

Struggle Is Real! Travails Of Teachers In Teaching Learners With Intellectual Disabilities In The Transition Program

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated challenges faced by teachers of intellectually disabled learners in the transition program. The research aims to provide a localized understanding of the problems, coping strategies, and its benefits to the transition program teachers of Isulan city. Utilizing interviews with five participants from Isulan Central School SPED Center, division of Sultan Kudarat, the study employed thematic analysis for data interpretation. Results indicated the problems encountered by the teachers of intellectually disabled learners in transition program encompassing short attention span, poor retention, lack of teaching materials and lack of skills and knowledge. The teachers employed coping strategies to address problems such as instructional modification and accommodation and continuous personal development. The coping strategies resulted in a positive outcome which was observed in the participants. This is the achieved objectives and goals. It was then recommended that the educational institutions must upskill their teachers, the LGU should provide essential support, the DepEd should provide necessary trainings and the researchers should investigate further on studies related to intellectual disabilities and transition programs. The transition program teachers confronted diverse challenges while teaching learners with intellectual disabilities. Despite these challenges, the teachers effectively employed supportive strategies to navigate difficulties, highlighting the importance of teaching flexibility, adaptation as well as continuous personal development.

Keywords: Intellectual Disability (ID); Transition Program, Problems; Coping Strategies

1. Introduction

Teaching children with intellectual disabilities has been a complex and profound experience for teachers, intellectually disabled learners exhibit significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, including social and practical skills (Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014). Hence, special education classes are needed. Special education is a program focuses on developing and applying tailored teaching methods and support strategies for children with disabilities such as sensory impairment, learning disabilities and most especially intellectual disabilities which hinder the learning outcomes of these children. Special education programs aim to assist each child in reaching their maximum potential and succeeding in society. Special education throughout the globe aims to incorporate students with special educational needs to become better functioning individuals within society so that they can become independent as they progress in their education. This is critical because many children with disabilities face challenges in accessing high-quality education in regular classrooms, highlighting the importance of special education programs to meet their educational needs.

One of the programs proposed by the Department of Education for the intellectually disabled learners is the Transition program. Transition program is an initiative that aims to assist Filipino students with disabilities as they transition from school to post-school life. This program is focused on helping students acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to transition smoothly into adulthood, including pursuing further education, securing employment, and achieving independent living. It involves various activities and support services, such as career guidance, vocational training, job placement assistance, and life skills training. The primary goal of the Transition Program is to help exceptional learners overcome their challenges and become functioning individuals (Vazquez, 2023). In addition, The Transition Program aims to instruct young adults, aged 18 to 22, who receive special education support, in independent

living skills, which encompass vocational skills (Plotner, et al., 2023). A transition program empowers students with disabilities to reach their aspirations and lead fulfilling lives after completing their schooling. The program follows the principles of inclusive education, ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, have access to the necessary support for a successful transition. It is personalized to meet each student's unique needs, considering their strengths, interests, and future goals.

Isulan Central School SPED Center, located in the Sultan Kudarat division, is actively implementing the Special Education program including the transition program, within its institution. However, teachers at this institution have encountered challenges in teaching students with intellectual disabilities the essential skills needed for the transition program. These challenges stem from the students' intellectual disabilities, which hinder their learning process and outcomes. Teachers struggle to effectively teach lessons that require focus, comprehension, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. To address this gap, the researcher aims to explore the problems that the teachers face when teaching students with intellectual disabilities in the transition program, as well as the coping mechanisms they employ to meet their educational needs, particularly in acquiring practical skills. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the problems faced by teachers in teaching learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program, leading to a lack of ideas on how to enhance teaching skills for students with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, the researcher sees a strong need to conduct research on the problems faced by teachers in teaching learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program, necessitating a reexamination of current practices.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study sought to discover the problems faced by selected teachers who teach learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program at Isulan Central School SPED Center, Sultan Kudarat Division, during the School Year 2023-2024. Using a phenomenological approach, the study employed interviews to collect relevant data. The objective was to identify the challenges these teachers encounter in teaching English to students with disabilities within their institutions. It is important to note that the study involved only five (5) participants, so the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of all participants or the institution.

1.3 Research Questions

The objective of this study is to determine the problems encountered by the teachers in teaching learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program.

Specifically, this study aims to address the following sub-problems:

- What are the problems encountered by teachers in teaching learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program?
- What are the coping strategies employed by the teachers to address the problems encountered?
- How beneficial are these strategies in addressing the problems encountered?

1.4 Theoretical Lens

In teaching learners in transition programs, both behaviorism and constructivism theories can be effectively applied, particularly in the context of students with intellectual disabilities. In the realm of behaviorism theory within transition programs, emphasis is placed on the learner's presence, behavior, stimulus, and response. For intellectually disabled students, the stimulus typically refers to the instructional content provided by teachers, while the response pertains to the students' reactions to that content. Skinner (1963) further elaborates that in behaviorism, teachers typically opt for brief instructions rather than lengthy lectures. Behaviorism theory offers a framework for understanding how students engage with instruction and how teachers can deliver content effectively and succinctly. Moreover, the behaviorist theory emphasizes the importance of providing explicit and direct instruction in the classroom setting, which holds promise for students with intellectual disabilities. Instead of focusing solely on the negative aspects of this approach, as seen in general education settings, it's crucial to recognize its positive potential for enhancing the learning experiences of students with intellectual disabilities (McMahon et al., 2016). An associated approach involves breaking down activities into smaller, more manageable tasks that students with intellectual disabilities can manage (Aykut et al., 2014). For instance, rather than teaching broad topics like life skills in transition programs, teachers can divide the lesson into smaller segments to facilitate comprehension and mastery.

Implementing a constructivist theory and teaching model can effectively address the learning challenges faced by both the teachers and the students with special needs and contribute to their teaching and learning experience. This teaching strategy proves particularly beneficial in inclusive classrooms, as it prioritizes students' understanding of the subject and fosters their engagement in practical and meaningful learning experiences. By emphasizing active participation and authentic learning opportunities, the constructivist approach empowers both students and teachers which will facilitate their overall educational growth (Koh, Chai & Tsai, 2014). The teacher who adopts a constructivist approach prioritizes real-life learning, independent investigation, and the exploration of personal interests in the classroom. They facilitate simulation activities, encourage discussions, promote collaborative learning, and utilize strategies such as think-pair-share to foster higher-order thinking skills. Extensive research in cognitive psychology, authentic learning, and student engagement consistently supports the notion that student-centered teaching, encompassing these practices, is highly advantageous for all students, including those with special need (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Larson & Keiper, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This chapter depicts the methods applied in this qualitative research. It includes the research design, research participants, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical consideration.

2.1 Research Design

This study followed a qualitative approach with case study as the guiding framework. Phenomenology was used to explore the lived experiences of people on a social phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Through in-depth interviews with five teachers of intellectually disabled learners in the transition program, this method aims to explore the intricate details and subjective meanings surrounding the challenges, coping mechanism and insights associated with teaching intellectually disabled learners in the transition program. The qualitative nature of the interviews enables a thorough exploration of the distinct viewpoints of each participant, as highlighted by Moustakas (2020).

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study were selected based on specific criteria: they were teachers from the Sultan Kudarat division who taught learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program and had at least 3 years of experience in teaching students with disabilities.

There are only 5 participants of this study. This study utilized a qualitative approach to describe the process using expressive and persuasive language. After collecting data, the researcher analyzed the meaning of the participants' statements (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher will determine the challenges of five transition program teachers in teaching students with intellectual disabilities.

2.3 Data Analysis

In this qualitative research, thematic analysis was used as the analytical approach to explore the problems faced by teachers of learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program. The study followed Clark and Braune's (2019) data analysis steps, which include data familiarization, generating initial codes, organizing them into themes, reviewing and refining these themes iteratively, and ultimately defining and naming the identified themes. This systematic approach ensures a thorough examination of the teachers' experiences in teaching learners with intellectual disabilities in the transition program. By using this methodology, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the coping mechanisms employed by teachers at Isulan Central School SPED Center with their learners.

2.4 Trustworthiness of the Study

Integrity and transparency: The researchers ensured that all communication related to the research is conducted with honesty and openness. Data and information obtained are maintained in their original form without any sort of distortion or manipulation for the researchers' benefit. Additionally, interview questions are carefully crafted to avoid offensive or discriminatory language, fostering propriety and respect for both the research and its participants.

Credibility: The researchers upheld through the meticulous gathering and documentation of pertinent information from interviews and observations. This ensures that the data collected are trustworthy and reliable, contributing to the validity of the research findings.

Confirmability: The researchers conducted thorough checks and rechecks of all collected data, along with manual verification to prevent any potential biases. This rigorous process guarantees the accuracy and integrity of the research outcomes.

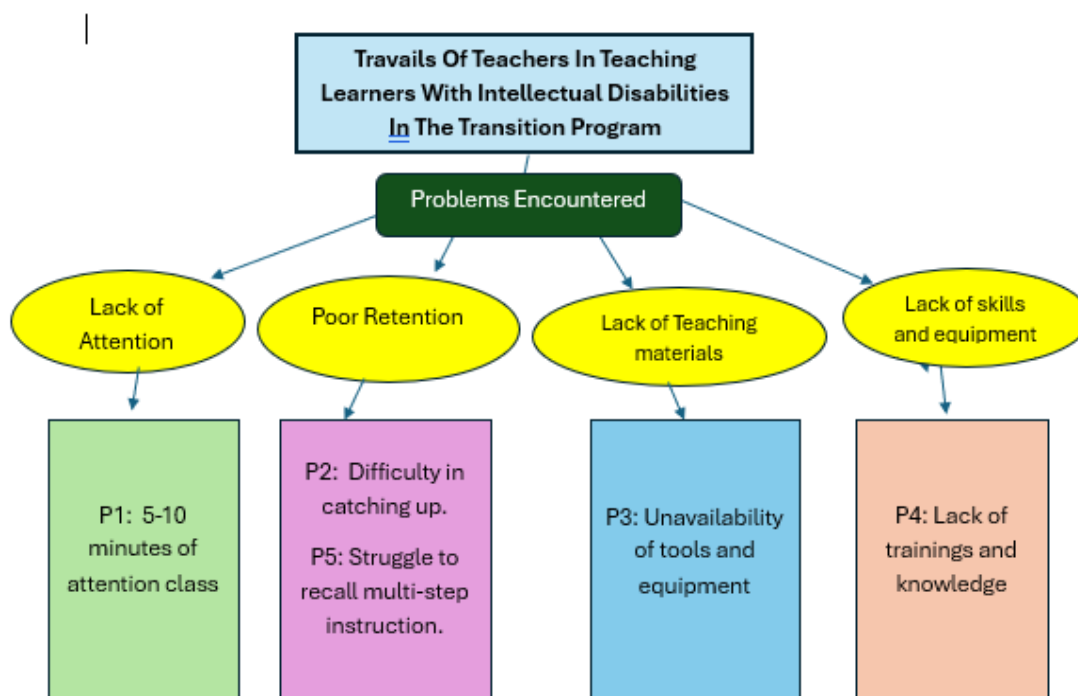
2.5 Ethical Consideration

In conducting research on teachers of transition program, ethical considerations play a significant role, aligning with the (Belmont, 1979). The researchers followed ethical standards throughout the study, which included a commitment to respecting the dignity and rights of the participants to ensure they were not exploited. The study aimed to explore the challenges faced by teachers at Isulan Central School SPED Center and was driven by its social value. Informed consent was obtained from the Special Education teachers, providing a clear explanation of the study's purpose and objectives, along with a guarantee of confidentiality and a discussion of potential consequences of their participation. Privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained, with all personal or professional disclosures by participants kept confidential to protect them from harassment or negative repercussions. These ethical considerations were crucial for safeguarding the well-being and rights of the study participants throughout the research process.

3 Results and Discussion

This section outlines the qualitative data collected to fulfill the study's objective. The data originates from audio-video recordings of teachers of transition program from Isulan Central School SPED Center. These recordings underwent manual transcription and translation into English. By analyzing significant statements from each interview transcript, deriving meanings, and identifying recurring themes, the thematic analysis process was employed to formulate themes.

Figure 1. Problems Encountered While Teaching in Transition Program.



3.1. Problems Encountered in Teaching intellectually Disabled Learners in the Transition Program.

The Data on figure 1 reflects on the problems encountered by the teachers of Isulan Central School SPED-Center while teaching in the Transition program. Four themes emerged respectively.

3.1.1 Short attention span.

Intellectually disabled learners typically have a shorter attention span than their non-disabled peers, making it challenging for them to stay focused on tasks or topics for long periods. Participant 1 declared that **“Learners with ID in my class only has 5-10 minutes of attention which makes it difficult for me fully deliver my lessons and demonstrations.”** Due to their intellectual disabilities, learners in the transition class typically have attention spans ranging from only 5 to 10 minutes. This limited focus makes it challenging for the teacher to effectively deliver the essential lessons and demonstrations in their entirety.

3.1.2 Poor retention.

This refers to their difficulty in remembering and retaining information over time. This can pose challenges for educators as they strive to ensure that students with Intellectual disability are able to grasp and recall essential concepts and skills. Participant 2 recounted that **“it is difficult to proceed to next lesson since they don’t catch up easily.”** This means that intellectually disabled learners often find it challenging to transition to the next lesson because they struggle to quickly understand and absorb the given lessons. This difficulty may stem from factors like cognitive processing limitations, trouble retaining information, or struggles in applying newly learned concepts. In addition, participant 5 shared that **“My ID learners in transition program frequently struggle to recall multi-step instructions given at the beginning of their task.”** This denoted to the learners in transition program that frequently face challenges in recalling multi-step instructions given at the beginning of their tasks. This difficulty arises as they navigate through various stages of the activity, often struggling to retain and remember the sequence of steps required for completion.

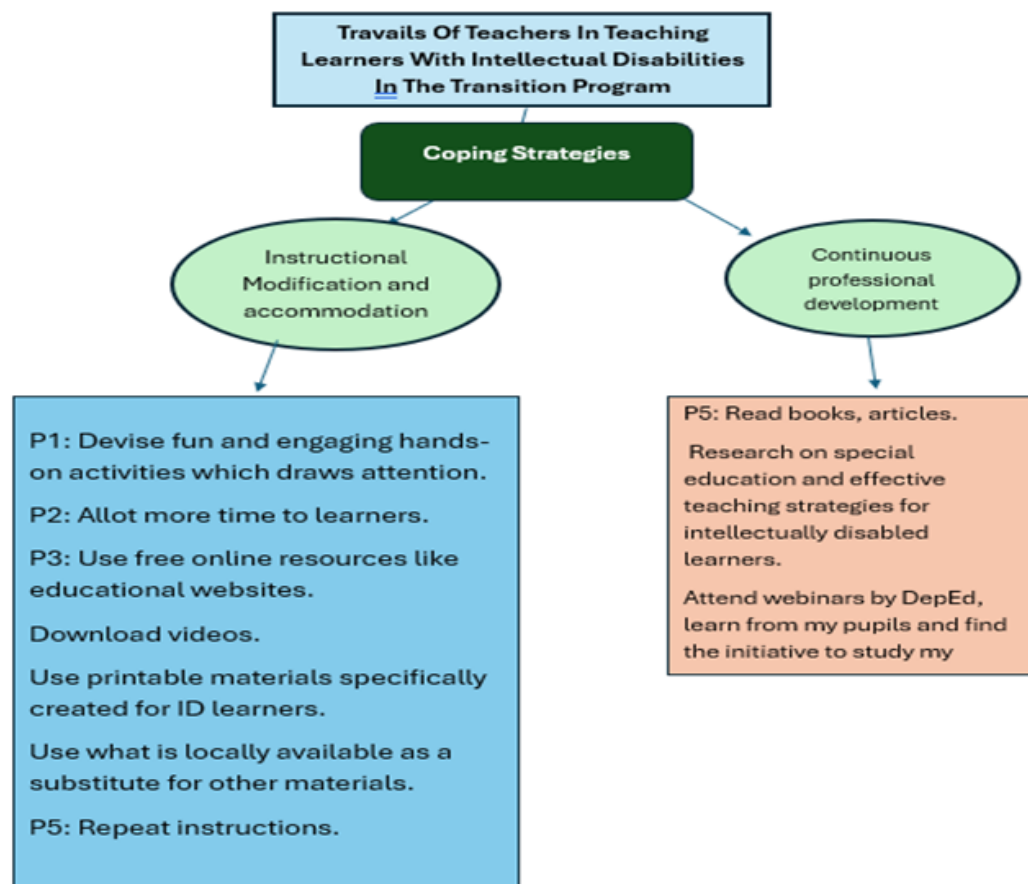
3.1.3 Lack of teaching materials.

The lack of teaching materials poses a significant challenge for intellectually disabled learners. Without adequate resources tailored to their specific needs and learning styles, these students may struggle to engage with the curriculum and fully grasp key concepts. This shortage can hinder their educational progress and limit opportunities for meaningful participation in the learning process. Participant 3 denoted that **“when started teaching learners that is ID is very challenging for me sometimes because when I teach them practical skills, we don’t have the materials and tools for them to learn.”** This means that one major hurdle in teaching and learning in the transition program is the lack of access to necessary materials and tools essential for their learning. This deficiency significantly impedes the teaching process, as students require hands-on experience and visual aids to effectively acquire new skills.

3.1.4 Lack of skills and knowledge.

Educators may struggle to meet the varied needs of intellectually disabled students if they lack training or familiarity with specialized teaching methods. This lack of expertise can impede the delivery of personalized instruction and support, ultimately affecting the learning experience and advancement of intellectually disabled learners. Participant 4 declared that **“Most of us teachers in the transition program at first frequently find it difficult to handle and adjust to ID learners because we have no trainings or enough knowledge on how to manage them.”** educators in the transition program often struggle to support intellectually disabled learners due to insufficient training and understanding of the strategies required to meet their unique needs. This lack of preparation can make it overwhelming for teachers to create inclusive environments and provide appropriate support.

Figure 2. Coping Strategies to Address the Problem.



3.2 Coping Strategies Employed to Address the Problems Encountered

The Data on Figure 2 portrays the coping strategies employed by the teachers to address the problems encountered in Isulan Central School SPED-Center while teaching in the Transition program. Two themes emerged respectively.

3.3.1 Instructional Modification and Accommodation.

This refers to modifying teaching methods and content to suit the specific learning requirements and circumstances of the students. Participant 1 denoted that **“I have said earlier that my pupils have short attention span, so I usually devise fun and engaging hands-on activities which draws their attention”** underscores that it is important to create interactive and enjoyable hands-on activities since these activities are designed to capture the Intellectually disabled learner’s interest and maintain their focus by making learning more dynamic and engaging by incorporating elements of fun and interactivity. These activities aim to keep the Intellectually disabled actively involved in the learning process, thus maximizing their retention, and understanding of the material.

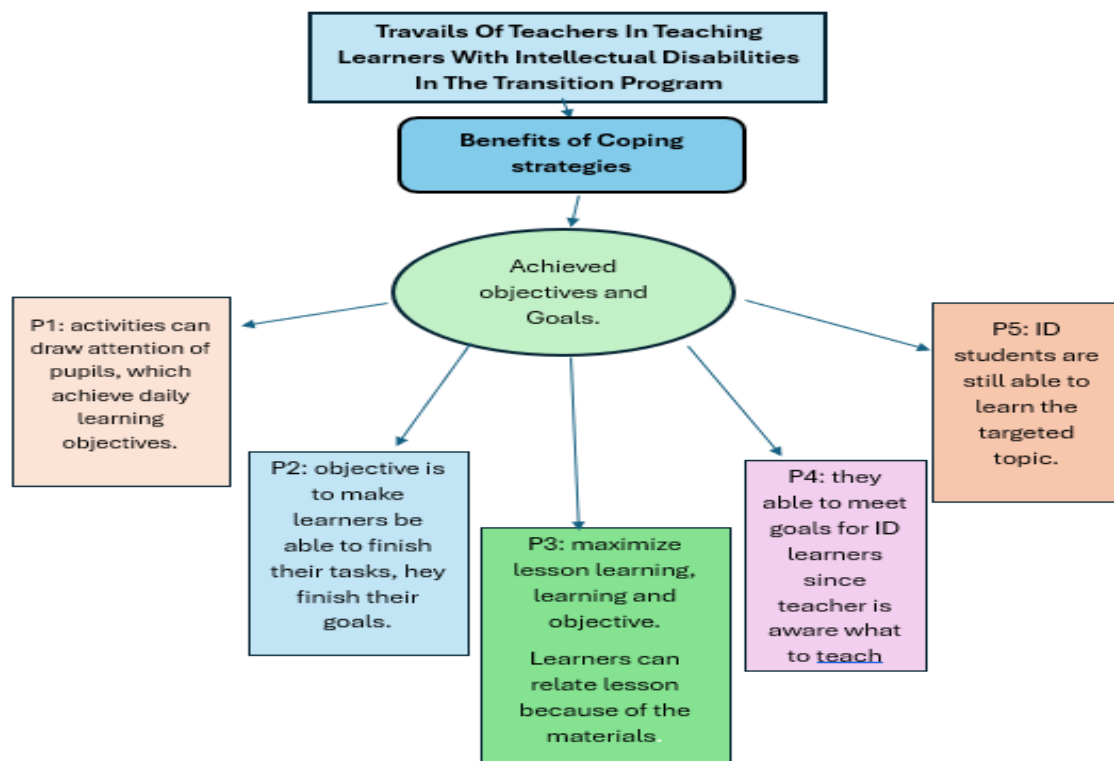
Participant 2 opined that **“I frequently allot more time to my learners because I think they need longer time to catch-up.”** This method of constant repetition enables the intellectually disabled student in the transition program have a precise and detailed examination of the subject matter, ensuring that every they have ample chances to understand and absorb the content at their individual speed. By extending the time allocated, the goal is to nurture their learning journey, acknowledging that some may need additional time and practice to reach mastery of certain content and needed practical skills.

Participant 3 mentioned that **“As of now I use free online resources like educational websites or you tube po, I download videos sir and I hmmm, use printable materials specifically created for my ID learners. And most of times sir, I use what is locally available as a substitute for other materials so they can relate ahmmmm, more.”** Emphasizes the significance of using free online resources like educational websites and YouTube, downloading videos to enrich lessons for intellectually disabled learners. In addition, creating printable materials customized for intellectually disabled learners and substituting materials with what is locally available help enhance relatability. This ensures that the resources are relevant and accessible, boosting engagement and understanding among my students. the strategic integration of free online resources, customized materials, and locally available resources can significantly enhance the educational experience for intellectually disabled learners in transition programs. By maximizing relevance, accessibility, and engagement, teachers can create dynamic learning opportunities that empower students to reach their full potential and thrive in their academic and personal pursuits. Participant 5 emphasized that **“Most of the times I repeat my instructions, I do it until they are able to get what I am saying.”** This entails that Repeated instruction is essential for intellectually disabled learners as it reinforces understanding and retention. Given their need for more time to process instructions in the transition class, repetition offers multiple opportunities for comprehension. This reinforcement strengthens key concepts, improving the chances of successful learning outcomes.

3.2.2 Continuous professional development.

This pertains to teachers of intellectually disabled students that continuously improves their professional skills to address the specific requirements and obstacles faced when teaching intellectually disabled students. This includes staying informed about the most effective methods, strategies, and resources for facilitating the learning and growth of intellectually disabled learners in the transition program. Participant 4 narrated that **“Right now, if I have extra time, I read books, articles, and uhhmm do, do research on special education and effective teaching strategies for intellectually disabled learners, I attend webinars by DepEd, learn from my pupils and find the initiative to study my students.”** This implied that continuous learning enabled the less experienced teachers of intellectually disabled learners to stay flexible in response to evolving educational environments in the transition program, incorporate innovative methods, and refine their teaching strategies to better meet the diverse needs of their students. Furthermore, Continuous learning enables teachers to maintain adaptability, empowering them to modify their methods in response to evolving demands within the transition program. This flexibility equips them to effectively address shifting student needs, changes in curriculum expectations, and updates in educational policies.

Figure 3. Benefits of Coping Strategies in Transition Program



3.3 The Benefits of Coping Strategies Employed to Address the Problems Encountered

The Data on figure 3 outlines the benefit of coping strategies employed by the teachers to address the problems encountered in Isulan Central School SPED-Center while teaching in the Transition program. One theme emerged, respectively.

Achieved objectives and goals.

Through the utilization of accommodation strategies and ongoing learning efforts, teachers can effectively achieve their teaching objectives and goals with intellectually disabled learners. This entails adjusting teaching techniques, materials, and settings to meet individual requirements, while continuously improving their own competencies to provide optimal support and guidance for these students' learning journey. Participant 1 shared that **"Because I devise uhmmmm, activities that are able to draw attention of my pupils, uhmmm we achieve our daily learning objectives."** Through the creation of interactive and engaging tasks, the teacher of the intellectually disabled learners ensures that students are actively engaged and motivated in their learning journey. These activities are meticulously crafted to spark curiosity, encourage participation, and promote comprehension of the subject matter. By captivating students' attention and fostering their enthusiasm, the teacher and students together successfully achieve their educational objectives daily. In addition, Participant **"My objective is to make my learners be able to, ahhhhh finish their tasks, and even we take time uhmmmm I take it as a win since they finish their goals."** This means that in their transition program class, the teacher aims to empower students to complete tasks successfully, emphasizing individual progress and recognizing that some may need extra time and support. Despite potential delays, the teacher celebrates when the intellectually disabled students achieve their objectives, fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages persistence and enhances overall success in the program. Moreover, participant 3 stated that **"I can now maximize my lesson and learning. Uhmmmm, learning objective since my ID learners have better learning materials than before, and they can relate to my lesson because of the materials I used."** With improved learning materials tailored to the needs of my intellectually disabled learners, the teacher was able to optimize her lessons and learning objectives. The enhanced materials enable the students to better connect with the lesson content, resulting in increased engagement and comprehension. Furthermore, Participant 4 asserted that **"Unlike before, sir, I am now able to meet my goals for my ID learners since I now know them better, so I am fully aware how they learn and how I should teach and manage them."** This denotes to the fact that the teacher was able to Benefit from a more profound comprehension of intellectually disabled learners, the teacher can now proficiently accomplish their teaching objectives. Armed with enhanced insights into the students' learning preferences and requirements, they are better prepared to customize teaching techniques and classroom management strategies, thereby fostering an environment conducive to their success. And finally, participant 5 opined that **"Yes, we take long time since we repeat the instruction and topic sir, but at the end of the day my ID students in transition program are still able to learn the targeted topic."** This highlights the importance of patience and persistence in the learning process, as well as the dedication of both the students and the teacher. Through continued effort and support of the teachers by repeating the topics, the students demonstrate their capacity to overcome their challenges and barriers in learning to achieve their learning objectives, contributing to their overall growth and development in the transition program.

4. Conclusion

In Conclusion, study entails that instructing students with intellectual disabilities in transition programs poses hurdles that demand thoughtful attention and strategic solutions. This also highlights the importance of resourcefulness, patience, and the eagerness to learn continuously which are essential traits in teaching intellectually disabled learner in the transition program. This research has highlighted various challenges, such as inadequate access to suitable teaching resources, struggles in managing brief attention spans and low retention rates, and a deficiency in educator training and expertise. These obstacles emphasize the necessity for focused actions to effectively meet the distinctive requirements of students in transition programs. It is crucial to formulate thorough strategies to address these challenges and guarantee the delivery of high-quality education for learners with intellectual disabilities. This involves advocating for enhanced availability of specialized teaching resources, offering continuous training and professional development opportunities for educators, and establishing customized support services within educational settings. The teacher's practices promote the comprehensive growth and achievement of learners with intellectual disabilities, ensuring they have access to the assistance and materials necessary to realize their educational potential. This research has highlighted various challenges, such as inadequate access to suitable teaching resources, struggles in managing brief attention spans and low retention rates, and a deficiency in educator training and expertise.

These obstacles emphasize the necessity for focused actions to effectively meet the distinctive requirements of students in transition programs. It is crucial to formulate thorough strategies to address these challenges and guarantee the delivery of high-quality education for learners with intellectual disabilities. This involves advocating for enhanced availability of specialized teaching resources, offering continuous training and professional development opportunities for educators, and establishing customized support services within educational settings. The teacher's practices promote the comprehensive growth and achievement of learners with intellectual disabilities, ensuring they have access to the assistance and materials necessary to realize their educational potential.

5. Recommendations

Department of Education should provide comprehensive training programs covering a wide range of topics related to special education. These programs should include understanding distinct types of disabilities, identifying individualized learning profiles, and implementing appropriate instructional strategies and interventions. By enhancing their knowledge of different disabilities and the challenges they pose, educators can adjust their teaching approaches and accommodations to effectively support the specific needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Moreover, **The School Administration** should have school-based seminars and workshops or conduct LAC sessions that strengthen teachers' teaching strategies in addressing students' problems in transition program since they play a vital role in fostering inclusive environments for students with intellectual disabilities. This involves providing professional development opportunities for educators, raising awareness of diverse learning needs, and creating inclusive spaces within schools to ensure a supportive educational experience for these students.

Local Government Units (LGUs) should establish tailored support services for learners with intellectual disabilities, including accessible assessment programs, community initiatives and provide needed materials which will aid the teachers in teaching. Additionally, LGUs can promote community awareness to reduce stigmas surrounding intellectual disabilities and collaborate with advocacy groups to develop targeted programs. And finally **Future researchers** should investigate the long-term outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities in transition programs. This includes exploring factors contributing to successful transitions to adulthood and ongoing support requirements. Furthermore, researchers should examine cultural influences on teaching practices and assess the effectiveness of various interventions and support programs to provide evidence-based recommendations.

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