

Barriers to Effective Teaching: Teachers' Experiences in Overcrowded Non-Graded Special Education Classrooms in Oroquieta City Central Elementary School

Norvina V. Namocatcat¹; Marry Cres S. Teves²; Chessa G. Balingit³; Leizel P. Salavaria⁴; Warlina C. Maca⁵; Janus A. Naparan⁶

¹⁻⁶Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines

Corresponding Author Email: norvinanamocatcat@gmail.com

Abstract

This study looked at the barriers that Special Education (SPED) teachers face when teaching in overcrowded, non-graded classrooms at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School. A qualitative case study design guided the work, and the data came from semi-structured interviews with SPED teachers. We asked how these teachers go about their instruction, what makes their work hard, and how they cope with large groups of learners whose needs vary widely. Thematic analysis showed that crowding made it difficult to individualize lessons, keep behavior in check, give each child enough attention, and put suitable strategies into practice. Teachers also pointed to cramped rooms, scarce materials, a heavy workload, and too little time. Even so, they kept finding ways to carry on: they adjusted activities, put the learners with the greatest need first, made use of whatever resources were at hand, and relied on classroom management routines to keep learning going. The findings underline the need for enough teaching staff, suitable classrooms, adequate instructional materials, and dependable administrative support. We recommend that schools strengthen their support systems and resources so that SPED instruction can be both effective and inclusive.

Keywords

Special Education, Overcrowded Classrooms, Teaching Barriers, SPED Teachers, Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

Education systems around the world increasingly stress inclusion and equity for learners with varied needs. For inclusion to work, schools must be places where learners with disabilities can take part in a meaningful way and get the support they need. In practice, though, how well inclusion works depends heavily on classroom conditions, available resources, and the workload teachers carry. UNESCO (2020) pointed out that teachers cannot respond well to learner diversity without proper preparation, resources, and workable conditions. Overcrowding is a clear example of where this breaks down: when a room is packed, giving each learner individual attention and responding to the many different needs of children with disabilities becomes much harder.

SPED teachers play a central part in delivering individualized instruction and suitable interventions. Their day-to-day tasks include adapting lessons, handling behavior, tracking progress, preparing materials, and working with parents and other professionals. The load grows quickly when a teacher is responsible for many learners whose educational and developmental needs differ. Walker et al. (2021) described how special education teachers juggle instruction, behavior management, collaboration, and individualized education programs, and they stressed that responsibility should be shared and teachers adequately supported.

Crowded SPED classrooms bring their own set of obstacles. With too many learners in too little space, it is hard for a teacher to keep the room organized, watch each child, or offer one-on-one help. Noise, movement, tight space, and the competing needs of learners can all interrupt a lesson. UNESCO (2020) named overcrowding and shortages of resources among the factors that restrict learner-centered, inclusive teaching. Samsuddin et al. (2021) similarly saw workload and working conditions as key to understanding the pressures on special education teachers.

Teachers do not simply accept these conditions; they adapt. They may group learners by ability, simplify tasks, prepare individual activities, draw on visual and multisensory materials, and spend extra time with those who need it most. Such moves show how hard teachers work to keep instruction effective despite classroom limits. Miña (2024), for example, found that SPED teachers relied on differentiated instruction, personalized education plans, multisensory approaches, and other flexible strategies to reach diverse learners, and also underscored the value of collaboration and professional development when teachers face the demands of inclusive settings.

Workload is another concern. Beyond teaching, SPED teachers prepare individualized activities, record learner progress, draft educational plans, handle behavior, and keep in touch with families. Add a large class to this list and little time is left for lesson planning or targeted intervention. Dotimas (2022) reported that SPED teachers experienced work-related stress tied to the demands of their duties and surroundings, and Mangonon (2022) described the difficulties special educators meet in developing individualized education programs, calling for suitable instructional and institutional support.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has kept strengthening policies for inclusive education and for appropriate services to learners with disabilities. DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021 sets out guidelines for educational programs and services for these learners within the K to 12 Basic Education Program, while Republic Act No. 11650, passed in 2022, establishes a policy of inclusion and provides for support and related services. Both place the responsibility on schools to offer accessible, responsive programs (Department of Education [DepEd], 2021; Republic Act No. 11650, 2022).

Even with these policies, Filipino SPED teachers still struggle with limited resources, training gaps, workload, classroom conditions, and instructional support. Kilag et al. (2024) reported that teachers in the Philippines dealt with scarce resources, limited preparation, and the difficulty of tailoring instruction to each learner. Español et al. (2025) likewise found that special needs teachers ran into obstacles in carrying out inclusive education policies, especially regarding available support and resources. Taken together, these studies suggest that good SPED practice needs more than dedicated teachers; it also needs adequate facilities, materials, staffing, professional development, and administrative backing.

Earlier work has looked at teacher workload, inclusive education, instructional challenges, and resource limits, yet qualitative studies that center on teachers' own experiences in overcrowded SPED settings remain scarce. Little is known about how crowding shapes the daily work of SPED teachers, especially their ability to individualize instruction, manage behavior, prepare materials, and meet learners' varied needs. This study, "Barriers to Effective Teaching: Teachers' Experiences in Overcrowded Special

Education Environment,” therefore set out to explore the barriers SPED teachers face, the strategies they use to deal with them, and the support they receive. Its findings may help school administrators, SPED coordinators, teachers, and other stakeholders improve classroom conditions and strengthen the support behind SPED instruction.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, which holds that what teachers experience and do is shaped by several interconnected environmental systems. In an overcrowded SPED setting, the classroom itself, school resources, family support, and wider education policy can all influence how well a teacher is able to teach. Akbayrak and Douglas (2022) showed how useful the ecological perspective is for understanding the roles of specialist teachers, and Yuwono and Okech (2021) stressed how much classroom environments and resources matter in special needs education. The theory thus gives us a way to see how environmental factors add up to the barriers SPED teachers describe.

Policy Context

Philippine law recognizes the right of learners with disabilities to quality, inclusive education. Republic Act No. 11650 (2022), the Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act, promotes inclusive education and support services, and DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021 lays out guidelines for programs and services that respond to each learner’s individual needs (Department of Education [DepEd], 2021).

Together, these policies expect schools and teachers to provide environments that respond to learner diversity. Republic Act No. 10533 (2013) promotes learner-centered, inclusive education, and the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 calls for stronger teacher capacity, learning environments, and educational resources (DepEd, 2022). Overcrowded SPED classrooms, however, can make it hard to individualize instruction, manage behavior, prepare materials, and serve learners who need different levels of support.

Policies set a foundation, but problems can still arise when they reach the classroom. Tight space, scarce materials, and large numbers of learners can limit what teachers are able to do for each child. Studying SPED teachers’ experiences in overcrowded settings can therefore reveal the gap between what policy expects and what classrooms actually look like, and can inform decisions on staffing, facilities, resources, and administrative support.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The study used a qualitative case study design following Merriam’s (1998) approach. It examined how SPED teachers experience the barriers to effective teaching in overcrowded non-graded classrooms at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School, and how they handle those barriers in their everyday classroom settings. The researcher acted as the main instrument for collecting and interpreting data.

2.2. Research Setting

The study was carried out at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School, in its overcrowded non-graded SPED classrooms. The school was chosen because it offers a fitting context for understanding the barriers teachers meet when delivering instruction to learners with special educational needs. It serves a diverse group of learners, which allowed the researcher to look at class size, learner diversity, instructional resources, and classroom management in a natural school setting.

2.3. Participants and Sampling Strategy

The participants were six SPED teachers who handle overcrowded non-graded classrooms at the school and who work with learners with varied special educational needs. They were selected through purposive sampling using three criteria: direct experience managing such classrooms, at least three years of SPED teaching experience, and willingness to take part in in-depth semi-structured interviews. To protect confidentiality, each teacher was assigned a code (TP1 to TP6).

CODE	GENDER	Years of Experience	CONTEXT
TP1	Female	6	Teaching learners with ID in inclusive settings
TP2	Female	5	Teaching learners with ASD in inclusive settings
TP3	Female	5	Handling ASD learners in inclusive settings
TP4	Female	6	Handling ID learners in inclusive settings
TP5	Female	4	Handling learners with mild autism
TP6	Male	7	Handling learners with autism in inclusive settings

2.4. Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed thematically, following Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The researchers read and re-read the transcripts until they were thoroughly familiar with them. Statements that spoke to teachers' experiences and to barriers to effective teaching were coded and sorted into categories. These categories were compared and refined repeatedly until they captured the challenges teachers faced in overcrowded non-graded SPED classrooms at the school.

2.5. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

All teacher participants gave informed consent before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and their confidentiality and anonymity were protected throughout. Parental consent was not needed because no learners were interviewed.

3. Results and Discussion

Three categories emerged from the data: (a) barriers to effective teaching in overcrowded non-graded SPED classrooms, (b) teachers' experiences in managing overcrowded classrooms, and (c) strategies teachers use to address these barriers. Together they show what SPED teachers at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School go through, how crowding affects their teaching and their support for learners, and what they do to keep instruction effective and inclusive.

3.1. Barriers to Effective Teaching in Overcrowded Non-graded Special Education Classrooms.

This category covers the difficulties teachers face in giving effective, individualized instruction while looking after many learners with different educational and developmental needs. Crowding can reduce the attention a teacher is able to give, make behavior harder to manage, and get in the way of differentiated strategies (Sebastian, 2025; Marchan et al., 2025). Three sub-categories emerged: managing diverse learner needs, limited classroom resources, and heavy teaching workload.

3.1.1. Managing Diverse Learner Needs

Here teachers spoke about responding to learners who differ in ability, developmental level, learning pace, behavior, and the support they require. In crowded non-graded classrooms, giving each learner individual attention and fitting instruction to their needs is hard (Sebastian, 2025). Differentiated, individualized teaching asks teachers to change strategies, activities, materials, and support to match learner differences (Lindner & Schwab, 2020).

"Lisod usahay kay lahi-lahi man gyud ang needs sa mga bata, mao nga kinahanglan nako i-adjust ang akong activities depende sa ilang ability."

[It is sometimes difficult because the learners have different needs, so I need to adjust my activities depending on their abilities.]

TP1:

"Dili parehas ilang learning pace. Naay dali makasabot, pero naa pud uban nga kinahanglan pa og balik-balik nga explanation ug guidance."

[Their learning pace is not the same. Some understand quickly, while others need repeated explanations and guidance.]

TP2:

"Challenge gyud ang paghatag og attention sa tanan kay daghan ang learners ug lain-lain pud ilang needs ug behavior."

[Giving attention to all learners is really a challenge because there are many learners with different needs and behaviors.]

TP3:

"Kinahanglan nako maghimo og lain-laing activities kay dili tanan makasunod sa parehas nga instruction."

[I need to prepare different activities because not all learners can follow the same instructions.]

TP4:

"Usahay lisod i-manage ang learners kay naa'y dali ma-distract ug naa pud nangingahanglan og one-on-one assistance."

[Sometimes it is difficult to manage the learners because some are easily distracted while others need one-on-one assistance.]

TP5:

“Lisod mahatagan og equal attention ang tanan, labi na kung daghan ang nanginahanglan og individual support.”

[It is difficult to give equal attention to everyone, especially when many learners need individual support.]

TP6:

3.1.2. Limited Classroom Resources

This sub-category is about shortages of instructional materials, learning resources, assistive tools, equipment, and other facilities that learners with special needs depend on. When a SPED classroom is crowded, a lack of resources makes it even harder to individualize teaching, adapt activities, and meet learners' varied needs. Research in Philippine SPED and inclusive settings has repeatedly named inadequate materials and resources as a major obstacle to effective teaching and learner support (Allam & Martin, 2021; Campado et al., 2023; Marchan et al., 2025).

“Usahay kulang ang instructional materials, mao nga kinahanglan mi mangita og alternative materials para magamit sa mga bata.”

[Sometimes the instructional materials are insufficient, so we need to look for alternative materials to use with the learners.]

TP1:

“Dili tanan materials available, labi na ang mga materials nga angay sa specific needs sa learners.”

[Not all materials are available, especially those that are appropriate for the specific needs of the learners.]

TP2:

“Kulang usahay ang visual aids ug manipulatives, mao nga maghimo nalang ko og akong kaugalingong materials.”

[Sometimes visual aids and manipulatives are lacking, so I make my own materials.]

TP3:

“Lisod kung daghan ang learners pero limitado ang materials kay dili tanan makagamit dayon.”

[It is difficult when there are many learners but the materials are limited because not everyone can use them at the same time.]

TP4:

“Naa gyud times nga kinahanglan namo mag-improvise kay kulang ang resources para sa among activities.”

[There are times when we really need to improvise because we lack resources for our activities.]

TP5:

“Kulang ang classroom resources, labi na sa equipment ug learning materials, mao nga makaapekto pud sa among pagtudlo.”

[Classroom resources are limited, especially equipment and learning materials, which also affects our teaching.]

TP6:

3.1.3. Heavy Teaching Workload

A heavy workload means having to handle instruction, assessment, documentation, and learner support all at once. In crowded non-graded SPED classrooms, teachers prepare differentiated activities, give individual help, manage behavior, track progress, and finish required reports. Because these duties overlap, less time is left for lesson planning and individual instruction, and the strain can lead to stress and weaker instruction (Aldosiry, 2022; Ilagan, 2024; Brunsting et al., 2026).

“Dili gyud igo ang oras kay daghan kaayo og learners nga kinahanglan tagaan og attention ug individual support.”

[The time is really not enough because there are many learners who need attention and individual support.]

TP1:

“Aside sa pagtudlo, daghan pud kaayo og reports ug documentation nga kinahanglan namong humanon.”

[Aside from teaching, we also have many reports and documentation that we need to complete.]

TP2:

“Kapoy usahay kay kinahanglan mag-andam og lain-laing activities para sa lain-laing needs sa mga learners.”

[It can be tiring because we need to prepare different activities for the different needs of the learners.]

TP3:

“Lisod i-monitor ang progress sa tanan kay daghan ang learners ug kinahanglan pud sila og individual assessment.”

[It is difficult to monitor the progress of all the learners because there are many of them and they also need individual assessment.]

TP4:

“Maglisod ko og balance sa pagtudlo, pag-assess sa learners, pag-manage sa behavior, ug paghimo sa mga reports.”

[I find it difficult to balance teaching, assessing learners, managing behavior, and completing reports.]

TP5:

“Usahay kinahanglan ko magdugang og oras para mahuman ang lesson preparation, activities, ug mga dokumento nga kinahanglan ipasa.”

[Sometimes I need to spend extra time to finish the lesson preparation, activities, and documents that need to be submitted.]

TP6:

3.2. Teachers' experiences in managing overcrowded classrooms

Teachers described struggling to hold learners' attention, handle varied behaviors, offer individual support, and organize activities within tight space and time. These demands weigh more heavily in

special education, where teachers must respond to differences in ability, development, and behavior across a large group. Crowding also adds to the workload and makes differentiated instruction and individual attention harder to deliver (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Aldosiry, 2022; Marchan et al., 2025). Three sub-categories emerged: managing learner behavior, maintaining learner attention, and maintaining classroom safety.

3.2.1. Managing Learner Behavior

This sub-category concerns teachers' efforts to keep behavior, attention, participation, and routines on track among learners with diverse needs. Behavior is harder to manage in a crowded room because the teacher must watch many learners at once and respond to different behavioral patterns. Frequent reminders, redirection, individual guidance, and suitable behavioral strategies are often needed to keep the classroom orderly and supportive (Aldosiry, 2022; Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Marchan et al., 2025).

"Lisod usahay i-manage ang behavior sa mga learners kay lahi-lahi man ilang needs ug reactions." [Sometimes it is difficult to manage the learners' behavior because they have different needs and reactions.]

TP1:

"Naay mga learners nga dali ma-distract ug maglisod og pagpabilin sa ilang activity, mao nga kinahanglan pirmi nako sila i-remind."

[Some learners are easily distracted and have difficulty staying with their activities, so I always need to remind them.]

TP2:

"Kung daghan ang learners, lisod bantayan ang tanan kay naa'y uban nga maglihok-lihok o makasamok sa uban."

[When there are many learners, it is difficult to monitor everyone because some may move around or disturb others.]

TP3:

"Usahay kinahanglan nako sila i-redirect balik sa activity kung mawala ilang attention."

[Sometimes I need to redirect them back to the activity when they lose their attention.]

TP4:

"Naay learners nga maglisod pagsunod sa classroom routines, mao nga kinahanglan og balik-balik nga reminders ug guidance."

[Some learners have difficulty following classroom routines, so they need repeated reminders and guidance.]

TP5:

"Lisod kung daghan ang learners nga kinahanglan og behavioral support kay dili nako mahatagan og parehas nga attention ang tanan."

[It is difficult when many learners need behavioral support because I cannot give everyone the same amount of attention.]

TP6:

3.2.2. Maintaining Learner Attention

Maintaining attention refers to what teachers do to keep learners focused, participating, and involved during a lesson. Teachers use varied and meaningful activities, clear instructions, a suitable pace, questioning, visual or hands-on materials, and positive interaction to limit distractions and keep learners engaged. Attention matters because it links information to learning; learners who are focused on relevant activities are more likely to process and understand the lesson (Keller et al., 2020).

“Kinahanglan gyud nako nga sige og balik-balik sa instruction kay dali ra kaayo sila mawala sa focus. Usahay, magpakita ko og pictures or actual objects para ma-catch balik ilang attention.”

[I really need to repeat the instructions because they easily lose focus. Sometimes, I show pictures or actual objects to catch their attention again.]

TP1:

“Kung makabantay ko nga dili na sila naminaw, usbon nako ang activity or himuon nako nga mas interesting. Ganahan sila kung naay movement ug hands-on nga activity.”

[When I notice that they are no longer listening, I change the activity or make it more interesting. They like activities that involve movement and hands-on tasks.]

TP2:

“Dili pwede nga taas kaayo ang discussion kay dali sila ma-bored. Ginapamubo nako ang activity ug ginahatagan sila og short breaks aron makabalik ang ilang focus.”

[The discussion cannot be too long because they easily get bored. I shorten the activity and give them short breaks so they can regain their focus.]

TP3:

“Akong duolon ang learner kung mawala iyang attention. Tawgon nako iyang pangalan ug istoryahan siya hinay-hinay aron mabalik iyang focus sa activity.”

[I approach the learner when they lose attention. I call the learner by name and talk to him or her calmly to bring the focus back to the activity.]

TP4:

“Makatabang gyud ang visual aids, labi na sa mga bata nga lisod mag-focus. Kung colorful ang pictures ug klaro ang instruction, mas dali nila masabtan ug mas dugay sila mag-attend sa activity.”

[Visual aids really help, especially for children who have difficulty focusing. When the pictures are attractive and the instructions are clear, they understand more easily and stay attentive to the activity longer.]

TP5:

“Ginahatagan nako sila og praise kung makapadayon sila sa activity ug makafocus. Ingon ko, ‘Good job, nakapadayon ka!’ Para ma-motivate sila nga ipadayon ang ilang gibuhat.”

[I give them praise when they stay with the activity and remain focused. I say, ‘Good job, you were able to continue!’ so they are motivated to continue what they are doing.]

TP6:

3.2.3. Maintaining Classroom Safety

Classroom safety covers what teachers do to keep learners physically and emotionally secure during learning activities. In SPED classrooms this means spotting hazards, arranging the space, watching learner behavior, setting clear safety rules and routines, and giving supervision and help that match each learner's needs. Teachers may also change activities, materials, and the physical setup to reduce risks and prevent accidents. A safe, supportive classroom matters because learners tend to participate and engage more when they feel secure (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

"Sigeg check nako sa classroom kung naay mga butang nga delikado. Akong ipahilayo ang sharp objects ug uban nga makadaot sa mga bata."

[I regularly check the classroom for things that may be dangerous. I keep sharp objects and other harmful materials away from the learners.]

TP1:

"Ginahan-ay nako ang mga chairs ug tables para dili sila matumba or magbanga ang mga bata. Kinahanglan pud nga adunay enough space para makalihok sila."

[I arrange the chairs and tables properly so that they will not fall or cause the learners to bump into one another. There should also be enough space for them to move around.]

TP2:

"Permi nako sila bantayan labi na during activities. Dili nako sila pasagdan kay naa koy mga learners nga kalit-kalit og lihok or mulakaw."

[I always supervise them, especially during activities. I do not leave them unattended because some of my learners may suddenly move around or walk away.]

TP3:

"Gina-remind nako sila sa safety rules, sama sa dili pagdagan sulod sa classroom, dili paglabay sa gamit, ug pagpangayo og tabang kung kinahanglan."

[I remind them about safety rules, such as not running inside the classroom, not throwing things, and asking for help when needed.]

TP4:

"Kung naay learner nga magtantrum or mahimong aggressive, akong kuptan ang situation calmly ug akong ipahilayo ang ubang learners para walay maunsa."

[When a learner has a tantrum or becomes aggressive, I handle the situation calmly and move the other learners away so that no one gets hurt.]

TP5:

"Akong tan-awon pud ang mga gamit nga gamiton sa activity. Dapat ang materials angay sa ilang age ug ability aron malikayan ang accidents."

[I also check the materials that will be used in the activity. The materials should be appropriate for their age and ability to prevent accidents.]

TP6:

3.3. Strategies used by teachers to address these barriers

This category describes the approaches SPED teachers use to cope with the demands of overcrowded non-graded classrooms: modifying activities, putting learners' needs in order of priority, grouping, improvising materials, setting routines, managing behavior, and organizing time and workload. These strategies help teachers respond to diverse needs and lower the barriers to participation and learning (CAST, 2024; Tomlinson, 2017). Three sub-categories emerged: grouping learners according to ability, establishing classroom routines, and adapting instruction to learner needs.

3.3.1. Grouping Learners According to Ability

Teachers organized learners into groups based on learning level, skills, readiness, or specific needs, which let them adjust instruction and give more targeted support to learners with similar needs. Grouping should nonetheless be flexible and handled with care, since research suggests that ability grouping does not automatically raise achievement and can widen differences among learners if poorly managed (Wang et al., 2023; Trinidad & King, 2022).

"Ginagroup nako ang mga learners base sa ilang level sa ability. Ang parehas og skill akong ipares para mas dali nako sila matudloan ug matabangan."

[I group the learners according to their level of ability. I pair those with similar skills so I can teach and assist them more easily.]

TP1:

"Kung naay learners nga parehas og learning needs, akong ipagroup sila para parehas ra ilang activity ug instruction."

[When there are learners with similar learning needs, I group them together so they can have the same activity and instruction.]

TP2:

"Dili nako sila permanent nga grupo. Usahay akong ilisan ang grouping depende sa activity ug sa ilang progress."

[I do not keep them in permanent groups. Sometimes, I change the grouping depending on the activity and their progress.]

TP3:

"Kung naa koy learners nga mas independent, sila akong hatagan og task nga kaya nila. Ang learners nga kinahanglan og more assistance akong ipares para mas mabantayan nako."

[For learners who are more independent, I give them tasks that they can manage. I group those who need more assistance so I can monitor them more closely.]

TP4:

"Makatabang ang grouping kay kung daghan ang learners, dili nako sila tanan matudloan one-on-one. Mas ma-manage nako ang activity kung gamay-gamay ang grupo."

[Grouping helps because when there are many learners, I cannot teach all of them one-on-one. I can manage the activities better when they are in smaller groups.]

TP5:

“Akong tan-awon ilang strengths ug weaknesses before nako sila i-group. Para ang activity dili kaayo lisod ug dili pud boring para nila.”

[I consider their strengths and weaknesses before grouping them so that the activity will not be too difficult or too easy for them.]

TP6:

3.3.2. Establishing Classroom Routines

Establishing routines means putting predictable procedures in place for everyday activities such as entering the room, getting materials, moving between activities, finishing tasks, and ending lessons. In SPED classrooms, clear routines give structure and predictability, which helps learners understand what is expected, feel less confused, and work more independently. Consistent classroom management is also linked to better engagement and behavior (Larson et al., 2021; Reinke et al., 2021).

“Ginatudloan nako sila sa daily routine, sama sa paglinya, pagkuha sa materials, ug pagbalik sa ilang gamit. Kung pirmi nila buhaton, maanad na sila.”

[I teach them daily routines, such as lining up, getting materials, and returning their things. When they do these regularly, they become accustomed to them.]

TP1:

“Maghimo ko og simple nga routine ug rules nga ilang masabtan. Akong balik-balikon ang instruction hangtod mahibalo na sila unsay buhaton.”

[I establish simple routines and rules that they can understand. I repeat the instructions until they know what to do.]

TP2:

“Sa pagsugod sa klase, naa mi routine nga greeting, attendance, ug short activity. Makatabang ni para ma-set ilang mind nga oras na sa learning.”

[At the beginning of class, we have a routine of greeting, attendance, and a short activity. This helps prepare them for learning.]

TP3:

“Kung mag-transition mi from one activity to another, akong hatagan sila og warning daan. Ingon ko, ‘Human na ta in five minutes, mag-next activity na ta.’”

[When we transition from one activity to another, I give them a warning beforehand. I say, ‘We will finish in five minutes and then move to the next activity.’]

TP4:

“Gamit ko og visual schedule para makita nila unsay sunod nga activity. Dako kaayo ni og tabang sa learners nga lisod mosunod sa routine.”

[I use a visual schedule so they can see what activity comes next. This is very helpful for learners who have difficulty following routines.]

TP5:

“Kung naa silay routine, mas dali nako sila ma-manage labi na kay daghan sila. Dili na kinahanglan pirmi nako isulti ang instructions kay kabalo na sila sa steps.”

[When they have routines, it is easier for me to manage them, especially because there are many learners. I do not have to give the instructions repeatedly because they already know the steps.]

TP6:**3.3.3. Adapting Instruction to Learner Needs**

Adapting instruction means changing teaching methods, activities, materials, and assessment tasks to suit learners’ abilities, developmental levels, and individual needs. In crowded non-graded SPED classrooms, teachers adjust their instructions and offer different levels of support so that learners with diverse disabilities can take part meaningfully. Differentiated instruction helps teachers respond to learner differences, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) encourages flexible approaches to engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2024; Education Endowment Foundation, 2020).

“Akong i-adjust ang activity depende sa ability sa bata. Kung lisod para niya ang written activity, maghatag ko og pictures or actual objects aron mas dali niya masabtan ang lesson.”

[I adjust the activity according to the learner’s ability. If the written activity is difficult for the learner, I provide pictures or actual objects to help them understand the lesson more easily.]

TP1:

“Lahi-lahi man ang level sa akong mga learners, mao nga dili parehas ang akong ihatag nga task. Ang uban simple nga activity lang, samtang ang uban kaya na og mas challenging nga buluhaton.”

[My learners have different ability levels, so I do not give them the same tasks. Some receive simple activities, while others can handle more challenging tasks.]

TP2:

“Kung dili nila masabtan ang instruction, akong pasimplehon ug usbon ang pag-explain. Usahay, akong ipakita una ang example aron makita nila unsaon pagbuhat.”

[If they cannot understand the instructions, I simplify them and explain them differently. Sometimes, I demonstrate an example first so they can see how to do the task.]

TP3:

“Kinahanglan gyud og pasensya kay dili tanan bata parehas og pacing. Ang uban dali makasabot, pero ang uban kinahanglan og dugang nga panahon ug guidance.”

[Patience is necessary because not all learners learn at the same pace. Some understand quickly, while others need additional time and guidance.]

TP4:

“Kung daghan ang learners, akong i-prioritize ang mga bata nga nagkinahanglan og more assistance. Samtang nagtabang ko sa uban, hatagan nako og independent activity ang mga learners nga kaya na mobuhat sa ilang kaugalingon.”

[When there are many learners, I prioritize those who need more assistance. While helping some learners, I give independent activities to those who can already work on their own.]

TP5:

“Gina-observehan nako ang ilang progress. Kung makita nako nga lisod pa ang activity, akong usbon ang strategy o hatagan sila og additional support.”

[I observe their progress. If I notice that an activity is still difficult for them, I change my strategy or provide additional support.]

4. Conclusion

The study found that teachers in overcrowded non-graded SPED classrooms at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School deal with many challenges: diverse learner needs, limited resources, heavy workloads, behavior management, keeping learners' attention, and ensuring safety. They respond by grouping learners by ability, building classroom routines, and adapting instruction to individual needs. The results show how much adequate resources, supportive school leadership, manageable workloads, and ongoing professional development matter if teaching is to be effective and learning is to be safe, inclusive, and meaningful for learners with diverse disabilities.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen inclusive education:

1. School administration: provide enough learning resources and classroom facilities, and give support that directly eases overcrowding.
2. SPED teachers: keep using effective classroom management strategies, differentiated instruction, and consistent routines to meet learners' varied needs.
3. Department of Education: assign more SPED teachers and supply instructional materials and professional development opportunities.
4. Parents and guardians: work with teachers to support learners' behavior, attention, and overall development.
5. Future researchers: carry out similar studies in other schools to uncover further challenges and effective strategies for overcrowded non-graded SPED classrooms.

References

1. Akbayrak, K., & Douglas, G. (2022). Examining specialist teachers' conceptualisations of their roles in supporting learners with vision impairment: A comparative analysis of Turkey and England using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 37(6), 979–993. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1989129>
2. Aldosiry, N. (2022). The influence of support from administrators and other work conditions on special education teachers. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 69(6), 1873–1887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1837353>
3. Allam, F. C., & Martin, M. M. (2021). Issues and challenges in special education: A qualitative analysis from teacher's perspective. *Southeast Asia Early Childhood Journal*, 10(1), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol10.1.4.2021>
4. Campado, R. J., Toquero, C. M. D., & Ulanday, D. M. (2023). Integration of assistive technology in teaching learners with special educational needs and disabilities in the Philippines. *International Journal of Professional Development, Learners and Learning*, 5(1), ep2308. <https://doi.org/10.30935/ijpdll/13062>
5. CAST. (2024). Universal Design for Learning guidelines version 3.0. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>
6. Department of Education. (2021). Policy guidelines on the provision of educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program (DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021). Department of Education. https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/DO_s2021_044.pdf
7. Department of Education. (2022). Basic Education Development Plan 2030 (DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2022). Department of Education.
8. Dotimas, J. V. G. (2023). Level of work-related stress and coping mechanism of special education teachers. *AIDE Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 3(1), 180–194. <https://doi.org/10.56648/aide-irj.v3i1.62>
9. Education Endowment Foundation. (2020). Special educational needs in mainstream schools: Guidance report. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/send>
10. Español, M. A., Huliganga, H. J., Fernandez, R., Velos, M. L., & Dayot, G. (2025). Navigating inclusive education: A qualitative study on the challenges faced by special needs teachers in policy implementation. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 43(7). <https://www.ejournals.ph/article.php?id=30334>
11. Keller, A. S., Davidesco, I., & Tanner, K. D. (2020). Attention matters: How orchestrating attention may relate to classroom learning. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 19(3), fe5. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.20-05-0106>
12. Kilag, O. K. T., Uy, F. T., Dela Cerna, Y. M. T., Doroy, E. G., Gomez, H. M. D., Rivalal, A. D., & Castañares, J. A. (2024). Special education: Challenges faced by teachers in the Philippines. Zenodo. <https://zenodo.org/records/12614584>
13. Larson, K. E., Pas, E. T., Bottiani, J. H., Kush, J. M., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2021). A multidimensional and multilevel examination of student engagement and secondary school teachers' use of classroom management practices. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 23(3), 149–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300720929352>
14. Lindner, K.-T., & Schwab, S. (2020). Differentiation and individualisation in inclusive education: A systematic review and narrative synthesis. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1813450>
15. Marchan, C. B., Tenerife-Cañete, J. J., Añora, H., & Pinili, L. (2025). Instructional practices and challenges of teachers in supporting special needs students in inclusive settings. *International Journal of Educational Studies*, 8(3), 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.53935/2641533x.v8i3.366>

16. Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED415771>
17. Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etextbooks/827/>
18. Miña, A. (2024). The lived experiences of special education teachers in teaching inclusive education. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 21(10), 1072–1090. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12731335>
19. Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
20. Panopoulos, N., & Drossinou-Korea, M. (2020). [Title of article not provided]. <https://doi.org/10.17263/jlls.759243>
21. Republic Act No. 10533. (2013). Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. <https://ldr.senate.gov.ph/legislative+issuances/Republic%20Act%20No.%2010533>
22. Republic Act No. 11650. (2022). Instituting a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities in support of inclusive education act. *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2022/03/11/republic-act-no-11650/>
23. Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., & Dong, N. (2021). The Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Program: Effects for students receiving special education services. *Remedial and Special Education*, 42(1), 7–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932520937442>
24. Samsuddin, S. J., et al. (2021). Elements of work type in the construct of special education teacher workload in Malaysia. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*, 12(11), 5259–5263. <https://doi.org/10.17762/turcomat.v12i11.6744>
25. Sebastian, R. O. (2025). Problematic situations in the multi-grade classrooms: Experiences of special education teachers. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 38(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.70838/pemj.380101>
26. Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). *How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms* (3rd ed.). ASCD.
27. Trinidad, J. E., & King, R. B. (2022). Ability grouping predicts inequality, not achievement gains in Philippine schools: Findings from PISA 2018. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 21(2), 305–322. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-021-09307-8>
28. UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all*. <https://doi.org/10.54676/WWUU8391>
29. Walker, J. D., Johnson, K. M., & Randolph, K. M. (2021). Teacher self-advocacy for the shared responsibility of classroom and behavior management. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 53(3), 216–225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059920980481>
30. Wang, H., King, R. B., & McInerney, D. M. (2023). Ability grouping and student performance: A longitudinal investigation of teacher support as a mediator and moderator. *Research Papers in Education*, 38(2), 121–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2021.1961293>
31. Yuwono, I., & Okech, J. B. (2021). The classroom impact of trained special needs education teachers in selected schools: An evaluation study. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 630806. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.630806>