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Research Article

A Heart of Service: Discovering the Lived Experiences of Special Education Teachers Using Skill-Based Learning in Cebu City

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ABSTRACT

Special education (SPED) learners often struggle in learning due to the curriculum and limited resources despite the awareness of the value of education globally. In the Philippines, inclusive education for all learners, especially for learners with special needs has yet to be delved deeper, hence, this study provides an exploration of the lived experiences of SPED teachers using skill-based learning to understand their perspectives of the participants on how this learning approach can help SPED learners acquire the skills needed for independence. Husserl's descriptive phenomenological research design was used to describe the meaning of the lived experiences of the five SPED teachers using skill-based learning from Cebu City, Philippines. A semi-structured interview schedule served as the primary data collection instrument, supplemented by a focus group discussion to ensure data saturation. Colaizzi's method of descriptive analysis was used to analyze the transcriptions, identifying key experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and meanings of teaching skill-based learning to SPED learners. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: Fulfillment in Teaching; Limited Resources, Parental Involvement, and Adjustment; Planning, Preparation, and Communication; and Emphasis on Practical Skills. Despite challenges, teaching SPED students could be fulfilling with passion and perseverance. The researchers recommend advocating for increased funding and programs to support SPED teachers in effectively implementing skill-based learning.

Keywords: *Phenomenological Study, Philippines, Skill-based learning, Special Education, Special Education Learners, Special Education Teachers*

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Introduction

The fourth sustainable development goal of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Access to quality education that incorporates a learning approach catering to each individual's needs is a basic human right for everyone, including learners with special needs. Special Education (SPED) is an educational program that involves different teaching approaches designed to meet the needs of students who cannot benefit from the standard school curriculum because of disabilities.

According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2022), inaccessibility to special education still exists worldwide. Despite the awareness of the value of education, SPED learners still fall behind and have difficulties in learning due to the curriculum.

The Department of Education Order No. 26 has institutionalized SPED in the country, resulting in the establishment of SPED centers in different school districts throughout the country (Formoso, 2019). However, as stated by Allam and Martin (2021) in Iligan City, Philippines, learners with disabilities did not receive all the necessary support and services to access the curriculum facilities.

In the study conducted by Sayson (2016), public special education schools in Cebu City offer limited programs and services to cater to different health-related disabilities. Basic and essential programs and services, such as governance, curriculum, budget, and parent and community involvement were found to be available but not sufficient; thus, are need to be made available and implemented fully.

Many studies have explored the challenges and issues SPED schools and SPED teachers face; however, there are no research studies that explore the lived experiences of SPED teachers using skill-based learning specifically in Cebu. This study aims to provide a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of SPED teachers using skill-based learning to determine how this learning approach can help SPED learners acquire the necessary skills needed to

prepare SPED learners to successfully transition as independent adults within the community. Their insights could inspire realizations and improvements in the curriculum. The right integration of quality education into the SPED curriculum will result in a progressive world where citizens equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge are produced

Inclusive education for all learners, especially for learners with special needs has yet to be delved deeper locally in the Philippines. Nuñez and Rosales' (2021) study emphasizes the movement of educational institutions in delving into implementing programs that cater to each learner's needs. During the pandemic, the SPED sector was also affected by the sudden transition from a classroom setting to an online setting. Glessner and Johnson (2020) examined the SPED teachers' experiences during the pandemic and determined the challenges they faced in distance learning which is relevant to the current study as it centers on a learning approach that requires hands-on training and practice.

Several studies examine the lived experiences of SPED teachers but are limited in the aspects of contextualized learning approaches, challenges that come with the experience, and its benefit to special education students as they transition to working adults. Allam and Martin (2021) merely focus on the issues and challenges faced by SPED teachers while the present study focuses not only on the challenges but also on their experiences, coping mechanisms, and self-interpreted meaning of skill-based learning. Almalki et al. (2021), however, run in conjunction with the present study as it examines challenges faced by SPED teachers emphasizing the challenges with parental involvement through the lens of SPED teachers. This is relevant to the present study as it will also focus on the challenges that come with teaching students with special needs through a skill-based approach. Additionally, Gallarde et al.'s (2022) study runs by the current as it describes the lived experiences of SPED teachers where several challenges from their experiences were determined including having mixed disabilities in one classroom, tantrum-inducing behavior, lack of comprehension, inadequate

funding and government support, and poor parental educational attainment. The study also determined that an individualized educational plan was one of the coping mechanisms for the challenges that were determined. This is relevant to the current study as it aimed to explore the lived experiences of SPED teachers teaching skill-based learning, an approach that is similar to an individualized educational plan that is contextualized according to what is beneficial for learners with special needs.

Paguiguiran's (2020) study explores the experiences of SPED teachers and implies the need for special education schools to provide education suited to the student's special needs or disabilities. A similar study by Mahmudah et al. (2023) studies the effectiveness of experiential learning, or learning by doing, in the development of vocational skills of students with special needs. The study further implied that the acquisition of life skills for students with special needs through experiential learning should be further promoted as it builds awareness about promoting social skill acquisition for individuals with disabilities, appropriate career, and vocational education. Similar to experiential learning, skill-based learning focuses on the role of practice and the application of knowledge for students with special needs to acquire life skills that will assist them in transitioning into functioning and contributing adults in society. Moreover, Jaya et al.'s study (2019) explores the importance of skill-based educational programs for students with special needs to help them live independently and become less dependent on others. This study delved deeper into the lived experiences of SPED teachers using skill-based learning as an approach to help their students with special needs acquire necessary skills that will be beneficial to them as they become independent individuals who are capable of working and earning for themselves.

The study aimed to describe the lived experiences of Special Education (SPED) teachers using skill-based learning in Cebu City for the school year 2022-2023. Specifically, the study aimed to explore the highlights of their experience, challenges, coping mechanisms, and the meaning of teaching students with special needs using skill-based learning. The

participants were selected based on the criteria of the selection of participants: SPED teachers who are (1) equipped with experience in teaching a range of students with special needs, (2) have experience using skill-based learning, (3) and teaching in a SPED center in Cebu City. The data collection was conducted through a personal interview and focus group discussion with the participants. The findings of this study will greatly benefit several sectors such as the special education learners and their parents, serve as a bridge for SPED teachers to grow as workers of the curriculum, and lead to the improvement of the curriculum. Lastly, future researchers may use the present study as a basis for future research.

Griffin (2012) stated that George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interaction Theory (1934) seeks to understand the relationship between humans and their society by studying the symbols that give meaning to the human experience. Symbolic Interactionism focuses on social interactions between SPED teachers using skill-based learning and students with special needs. Social interactions between teachers and students affect the learning of the students more involved the teachers are, the more the students learn. Hurst et al. (2013) stated that teachers also gain from social interactions with other

teachers. This perspective can contribute to understanding the meaning of SPED teachers using skill-based learning to students with special needs and the impacts and relevance of skill-based learning to the work of SPED teachers, students with special needs, and society.

In addition to that, Robert M. Gagné's Conditions of Learning outlined the relation of learning objectives to appropriate instructional designs (Gagne & Driscoll, 1988). It specifies that there are different types or levels of learning and each classification requires different types of instruction. The theory of Conditions of Learning Theory by Robert M. Gagné (1965) has been applied to the design of instruction in all domains and the principles state that different instructions are required for different learning outcomes (Gagne & Driscoll, 1988). The use of skill-based learning as a curriculum for SPED schools addresses the learning needs and outcomes of SPED learners that SPED

teachers have to cater to. Galindo (2020) states it is necessary to know what kind of learning is appropriate for the students, in addition, the lived experiences of SPED teachers enlighten that. Furthermore, the first-hand lived experiences of SPED teachers in using skill-based learning provide insight into a suitable learning approach that can meet the various learning needs of SPED learners. Both theories aid the study in contextualizing the lived experiences of SPED teachers using skill-based learning and exploring how it affects society.

Methods

The study employed Husserl’s (1899) descriptive phenomenological method to explore the experiences of Special Education (SPED) teachers using skill-based learning to SPED learners in a SPED learning center in Cebu City. In descriptive phenomenology, researchers set aside all personal biases, beliefs, assumptions, and presumptions to separate these subjective factors from the description of phenomena given by participants (Amolo et al., 2024). Moreover, according to Rabuya et al. (2023),

using this method for inquires to be acknowledged with certain experiences that require understanding from the perceptions of the persons involved. Five (5) SPED teachers were selected as participants of the study, as Creswell (1998) recommends at least 5 participants for phenomenological studies, through non-probability sampling, specifically, purposive sampling. The criteria for participant selection are as follows: (1) SPED teachers with experience in teaching a range of students with special needs, (2) SPED teachers with experience in using skill-based learning, and (3) SPED teachers teaching in a SPED center in Cebu City. A diverse range of teaching experiences of new and veteran teachers provides an avenue for comparison of perspectives and teaching practices, as veteran teachers provide historical context and career insights while new teachers offer fresh ideas and recently acquired knowledge, resulting in richer discussions and a more comprehensive understanding of SPED teaching (Porter & Whitcomb, 2004; Castillo et al., 2012).

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Major	Teaching Experience as a SPED Teacher	Teaching Experience Using Skill-Based Learning
<i>Maltese</i>	30	F	Special Education	8 years	1 year
<i>Dove</i>	36	F	Special Education	7 years	5 years
<i>Poodle</i>	48	F	Nursing Aid	11 months	11 months
<i>Elephant</i>	33	M	Psychology	1 month	1 month
<i>Carabao</i>	49	F	Elementary Education	10 months	10 months

This study utilized an interview schedule that contained an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire created by the researchers that asked the participants to comment on their responses based on their own experiences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their views and feelings. To ensure a non-biased and credible result, triangulation methods were used using multiple sources of data such as interviews and focus group discussions. Biases were also eliminated through member checking. Individual interviews were conducted to gather their input and perceptions based on their experiences followed by a focus group discussion allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other’s statements.

Data Gathering Procedures

First, the researchers consulted with different Special Education (SPED) teachers about their lived experiences in applying skill-based learning in their curriculum. After they received the go signal from the SPED teachers and School Principal, the researchers provided a letter for approval from the Research Coordinator and the Principal. The researchers also prepared the transmittal letters, letters of informed consent, and consent forms containing all the information about the study, and the letters were given to the participants. The group conducted an on-site gathering of data through one-on-one interviews guided by the interview schedule which were followed by a focused

group discussion between the participants and the researchers. The group also informed the participants that they were taking an audio recording. The researchers observed bracketing and member checking until there was a saturation of data and information. The identity of the participants and data were kept with utmost confidentiality and the vulnerability, possible risks, and incentives were considered.

Data Analysis

This study employed the descriptive phenomenological data analysis approach proposed by Colaizzi (1978). Colaizzi's (1978) method of data analysis was employed to generate the themes of the study that capture the lived experiences and their meaning and essence to the lives of the eldest sibling living in

separated families (Depakakibo et.al., 2020). Verbatim statements were extracted and analyzed to identify significant meanings. Emergent themes reflecting the essence of the experiences were identified. To ensure credibility and confirmability, member checks and cross-examination were utilized. Reflective practices, such as bracketing, were used to minimize biases to not distort the data. Saturation was reached when the information shared by the participants validated the previously obtained data.

Results and Discussions

These are the results and discussions of the study. The final themes were largely formed by the data acquired from the transcriptions during the interview.

Table 2. Final Themes of the Study

No.	Themes
1	"You need to have the heart and passion for it": Fulfillment in Teaching
2	"We are struggling": Limited Resources, Parental Involvement, and Adjustment
3	"Don't stop, don't quit. Just continue.": Planning, Preparation, and Communication
4	"What I can do best for these learners": Emphasis on Practical Skills

Theme No. 1: "You need to have the heart and passion for it": Fulfillment in Teaching

Teaching special education (SPED) students is a challenging task that requires a need for patience, heart, and passion to effectively teach them. The student's disabilities can prompt difficult behaviors that can make handling them a challenge. However, no matter how hard it may be, the experience of teaching still ends up fulfilling. As participant *Maltese* has said:

"Teaching students with special needs requires a lot of patience. You need to have a high level of patience. And of course, you need to have the heart and passion for it, because, without passion, it may seem useless." (T1, P3-4, L121-128)

Gagne's Conditions of Learning theory presents that there are learning hierarchies that define what and how skills are taught (Gagné Conditions of Learning, n.d.)—different instructions are required for different learning outcomes. Each learner has different needs

hence the teachers tailor their teaching methods in accordance to the needs of a student to effectively teach the students and cater to their needs. As participant *Poodle* has said:

"So, I, I have to adjust to their needs." (T3, P31, L1302-1303)

Glessner and Johnson (2020) stated that the perseverance of teachers affects the teaching effectiveness of students. Teaching SPED students is indeed a challenge however with the right passion and perseverance, it will become effective. Through skill-based learning, teachers can assess each student's abilities and focus on teaching skills that are relevant to their future vocations and everyday lives. Skill-based learning does not only addresses the uniqueness of each student but also ensures that each instruction is practical. As stated by Gajjar (2017), skill-based learning emphasizes the application of knowledge to real-world scenarios. This approach helps enhance their independence and their readiness to contribute to society. The participants have found and

proved the fulfillment in teaching SPED students; in knowing that they have had a positive impact on their survival in this world as a person with disability.

Theme No. 2: "We are struggling": Limited Resources, Parental Involvement, and Adjustment

Teaching learners with special needs may be a fulfilling experience but it also has challenges that the SPED teachers need to prepare themselves for. With students requiring special attention, the SPED teachers, centers, and schools, also need help and attention from not only the private sector but also the government. As shared by participants *Dove* and *Poodle*:

"So talking, about the resources, we are struggling, but, uhm, the government? They are also struggling." (T2, P18, L866-870)

Patience, preparedness, and resourcefulness play a significant role in the lives of these SPED teachers. Gesel et al. (2022) found that SPED teachers rated the sufficiency of support between somewhat insufficient and somewhat sufficient. The same goes for the participants in this current study, they would say that the resources are sufficient but also insufficient. They want to make progress in teaching, but sadly, due to limited resources and financial constraints, they do not usually meet the standard that they want. As shared by participant *Poodle*:

"That is also what slows us. For instance, that is what we're making on this day, and the materials are incomplete, so it needs to be prepared." (T3, P34, L1428-1433)

Despite that, the participants still make it work through the help of different schools that partner with them for internships. From these partnerships, they were able to gradually collect financial help to provide for the learners and deliver quality education to them.

Moreover, the limited resources and financial constraints are not the only challenges the participants face but also managing their time and properly implementing skill-based learning. Additionally, the scarcity of literature on skill-based learning poses a challenge for teachers and limits awareness of its effectiveness for use in SPED schools. Creating the activities for the students is not a challenge but making sure that skill-based learning is executed and implemented properly is the real challenge for them. As shared by participant *Maltese*:

"We have to budget our time carefully. We usually prepare for one week and adjust our lesson plan accordingly." (T1, P5, L206-210)

"Achieving the learning objectives can be challenging for students with special needs because it takes a lot of patience and time for them to understand the lesson. The instructions must be step-by-step, with repetition to help them understand the material. They have difficulties, so it may take them longer to achieve the learning objectives." (T1, P4-5, 162-173)

In line with the implementation of the learning approach, adjustments and adapting to different characteristics and attitudes of the learners is something that the participants do daily. As a teacher of learners who need special care and attention, they are exposed to different conditions and behaviors of the learners which may be a challenge to them. Rathod (2023) states that through skill-based learning, teachers are able to work beyond being transmitters of information and will become essential facilitators and mentors in the acquisition of skills. Hence, adjusting to their students' conditions and behaviors also involves adjusting and managing their time. Participant *Carabao* and *Poodle* shared:

"Yes, for instance when they have tantrums, once they have tantrums, they cannot be forced. So you will just have to observe and wait until they have recovered." (T5, P53, L2254-2259)

"Oh, especially when there is a time where there are meltdowns, but those

meltdowns— those, when, what is this, that one when... when they get tantrums, those. That is what challenges us.” (T5, P52-53, L2223-2229)

“When they get tired, they don't want to do [what they need to do]. So, [the instructions] need to be repeated, for whatever they're being sullen over...” (T3, P32, L1337-1342)

Furthermore, learning does not stop even if the learners are not with the teachers or in schools—it keeps going. Thus, having coordination and collaboration between the parents and the teachers is vital as parents help the teachers to continue fostering and empowering the learners and their capabilities. Parents have to understand that they are also needed for their children to learn and to be more independent in this world. As shared by participant Dove:

“Because you're already there, you already have a lesson plan and you implement that, then, you already have things to require, that's where the problem lies because every time after, we

have progress reports, evaluation plans, and assessments. And when it comes to evaluation, it's all--who's still involved? The SO, parents, right?” (T2, P17, L711-722)

“Then the most challenging is to deal (with) this kind of, I could say, it's hard to pull them out from the system. It is very hard to like because some of our parents think--thinking that, they are not, you know--they consider that “Ah, it's like that, like this. They are not like--as if there's no hope.” (T2, P15, L627-636)

“But the challenges that we are facing right now is how are we going to motivate, how are we going to empower these parents of our learners” (T2, P15, L603-608)

Wahyuni and Mangunsong (2022) stated that parental involvement has a significant correlation with parents' perception of the academic achievement of their child with special needs. This means that the learners' motivation

and achievement tend to increase as their parents involve themselves more in their lives. The participants emphasized that they need the involvement of the parents to empower the students to learn and be motivated to work.

Lastly, with the limited resources and support, the SPED teachers have to constantly adjust their teaching methods to cater to the needs of the learners. As per Blumer (1969), “Humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances.” This can be seen in how SPED teachers adapt to different situations—understanding the people, things, challenges, and student behaviors they encounter. Hence, it makes skill-based learning an appropriate method that enables, not just the student but also, teachers and parents to understand, interpret, and realize different situations inside and outside the classrooms, houses, and society. Thus, for the students to effectively learn and be independent in this world, they do not just need the help of their teachers but also their parents' concern and responsibility for them, given that there are also sufficient resources for them to utilize in learning.

Theme No. 3: “Don't stop, don't quit. Just continue.”: Planning, Preparation, and Communication

Teaching students with special needs using skill-based learning requires SPED teachers to be ready to cope with the challenges they will face during the teaching process. The existence of limited resources and constraints, meticulous planning and preparation for skill-based learning activities are vital. This ensures that participants can achieve effective learning outcomes despite the obstacles they face. As participant *Maltese* shared:

“It's essential to ensure that the activities or learning skills are achieved by the students, which is the basis of their learning. If they don't understand, it means it's not effective for them. That's why we plan

using our lesson plan, which we call a weekly plan." (T1, P6-7, L253-262)

The urgency of the teachers to first identify their learners' needs is anchored on the Conditions of Learning Theory as it supports the idea that SPED teachers primarily recognize each learner's skills to prepare learning objectives that are appropriate for the students with special needs.

Furthermore, the preparation process of the teachers involves being mentally ready to handle their daily classroom setting. Moreover, a study by Miller et. al. (1999) states that when special education teachers are highly stressed by the unmanageability of their workload, they are more likely to leave the special education classroom. Hence, patience is another vital component to cope with making the students understand the lessons and activities implemented in skill-based learning. As participants *Poodle* and *Elephant* answered:

"Patience, because it's really hard to handle [them]." (T4, P43, L1742-1743)

The participants also expressed how their students remain as their motivation to continue, as shared by participant *Dove*:

"Then, good thing I have these learners; they are the ones who motivate me to 'Don't stop, don't quit. Just continue.'" (T2, P15, L622-625)

The study of Sudtho et al. (2015) states that the interaction between the teacher participant and social objects, such as her students, influenced the most in the formation of her professional identity. Mead and Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism Theory explains how SPED teachers gain a sense of fulfillment in seeing their students succeed and turn it into their motivation to keep teaching by the concept of "I" and "me" by George Herbert Mead. The concept supports the idea that SPED teachers took the expected role of effectively teaching students with special needs as it became their identity.

Regarding their school resources, the teachers solely depend on available materials and resources to cope with resource shortages

as mentioned by participants *Maltese* and *Dove* below. Given the limited information of skill-based learning on the internet, it becomes challenging for the teachers considering that they utilize what is free and available. Hence, the implementation of skill-based learning compels the teachers to adapt and innovate with the scarce resources at hand, often without access to comprehensive guides.

"We usually depend on what is available on the internet or what materials we have in our possession." (T1, P7, L269-273)

"But we collaborate with the barangay for support, such as when we need a vehicle for transportation during outside activities." (T2, P18, L767-772)

SPED teachers need the collaboration of other teachers, parents, and school staff to cope and effectively meet the needs of students with special needs, as mentioned by participants *Maltese* and *Carabao*:

"We coordinate with the parents, coordinators, administrators, and co-teachers to address the needs of our students." (T1, P7, L279-283)

"With myself, I try my best with what I can give and what I am capable of, and with the help of teachers with experience, because I don't have that much experience, I also depend on them with experience about SPED." (T5, P55-56, L2361-2369)

Furthermore, collaboration with the parents of students with special needs is vital in dealing with the behavior and learning process of their students. As participant *Dove* mentioned:

"That is why every time there is a meeting, I would address them directly, 'I think we need to check our vision (and) mission here. Our vision, that's one—what is your goal? What is your dream for your child? Because maybe we are not aligned

to this dream and it is hard for us to motivate our learners themselves if you are not being motivated.” (T2, P16, 639-652)

The participants also emphasized the importance of other professionals, such as Physical Therapists and Occupational Therapists, in coping with challenges directly involving the behavior of students with special needs, such as meltdowns. As participant *Dove* emphasized:

“But talking about behavioral in the higher perspective, we are, uhm, we refer to the PT, if there's a need for the PT.” (T1, P2, L866-870)

“We refer to the OT, we can see—we evaluate if this learner needs an OT. For example, behavioral problems like meltdowns, some hygienic things, some part of their toileting, so we need OT for that.” (T2, P21, L871-878)

The collaborative approach of the SPED teachers with each other, the parents, and other professionals shows their commitment to preparing themselves and meeting the needs of the students. Based on the study of Organiza (2016), there is a strong correlation between motivation and the quality of work-life of SPED teachers, with both variables having high levels. In the context of this theme, the teachers' dedication to teaching the students using skill-based learning is a driving force to overcome these challenges. The participants continue to persevere despite the challenges of the implementation of skill-based learning by preparing themselves, acknowledging the needs of their students, and collaborating with other important figures in the lives of the students with special needs.

Theme No. 4: “What I can do best for these learners”: Emphasis on Practical Skills

Special education teachers work hard to recognize and cultivate each student's distinct skills, tailoring instruction to students' interests. The use of skill-based learning allows educators to take on a mentorship role, providing guidance and support to students in their skill development journey (Rathod, 2023). They

empower students to succeed by focusing on skills relevant to their future vocations. As participants, *Carabao* and *Dove* said:

“...One learner, we will focus on them, observe them, and find out what skills they have and that's where we'll focus...” (T5, P55, L2325-2330)

“It is not said that your skills, only your skills, that you know from yourself, shouldn't be asserted on a child who has different skills that they don't know” (T5, P55, L2333-2338)

One of the objectives of skill-based learning is for the teachers to assess and evaluate students to identify their unique skills and needs, dedicating themselves to teaching skills that will help students earn funds from their hard work. Participant *Dove* mentioned the skills in the interview:

“The most common basic skill that I see is cooking. Because it's something they do every day and it's a way for them to earn a living.” (T2, P24, L1007-1011)

Special education students acquire practical skills through skill-based learning activities preparing them for employment. This empowers them as contributing members of society without facing any form of prejudice. Mahmudah et al. (2023) imply that through acquiring practical life skills students are able to build social, vocational, and career awareness that will aid them in transition and preparation in facing the real world. Participant *Dove* stated:

“I always like, look at the brighter perspective; what I can do or what best that we can do for these learners, for them to be empowered, for them to be able to be recognized by the society that they are not hopeless, but somehow, they are part of this world.” (T2, P26, L1082-1089)

The teachers are able to become skill nurturers and life mentors given that skill-based learning allows the teachers to tailor activities that meet their needs upon assessment and

evaluation. Working with students with special needs requires cultivating or improving characteristics to create a positive and safe learning environment. This is as said by participants *Poodle and Carabao*:

"So a dog, because, it is not a- yes, it's like a companion." (T3, P38, L1596-1598)

"They [carabao] can handle it, even when beaten, I won't get angry easily, because I have a lot of patience." (T5, P56, L2390-2393)

The Symbolic Interactionism Theory explores how individuals assign meaning to social interactions. SPED teachers use skill-based learning to assist students in gaining practical skills. Smit and Fritz (2008) suggest that situational, social, and personal identity constructs serve as a lens to derive meanings from corresponding narratives and texts. This theory explains how SPED teachers find fulfillment in their students' success by deriving meaning from their experiences and challenges.

The Conditions of Learning Theory by Robert Gagne emphasizes designing appropriate learning approaches based on learners' needs, which SPED teachers apply by recognizing individual skills and tailoring instruction accordingly (Gagne & Driscoll, 1988). This theory provides a framework for understanding how SPED teachers adapt their instructional approaches to address the student's learning needs, focusing on developing practical skills important for daily living and future vocations.

The fourth theme of the study emphasizes the participants' focus on skill-based learning as a practical source of hands-on skills for students, promoting real-world experiences and engagement in the industry for students to gain knowledge and actively participate in the workforce. Jaya et al. (2018) support the notion that vocational skills are essential for individuals to achieve independence and contribute to society, aligning with the need for life skills as a continuum of knowledge and abilities.

Training children in life skills is the same as developing and training children's physical, motor, language, and social-emotional aspects (Diana et al., 2021). As said by the participant, the teachers ought to assist SPED students in

making them recognized by society. Through the implementation of skill-based learning, the teachers become motivated to help SPED students not just dubbed as people with disabilities but they are also people with the resilience to go through everything with the help of teachers and an appropriate learning approach tailored to their special needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As SPED teachers, teaching skill-based learning to special education students can be challenging, but with passion and perseverance, it can be fulfilling and rewarding to make a positive impact on their lives. These SPED teachers face challenges with limited resources and financial constraints, time management, and the proper implementation of skill-based learning approaches. However, with the possession of proper values such as resilience, passion, perseverance, and collaboration, SPED teachers can ultimately help in the development of SPED learners. Furthermore, the SPED teachers also emphasize the importance of recognizing and nurturing the distinct skills of each student, and utilizing assessment and evaluation to teach practical skills that will be relevant to their future vocations and everyday lives, enabling them to feel empowered and acknowledged as contributing members of society without facing any form of prejudice through the use of skill-based learning. In essence, skill-based learning is a powerful tool for SPED teachers. It allows them to move beyond standardized tests and focus on what truly matters: nurturing the unique potential of each student and preparing them to thrive in the real world. This study presents the experiences and challenges of SPED teachers utilizing skill-based learning in Cebu City while emphasizing their resilience, dedication, and collaborative efforts to empower students with special needs, nurture their individual skills, and foster inclusive education through skill-based learning, ultimately making a positive and meaningful impact on their lives and societal integration.

This study recommends an annual SPED teacher training, curriculum instruction, assessment, and instruction, emphasizing the

need for tailored approaches that may empower and integrate SPED students into society. It is also recommended to increase financial resources and funding to support educational programs for these SPED teachers and students, enabling them to effectively teach and promote the skill-based learning approach.

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