

## **Viewpoints of Novice Filipino Special Education Teachers during Post-Pandemic in the Lens of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry**

**Dr. Lloyd Matthew C. Derasin<sup>1</sup>, Jonah M. Novo RN MN<sup>2</sup>, Marian Robert A. Elgincolin RN MAN<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1-3</sup> Faculty, College of Nursing and Allied Health Science, Cebu Institute of Technology University

**Abstract** - The study focused on The Transition of Novice Special Education Teachers in the Philippines from Distance Education to the Resumption of Face-to-Face Classes. The study used the phenomenological approach, specifically the hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry. The study explored the experiences of Special Education teachers handling special education students. Furthermore, the participants in this study consisted of novice special education teachers who were involved in online learning and continued to teach special education classes when face-to-face instruction resumed. Likewise, the researchers employed the purposive sampling technique to determine the informants for this study. The researcher identified several themes through the analysis of the collected data namely: (1) The Zeal in Teaching (2) The utilization of pedagogical approaches, (3) The Tough Times in Special Education Classes, and (4) the Resiliency of Special Education Teachers. Moreover, the study found that Special education teachers face a multitude of challenges and barriers in their field of work. Nonetheless, the educators' dedication and passion for instructing pupils with Special needs, as well as guaranteeing their ultimate success, act as the principal motivating factor for their ongoing involvement in special education initiatives.

**Keywords:** *Novice Special Education Teachers, and Face-to-Face Classes*

### **Introduction**

Special education teachers are highly skilled individuals who have undergone specialized training to provide instruction to children who possess unique learning requirements or disabilities. The individuals in question are highly skilled practitioners who specialize in providing support to students facing challenges related to their development, physical abilities, behavior, and emotional well-being. In the field of special education, educators prioritize the provision of an equitable education to kids with exceptional needs, encompassing fundamental competence such as literacy, written expression, and numerical comprehension, which are typically imparted to their non-exceptional peers. In addition, the acquisition of the necessary skills to excel as a special education teacher necessitates a substantial amount of dedication and exertion. In order to get a high level of proficiency as a special education teacher, those entering the field must navigate through a multitude of obstacles.

Hillel (2015) asserts that special education instructors have more challenging and demanding circumstances in comparison to their counterparts in general

education. According to Weber (2010), the aforementioned factors were some of the rationales behind the departure of special education educators from the field. Similarly, educators specializing in special education are engaged in a multifaceted professional environment as they navigate the implementation of educational policy and the instruction of kids with disabilities (Woulfin & Jones, 2021). According to Kebbi (2018), special education teachers are required to allocate additional time and resources toward the task of imparting information to children with impairments. Special education instructors may have psychological challenges, such as anxiety, diminished job performance, and reduced motivation, due to the stress they encounter in their profession. These factors might ultimately lead to employee attrition.

Additionally, it has been found that the primary stressors associated with the difficulties encountered by teachers in instructing students with special needs include inadequate access to resources and materials, heightened sense of accountability for the well-being and academic progress of their students, insufficient governmental support in recognizing their

professional standing, the burdensome workload, and instances of discriminatory treatment. Antoniou and Polychroni (2009) discovered that the five most prevalent stressors primarily align with the characteristics of work environment, workload, and organizational challenges among the stress items. Another contributing element is. The primary factors contributing to teacher turnover in special education were found to be inadequate qualifications, elevated levels of perceived stress, and a negative perception of the school environment. Educators who opted to transition to an alternative educational institution or district conveyed elevated levels of stress and unfavorable perspectives toward the pedagogical milieu. Moreover, this group of teachers had a significantly lower average age compared to their counterparts who chose to remain in their current positions. Undoubtedly, novice and youthful educators are confronted with a significant risk of attrition within their profession.

The researcher expresses a desire to undertake this study in light of the aforementioned thoughts and beliefs. The researcher posits that this study will make a valuable contribution to the pedagogical practices and educational outcomes within the domain of special education. The findings of this research hold promise in fostering the advancement of strategies aimed at mitigating attrition among novice special education educators. This can be achieved by the systematic monitoring and analysis of the professional journeys of these individuals.

#### **Methods and Materials**

The study used the phenomenological approach, specifically the hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry. The study explored the experiences of Special Education teachers handling special education students. A hermeneutic phenomenology is an approach that focuses on human experience and life itself (Laverty, 2003), which focuses on giving significant meanings and understanding the experiences that may seem insignificant to others (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Furthermore, the participants in this study consisted of novice special education teachers who were involved in online learning and continued to teach special education classes when face-to-face

instruction resumed. Likewise, the researchers employed the purposive sampling technique to determine the informants for this study. The researcher will intentionally choose Special Education teachers in order to gain insight into the difficulties and experiences associated with teaching in a Special Education program. When choosing informants, the researchers adhere to specific criteria. These requirements include being a Special Education teacher who works with students with impairments at any level. Additionally, participants must hold a teaching license and possess a minimum of two years of experience in the field.

The researcher employed the Colaizzi approach for data analysis. The Colaizzi (1978) process, consisting of seven stages, ensures a comprehensive inquiry, with each phase maintaining fidelity to the empirical evidence. The ultimate outcome is a succinct yet comprehensive elucidation of the phenomenon being investigated, which has been validated by the people who created it. The methodology relies on a comprehensive collection of firsthand experiential experiences, which can be acquired through many means such as in-person interviews, written narratives, online blogs, research diaries, and virtual interviews, among other modalities.

#### **Results**

This section encompasses the data collected via interviews. The researchers employed Colaizzi's Method to interpret and analyze the collected data. The researchers identified several themes through the analysis of the collected data. (1) The Zeal in Teaching (2) The utilization of pedagogical approaches, (3) The Tough Times in Special Education Classes, and (4) Resiliency of Special Education Teachers

##### **Theme 1: The Zeal in Teaching**

This theme presents Special Education teachers' inspiration, reason, and motivation to continue teaching despite the different experiences and challenges faced by teachers handling students with disabilities.

**Subtheme 1.1: Driven.** This subtheme explores the factors that drive teachers' motivation within their work environment, including the support they receive from colleagues and the impact on their students.

According to Informant 1, remaining in the field of teaching is contingent upon possessing devotion and a genuine passion for the profession. Furthermore,

the informant expressed that their motivation is derived from the affection and admiration exhibited by their students.

*"The dedication and the love of teaching are an aspect to motivate me to remain in this profession and also mao to akong geingon nga usa pud sa rason nga na motivate ko kay tungod sa mga bata." Informant 1*

Furthermore, Informant 3 articulated that the essential qualities for a special education teacher include a commitment to their profession and a

genuine affection for their kids. Furthermore, possessing a significant level of patience is necessary.

*"I can only say that if ganahan mo mag teach ug children with special needs, you should have passion and commitment to our learners. Most specially love to your pupil same as you love your family. Give more patience to our learners as well as to our parents." Informant 3*

Finally, Informant 6 expressed that their involvement in the area serves as a source of motivation, fostering more innovation and creativity. This is particularly

evident in their discernment of effective learning strategies that yield advantageous outcomes for the learners

*"I chose to be in this field is the fact nga being with these type of learners makes me more innovative and creative, especially when it comes to the learning style that suits for them." Informant 6*

**Subtheme 1.2 Empathy with the students.** This subtheme highlights the profound affection and empathy that special education teachers demonstrate toward their children. Despite the behavioral challenges exhibited by students with impairments, teachers consistently demonstrate compassion, patience, and caring for these learners.

As per the account provided by Informant 3, their affection for their profession and the students serves as a means of alleviating stress, particularly when the students express their affection through physical gestures such as hugs. The teacher regards her students with familial affection

*"If love nimo ang imong mga pupil it doesn't affect your stress because you consider him or her as your own family. Diba? Mawala ra man pud ang imong stress mag tan-aw nila labi na nga mo hug sila nimo or naa silay na learn nga bag-o." Informant 3*

Furthermore, Informant 4 frequently demonstrates her affection and empathy towards the students. Typically, she assumes responsibility for the students by facilitating their departure from the premises,

assuring their well-being, addressing their requirements, and providing assistance wherever feasible. The author's empathy towards the students

and their subsequent instant response serves as evidence of her deep affection and concern for them

*“Actually sa ako regular class kay sya rajuy moari magkuha sa module ang gipaningot maayo and maka feel kog something so ako ihatod ang bata. Its like immediate act or teacher like behavior.*

*Sa public, its nice sa feeling nga ikaw ang maka help sa bata. Makahilak jud ka makakita sa bata nga way sanina tarong. Imohang qikaon is i give up nimo para ana. “Informant 4*

Informant 7 asserts that the teacher's show of empathy toward the children serves as a noteworthy approach to exhibiting care and affection toward them. Educators foster an atmosphere in which

students perceive their understanding and recognize a sincere dedication to improving their academic development.

*“Pero dili pd abi kay slow sila mo ingon raka og ah ana na bitaw na sila, dili pud kay wala na atong heart ana sa SpEd, wala na atong care sa mga kids. Ang atoa lang tabangan nato cla sa ilang socialization, and know your learners kay di man ta maka tudlo ana nya kung dili nto sila mailhan.” Informant 7*

## Theme 2: The Utilization of Pedagogical Approaches

This Theme explores the strategies employed by educators to effectively instruct and support students with diverse needs and disabilities. Special education

teachers employ a variety of tactics, strategies, techniques, approaches, and teaching styles to accommodate the diverse learning needs of pupils.

**Subtheme 2.1: Individualized Educational Plan.** This subtheme explores the implementation of differentiated instruction through the utilization of an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) by educators, which aims to address the unique requirements and

learning styles of each student. As per the account provided by informant 1, the educators employed Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) as a means of instructional guidance, even while tailoring the content to the unique needs of each student

*“We had individual educational plan (IEP) in each of them so that we are guided and sa akona ng geiingon ganiha, differentiated lesson and if responsible jud ka, ma manage jud nimo imohang oras.” Informant 1*

According to the statement of Informant 5, the teacher employed Individualized Education Programs (IEP) as a pedagogical approach for instructing kids

with learning difficulties. The teacher places emphasis on fostering individualized student management through one-on-one interactions.

*“Sa akong ID/LD before, I did individualized approach most of the time for the LWDs, learners with disabilities. One-on-one interaction with the student. Since there are 4 of them, I manage to have time with them individually and focus sa unsay needs nila nga dapat nila malearn.” Informant 5*

Before the pandemic, IEPs were frequently used by teachers, but they were not emphasized in classroom discussions, according to Informant 7. However, the

teacher reported that since face-to-face classes had already been implemented, it was hoped that the teachers would employ IEP.

*“Sauna wala pa jd to na emphasize ang IEP regular lesson plan pa jud to sya, so si teacher na jud ang bahala unsaon nya pag bahin bahin ang klase so in one lesson plan mao na sya ang naay activity para ni grade 1,2, and 3. Karon naa na jud syay IEP pero wala pa jud na sya na gamit hopefully next year. Samot na pag two years nga pandemic kay weekly home learning plan raman to. Mag base ra sa activity nga gi hatag. So hopefully next year 100% face to face na or anam<sup>2</sup> ba kaha.” Informant 7*

**Subtheme 2.2: Anecdotal Records.** This subtheme elucidates the utilization of anecdotal records by educators for the purpose of monitoring and observing students' behavioral, emotional, and academic growth within the classroom setting. As to

the account provided by Informant 6, educators maintained anecdotal records wherein they documented their behavioral observations pertaining to student interactions.

*“Or else if wala pa we do it through behavioral observation inside the classroom, how he or she interacts with his/her peers that surrounds him/her then writing it down on the teacher's anecdotal record.” Informant 6*

Furthermore, Informant 1 asserted that the utilization of Anecdotal Records functions as a reliable means of

documenting all occurrences inside the confines of the classroom environment

*“Maong para safe ka teacher naa jud Kay anecdotal record. Kana mao jud na timan-an ninyo, very important na siya sa teacher. At the end of the day, di naman ka ma worry unsay sunod buhaton kay naa naman kay mga record” Informant 1*

However, Informant 7 explained that parents did not generally accept anecdotal evidence as proof that a pupil had a learning disability.

*“Nag anecdotal record nako ato niya ang mama di man jud sya mo tuo kay ang iyang bata needs love ra daw. Until such time nga iya ng e bang iyang head sa wall mao to akoa ng gi video-han suko pa kaayo ang mama kay cyber bullying daw, nga wala daw koy love nga mother na man daw unta ko need ra kuno go e hug. So mao to sya ang pinaka challenging sa akoang GT.” Informant 7*

**Subtheme 2.3: LAC Session.** This subtheme explains how instructors' participation in LAC sessions enhances their pedagogical strategies for working with students with special needs. In which instructors consult one another's ideas and instructional

strategies to improve lesson planning and delivery. According to Informant 4, they conduct LAC sessions during which they address student performances and conduct faculty meetings

*“Naa mi LAC session and ara mi diha mag tackle like unsay present level performance sa bata and also faculty meeting.” Informant 4*

According to Informant 1, teacher's used LAC sessions to discuss teaching techniques, strategies, and methods to enhance their productivity and skills.

*"yes, during our LAC session our school head and master teacher discussed and share with us some techniques and strategies to enhance us become a productive, tangible, compassionate teacher. Di gyud na mahitabo, as lkaw teacher ka naa jud nay mo mentor nimo Kay di man tanan imo nahebaw-an. Bisag unsan jud ka ka professional naa juy mga, naa man guy kuan nga mga pamaagi nga di nimo mahebaw-an labi na katong ahead sad nimo"* **Informant 1**

In addition to that, based on Informant 3, the LAC session helped improve the teaching styles used in

transitioning from teaching regular students to handling special education students.

*"Yes, of course. Specially on how to teach special students and I am very thankful to my friends and co teacher share their expertise. Kay gikan baya kos regular students and nagswitch ko to special education. Mag ask jud ko sa akong mga co teachers."* **Informant 3**

### **Theme 3: The Tough Times in Special Education Classes**

This theme explains the challenges experienced by special education teachers inside the classroom. Their causes of stress and burnout, and the factors that affect their effectiveness inside the classroom.

**Subtheme 3.1: My Stress and Burnouts.** This subtheme explains the causes of stress and burnout experienced by teachers, mainly due to working overtime from spending too much time on paperwork

and extra workloads. This includes written documents, reports, and school forms that a teacher manages to ensure the class records. The amount of time special education teachers must spend away from their pupils and outside of work to meet legal obligations and deadlines has been identified as a key cause of burnout and stress among teachers.

According to informant 4, it affects their time managing teaching duties and personal matters due to unexpected reports and workloads beyond their working hours.

*"Para nako ang paperworks is di jud okay. Daghan jud kaayo. Kalit-kalit nga mga reports while nag teach ka tas ipatawag kag kalit. Di nalang ka maka enjoy sa imong personal leisure."* **Informant 4**

Furthermore, according to Informant 3, this phenomenon has a significant impact on her schedule, particularly in terms of the time that should be allocated for familial engagements. The presence

of paperwork diminishes the amount of quality time that certain parents are able to allocate to their families.

*"Yes, I am also mentoring my co teacher and some paperworks can be done at home. Yes, it really does affect me as a parent because sometimes tungod sa paperwork you can only have less time to your family specially if you have reports need to accomplished and to be passed on nya nag apas sa deadlines."* **Informant 3**

Additionally, informant 1 emphasized the importance of flexibility and responsibility among special

education teachers in order to minimize grievances related to paperwork

*"Kanang workload, kanang nature na jud na sa teacher, teacher gali ka nga responsible bisag unsa pa ihatag ninyo, sa akong nang ge ingon flexible kaba. Ang uban man gud ba tapulan mao na mureklamo." Informant 1*

**Subtheme 3.2: Lack of Parental Support.** This subtheme explores the role of parental support in a student's education, which involves providing many forms of assistance, such as physical, emotional, and financial support, to motivate and facilitate the student's academic advancement. Informant 7 asserts that parental denial regarding their child's condition

results in a failure to adequately support the child's unique needs. Frequently, this tendency results in the neglect of the learner's needs, hence exacerbating the challenges faced by the teacher responsible for the student.

*"Ang challenge lang nako ato mga third year nko diri sa SpEd kay ang mama ba in denial nga ang iyang anak kay naay special needs. Grade 1 palang ang bata ako na sge na og ingon nga mo sulod sa Cr nya inig gawas sa Cr nag hubo na unya mo tuwad sa atubangan ipakita Ang lubot sa classmates. So dadto sa akoang time akong na jd gi inform ang mama nga need jd ang bata ipa check sa other professionals akong gi advice san Ang mama for assessment nya wala na man ni balik ang mama so wala jud sya na diagnose"* Informant 7

Furthermore, the provision of financial assistance was a significant challenge for parents with a child with special needs, as the demanding nature of caring for

the kid necessitated one parent to assume the role of caregiver while the other parent pursued employment

*"Support physically okay ra, pero usually jud sa students with disability when it comes to money, like kanang mo ingon kag mga amotan kay naa man jud na ginagmay, di jd ta kapugos nila. Kay usually jd ani atong mga parents nga naay anak with impairments kay di baya ka work ang usa, so kasagaran jud ana nila naa juy problem financiallv"* Informant 7

Moreover, lack of physical support from parents can also be seen as teachers often feel stressed when parents seem to rely on the teacher to take care of the

child rather than constant follow-ups to see how well their child is in the class.

*" magpatawag ka ug parent's kay naa kay concern ni kuan or ni kinsa unya di mutunga kay daghan pasangil makalabad"* Informant 5

**Subtheme 3.3: Not Compensated well.** This subtheme explores the remuneration package, including salary, benefits, additional compensation, and pension, obtained by educators during their

tenure at educational institutions. According to Informant 1, despite the tedium and stress associated with their profession, teachers are willing to continue

working in the sector. However, an increase in their compensation would be preferable.

*"Least ug kapoy ang private kay inig uli nimo niya aircon pero di kaayo dako, pero ug ulitaw or dag aka okay ra sa private kay wa may buhion pero kung pareha namo naa nay pamilya, so gawas nga love namo ang teaching, love sad namo ang sweldo so aawanta iud ka"* **Informant 1**

Lastly, informant 7 expressed that it is much better to be in public institutions compared to private. In terms of salary, financial management is the key.

*"Okay ra man ang private pero mas okay ang public. Sa sweldo, it depends kay it's about man sa financial management. Di jd ka mangutang og lapas sa imong sweldo"* **Informant 7**

**Subtheme 3.5: Lacking Instructional Materials and Resources.** This issue explores the various instruments employed by educators to facilitate the dissemination of information and knowledge to their pupils, hence enhancing the effectiveness of the learning process. Based on the testimony of informant 7, it has been observed that public schools

are facing a deficiency in terms of teachers, instructional materials, and other learning resources. The lack of necessary materials and resources resulted in special education teachers bearing the burden of procuring the materials and equipment required for their pupils' learning.

*"Yes wala jud me mga equipment, ang amo rang gamit is kanang slate and stylus which is not easy to use. Kay wala man ta'y brailer kay mahal man kaayo na. Kay sa slate and stylus mag press<sup>2</sup> man ka ana nya daghan Kay kog bata kapila intawon ko mag doot<sup>2</sup> ato mamula intawn akoang kamot. Mao sad na ang naka disadvantage."* **Informant 7**

**Theme 4: Resiliency of Special Education Teachers.** This theme presents the stress coping mechanisms that are used by the teachers in managing stress such as engaging in a variety of soothing activities.

Informant 3 stated that stress does not affect a teacher's ability to teach if you only have the dedication to teach the students with special needs.

*"Para sa akoo, stress doesn't affect your teaching ability if you love and have passion to teach our learners with special needs. So kay love man nako akong work ug akong studyante, wala ra ma affect ang akong teaching ability."* **Informant 3**

Furthermore, informant 4 said that she employs patience and adaptation as strategies to manage the various stressors she encounters.

*"Lisod kay naay personal and naay work na stress, so di nalang jud ka magpadala. Ikaw lang jud ang mo adjust. Patience rajud."* **Informant 4**

According to Informant 6, time management between work and personal time is the key to carrying out all the tasks without feeling burdened.

*“Time management lang gyud para sa akua kay madala raman labi na nga kasagaran is more on activities man ta sa mga students with special needs.” Informant 6*

According to the testimony of Informant 9, effective time management is crucial for successfully completing activities without experiencing excessive

strain. This entails effectively balancing professional and personal commitments.

*“Stress makes me unmotivated to work. That's why I always try my best to de-stress myself. Kay kung ma stress man gud ko dae dako jud kaayu epekto ang teaching nako mura kog mawad an ug focus. Mao na e motivate jud nako akong self d magpa stress. Chill lang!” Informant 9*

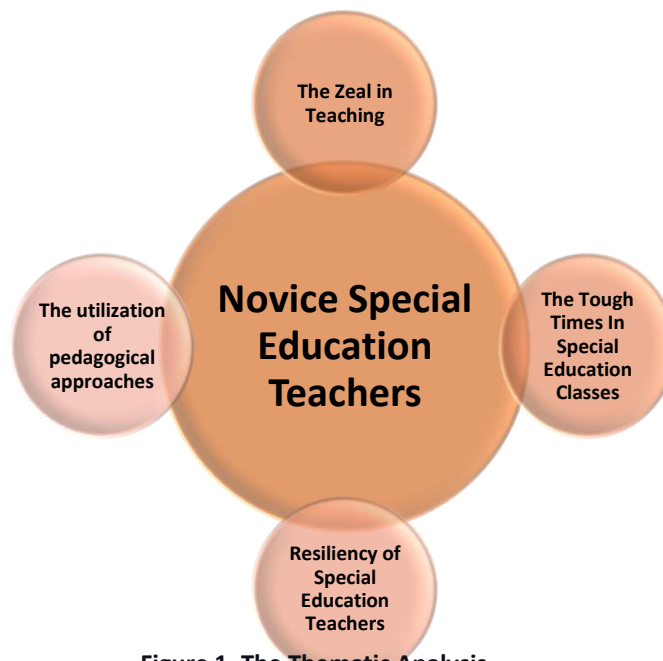


Figure 1. The Thematic Analysis

## Discussion

After the analysis of Data, the researcher was able to generate four general themes, namely: 1) The Zeal in Teaching (2) The utilization of pedagogical approaches, (3) The Tough Times in Special Education Classes, and (4) Resiliency of Special Education Teachers

Teachers, sometimes referred to as learning facilitators, play a crucial role as integral personnel responsible for overseeing and facilitating the

educational endeavors of students (De Pedro and Derasin, 2022; Carredo et. al, 2023; Villar et al., 2023). The study found that special education teachers are driven by passion and motivation in their teaching practice. According to Day (2000) The profession of teaching is characterized by its intricacy and the high level of demands it entails. In order to keep their energy and passion for their profession, teachers must uphold their personal dedication to their work

(Montero et. al., 2022). Teachers are required to actively participate in their work on a daily basis, utilizing both their intellectual faculties and emotional capacities (Day, 2004; Elliott & Crosswell, 2001; Fried, 1995; Nias, 1996). It is imperative for educators to exhibit emotional dedication to their job, as the absence of such a connection exposes them to the persistent risk of burnout within a progressively demanding work setting (Nias, 1996). In addition, Teachers rely on motivation to maintain their engagement and enthusiasm (Bayawa, 2021). When teachers are driven, they are more inclined to surpass expectations to design captivating classes, foster robust connections with their students, and consistently pursue opportunities for professional growth. Consequently, this results in a favorable educational atmosphere and improved achievements for pupils.

Moreover, the study also revealed the utilization of pedagogical approaches of special education teachers which included the use of Individualized Educational Plans. The utilization of Individualized Educational Plans significantly enhances the educational experience for students with disabilities. The involvement of parents and students is emphasized by several scholars (Gross, 2000; McCausland, 2005; Nugent, 2002; Strogilos & Xanthacou, 2006; Reyes et. al., 2023), leading to collaboration among various stakeholders (Hartas, 2004). This collaboration aims to provide guidance for teachers' instructional practices (Lee-Tarver, 2006) and assess students' progress (Torana et al., 2010), thereby ensuring that parents can trust that their child is receiving instruction tailored to their specific educational needs (Frankl, 2005).

In addition, the study also sheds light on the challenges experienced by special education teachers inside the classroom. Their causes of stress and burnout, and the factors that affect their effectiveness inside the classroom. According to Obinguar et. Al. (2023) As a result of the inherent demands and external factors that teachers encounter within their profession, the experience of work-related stress has become pervasive and prevalent (Boligol, 2023). Likewise, the research findings also indicate that the absence of parental support for children with special

needs poses significant challenges for special education teachers. Beduya et al. (2023) assert that the education of children with disabilities is heavily contingent upon the active participation of families. It is apparent that children would encounter significant challenges in their academic pursuits in the absence of parental support.

Furthermore, the research findings also indicated that educators expressed a preference for an augmented remuneration package due to the significant levels of stress inherent in their occupation. According to Nadeem, Rana, Lone, Maqbool, Naz, and Ali (2011), it has been found that the inadequate socio-economic condition of teachers hurts their overall performance. Finally, the study revealed the Resilience of Special Education Teachers. According to Montero et al. (2002) and Romeo et. al. (2023) teachers are anticipated to overcome any problems they face in their profession. Educators possess the capacity to effectively manage stress and execute their professional responsibilities with proficiency, even when confronted with tasks that lie beyond their area of competence. Efforts will be made to devise strategies for addressing the issue

### **Conclusion**

The general society frequently fails to acknowledge and undervalue the perspectives and experiences of special education teachers within the special education program. This study reveals the discrepancies experienced by instructors, including variations in their level of excitement towards teaching, instructional strategies utilized while working with kids with special needs, and the stressors present in their professional setting. The pressures predominantly encompass an abundance of administrative tasks, augmented labor obligations without commensurate remuneration, and a dearth of educational materials within the public school system. However, special education teachers experience significant levels of stress as they encounter a range of challenges, utilizing a variety of coping strategies like efficient time management, fostering patience, and maintaining a positive mindset. Special education teachers face a multitude of challenges and barriers in their field of work.

Nonetheless, the educators' dedication and passion for instructing pupils with Special needs, as well as guaranteeing their ultimate success, act as the

principal motivating factor for their ongoing involvement in special education initiatives.

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