. He punches the walls of our house and throws stones. So I just sit down and reflect on the situation. Sometimes I wait for him to cool down. Sometimes I cry...but sometimes he is the one who comes near me....but despite of it all, I still want him to finish his education even we are poor. We will do our best for him".</i> Transcript 7, Lines 58-59,68-70 <li data-bbox="391 1409 1390 1528">■ <i>"If he is watching TV, I will not force him to study because he will sneeze on me, then he will pretend to cough, play dead, and sometimes after he will defecate he will wipe his feces on me... but I endure him for he is given to me by God."</i> Transcript 29, Lines 13-16, 21-22 <li data-bbox="391 1549 1390 1606">■ <i>"Sometimes in the morning, at noon depending if I don't have any work or job to do."</i> Transcript 16, Line 40 <li data-bbox="391 1627 1390 1745">■ <i>"I told her my daughter, just be patient because you'll never know when God will give you the ability to speak properly and hopefully that your sickness will be gone since she suffers from epileptic seizures....since last December 13, I thought she'll die (crying)."</i> Transcript 13, Lines 15-19

4. Conclusion

Based on the participants' significant statements and the related literature of the study, the investigators have concluded that it can be inferred that although they have their own ways and strategies in teaching their children, they are delimited as to their capacity to teach, they then resorted in asking the other persons' help especially from immediate family members; they have utilized existing learning resources and materials that they have at homes, and also express their needs in this regard as well; the time spent by the parents with the teaching of their children is dependent on their availability usually only at night and/or when they have no work to do or after the day's job which is even coupled with the mood swaying of their children that proved to be very unpredictable and/or erratic most of the time; these implies that they evidently requires assistance in the form of upskilling and the training of the parents to make them more capable in teaching; finally, with their challenges and sentiments are really very heartbreaking, experiencing all of those in a day to day basis really is unthinkable which clearly seeks for extending psychological assistance for them.

This undertaking has highlighted major issues: 1) Strengthening the parents and SPED teachers of Malalag Central Elementary School-SPED Center to intensify and equip them towards learners with special educational needs.; and 2) The results provided valuable implications for ways to formulate parents' and teachers' partnership school program to strengthen the learning continuity of Learners with Special Educational Needs concerning the new normal education in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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