

# Exploring the Support Systems of Special Education Teachers

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**Abstract** Special Education (SpEd) teachers are responsible for addressing the educational needs of learners with disabilities. This includes developing skills in areas like communication, social interaction, physical abilities, and life adaptation, while ensuring the learners 'overall well-being through professional and attentive care. Due to high turnover rate, the study explored the support systems of the SpEd teachers in relation to their retention and job satisfaction. The support systems include administrative, colleagues, and parents/stakeholders' support. The study employed a mixed-method research design to collect the data. The researcher utilized a teacher-made test that was proven to have content validity. The researcher used purposive sampling to select 30 SpEd teachers, consisting three males and 27 females, who had been working with learners with disabilities for more than two (2) years during the school year 2023-2024 in the Division of Misamis Oriental, Philippines. The study revealed that administrators' support, colleagues' support, and stakeholders' support had a moderate correlation with retention and job satisfaction. Despite facing limited support, many special education teachers remain in their roles and experience job satisfaction due to a strong dedication to their learners, intrinsic rewards, and the positive connections they build with their learners. The three support systems yielded satisfactory results, but the weakest support systems came from stakeholders, suggesting that special education learners face limited opportunities to earn a living due to various limitations. Continuous vocational training and inclusive policies can help these learners enter the workforce, supporting both teacher retention and job satisfaction while encouraging future policies for a more inclusive community.

**Keywords:** special education teachers, support systems, administrative support, colleagues' support, parents' support, stakeholders' support

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## 1. Introduction

In education, special education teachers stand as unsung heroes, dedicating their expertise to nurturing the unique needs of learners with disabilities [1]. They play a vital role in providing tailored instruction and support to help learners overcome challenges and succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. By collaborating with professionals, parents, and administrators, they create individualized education plans (IEPs) to address each student's unique strengths and needs [2].

One of the research studies that highlight the importance of support systems for teachers noted that relationships, pedagogical knowledge, mentoring, and reflection are keys to teacher retention [3]. Their study emphasizes that continuous professional development and stakeholders' involvement are crucial for addressing challenges and enhancing the learning environment for learners with disabilities. These support systems are coming from the administrators, colleagues and

stakeholders in the community.

Administrative support is vital for creating favorable conditions for SpEd teachers, impacting their retention and job satisfaction [4]. Moreover, supportive leadership, including transparent communication, mentorship programs, and provision of specialized resources, enhances SpEd teachers' satisfaction and commitment [5].

As supported by another researcher, effective colleague support systems improve instructional strategies for SpEd teachers, promoting collaboration, mentorship, and professional learning communities. This peer support boosts morale, job satisfaction, and retention, creating a positive school climate that benefits both staff and learners [6].

Stakeholders like parents, community members, and policymakers are vital in supporting SpEd teachers [7]. Parents can engage in open communication with schools, while community organizations offer resources and volunteer support. Policymakers can advocate for funding, reduce bureaucratic barriers, and promote inclusion [8].

On the other hand, special education teachers face numerous challenges, which are worsened by inadequate support [9]. While they find their duties manageable, the

burdens stem from a lack of administrative support, large caseloads, IEP paperwork demands, diverse student needs, and insufficient appreciation from colleagues and administrators [10]. In addition, SpEd teachers often work tirelessly to meet the unique needs of their learners, but without administrative recognition and support, their contributions may go unnoticed [11]. Studies show that a supportive, collaborative environment that values teacher independence and professional development positively influences SpEd teacher retention and job satisfaction [12].

Therefore, there has been a growing trend of Filipino SpEd teachers migrating abroad, due to attractive pay, resources, and support, especially in the U.S., Canada, and the Middle East. This migration is estimated to involve over 20% of Filipino SpEd teachers, creating concerns about a "brain drain" that could impact the availability of qualified SpEd teachers in the Philippines [13].

With this end, the researcher explored the support systems in relation to the retention and job satisfaction among special education teachers in the Division of Misamis Oriental, Philippines.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the support systems in relation to the retention and job satisfaction of special education teachers

The design of this study is illustrated as shown:

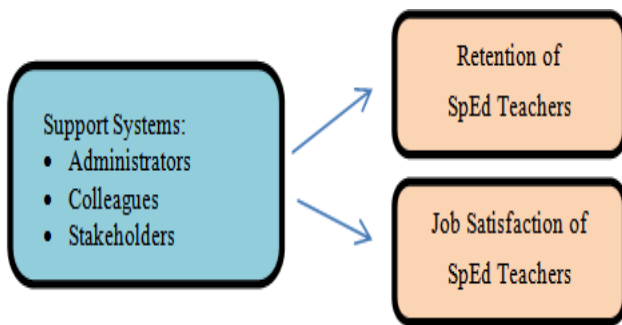


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

This study used a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to investigate support systems and their relation to the retention and job satisfaction among special education teachers in Misamis Oriental during the academic year 2023-2024. Quantitative surveys provided structured insights into support from administrators, colleagues, and stakeholders, while qualitative interviews offered deeper perspectives on how these factors shaped SpEd teachers' experiences and well-being. Thematic analysis identified patterns and themes, revealing the complexities within SpEd teachers' support systems. The study was conducted in the Division of Misamis Oriental, located in the Northern part of Mindanao, Philippines. The participants were 30 SpEd teachers; 3 males and 27 females who had been handling learners with disabilities for more than two (2) years.

### 2.2. Research Instrument

The 26-item researcher-made questions were used to collect the data to determine the relationship of the variables. This instrument was subjected to content validity and reliability. It was composed of a 21-item survey question and a 5-item interview question. A group of experts reviewed each item of the test for face and content validity, providing corrections and suggestions. The researchers then modified the instrument and administered the revised test to participants.

The questionnaire employed validated Likert-scale questions to assess the support systems from administrators, colleagues, and stakeholders in relation to the retention and job satisfaction of the special education teachers. The interview guide, featuring open-ended questions, allowed teachers to share detailed insights into their experiences with support systems and their impact on well-being and retention. Together, these instruments provided a comprehensive view, combining quantitative trends with qualitative depth to inform practices and policies that support SpEd teachers' retention and job satisfaction.

### 2.3. Data Collection

Data collection for this study began with careful planning and coordination with Misamis Oriental division authorities to secure approvals and create a structured timeline. The researcher arranged logistics, ensuring participant's availability and suitable interview locations, and obtained consent to guarantee ethical compliance, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Surveys were distributed to SpEd teachers with clear instructions and channels for secure, private submission, and participants were offered a small token of appreciation.

After completing the surveys, selected teachers were invited to participate in structured interviews through online and personal invitations. Interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing to allow teachers to share their experiences freely. This process aimed to gather high-quality data, offering insights into the support systems' relation with the retention and job satisfaction among SpEd teachers in Misamis Oriental.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 demonstrates that the administrative support has an average mean of 3.98 with the standard deviation of 0.81 which is considered satisfactory. The school administrator listens to SpEd concerns and provides opportunities for professional development. However, despite the provision of adequate resources and materials the teachers' needs were not met. Although the results addressed the needs of both teachers and learners, the school's limited funds prevented them from providing necessary resources. In relation with this, special education teachers commented that administrators supported them by catering to the needs of the learners and attending training sessions specifically designed for them.

Moreover, it was expounded that inadequate resources significantly challenge special education teachers, limiting

their ability to provide individualized instruction. Many lack essential materials, assistive technologies, and supports, which not only hinder student progress but also increase teacher workload and stress. Without improved resource allocation and support, achieving equitable education for learners with disabilities remains difficult, underscoring the need for policy changes and better funding [14].

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Administrators' Support**

| Statement  | Mean | SD   | Interpretation |
|--|------|------|----------------|
| 1. The school administrator advocates for the needs of SpEd teachers in the school.  | 4.00 | 0.98 | Satisfied      |
| 2. The school administrator provides adequate resources and materials for SpEd learners  | 3.77 | 0.90 | Satisfied      |
| 3. The school administrator provides opportunities for professional development of SpEd teachers' needs.                       | 4.10 | 0.76 | Satisfied      |
| 4. The school administrator listens to SpEd concerns.  | 4.13 | 0.63 | Satisfied      |
| 5. The school administrator informs the SpEd teacher about the latest policies and educational practices on special education. | 3.83 | 1.15 | Satisfied      |
| 6. The school administrator encourages and recognizes the work of the SpEd teacher.  | 4.07 | 1.11 | Satisfied      |
| 7. The school administrator provides constructive feedback or guidance to the SpEd teacher.                                    | 3.97 | 1.00 | Satisfied      |
| Total  | 3.98 | 0.81 | Satisfied      |

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Colleagues' Support**

| Statement  | Mean | SD   | Interpretation      |
|--|------|------|---------------------|
| 1. The colleagues are willing to help and share resources with the SpEd teacher.   | 4.23 | 0.73 | Extremely Satisfied |
| 2. The colleagues provide emotional support during difficult times.  | 4.07 | 0.83 | Satisfied           |
| 3. The colleagues value and respect the contributions of the SpEd team.  | 4.20 | 0.71 | Satisfied           |
| 4. The colleagues collaborate with SpEd teacher to develop the individualized education plans (IEPs) for learners with disabilities. | 3.97 | 1.03 | Satisfied           |
| 5. The colleagues implement appropriate accommodations and modifications for learners with disabilities.                             | 4.17 | 1.02 | Satisfied           |
| 6. The colleagues participate in learning about inclusive education.   | 4.23 | 0.97 | Extremely Satisfied |
| 7. The colleagues advocate for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in school.  | 4.23 | 1.04 | Extremely Satisfied |
| Total  | 4.16 | 0.80 | Satisfied           |

Table 2 indicates that the SpEd teachers are satisfied with colleagues' support, with an average mean of 4.16 with SD of 0.80. Colleagues are willing to help and share resources; they participate in inclusive education and advocates for inclusion which they are extremely satisfied with. On the other hand, colleagues collaborate with SpEd teacher to develop the individualized education plans (IEPs) for learners with disabilities. This implies that

general education teachers support inclusive education but offer limited assistance with IEP planning due to time constraints and other school activities. Special education teachers emphasize that general educators' commitment to learners in mainstream settings is crucial for success.

It was noted that teachers frequently cite time constraints and heavy workloads as barriers to supporting IEPs. The added responsibility of modifying lessons and assessing progress is often overwhelming, particularly without structured time or support for IEP-related tasks [15].

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Parents/Stakeholder Support**

| Statement   | Mean | SD   | Interpretation |
|---|------|------|----------------|
| Parents/Guardians actively participate during IEP meetings and work with teachers           | 3.80 | 1.06 | Satisfied      |
| 2. Parents/Guardians create a supportive home for their child's learning.                   | 3.90 | 0.88 | Satisfied      |
| 3. Parents/Guardians attend training to better support their child's education.             | 3.77 | 0.90 | Satisfied      |
| 4. Parents/Guardians provide therapy or other services for their child's needs.             | 3.63 | 1.13 | Satisfied      |
| 5. Stakeholders provide enough funds and materials for SpEd teachers.                       | 3.93 | 0.94 | Satisfied      |
| 6. Stakeholders create job opportunities for learners with disabilities in the community.   | 3.59 | 1.12 | Satisfied      |
| 7. Stakeholders are involved in decision-making/ support the SpEd programs and initiatives. | 3.76 | 1.02 | Satisfied      |
| 8. Stakeholders recognize SpEd teachers' contributions to the community.                    | 3.93 | 1.00 | Satisfied      |
| Total   | 3.79 | 0.86 | Satisfied      |

Table 3 shows that SpEd teachers were satisfied by the support of parents and stakeholders. They also ensure that the learners receive adequate funds and materials. Furthermore, they generate employment opportunities for learners with disabilities within the community. This implies that while they provide resources for learners and teachers, they lack sufficient job opportunities to sustain their livelihoods.

Furthermore, the majority of SpEd teachers emphasized that parents must provide financial support for their children's therapies, as government funds are available to assist them. Stakeholders' support is also essential for the inclusivity and livelihood of the learners with disabilities.

However, societal biases significantly limit employment opportunities for learners with disabilities. They perceived that these learners were stereotypes such as less capable which lead employers worry about productivity and disruptions. Despite the evidence that these learners are often highly motivated and valuable contributors, they remained the notion of not being capable. Furthermore, many organizations lack structured policies for disability inclusion, limiting career progression and engagement for employees with disabilities. These combined factors result in their ongoing underrepresentation in the workforce [16].

Table 4 shows that administrators'; colleagues'; stakeholders' support, have a moderate correlation to retention and job satisfaction. It has been stated that

despite limited support, many special education teachers stay and find satisfaction in their jobs, driven by a deep commitment to their learners, intrinsic fulfillment, and positive relationships with colleagues and learners, which outweigh systemic challenges [17].

**Table 4. Correlations between retention, job satisfaction, administrator's support, colleagues' support, and stakeholders' support**

| Variables               | Mean | SD   | Variables               | Mean | SD   |
|-------------------------|------|------|-------------------------|------|------|
| Retention               | 4.57 | 0.51 | Job Satisfaction        | 4.65 | 0.37 |
| Administrators' Support | 3.98 | 0.83 | Administrators' Support | 3.98 | 0.83 |
| Colleagues' Support     | 4.15 | 0.82 | Colleagues' Support     | 4.15 | 0.82 |
| Stakeholders' Support   | 3.77 | 0.86 | Stakeholders' Support   | 3.77 | 0.86 |

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that strong support systems for Special Education teachers are essential for improving their effectiveness, job satisfaction, and retention, all of which benefit learners' outcomes.

Administrative support for SpEd teachers can take many forms, including providing resources, professional development, emotional support, and workload management. This support can manifest in providing adequate teaching materials, technology, and classroom aides, which reduces workload and enhances teacher effectiveness. Targeted professional development opportunities can help teachers feel more competent and confident in their roles, equipping them with effective strategies and best practices. Most of the SpEd teachers look forward that there will be changes in the Department of Education in terms of teacher-student ratio, available therapist, more teachers, classrooms and specialized materials for learners with disabilities.

Colleagues play a vital role in supporting SpEd teachers by providing emotional, instructional, and practical assistance. They foster a supportive community where teachers feel valued and understood, reducing stress and burnout. Continuous training for general education teachers is needed to support the individualized educational program of the learners and strategies to teach them.

Among the three (3) support systems, stakeholders' support was the least, which showed the community does not provide enough opportunities for them to make a living because of many reasons such as incapability of the learners, illness, maturity and many more. Therefore, through continuous vocational training for skills enhancement, students may be given the ability to work with the competent people. The community should establish policies and provide opportunities to include the learners with disabilities in the workforce, taking into account their unique circumstances.

Thus, these support systems contributed to the retention and job satisfaction of the SpEd teachers and needed for future researchers to create policies in the

Department of Education and to make a more inclusive community for all of us.

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