

Capacity Development Strategy For Special Education Teachers (SPET) In The Division Of Camarines Norte ¹⁹⁴

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Abstract

Teachers (SPETs) by exploring respondents' profiles, training impact, challenges, solutions, and proposed interventions. SPETs from both public and private schools, with a minimum of 3 years of service, were examined using a researcher-made questionnaire and interviews. Descriptive Statistics and Thematic Coding were employed for quantitative and qualitative data analysis, respectively. The study encompassed 13 female Special Education Teachers in Camarines Norte, revealing a diverse profile across age, marital status, education, and teaching experience. Training attendance was highest in Special Needs Education, significantly impacting teaching proficiency. Despite challenges like alignment issues, budget constraints, and communication challenges, respondents addressed them through personal investment, skills enhancement, parental collaboration, strategic budget allocation, and seeking external support. The proposed strategy involves a Division-wide Seminar Training Workshop focused on handling students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ADHD. Furthermore, the study recommends that tailored interventions may be included for Special Education Teachers (SPETs) to support their diverse needs, with specialized capacity development for SPED classes. Targeted training programs for handling autistic and ADHD learners may also be realized to address identified challenges. Advocacy for improved funding aligned with DepEd Order No. 042, s.2021, and exploring innovative training approaches, like mobile app-based training for ASD, can also be conducted to enhance SPETs' capabilities. A swift implementation of a budget-prioritized Division-wide Seminar Training Workshop for SPETs, emphasizing inclusive education and external partnerships, may be applied for continuous development and effective education in Camarines Norte.

Keywords: Inclusive Education Training; Special Education Professional Development; Teacher Competence Enhancement

1. Introduction

In the pursuit of effective inclusive education, teachers and administrators play a crucial role, requiring the cultivation of awareness and positive attitudes (Allam & Martin, 2021). Special programs are designed for students facing developmental delays in various aspects, necessitating adaptations in traditional classroom settings. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2010) defines capacity development as acquiring global progress and sustainability. Within the Philippines, capacity development is vital for teachers, particularly in special education, ensuring the competitiveness and effectiveness of the education system. However, challenges exist, with Special Education teachers lacking strategies due to insufficient specialized training, hindering their ability to handle learners with disabilities (Allam & Martin, 2021).

The Department of Education emphasizes the importance of capacity development, outlined in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). The PPST serves as a guiding framework for learning and development initiatives for teachers, ensuring their competence to implement the K-12 Program effectively. However, there appears to be a gap between the existing capacity development programs and the practical demands of Special Education Teachers (SPETs). This discrepancy arises from factors such as generalized training programs not aligning with classroom needs, theoretical knowledge emphasis without practical applications, and limited feedback and support mechanisms due to budget constraints.

As the education sector strives for inclusivity, the research aims to comprehensively describe the capacity development strategy employed by the Division of Camarines Norte for public school SPETs and their impact. It seeks to formulate a policy guide for planning, implementing, and evaluating capacity development strategy for SPETs. Given the integral role of SPETs in the Department of Education, accessible and effective capacity lays the foundation for the further development and enhancement of the special education curriculum within the division.

2. Methods

A Mixed-Methods research approach was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, utilizing quantitative methods for establishing respondent profiles and thematic analysis to explore the benefits, challenges, and solutions related to training strategy for capacity development among Special Education Teachers (SPET) in the Division of Camarines Norte. The study involved nine public and private schools within the Division, using purposive sampling to select special education teachers with a minimum of three years of experience.

The research process included obtaining official permission, ensuring ethical standards, and assessing Special Education teachers' profiles through questionnaires and interviews. Additionally, the study employed a well-organized approach, including purposive sampling, Focus Group Discussions, and systematic data analysis, to comprehensively explore capacity development experiences in diverse school settings and provide a foundation for informed recommendations and potential interventions. The research instruments used were structured survey questionnaires and interview guides, facilitating the collection of comprehensive data covering profiles, challenges, solutions, and training benefits through Focus Group Discussions. Descriptive statistics, specifically the Frequency Count and Percentage Technique, were applied to analyze participants' profiles, offering insights into the relative frequency of survey responses. Thematic analysis was also employed to uncover patterns and themes in qualitative data.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

The study encompassed 13 female Special Education Teachers in Camarines Norte, revealing a diverse profile across age, marital status, education, and teaching experience. As to age, the lowest representation is observed in the 20-29 age range, accounting for one respondent (7.69%), while the highest representation is found in the 60 and above age group, encompassing four respondents (30.77%). Notably, the age distribution indicates a considerable concentration in the 60 and above age group, suggesting a potential demographic shift or longevity in Special Education Teaching careers. These findings align with the study of Kaiseroglou (2023) which concluded that there is a need for targeted strategies to support and retain experienced educators.

As to sex, 13 or 100% of the respondents were female. The exclusive female representation aligns with broader trends in the teaching profession. These findings correspond with the study of Fores (2018), which suggested that understanding the impact of gender on teaching dynamics can offer valuable insights for enhancing the professional capacities of Special Education Teachers. As to civil status, the lowest occurrence is in the widowed category, with one respondent (7.70%), while the highest representation is observed among the married respondents, constituting ten individuals (76.92%). The prevalence of married individuals among the respondents highlights the need for a distinct approach to accommodate the professional responsibilities intertwined with marital commitments. This data is similar to the conclusion made by Omeje (2018) that there is a need for a more inclusive and supportive work environment in the field of Special Education. As to highest educational attainment, the lowest occurrence is represented by one respondent (7.70%) possessing a

Doctorate Degree, while the highest representation is observed among those with a Master's Degree, totaling five individuals (38.46%). The educational attainment profile indicates a vigorous presence of Master's Degree holders, emphasizing a common academic trajectory among the participants. Omeje (2018) also suggested exploring opportunities for continuing education and specialized training to further enhance the respondents' expertise and contribute to their continuous professional development.

As to number of years in teaching, the lowest representation is one respondent (7.70%) with 6-10 years of experience, and the highest representation is found among six respondents (46.15%) with 21 years or more of teaching experience. The variation in teaching experience underscores a diverse range of expertise, with a notable cluster in the 21 years or more category, indicating the presence of seasoned educators. Kaiseroglou et al.'s (2023) study aligns with the notion of introducing mentorship programs to harness experienced educators' wealth of knowledge, aiming to support and enhance the professional development of those with fewer years of teaching experience. As to relevant training, the lowest attendance is observed in Assistive Technology, with five respondents (38.46%), while the highest attendance is recorded in Special Needs Education, with all 13 respondents (100%) having attended this training. The lower attendance in Assistive Technology training signals a specific area for improvement in capacity development initiatives. Kaiseroglou et al.'s (2023) research delving into the effectiveness of training Assistive Technology provides insights that may inform the development of targeted interventions to address identified gaps and enhance overall professional competencies among Special Education Teachers.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

INDICATORS	F	%
AGE		
20-29	1	7.69
30-39	2	15.38
40-49	3	23.08
50-59	3	23.08
60 and above	4	30.77
Total	13	100
SEX		
Male		
Female	13	100
Non-binary/ Prefer not to say		
Total	13	100
CIVIL STATUS		
Single	2	15.38
Married	10	76.92
Widowed	1	7.70
Separated/ Divorced		
Total	13	100
HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
High School Graduate		
Bachelor's Degree	2	15.38
Master's Degree	5	38.46
Doctorate Degree	1	7.70
Others:		
With units in MAEd/ SPED	2	15.38
MAEd-SPED Complete Academic Requirements	1	7.70
With units in MA	2	15.38
Total	13	100
NUMBER OF YEARS IN TEACHING		
1-5 years	2	15.38
6-10 years	1	7.70
11-15 years	4	30.77
16-20 years		
21 years and above	6	46.15
Total	13	100
RELEVANT TRAININGS		
Inclusive Education	12	92.30
Special Needs Education	13	100
Classroom Management Techniques	10	76.92
Behavior Modification Strategies	6	46.15
Assistive Technology	5	38.46
Differentiated Instruction	7	53.84
Total	13	100

3.2 Benefits of Training to the Respondents

The trainings significantly enhanced the respondents' teaching proficiency, Filipino Sign Language skills, confidence, acquisition of SPED methodologies, and overall Special Education teaching performance. This means that respondents experienced significant improvements in teaching proficiency for instructing special students, enhancing class delivery, classroom management, and specialized strategies for autistic students, alongside the development of proficiency in Filipino Sign Language (FSL), fostering inclusivity. Despite lacking formal SPED degrees, the acquisition of SPED methodologies showcased their ability to implement effective teaching strategies, resulting in a demonstrable enhancement in overall SPED teaching performance. Frantz (2019) highlights collaborative knowledge sharing and support in health profession education, leading to personal and professional growth and emphasizing the growing need for capacity development within faculty development programs for sustained effectiveness.

Table 2. Benefits of Training to the Respondents

Benefits Given by the Training to the Respondents in their Capacity Development	Themes
Increased knowledge, skill sharing	Enhanced Teaching Proficiency
Developed effective classroom management	
Confidently handled autistic students	
Found inspiration and increased confidence in real-life settings	
Explored new teaching strategies, broadening perspectives	
Applied effective SPED techniques	Growth in Filipino Sign Language (FSL) and Confidence
Enhanced student understanding, participation	
Conducted workshops and seminars	
Boosted Abilities in FSL	
Developed Sensitivity	
Improved Sign Language Skills	SPED Methodologies Acquired
Learned SPED skills (not SPED majors)	
Applying More Effective Classroom Management Techniques	
SPED Methodologies Acquired	
Gained from Grasp of SPED Teaching	
Students Become More Participative and Active	Elevated SPED Teaching Performance
Improved Communication to Students with Different Impairments	
Students Gain More Understanding in Class Instructions	
Improved Sign Language Vocabulary	
Enhanced SPED Teaching Performance	

3.3 Challenges Encountered by the Respondents in Their Capacity Development

The challenges encountered by the respondents in their capacity development include Lack of Special Education Alignment and Repetitive Content, Budgetary Challenges, Teacher Flexibility and Time Constraints, Misalignment with Student Needs, and Communication Challenges with Parents. This means that respondents encounter challenges with non-specialized and repetitive training content, impaired by limited budgetary support. The demand for teacher flexibility and time constraints in preparing materials further add to the difficulties. Additionally, misalignment with student needs and communication issues with parents during seminars compound the overall hurdles in their capacity development. These findings are similar to the

study of Balading et al. (2022) that there are significant challenges encountered by SPED educators, particularly the lack of government support both in terms of physical resources and in terms of financial compensation.

Table 3. Challenges Encountered by the Respondents in their Capacity Development

Challenges Encountered by the Respondents in their Capacity Development	Themes
Trainings not specifically designed for Special Needs Education (SNED). Repetition of training content. Limited funding support for specialized training. Exhaustion and fatigue due to the demands of training sessions. Teachers experiencing depression. Crowded training sessions. Lack of SPED teachers contributing to an increased workload. Limited trainings on autism and ADHD despite overwhelming enrollees with these conditions. Challenges in teacher collaboration. Difficulty in finding a one-size-fits-all strategy for students with special needs. Limited focus on dealing with parents. Coping difficulties among community members dealing with special children. Parents feeling hopeless, answering modules for their children. Attendance in seminars not aligned with the needs of students handled. Teachers being transferred out due to localization.	Lack of Special Education Alignment and Repetitive Content Budgetary Challenges Teacher Flexibility and Time Constraints Misalignment with Student Needs Communication Challenges with Parents

3.4 Solutions to Address the Challenges

The solutions done by the participants to address the said challenges include Personal Investment in Professional Development, Commitment to Skills Enhancement, Parental Collaboration and Communication, Strategic Budget Allocation, and External Support and Collaborative Approach. This means that teachers are dedicated to professional development, attending external training, and enhancing instructional approaches. They prioritize collaboration with parents, manage finances strategically, and seek support from diverse stakeholders to address challenges in their roles as educators of special learners. This collaborative approach benefits both teachers and students. This is aligned with Dodd's (2020) research, which explores the effectiveness of co-teaching models and strategies between general and special education teachers, particularly emphasizing classroom collaboration, this study identifies preferred co-teaching models and underscores the necessity for additional training to optimize these strategies concerning specific disabilities.

Table 4. Solutions to Address the Challenges

Solutions to Address the Challenges	Themes
Participates in skills and game-based trainings	Personal Investment in Professional Development
Personally searches for additional trainings outside school	
Implements gradual classroom management techniques	
Seeks knowledge and skills growth through graduate education	
Proper parent orientation, review, and practice	Commitment to Skills Enhancement
Balances and properly budgets funds	
Connects with other experts such as psychologists	
Connects with parents in every meeting	Parental Collaboration and Communication
Collaborates with LGU and other NGOs	
Balances and properly budgets funds	Strategic Budget Allocation
Collaborates with LGU and other NGOs	
Connects with co-teachers for collaboration	External Support and Collaborative Approach
Students boost self-confidence in class and learn entrepreneurial skills	
Develops socialization skills	
Students become more active in class	
Develops better writing skills	
Eliminates discrimination in teaching special students	
Enables sharing and collaboration among teachers	
Teachers are happier and more confident, becoming more effective educators	

3.5 Capacity Building Strategy to Improve the SPETs

To enhance the ongoing development of Special Education Teachers (SPETs), an intervention entails implementing a Division-wide Seminar Training Workshop focused on handling students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ADHD in the Division of Camarines Norte. The said training serves as a strategic and targeted intervention to address the scarcity of specialized training for Special Education Teachers (SPETs) in the Division of Camarines Norte, aiming to optimize resources and foster a conducive learning environment. This aligns with the call of Unesco that advocates for a global initiative aimed at enhancing the capacity of teachers, particularly those engaged in inclusive education.

4. Conclusions

Based on the obtained results, the researcher formulated the following conclusions.

1. The field of Special Education Teaching, as represented by these respondents, is predominantly characterized by experienced and female professionals, most of whom hold Master's Degrees. The concentration in the 60 and above age group underscores the need for targeted strategies to support and retain experienced educators. The prevalence of marital status among respondents accentuates the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by married Special Education Teachers. The lower attendance in Assistive Technology training signals a specific area for improvement in capacity development initiatives.

2. The teachers significantly improved their teaching proficiency, including class delivery, classroom management, and specialized strategies for autistic students, while gaining proficiency in Filipino

Sign Language, fostering a more inclusive classroom. Despite lacking formal SPED degrees, the acquisition of SPED methodologies showcased their ability to implement effective teaching strategies, resulting in a demonstrable enhancement in overall SPED teaching performance.

3. The teachers encounter challenges with non-specialized and repetitive training content, impaired by limited budgetary support. The demand for teacher flexibility and time constraints in preparing materials further adds to the difficulties. Additionally, misalignment with student needs and communication issues with parents during seminars compound the overall hurdles in their capacity development.

4. The teachers actively invest in their personal professional development through external trainings, emphasizing a commitment to enhancing instructional approaches for both self and students. Prioritizing meaningful conversations with parents fosters collaboration, while strategic financial management ensures resources are directed to essential student needs. Seeking external support reflects a collaborative approach to address challenges in their roles as educators of special learners.

5. The proposed Division-wide Seminar Training Workshop on Handling Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) aims to address a critical gap in the current training landscape for Special Education Teachers (SPETs) in Camarines Norte. This division-wide approach not only tackles issues related to crowded regional trainings but also underscores the importance of tailored professional development, optimizing budget resources, fostering a conducive learning environment, and encouraging collaboration among SPETs.

5. Recommendations

The conclusions lead to the following proposed recommendations:

1. Tailored interventions may be implemented to acknowledge and accommodate the diverse characteristics and requirements of Special Education Teachers. This approach can foster a supportive environment conducive to their sustained professional growth.
2. Capacity development and training initiatives may be implemented not only for mainstream classes but particularly for special education classes. Given the intricate and demanding nature of SPED classes, specialized efforts in capacity building and training aligned with special needs education may be highly recommended for both public and private schools. This recommendation aims to enhance the effectiveness of educators in addressing the unique challenges presented in special education settings.
3. To address the identified challenges faced by Special Education Teachers (SPETs) in Camarines Norte, the implementation of targeted training programs focused on special needs education, particularly in handling autistic and ADHD learners, may be considered. This approach considers the prevalence of these disabilities among enrolled students. Advocating for improved funding mechanisms aligned with DepEd Order No. 042, s.2021, can ensure timely and sufficient financial support for SPED schools. Exploring innovative training approaches, such as mobile app-based training for ASD, may enhance the overall capacity of SPETs to meet the diverse needs of special learners.
4. Institutional support may be provided for teachers dedicated to the development of special learners, recognizing and encouraging their proactive efforts in seeking external training.
5. Swiftly implementing a budget-prioritized Division-wide Seminar Training Workshop for Special Education Teachers (SPETs) in Camarines Norte, focusing on inclusive education and adopting a division-wide approach for a more conducive learning environment, can be crucial. Fostering external partnerships with stakeholders like parents, co-teachers, LGUs, NGOs, and psychology experts may enrich training content and provide ongoing support. This comprehensive recommendation emphasizes the necessity for concerted efforts to address unique challenges, ensuring continuous development and effective education for students with special needs in the division.

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