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Research Article

Establishing Stronger Connections: Enhancing School-Family Collaboration for Students with Hearing Impairments

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate approaches that improve school-family partnerships in supporting hearing-impaired learners in selected Special Education (SPED) centers in Cebu. This study utilized a comparative descriptive design and sought to find out the similarities and differences between teachers and parents on aspects of communication approaches and shared decision-making in the learning process of hearing-impaired learners. The respondents of this study were SPED center teachers and parents of hearing-impaired learners chosen through purposive sampling. The total number of respondents was 50. The researcher used a validated survey questionnaire to gather data. This data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-tests to find differences between and within the groups of people surveyed. The findings of this study revealed that hearing-impaired learners benefit from improved communication approaches and parental involvement in addressing issues affecting academic performance and boosting students' self-esteem and social behavior. This study therefore concludes that school-family partnerships are vital in the development of hearing-impaired learners and suggests that parent training and community support are vital in addressing issues affecting hearing-impaired learners in Cebu.

Keywords: *Descriptive-Comparative Design, Inclusive Education Parental involvement, Special Education, Teacher-parent partnership, Teacher preparedness*

Introduction

Effective communication and cooperation between learning institutions and parents are essential for the academic and social development of hearing-impaired students. In

the true spirit of special education, it is essential for teachers and parents to forge a partnership for creating an environment that caters to the special needs of these students (Lai & Lee, 2018). This is especially true for hearing-

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impaired students, who often face challenges related to communication, language, and social integration (Jackson & Rivera, 2020).

A good example of a conducive educational environment is the Naga Special Education (SPED) Center in Cebu, which provides special education to students with hearing impairment. The SPED centers, which are part of the Philippine education system, are informed by the Department of Education's policies on inclusive education, such as Department Order No. 72, s. 2009, which aims to "institutionalize the implementation of inclusive education for children and youth with special needs." These special education programs are designed to facilitate inclusivity and ensure that all students have access to learning opportunities (Department of Education, 2017). While special education programs have achieved remarkable success, their effectiveness depends on parents' active participation in the educational process.

However, recent statistics from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2020) show that over 400,000 Filipinos suffer from some kind of hearing disability. In the education sector, the recent DepEd SPED enrollment report (2023) showed that around 8,000 students with hearing impairment are currently enrolled in public schools, with many attending SPED centers. However, there is still a need to develop more rounded strategies that will effectively and consistently integrate families into the educational process. Research has shown that parental involvement is important in improving the development, literacy, and academic success of children with hearing impairment (Gallaudet University, 2019; Allen, 2015). Moreover, Antia, Jones, Reed, and Kreimeyer (2009) emphasized that students with hearing impairment will achieve better academic and social outcomes if their families are involved in activities related to the school process. Recent studies by Smith and Douglas (2021) showed that the consistent involvement of families will positively affect the educational and emotional outcomes of learners with hearing challenges.

The process of establishing effective communication between schools and families remains a complex challenge. Kern and Hodge (2021) identified several barriers, including limited understanding of hearing impairments,

prevailing cultural beliefs regarding disabilities, and socioeconomic constraints, which may impede effective collaboration. In the Philippines, most families of children with disabilities reported insufficient awareness and involvement in educational decision-making for their children (EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, some schools may not have programs in place for regular family collaboration, thus creating a gap in this area. At the Naga SPED Center, the establishment of a collaborative relationship between teachers and families is essential in addressing the unique learning needs of students with hearing impairments. While there are some reports that communication strategies are being used, there is not enough research to prove how effective they are. In addition, there is little research in the Philippines to help families and schools work together to support students with hearing impairments and their unique learning needs.

This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating current communication and collaboration practices between the Naga SPED Center and the families of its students with hearing impairments. It will review existing methods, identify barriers, and propose actionable strategies to enhance family involvement. The findings aim to provide meaningful insights for improving school-family partnerships and advancing inclusive education not only within the Naga SPED Center but also across similar institutions in the country. Despite growing global awareness of inclusive practices, a localized understanding to best support family-school collaboration in SPED settings for hearing-impaired students in the Philippines remains under-researched. Thus, this study will contribute to closing that research gap and guide future policies and practices.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive comparative research design to examine and compare perceptions of school and family involvement in supporting students with hearing impairments at Naga SPED Center. As defined by Lucero et al. (2022), this design allows researchers to identify differences between groups based on existing conditions without manipulating

variables. The purpose of using the design is to identify differences and similarities between the perspectives of key stakeholders – teachers, parents, and school administrators—regarding the existing school–family partnership strategies. It allows for an in-depth description of the current practices and facilitates the comparison of stakeholder views on their roles, challenges, and contributions in strengthening support systems for learners with hearing impairments. The sample included all SPED teachers using total population sampling and parents of SPED learners using purposive sampling. Due to the small target population, only 20 SPED teachers and 30 parents met the inclusion criteria and were available, making these sample sizes suitable and representative for the study context.

This study employed a structured survey questionnaire as the primary tool for collecting quantitative data to assess the level and quality of communication and collaboration between the Naga SPED Center and the families of learners with hearing impairments. The instrument was organized into three main sections aligned with the research objectives and adapted from validated sources. The first section gathered demographic information from respondents, including age, gender, relationship to the student, and the number of years they have been involved in the child’s education; this part was intended for descriptive analysis only and was not included in scoring. The second section assessed how often communication occurs between parents and school personnel, especially teachers, and evaluated the consistency and methods of communication used. Items in this section were adapted from Hirano, Garbacz, and Rowe (2018), which provides validated measures for communication frequency, preferred methods, and perceived challenges in school-based interventions. The third section measured the perceived quality of collaboration between families and educational staff, focusing on partnership effectiveness and shared decision-making. Items were adapted from Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, and Beegle (2004), which includes validated scales for assessing family-professional partnerships and collaboration quality. The adaptation of these instruments ensured that the

questionnaire was evidence-based and aligned with international standards for evaluating family-school communication and collaboration in special education contexts.

To analyze the data gathered in this study, several statistical tools were employed. Frequency count was used to determine the number of respondents in each category of the demographic profile, while percentage was applied to indicate the proportion of respondents who selected each response option. To test for significant differences in perceptions between educational staff and families of learners with hearing impairments regarding the frequency of communication and the effectiveness of collaboration, the Mann-Whitney U Test was utilized as the appropriate nonparametric statistical method.

Result and Discussion

The study revealed that most educational staff were principals (80%), predominantly aged 41–50 years (40%), with advanced academic qualifications—65% holding a Master’s degree—yet half had limited experience of only 0–2 years in their roles. Parents, on the other hand, were primarily mothers (56.67%), mostly aged 31–40 years (33.33%), and demonstrated long-term engagement with the SPED Center, with 46.67% having children enrolled for over six years.

Both groups reported frequent interaction, with 70% communicating daily, mainly by text and email. Parents preferred letters more than educational staff, highlighting the need for varied communication methods. 75% of educational staff reported having sufficient training in communication; 10% were unsure, underscoring the need for ongoing professional development.

Regarding collaboration perceptions, educational staff generally viewed the partnership positively, rating it as “Good” (55%) or “Excellent” (35%). Parents, however, expressed more varied opinions, with 40% rating collaboration as “Fair,” indicating room for improvement in meeting family expectations.

The study also identified key challenges in communication. Educational staff cited lack of parental engagement (31.25%) and time con-

straints as major barriers, whereas parents emphasized language barriers (57.45%) as the most significant challenge, underscoring the need for accessible and inclusive communication strategies. When asked about additional resources to improve collaboration, both groups prioritized the provision of sign language interpreters (31.25% of staff and 51.06% of parents), followed by parent training programs and more frequent parent-teacher conferences.

Finally, hypothesis testing revealed no significant difference between educational staff and parents in their perceptions of communication frequency ($p = 0.829$) and collaboration effectiveness ($p = 0.111$), suggesting that both groups share similar views on these aspects, although qualitative data indicate opportunities for enhancing the depth and inclusivity of engagement.

Conclusion

The research finds that both teachers and parents have comparable views on how often they should talk to each other and how well they should work together, as shown by the fact that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. This indicates that existing communication methods establish a robust basis for school-family collaborations. However, qualitative data show that there are disparities in technique choices, language accessibility, and depth of participation, especially for families of students with hearing impairments. Parents mostly use letters and text messages to talk to each other, which shows how important it is to have more inclusive and culturally appropriate tactics.

Most teachers and other school personnel think that working together is a good thing, giving it a "Good" or "Excellent" rating. Parents, on the other hand, had more mixed thoughts, with a large number giving it a "Fair" rating. This difference shows that expectations have not been reached and that schools need to go beyond frequent contact to meaningful interaction that builds trust and allows for joint decision-making. Challenges like parents not being involved, not having enough time, and not speaking the same language show how important it is to have structured supports.

In general, the results show that good communication is more important than a lot of it in special education. Communication should be easy to understand, encourage participation, and support family involvement. For students who have trouble hearing, this means putting language access, structured parent involvement, and professional development for teachers first in order to strengthen partnerships and improve educational outcomes.

Recommendation

The study suggests adopting multilingual and plain-language materials, using sign language interpreters, and utilizing a variety of channels, including digital platforms and printed letters, in order to improve school-family engagement at Naga SPED Center. Educational staff members should receive specialized training on hearing impairment, family engagement, and culturally sensitive communication as part of their ongoing professional development. Workshops on IEP navigation, school portals, and effective two-way communication must be a part of parent empowerment programs, and they should be available on a flexible schedule. Regular parent-teacher conferences with virtual choices and translation assistance, accompanied by collaborative decision-making and explicit agendas on student achievement, should institutionalize structured participation. Accessibility criteria should be required by policy, resources should be set aside for interpreters and training, and monitoring methods should be put in place to assess the success of partnerships.

As part of these recommendations, a Comprehensive Enhancement Plan for Naga SPED Center is proposed. This plan includes the following: the recruitment of qualified sign language interpreters, the provision of regular training for staff and parents, the development of plain-language and multilingual communication tools, the scheduling of three parent-teacher conferences annually, and the establishment of feedback mechanisms to monitor progress. It is the objective of this plan to establish an environment that is inclusive, responsive, and collaborative, and that facilitates the academic and social growth of students with hearing impairments.

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