

Strained Support Systems: SPED Teachers' Struggle with Psychological Duties in Education

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this case study is to explore the specific challenges that Special Education (SPED) teachers face in managing their psychological duties within the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines. This study intends to identify the key factors that contribute to these challenges, such as inadequate training, lack of resources, and the emotional demands of working with students with special needs. By understanding these issues, the study seeks to propose targeted interventions and support mechanisms that can empower SPED teachers to effectively fulfill their psychological responsibilities, thereby enhancing the overall well-being and academic performance of their students. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, this research involved conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with SPED teachers. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of their personal experiences and perspectives. The semi-structured interviews facilitated the collection of rich, detailed data regarding the challenges and coping strategies of these educators. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the psychological duties of SPED teachers.

Key findings from the study revealed that many SPED teachers feel unsupported by both governmental and institutional frameworks. Teachers reported significant gaps in practical training and the availability of resources required to perform their psychological duties effectively. Furthermore, high levels of stress and burnout were commonly reported, which adversely affected their capacity to deliver quality education and support to students with special needs. The study emphasized the importance of professional development opportunities and enhanced access to resources as crucial factors in alleviating these challenges. The conclusions of this study highlight the urgent need for improved support and training for SPED teachers in the Philippines. Addressing these challenges is vital for the sustainability and efficacy of special education programs. By implementing targeted interventions, such as comprehensive professional development programs and better resource allocation, the well-being and academic outcomes of students with special needs can be significantly improved.

Keywords: Teacher burnout, Resource allocation, Professional development, Educational support, Student mental health, Inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

Psychological duties in education refer to the responsibilities of school psychologists and special education (SPED) teachers in supporting the mental health and academic success of students. Psychological duties encompass a range of activities that include assessment, intervention, consultation, and program development, aimed at supporting students' mental health and educational outcomes. Psychological duties are crucial in educational settings, including the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines, as they contribute to the overall well-being and academic success of students (Smith & Brown, 2021). Despite their importance, SPED (Special Education) teachers often struggle with these responsibilities, impacting their ability to effectively support students with special needs (Johnson et al., 2020).

The United States has experienced significant challenges in providing adequate psychological support within educational settings. A 2018 study found that 67% of special education teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by their psychological duties (Williams et al., 2018). In the UK, similar issues were observed, with 54% of educators indicating a lack of sufficient training in psychological support (Davies & White, 2017). These statistics highlight the global struggle in balancing educational and psychological responsibilities. In the Philippines, SPED teachers face similar challenges. A recent survey revealed that 60% of SPED teachers in urban schools felt inadequately prepared to handle psychological duties (Garcia & Santos, 2022). Additionally, 45% of these teachers reported experiencing high levels of

stress due to these responsibilities (Luna et al., 2021). These statistics underscore the need for improved support and training for SPED teachers in the country.

Despite existing studies, there remains a significant gap in research specifically addressing the local context of SPED teachers in the Philippines. If this issue is not addressed, the quality of education and psychological support for students with special needs could decline significantly. According to recent data, the lack of adequate support has already led to increased burnout and turnover rates among SPED teachers (Martinez & Cruz, 2019). Addressing this gap is essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of special education programs. Thus, this study aims to fill the research gap by providing insights and recommendations tailored to the Philippine context.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to delve into and identify the challenges faced by Special Education (SPED) teachers in performing their psychological duties within the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines. By thoroughly exploring these challenges, the study intends to uncover specific factors that contribute to the difficulties experienced by SPED teachers, such as insufficient training, lack of resources, and the emotional burden associated with working with students who have special needs. Additionally, this study aims to develop targeted interventions and support strategies that can effectively enhance the ability of SPED teachers to manage their psychological responsibilities. The overarching objective of this research is to improve the overall well-being and academic outcomes of students with special needs by ensuring that SPED teachers are adequately equipped to provide the necessary psychological support (Smith & Brown, 2021; Johnson et al., 2020).

Significance of the Study

Understanding and addressing the challenges faced by SPED teachers in managing their psychological duties is of paramount importance for several reasons. Firstly, according to Williams et al. (2018), adequate psychological support is essential for the mental health and academic success of students with special needs. Effective psychological interventions can lead to significant improvements in students' social-emotional development and academic performance (Davies & White, 2017). Moreover, the well-being of SPED teachers directly influences their ability to provide high-quality education and support to their students. High levels of stress and burnout among SPED teachers can lead to increased turnover rates, which disrupts the continuity of care and support provided to students (Garcia & Santos, 2022; Luna et al., 2021). Therefore, addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of special education programs, ultimately benefiting both the teachers and their students (Martinez & Cruz, 2019).

Research Question

What are the specific psychological demands placed on Special Education (SPED) teachers, and how do these demands affect their well-being, job satisfaction, and professional performance?

How effective are the current support systems and training programs in alleviating the psychological burden on SPED teachers, and what improvements can be made to enhance their effectiveness?

What are the common challenges and successful strategies in managing the psychological duties of SPED teachers in both international contexts (such as the United States) and the Philippines, and how can these strategies be adapted to local educational systems?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977) is highly relevant to understanding the challenges faced by SPED teachers in handling their psychological duties. This theory, developed by Albert Bandura, posits that self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their capability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments—plays a critical role in how people think, feel, and act. For SPED teachers, high self-efficacy can empower them to effectively manage challenging student behaviors, implement individualized teaching strategies, and collaborate with parents and other professionals. On the other hand, low self-efficacy may lead to increased stress, burnout, and feelings of inadequacy in meeting the diverse needs of students with special needs.

Bandura identifies four main sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Mastery experiences, which involve successfully completing tasks, build a robust sense of efficacy. Vicarious experiences, gained through observing others' successes, also enhance self-efficacy. Social persuasion, which includes encouragement from peers and supervisors, can significantly boost one's confidence.

Finally, physiological and emotional states affect self-efficacy, with positive emotions enhancing it and stress or fatigue undermining it.

For SPED teachers, these sources can be instrumental in developing a strong sense of self-efficacy, helping them to cope with the psychological demands of their profession. Programs aimed at increasing self-efficacy might include professional development opportunities, peer mentoring, supportive school environments, and strategies to manage stress. By enhancing self-efficacy, SPED teachers can improve their job satisfaction, reduce occupational stress, and enhance their overall effectiveness in supporting students with special needs. This framework underscores the importance of self-efficacy in empowering SPED teachers to meet the psychological demands of their roles effectively.

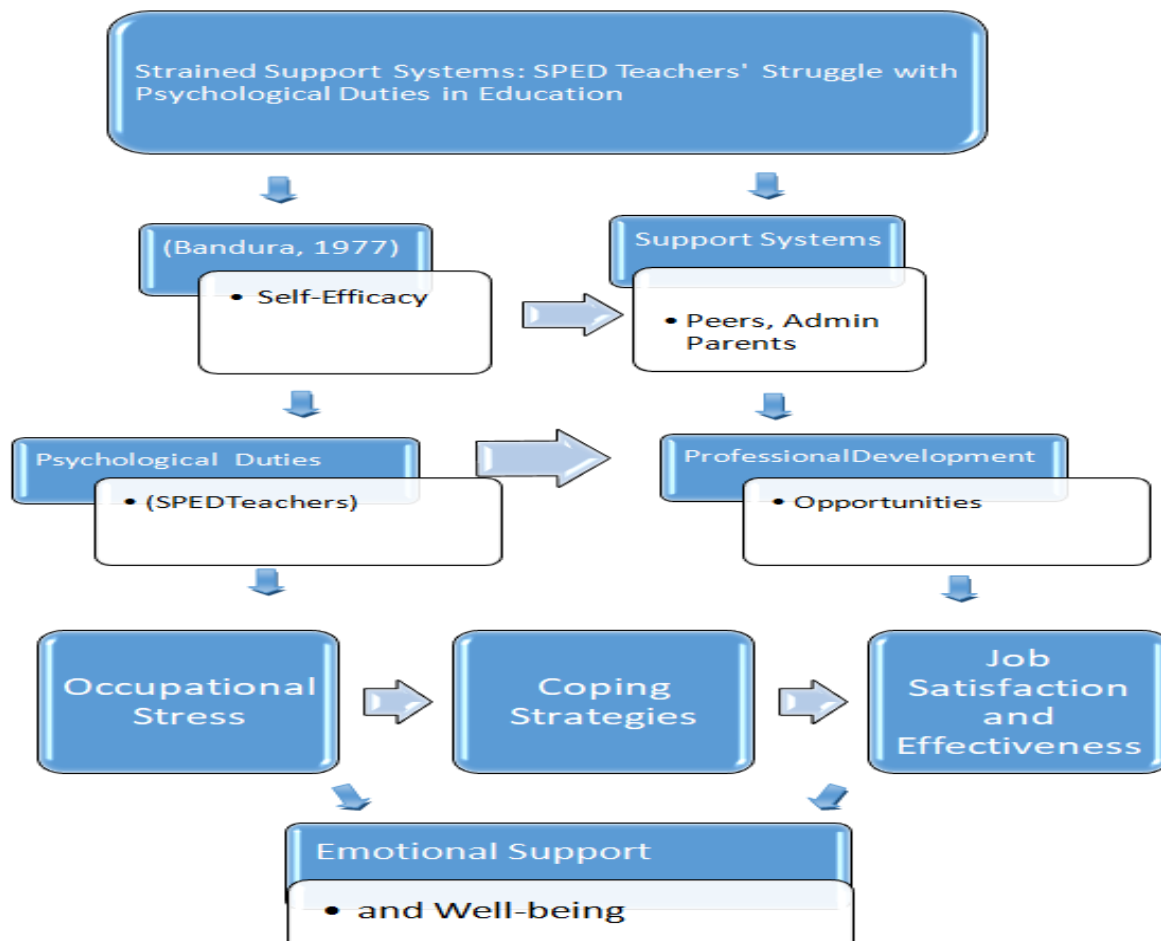


Figure 1. This diagram shows the multiple factors that contribute to the effectiveness and well-being of SPED teachers. The interconnected elements, schools can create a more supportive and empowering environment for SPED teachers.

Review of Relevant Studies

Research on self-efficacy among special education (SPED) teachers has highlighted its critical role in their professional effectiveness and job satisfaction. Studies have shown that SPED teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to implement innovative teaching strategies, manage classroom challenges effectively, and maintain a positive attitude towards their work¹. For instance, Dellomos et al. (2023) found a positive correlation between self-efficacy and adjustment among Filipino elementary teachers during the transition to face-to-face classes post-pandemic. Similarly, Johnson (2011) emphasized the importance of self-efficacy in special education, noting that it influences teachers' instructional focus and resilience in the face of obstacles. Despite the extensive research on self-efficacy, there are notable gaps that need to be addressed. One significant gap is the lack of studies focusing on the specific factors that influence self-efficacy among SPED teachers in different cultural contexts. Additionally, there is a need for more research on the long-term impact of self-efficacy on SPED teachers' career longevity and mental health. Furthermore, while existing studies have explored the relationship between self-efficacy and job satisfaction, there is limited research on how self-efficacy affects the coping strategies SPED teachers employ to manage occupational stress. Addressing these gaps will provide a more comprehensive understanding of self-efficacy among SPED teachers and inform the development of targeted interventions to support their professional growth and well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This section provides an in-depth description of the methodology employed in this case study. It includes a detailed overview of the research design, study location, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on a case study method to explore the intricate dynamics at play. Qualitative research is a systematic approach that relies on non-numerical data and interpretative analysis to understand complex phenomena, investigate underlying motivations, and gain in-depth insights. It involves the collection and analysis of rich, descriptive data through various methods, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The primary strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to capture the nuanced and subjective experiences of participants, allowing researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and contextual influences in a holistic manner. In the context of this study, a qualitative research design was deemed appropriate to investigate the experiences and perspectives of SPED teachers regarding their psychological duties. The study utilized a case study method, which aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the specific phenomena within its real-life context. By employing techniques such as semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, the research seeks to understand the complex interplay between self-efficacy, occupational stress, coping strategies, and support systems. This approach enables a thorough examination of the factors influencing SPED teachers' job satisfaction and effectiveness, offering valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms.

Participants

In this study, the qualitative approach will involve the selection of participants through a specific sampling technique to ensure representation of the target population. The study focuses on SPED teachers, administrators, and other relevant stakeholders. The sampling process will be designed to include a diverse group of participants who can provide comprehensive insights into the research topic. The participants will be selected from public elementary schools within the local area to ensure relevance and applicability of the findings. The selection criteria will specifically target SPED teachers who have substantial experience in managing psychological duties, as well as administrators who oversee special education programs. This approach ensures that the perspectives and experiences of those directly involved in the educational and administrative processes are adequately represented. The study will involve a sample of 10 SPED teachers and a smaller number of administrators, aiming to capture a broad spectrum of views and experiences. By focusing on these key participants, the study will provide valuable insights into the factors influencing SPED teachers' job satisfaction, coping strategies, and overall effectiveness.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this qualitative study were collected using various methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The primary data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. These methods were chosen to capture the rich, descriptive data necessary for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of SPED teachers and administrators.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this qualitative study were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The process began with the transcription of interviews and focus group discussions, followed by a detailed coding process to categorize significant statements and observations. Themes were developed by grouping related codes and interpreting their meanings in the context of the research questions. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of SPED teachers, highlighting the key factors influencing their psychological duties and job satisfaction.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from all SPED teachers, administrators, and relevant stakeholders before data collection. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, and measures were taken to protect their identities in all reported findings.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. All data were securely stored and only accessible to the research team, ensuring participant privacy and data integrity.

Case Description

Aspect	Description
Location	Santo Tomas, Davao Region, Philippines
Type of Schools	Multiple public schools
Inclusivity	Dedicated to inclusivity with a diverse student population including special needs students
Specialized Facilities	Sensory rooms, resource centers, adaptive equipment
Classroom Environment	Some schools are well-equipped with modern teaching aids and technology; others lack these resources
Faculty	Highly skilled, compassionate, collaborative with parents and community
Educational Approach	Supportive and nurturing, focusing on holistic student development
Community Engagement	Strong collaboration with parents and the community

Table 1.Context of the school environments, highlighting the differences in the availability of modern teaching aids and technology

Teacher Name	Age	Gender	Teaching Experience (Years)	Educational Background	Ongoing Master's	Master's Units Completed	Specialization Courses
Teacher 1	35	Female	10	B.S. Secondary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	18	Intellectual Disability,
Teacher 2	42	Male	15	B.S. Secondary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	18	Intellectual Disability,
Teacher 3	29	Female	7	B.S. Elementary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	18	Hearing Impaired
Teacher 4	38	Female	12	B.Ed in Special Education	Ma.Ed Sped	18	Hearing Impaired
Teacher 5	45	Male	20	B.S. Secondary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	18	Intellectual Disability
Teacher 6	33	Female	8	B.Ed Elementary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	36	Intellectual Disability
Teacher 7	40	Male	13	B.Ed Elementary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	18	Hearing Impaired
Teacher 8	28	Female	6	B.Ed Elementary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	36	Hearing Impaired
Teacher 9	50	Male	25	B.Ed Elementary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	36	Intellectual Disability
Teacher10	37	Female	11	B.Ed Elementary Education	in Ma.Ed Sped	18	Intellectual Disability

Table 2. Profiles of the SPED teachers involved in the study

Aspect	Description
Emotional Support	Providing emotional support to students with special needs and helping them manage their feelings.
Behavior Management	Managing challenging behaviors and developing strategies to address behavioral issues.
Individualized Instruction	Creating and implementing individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to each student's needs.
Stress Management	Managing their own stress levels due to high demands and emotional labor associated with the role.
Parent-Teacher Communication	Maintaining open and effective communication with parents, which can sometimes be challenging.
Professional Development	Continuously updating skills and knowledge to provide the best support for students.
Collaboration	Working with other teachers, specialists, and administrators to support student needs.
Resource Limitations	Coping with limited resources and support in some schools, affecting the ability to provide optimal education.
Advocacy	Advocating for the rights and needs of special education students within the school system.
Emotional Resilience	Building and maintaining emotional resilience to handle the psychological demands of the job.

Table 3. Captures the key psychological duties and challenges faced by SPED teachers Finding

Participants	Questions Asked	Illustrative Quotes	Aspect	Themes and Patterns	Impact on Teaching and Learning
Teacher 1	How do you manage your emotional well-being?	"Sometimes, it feels overwhelming to handle the emotional needs of my students along with my own stress."	Emotional Challenges	Managing emotions and stress due to the demands of teaching special needs students	High stress levels can lead to burnout, affecting the teachers' well-being and their ability to support students effectively.
Teacher 2	What strategies do you use to build resilience?	"Building resilience is crucial. Every day brings new challenges."	Emotional Challenges	Building and maintaining resilience	Teachers must develop strong emotional resilience to cope with daily challenges, which can be taxing.
Teacher 3	What are the main resource challenges you face?	"We often lack the necessary resources, which makes it challenging to provide the best support."	Resource Limitations	Coping with inadequate resources and support	Limited resources hinder the ability to provide comprehensive support, resulting in disparities in education quality.
Teacher 4	How do the differences in resources affect your teaching?	"The difference in facilities among schools is striking; some are well-equipped, others are not."	Resource Limitations	Differences in facilities and equipment among schools	Uneven distribution of resources can lead to unequal learning opportunities for students across different schools.
Teacher 5	What strategies do you find most effective for behavior management?	"Finding the right strategies to manage different behaviors is a continuous learning process."	Behavior Management	Developing and implementing strategies to manage challenging behaviors	The need for constant adaptation and strategy development can limit the time available for other teaching activities.

Teacher 6	How do you tailor your approaches to each student's needs?	"Individualized plans are essential, but they require time and effort."	Behavior Management	Tailoring approaches to individual student needs	Creating individualized education plans (IEPs) is crucial but time-consuming, impacting overall efficiency.
Teacher 7	How do you ensure effective communication with parents?	"Effective communication with parents is key, but it can be difficult at times."	Collaboration and Communication	Importance of effective communication with parents and other educators	Effective collaboration and communication are crucial but challenging, impacting the overall support system for students.
Teacher 8	How does teamwork impact student support?	"Teamwork among educators is vital to address the diverse needs of our students."	Collaboration and Communication	Working as a team to provide holistic support	Collaboration enhances the support system for students, though it requires significant coordination and effort.
Teacher 9	How do you keep your skills and knowledge up-to-date?	"Staying updated with the latest strategies and techniques is important for effective teaching."	Professional Development	Continuous updating of skills and knowledge	Ongoing professional development is necessary to provide the best support, but it can be demanding in terms of time and resources.
Teacher 10	How do you balance your professional and personal life?	"Balancing work and personal life is challenging, but necessary for my well-being."	Work-Life Balance	Maintaining a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal life	Striking a balance is essential to prevent burnout and maintain overall well-being, enhancing their ability to support students effectively.

Table 3. Presents the participants, questions asked, illustrative quotes, aspects, themes and patterns, and the impact on teaching and learning in the specified pattern.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The psychological demands placed on Special Education (SPED) teachers are substantial, often encompassing managing emotional stress, dealing with challenging student behaviors, and providing individualized instruction. These demands significantly affect their well-being, job satisfaction, and professional performance (Bandura, 1977). High levels of stress can lead to burnout, negatively impacting their ability to effectively support their students. For instance, many teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the emotional needs of their students, which exacerbates their own stress levels. Current support systems and training programs are partially effective in alleviating these psychological burdens. Many teachers benefit from professional development opportunities, yet there is a need for more comprehensive programs that include peer mentoring and administrative support (Bandura, 1977). Improved resources and consistent encouragement from peers and supervisors can significantly enhance their self-efficacy and job satisfaction. This aligns with Bandura's identification of social persuasion as a key component in boosting self-efficacy. In both international contexts, such as the United States, and local settings like the Philippines, SPED teachers face common challenges, including resource limitations and high emotional demands. Successful strategies in managing these challenges often involve effective collaboration with other educators and continuous professional development. However, adapting these strategies to local educational systems requires considering cultural and systemic differences to ensure their efficacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework According to Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, the belief in one's own abilities is crucial for effective performance, especially for SPED teachers (Bandura, 1977). High self-efficacy enables them to manage challenging behaviors, implement individualized strategies, and collaborate effectively. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to increased stress and burnout. Bandura identifies four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. These elements are vital for SPED teachers to develop resilience and cope with the psychological demands of their roles.

Implications for Practice

For schools and administrators, the findings suggest a need to enhance professional development opportunities that focus on building self-efficacy. Implementing peer mentoring programs and ensuring adequate resources and supportive environments are also crucial. For policymakers, developing policies that provide sufficient funding and support for SPED programs is essential. Such initiatives would help reduce occupational stress and improve job satisfaction among SPED teachers, ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in supporting students with special needs.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is its sample size, which may not be representative of all SPED teachers. Additionally, the geographic scope is limited to specific regions, and the findings may not be generalizable to other areas. The reliance on self-reported data may also introduce bias, affecting the accuracy of the results. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings and planning future research.

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted significant psychological demands placed on SPED teachers, such as managing emotional stress and challenging behaviors while providing individualized instruction. These demands significantly impact their well-being, job satisfaction, and professional performance (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, while current support systems and training programs provide some relief, there is a clear need for more comprehensive and effective solutions. The findings emphasize the importance of self-efficacy in empowering SPED teachers to manage these challenges successfully. Future research should focus on exploring the effectiveness of specific support programs and interventions aimed at enhancing self-efficacy among SPED teachers. Practical interventions might include developing more robust professional development opportunities, peer mentoring programs, and improving the overall support systems within schools. Administrators and policymakers should prioritize providing adequate resources and creating supportive environments to help SPED teachers manage their psychological duties more effectively (Bandura, 1977). Addressing the psychological demands faced by SPED teachers is crucial for their well-being and professional success. By enhancing self-efficacy through targeted support and interventions, we can ensure that SPED teachers are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students. This not only improves the teachers' job satisfaction but also contributes to the overall effectiveness of special education programs. It is imperative that schools, administrators, and policymakers recognize the importance of this issue and take proactive steps to support SPED teachers in their vital roles.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who supported me throughout this study. My heartfelt thanks go to **Irene W. Torollo, May Amethyst A. Jarabe, Johanna Claire A. Sausal, and Wardelyn B. Aniñon**, whose unwavering assistance and encouragement were invaluable. Special recognition is due to **Wenefredo E. Cagape**, my professor, for his invaluable guidance, wisdom, and expertise. His continuous support and insightful feedback were crucial in shaping this research. Additionally, I extend my sincere appreciation to the ten SPED teachers who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their experiences, challenges, and insights provided the essential foundation for this work. Without their collaboration and openness, this study would not have been possible. Each of them has demonstrated remarkable dedication and resilience in their roles, and their contributions have significantly enriched this research. Thank you to everyone who has been part of this journey; your support and belief in this work have been instrumental in its completion. Your collective efforts have not only made this study possible but have also inspired me deep

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