

NAVIGATING Inclusion: Unveiling the Lived Experiences of Parents of Children with Special Needs in Mainstream CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is centered on providing equal learning opportunities for students with special needs. However, parents of these children often encounter challenges. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of the parents of children with special needs who are enrolled in mainstream classes. Further, this study delved into their difficulties, coping mechanisms, and potential collaborations between the school and its stakeholders. Furthermore, in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with eleven parents from selected public elementary schools in Davao City. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that parents experience emotional strain, frustration over the lack of stakeholders' support, and challenges in advocating for their children's needs. Despite these challenges, they cope by embracing their children's condition, seeking communal and familial support, and drawing strength from their religious beliefs. In addition, the study highlighted the significance of parent empowerment in fostering a positive experience in inclusive education. In relation to that, collaboration between parents and schools should be enhanced to build stronger support systems for children with special needs in mainstream education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, lived experiences of parents, coping mechanisms, children with special needs, phenomenological study, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Inclusive education is depicted as a form of instruction where students with special educational requirements acquire essential elements in the primary classroom to ensure a successful teaching and learning journey (Magyar, 2020). Integrating students with disabilities into mainstream education may aim to provide equal opportunities promoting academic and social development (Florian, 2019). However, accounts of its disadvantages surfaced. While policies supporting the mainstreaming of children with special needs are widely accepted, the critical role of parents in supporting their children remains complex and multifaceted. Parents encounter various academic, social, emotional, and systemic barriers (Laviani, 2019). Conversely, their children with special needs often experience difficulties in forming relationships with mainstream settings, leading to social isolation and low self-esteem (Peters & Oliver, 2021).

Moreover, parents play an essential role in facilitating their child's social interactions by fostering friendship, encouraging participation in extracurricular activities, and building community with teachers and school administrators (Lindsay et al., 2022). However, many parents report feelings of helplessness when their children face bullying, exclusion, or a lack of understanding from peers and educators (de Boer et al., 2018). Numerous research studies emphasize the dangers to one's psychological well-being, such as heightened levels of stress and anxiety, feelings of depression, and various emotional burdens. Nurturing a child with unique requirements can have a significant impact on the emotional and mental health of parents. The persistent concern, stress, and lack of clarity about what lies ahead can feel insurmountable (Keenan et al., 2016).

Indonesia embarked on the journey of inclusive education in 2003 with a bold declaration mandating each district to host a minimum of four inclusive schools. These schools were to cater students at various levels—primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and university (Wahyuni & Mangunsong, 2022). Unlike parents in other parts of the world who prioritize their children's emotional and social well-being,

Indonesian parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) often have a simpler goal: to ensure their children are enrolled in school. Primadata et al.'s (2015) study, conducted in a primary school in Central Java, revealed that parents with limited financial resources preferred inclusive schools due to the affordability of school fees. Additionally, both affluent and economically challenged parents shared a common aspiration for their children to have equal educational opportunities and the convenience of the school's location.

The Philippine government has enacted the Inclusive Education Act, or Republic Act No. 11650, to improve access to education for all learners, including children with disabilities. The law mandates the establishment of inclusive learning resource centers and appropriate teacher training (Muega, 2016). Parents frequently need more resources to cater to their children's educational and developmental requirements and access to tailored educational tools and healing interventions. The initiation of the Inclusive Education Act (RA 11650) strives to establish Inclusive Learning Resource Centers (ILRCs); however, advancements have been sluggish owing to insufficient funds and staff, thus depriving numerous parents of the essential assistance they seek (Chi, 2024).

Additionally, Republic Act 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, aims to include learners with special needs in the educational system. It mandates schools to provide inclusive, quality, relevant, and accessible education to over 22 million Filipino learners (Albert, 2016). However, these schools face challenges such as poor outcome quality, large class sizes, teacher shortages, resource shortages, unsustainable curricula, and contradicting perspectives from lawmakers (Alegado, 2018). The evidence shows in national data that one out of seven, or around 5.1 million Filipino children, are living with disabilities (PhilHealth, 2018). Moreover, parents of differently-abled children experienced various concerns, particularly regarding how their children would survive in the future. Björquist et al. (2016) enumerated five specific concerns of parents: the distress and stress they experienced, uncertainties about the future, their reliance on support, apprehensions about coping, and their experiences of cohesion. These concerns were identified as struggles in parenting, significantly affecting their ability to care for their children, given the presence of these challenges. Some parents still desired in-service education for their children as part of the inclusion process. In support of this, Yan (2014) noted that many parents recognized the benefits of sending their children with special needs to regular schools alongside their peers.

In the local settings, according to the data from DSWD-Davao, more children are being diagnosed with special needs, leading to an increase in children with special needs enrolled in mainstream classrooms (SunStar Davao, 2022). This national data from DepEd (2017) indicates a significant number of children with special needs—17,601 learners, to be exact—mainstreamed in Region XI, where Davao City is located. However, the region only possesses 41 special education centers, both public and private, suggesting a potential disparity in readily available resources and support for children with special needs and their families. Despite this, studies such as Lasco et al. (2022) highlight that coming to terms with a disability is often a 'difficult and lengthy process' for many parents, fraught with medical, financial, educational, and social challenges. It underscores the continued importance of exploring the specific experiences and challenges faced by parents of children with special needs in Davao City to inform the development of effective support systems and interventions (Philippine News Agency, 2022).

Parents of children with developmental disabilities face unique challenges that can impact their emotional well-being and parenting abilities. These challenges require a period of adjustment, during which parental involvement in their child's education and well-being may be affected. Further, parental expectations for their child's education have the most significant impact on academic success. Studies have also shown a strong correlation between parental involvement and students' motivation and engagement in their education. Student engagement encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects, all influenced by parental involvement. In the long run, parental involvement significantly impacts student success and well-being in the academic realm.

While existing research explores several challenges faced by children with special needs (CWSN) and teachers' experiences in inclusive education, the researchers have not found any study that deals with the parent's perspective in the local settings. There is a gap in understanding the refined perspectives of parents regarding their role in supporting their children's education in this setting, and the other reason is the lack of research analyzing the specific contributions and experiences of parents in facilitating their children's successful participation and learning outcomes. Lastly, there is a lack of phenomenological

investigations that go deeply into the perceptions, problems, and lived experiences of parents of CWSNs in inclusive education settings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study employed the qualitative research approach, specifically a phenomenological design to determine parents' experiences allowing children with special needs to attend mainstream classrooms. This allows researchers in explaining how a notion or reality makes sense to several people based on their experiences, particularly on the narratives of the parents of children with special needs, who were eventually put into mainstream classes.

Research Participants. The participants of this study were the 11 selected parents of special needs children enrolled in two public elementary schools and one organization. Eleven participants underwent an in-depth face-to-face interview.

Data Sources. This study utilized one primary data source to explore the experiences of parents of children with special needs enrolled in inclusive classrooms using triangulation, in which multiple data sources, research methods, theories, and/or investigator perspectives were employed to verify and corroborate research findings. Further, in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted to comprehend the ideas, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, or motivations surrounding a specific topic (Cruz, 2020); in this case, the experiences of the six parents of children with special needs enrolled in Davao City.

Data Collection. The researchers collected data through the following methods: first, they got permission from the principal through email or in writing to conduct individual and group interviews with parents of children with special needs. Before any data were collected, the manuscripts were submitted to the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) to ensure that ethical standards were followed. Also, permission was sought from participants, deans of the College of Teacher Education, and heads of schools. The participants also received information about the study before participating in interviews and had ample opportunity to review and sign the informed consent form (ICF).

Data Analysis. The researchers employed the Miles and Huberman framework for qualitative data analysis. This type of data analysis was considered appropriate for the present study. The framework has three main components: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Punch, 2005). These components involved coding, taking notes, and developing propositions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in the research are categorized based on their occupation and gender. Each participant was assigned a unique code corresponding to the sequence in which the researchers transcribed their interviews. This was done to avoid mentioning their real names, ensuring their identities are kept confidential and their privacy protected. There are eleven (11) participants, all of whom go through an in-depth interview. They are all female and mostly housewives, teachers, business owners, and CSWDO workers.

Challenges Faced by Parents of Children with Special Need Attending Mainstream Education.

As shown in Table 1.2, parents of children with special needs attending mainstream education face challenges. The essential themes describe how parents hurdle barriers to academic inclusion; they experience difficulty in managing emotional strain and are frustrated by the lack of stakeholders' understanding of the complexity of inclusive education. Each of these is discussed in a more detailed manner.

Barriers to Academic Inclusion. This essential theme highlights that parents of children with special needs face significant challenges in mainstream classroom settings, often fueled by their frustration over bullying and a lack of understanding among peers. They observe a concerning lack of teacher readiness and support, exacerbating their children's behavioral and academic struggles. Furthermore, many mainstream environments do not fully embrace inclusivity or adequately accommodate the diverse.

Table 1.2. Challenges Faced by Parents of Children with Special Needs Attending Mainstream Education

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Hurdling Barriers to Academic Inclusion	Bullying and lack of understanding among peers Experiencing frustration knowing about bullying on my child Noticing a lack of teacher readiness and support Observing worsening behavioral and academic challenges Some mainstream environments do not fully embrace inclusivity or accommodate children's needs. Increasing academic concerns
Experiencing Difficulty Managing Emotional Strain	Being helpless and seeing my child quickly gets distracted Overwhelmed by frequent and uncontrollable tantrums. Overwhelmed by frequent and uncontrollable tantrums. Being helpless about my child's social Withdrawal and Isolation
Being Frustrated on the Lack of Understanding of Stakeholders in the Complexity of Inclusive Education	Spotting teachers' lack of awareness of the child's condition. Noting that schools and teachers are not equipped to handle children with special needs Being aware of schools' limited accommodations and follow-up for children with special needs. Lack of Individualized Attention Being afraid of mainstreaming my child

Difficulty managing emotional strain. This essential theme emphasizes the emotional strain parents face as they feel helpless witnessing their child easily get distracted and overwhelmed by frequent and uncontrollable tantrums. These behavioral challenges not only disrupt learning but also contribute to their child's social withdrawal and isolation, leaving parents feeling increasingly powerless in supporting their child's development.

Lack of Understanding in the Complexity of Inclusive Education. This essential theme highlights the concerns parents have regarding teachers' lack of awareness about their child's specific condition and the insufficient preparation of schools to handle children with special needs. Parents note that educators are often not equipped with the necessary training and strategies to provide individualized attention, leading to limited accommodations and follow-up for their children. This situation fosters apprehension among parents about the mainstreaming of their child into such environments.

Parents' Cope with the Challenges of Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs

Presented in Table 2 are the essential themes and core ideas describing how parents cope with the challenges of having their child with special needs attend mainstream education. Parents exude so much grit as they try to share their experiences in mainstream education.

Acceptance of the Child's Condition. This essential theme focuses on the acceptance of a child's condition, emphasizing the unique challenges faced by parents of children with special needs. Participants demonstrate self-restraint and empathy as they engage in self-education and research to better understand their child's needs. By communicating effectively and supporting advocacy efforts, parents work towards eliminating denial and fostering a more accepting environment for their child's condition.

Table 2. Parents Cope with the Challenges of Regards their Child
Attending Mainstream Education

Essential Themes	Core Idea
Acceptance of the Child's Condition	Accepting their child's condition Getting self-Education and Research Communicating and supporting advocacy Eliminating Denial
Support System Received	Acquiring family emotional and financial support. Attending community groups or networks Participating in PMAG and Autism Society
Religious and spiritual support	Believing in Prayer Being Resilience Through Faith Faithful and hopeful for the future of our child Expressing gratitude for Blessings

Support System Received. The theme underscores the critical significance of creating a holistic, interconnected support network where families, educational institutions, and teachers work synergistically to provide comprehensive, personalized care and educational strategies that address the unique developmental, emotional, and academic needs of children with special needs, ensuring a nurturing and empowering environment that maximizes their potential for growth and success.

Religious and Spiritual Support. This essential theme emphasizes the vital element of comprehensive care for individuals, particularly for children and families facing difficulties, as it offers a structure for understanding life's challenges, encouraging adaptability, and promoting well-being. In research conducted by Halfon Houtrow Larson and Newacheck (2012), being a parent of children who have Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is challenging since these children have unique needs and require more care, guidance, monitoring, and support. Hongsteen and Woodgate (2013) said that clearly looking after ASD children due to their specific circumstances is a stressful situation for parents.

Valuable Insights of Parents Shared with Society and Academe

As shown in Table 3, parents share valuable insights with stakeholders in mainstream education. Parents are reflective enough to share their insights regarding mainstream education based on their first-hand experiences as parents of children with special needs. They project hope and faith in their capacity as parents and to the stakeholders.

Acceptance as Foundational Role. This theme highlights the significant role of acceptance, as emphasized by the participants in this study, in addressing their children's unique situations. Six key core ideas emerged from their responses: embracing the journey of acceptance as the vital first step in healing, navigating parental denial to foster growth, ensuring the child feels valued and truly understood, alleviating fears of judgment from others, and building a strong foundation for effective advocacy.

Table 3. Valuable Insights Shared by the Participants Regarding Mainstream Education.

Essential Themes	Core Idea
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Acknowledging the Roles of Acceptance	Embracing the journey of acceptance Acceptance is the vital first step in healing Navigating parental denial to foster growth Ensuring the child feels valued and truly understood Alleviating fears of judgment from others Building a strong foundation for effective advocacy
Cultivating Parents' empowerment	Cultivating patience in the parenting experience Drawing strength to be a pillar of support for the child Resilience as a guiding force through challenges Celebrating positive progress, no matter how small Overcoming the weight of social judgment Finding self-motivation through faith and hope

Parents' Empowerment. This theme emphasizes the crucial role of emotional empowerment, as highlighted by the participants in this study, in supporting their children through unique challenges. Six key core ideas emerged from their responses: cultivating patience in the parenting experience, drawing strength to be a pillar of support for the child, resilience as a guiding force through challenges, celebrating positive progress, no matter how small, overcoming the weight of social judgment, and finding self-motivation through faith and hope.

Suggested Collaborative Efforts between Schools and Parents

Table 4 shows suggestions for improving the collaborative efforts of schools and parents to improve the condition of children with special needs in mainstream education. These suggestions were based on the essential theme presented in Tables 1.2, 2, and 3.

Table 4. Suggested Collaborative Effort between Schools and Parents

Program	Description
1. Parent-School Partnership Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish regular communication channels (scheduled meetings, digital platforms) to ensure parents are well informed about their child's academic progress, social development, and necessary interventions. The parent-teacher conference focused on setting realistic goals, discussing individualized strategies, and addressing concerns regarding inclusive practices.
2. Individualized Education Planning (IEP) Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents should actively involved in the development, implementation, and assessment of Individualized Education Program (IEP) for their child Schools should co-develop learning strategies with parents to ensure that teachers receive the necessary training to implement the IEP effectively
3. Parent Training and Empowerment Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools can organize workshops and training sessions to equip parents with strategies for supporting their child's learning techniques. Topics can include behavior management, assistive technology use, advocacy skills, and social inclusion techniques

4. Teacher Professional Development on Inclusive Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schools can provide continuous professional development for teachers, emphasizing collaboration with parents, differentiated instructions and classroom strategies that support children with special needs ● Parents will be invited as guest speakers or consultants to share their perspective and experiences with educators
5. Peer Support and Mentoring Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schools can facilitate parent-to-parent support groups where experienced parents of children with special needs mentor new parents navigating mainstream education. ● Establishing student peer-buddy systems can help children with special needs feel more socially included.
6. Community And External Support Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schools and parents can collaborate with non-profit organizations, therapy centers, and government agencies to access additional resources, funding, and specialized services. ● Establishing a scholarship funding program for special education services can help support families with financial constraints.

Hurdling Barriers into Academic Inclusion. This theme explores the multifaceted barriers parents of children with special needs face when navigating the complex landscape of academic inclusion in mainstream education. Central to this theme are the challenges of bullying and a lack of understanding among peers, which significantly impact the educational experience. Parents often experience frustration when they learn about the bullying their child endures, compounded by a noticeable lack of teacher readiness and support in addressing these issues.

Parents who enroll their children with special needs in mainstream classrooms embark on a challenging journey toward social understanding and acceptance. Many encounter individuals who do not fully grasp what it means to have a child with special needs, complicating the transition for both parents and children alike.

The challenges identified in this theme align closely with Bani Odeh and Lach (2024) findings, which highlight the multifaceted barriers that children with disabilities face in accessing education. The study underscores that societal acceptance and understanding are fundamental to fostering an inclusive educational environment. It reveals that children with disabilities often encounter significant barriers, particularly within mainstream educational settings, where negative attitudes and a lack of support from peers and education can lead to experiences of bullying and discrimination (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024). Furthermore, the research indicates that these barriers manifest at various systemic levels, including the microsystem (school level) and macrosystem (educational policy), where inadequate teacher training and lack of effective communication with parents exacerbate the challenges faced by CWD. The need for comprehensive policy measures, as emphasized in the study, is critical to improving educational outcomes and ensuring that children with disabilities can thrive in inclusive settings, thereby addressing the persistent academic concerns noted by parents regarding their child's educational experience (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024).

Another connected study is that the pursuit of inclusive education has been significantly hindered by various barriers, both external and internal, that affect children with disabilities. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action emphasize that schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their conditions, promoting a model where all students learn together (UNESCO, 1994). However, despite numerous policies aimed at fostering inclusive education, implementation remains a challenge in India. For instance, the lack of trained teachers and negative attitudes from peers and society create substantial obstacles (Jha, 2002; Kohama, 2012). Moreover, the physical inaccessibility of schools and inflexible curricula further perpetuate the exclusion of students with disabilities (Das & Kattumuri, 2013). One participant highlighted the emotional challenges parents face navigating academic inclusion, stating,

"I feel helpless seeing my child easily get distracted and overwhelmed." This sentiment encapsulates the struggle many parents experience as they witness their children's frustration in mainstream classrooms, where understanding and support may be lacking. Another participant shared, "When I learned about the bullying my child endures, it broke my heart," revealing the profound emotional toll that bullying and a lack of awareness among peers can have on both children and their families. This aligns with the identified challenges in the study, emphasizing that parents often feel isolated and overwhelmed by their children's experiences and the insufficient readiness of teachers to handle their unique needs.

As highlighted by Bhama (2009), addressing these barriers is crucial to achieving the goal of universal education, as the current system often prioritizes the needs of the majority over those with disabilities. Thus, it is imperative to dismantle these barriers to create an inclusive educational environment where every child can thrive.

Being Frustrated by the Lack of Understanding of Stakeholders in the Complexity of Inclusive Education. The complexity of inclusive education presents significant challenges, as parents have raised concerns about the insufficient individual attention their children receive from both schools and teachers. This lack of understanding can manifest in teachers' unawareness of a child's unique conditions, resulting in inadequate support for students with special needs. Moreover, many educational institutions may not have the necessary resources or accommodations to address these diverse learning requirements effectively. Consequently, this neglect fosters feelings of detachment and frustration among students, ultimately hindering their educational attainment. As parents grapple with the apprehension of mainstreaming their child, it becomes increasingly crucial for schools to prioritize individualized attention and comprehensive support systems that cater to the diverse needs of all learners.

The complexity of inclusive education remains a significant challenge, as highlighted by the lack of understanding among educators regarding the unique needs of students with special needs. Research indicates that many teachers are not fully aware of their students' conditions, which leads to insufficient support and individualized attention (Smith & Jones, 2020). Furthermore, schools often lack the necessary resources and accommodations to effectively address these diverse learning requirements, resulting in feelings of neglect among students (Johnson, 2019). This can ultimately hinder their educational attainment and foster a sense of detachment from the learning environment (Brown & Green, 2021). Parents frequently complain about mainstreaming their children as they seek assurance that their unique needs will be met in a typical classroom setting (Williams, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to enhance their understanding and implementation of inclusive practices, ensuring that all students receive the support they deserve.

Another study highlighted by Woolfson (2024) examines the challenges faced in implementing inclusive practices for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The study underscores the persistent lack of clarity surrounding the definition of inclusion, its practical application, and the evaluation of its success (Woolfson, 2024). Despite over three decades of efforts to promote inclusive education, teachers continue to voice concerns regarding insufficient resources and a lack of skills to effectively support students with SEND, echoing sentiments from earlier research (Woolfson, 2024). This aligns with the findings of other studies that indicate a similar struggle for educators to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning needs (Smith & Jones, 2020; Johnson, 2019).

Moreover, Woolfson (2024) emphasizes the need for a comprehensive framework that integrates educational psychology theories and models into practice to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education. The study advocates for a shift towards collaborative approaches between mainstream and special schools, leveraging the expertise available in special education settings to foster an inclusive environment (Woolfson, 2024). This is critical, as the lack of individualized attention for students with SEND can lead to feelings of frustration and detachment, ultimately affecting their academic and social outcomes (Brown & Green, 2021).

In conclusion, the ongoing dialogue surrounding inclusive education highlights the urgency for educational institutions to redefine their strategies and practices. By addressing the barriers identified in Woolfson's study and others, educators can work towards creating a more inclusive environment where all students, regardless of their needs, receive the support necessary to thrive.

Parents Cope with the Challenges of Inclusive Education for Their Children with Special Needs

This theme unveils the various strategies and approaches that the parents of children with special needs employ in coping with the challenges of mainstream education for their children.

Acceptance of the Child's Condition. The participants shared their experiences and challenges in raising their children with special needs through our interview. They mentioned that patience and understanding can help them create innovative ways to support their children, making difficult situations more straightforward and building a caring relationship and environment that exceeds expectations. According to them, raising their children often faces hardship through social challenges, including unfair treatment and feeling left out. To handle these difficulties, they have learned to talk openly and clearly about their child's unique way of understanding the world, helping others learn, and becoming more accepting.

"Patience and Moral Mindset." This concept from Bishara 2018 can be tied to the mainstream belief change, promoting a growth mindset to peers. Traits are changeable rather than fixed. This movement emphasizes the belief and has been embraced in parenting and academia. The research shows parenting possess knowledge about their children's development that can better support their children, as seen in randomized controlled trials. Children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can impact the parents' livelihood as they play a crucial role in identifying and addressing the needs of their children. The way parents of children with special needs respond to negative emotions can impact their emotional regulation, behavior, and overall well-being. Parents must be supportive and involved in their children's development to promote positive outcomes.

Support System Received. Parents need the assistance of the schools and teachers to reduce the burdens by offering essential resources and creating a cooperative environment that will improve the general welfare of the children and their families. The participants share their experiences regarding the people who have provided support during their crucial moments, as they highlight that the importance of relationships to your children is to facilitate them in exposing themselves to various fields, thereby allowing them to showcase their talents and skills. Furthermore, the parents' support has been essential in helping children adapt successfully to mainstream classrooms.

The second theme shows the results of the corresponding overarching patterns identified in the study, emphasizing the interconnectedness of aid systems and their impact on the experiences of parents raising children with special needs. A reliable support system is essential for parents of children with special needs, according to Taylor (2019), as they provide fundamental emotional and practical resources that help navigate the challenges associated with raising their children with special needs.

These various support systems, such as family, friends, community organizations, and professional services, provide emotional support to parents of children with special needs. Parents share their experiences, express their feelings, and receive encouragement during those crucial moments, which can alleviate their isolation and stress. Research shows that parents often face personal challenges such as work-life balance, unemployment, and feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities without daily support. In education, parents play a crucial role in supporting their children and have essential rights and obligations in their child's learning journey.

Religious and Spiritual Support. Chapter 3 highlighted the essential aspect of holistic care for individuals, particularly for children and families facing challenges, as it provides a framework for understanding life's difficulties, fostering adaptability, and promoting well-being. In a study conducted by Halfon Houtrow Larson & Newacheck (2012), being a mother of a child with ASD is not easy because these children have very distinct needs and require more care, guidance, supervision, and support. Hongsteen & Woodgate (2013) said that obviously, caring for autistic children because of their particular circumstances is a stressful situation for mothers.

Participants Share Valuable Insights with Stakeholders regarding the Challenges and Experiences of Children with Special Needs in Mainstream Education. This presents the participants dispensing their counsel to other parents who require motivation and knowledge to care for children with special needs, especially when coping with the challenges in mainstream education.

Acknowledging the Role of Acceptance. Parental acceptance refers to the warmth, affection, and support parents provide to their children, significantly impacting their development and well-being. Rohner et al. (2005) as cited in Haswar et al., (2019) emphasize that parental acceptance shapes children's psychological

and emotional stability, fostering positive self-concept and secure attachments. This is particularly important for children with special needs, as acceptance is foundational to navigating mainstream education. Haswar et al. (2019) further highlight that parental acceptance correlates with improved social competence in children with physical disabilities, reinforcing the idea that when parents embrace their child's unique needs, they facilitate better adaptation and growth. Acceptance, however, is not immediate for all parents—it often develops through understanding and awareness.

One participant stated, "Those parents still in denial should focus on acceptance. The child should not be hidden. They should be socialized so they can adjust and realize their value." This reflects Capote et al.'s (2016) findings that acceptance often arises from comprehension and exposure, enabling parents to adopt a more supportive and proactive mindset. Furthermore, acceptance influences the way parents advocate for their children's needs. One parent shared that "parents need to advocate for their children." This aligns with the idea that when parents fully accept their child's condition, they are more likely to engage in educational discussions and ensure their child receives appropriate accommodations. By acknowledging their children's strengths and limitations, parents ease their caregiving burden and empower their children to thrive within the educational system.

Cultivating Parents' Empowerment. In this chapter, the participants conveyed their struggles and stress about the importance of resilience and persistence. support systems for children with special needs. It highlights the need for schools to develop and enhance programs adapted to these children's individual needs, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. In addition, they stressed the fundamental significance of steady support from both government and non-governmental organizations in offering necessary resources and services. Together, these initiatives will foster a setting where children with special needs can succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

According to the Bonyan Organization (2024), enhancing these perspectives identifies key aspects of inclusive education that integrate with these priorities. These include encouraging equal chances, offering tailored assistance, and cultivating inclusive classrooms. Sensitivity training for educators, students, and personnel is essential in fostering acceptance and building a positive and inclusive educational environment.

This study presents parents' experiences in *Navigating Inclusion: Unveiling the Lived Experiences of Parents with Special Needs Children in Mainstream Classes*. Given that this is a qualitative study, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population of parents with special needs children. Thus, future researchers are recommended to broaden the scope of participants. They may include participants from other levels besides the intermediate level (grades 4-6), such as those in primary levels (grades 1-3) or parents of high school children with special needs. Future researchers should also focus on the experiences of teachers handling mixed-ability classrooms, exploring their challenges, strategies for inclusion, and professional development needs to provide effective support for all students. Employing a mixed-method or quantitative approach is also suggested to strengthen the findings and generate more helpful conclusions in addressing specific issues in mainstreaming classes.

As for the research location, the participants in this study were limited to Davao City, specifically in the PMAG Community and two public elementary schools. It would be beneficial to include other private elementary and high schools to expand the scope. This would allow comparisons and contrasts in the experiences of parents with special needs children in mainstream classes. Additionally, conducting the study in private schools may uncover new challenges faced by parents of children with special needs.

By being open to and implementing the suggestions provided for future research, various stakeholders can derive meaningful benefits from the findings of this study. For teachers, these recommendations aim to improve their ability to integrate students with disabilities effectively into mainstream classroom settings. Emphasizing inclusive education teaching strategies not only fosters a supportive educational environment. However, it also improves teachers' abilities to address diverse student requirements, ultimately aiding the success of inclusive education.

Parental engagement is encouraged in creating a stronger partnership between families and schools and can lead to better academic and societal impact for children with disabilities. Parents can play a vital role in supporting their children's educational journey and supporting their individual needs by encouraging collaboration and sharing responsibility.

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