Involvement and Experiences of Parents Having Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the academic participation and experiences of parents having children with special needs. The narrative inquiry served as the study design, while the interview questionnaire served as the main instrument. Data obtained were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to determine the emerging themes and essence of the study. The results revealed that parents support their children’s scholastic activities and allow them to socialize with their peers. Their experiences in raising children with special needs include imposing discipline, teaching them domestic chores, siblings’ rivalry, and communication barriers. Taking things holistically, it can be concluded that parents of children with special needs immensely involve themselves in all the academic undertakings of their children. They are able to manage the challenges in raising children with special needs and provide them a well parental-related care.

Keywords: Academic Involvement, Experiences, Parents Participation, Special Education

I. INTRODUCTION

Parents play a significant role in supporting their children’s educational needs, teaching right conduct, training household activities, providing their economic needs, and guiding them to become socially responsible individuals. History had put in records that parents serve as the first teachers of their children. Oftentimes, when parents are not around, the guardians take full responsibility to realize the abovementioned needs of their children.

Children today tend to imitate what they observe in their respective surroundings and immediately adapt to the trends. There are even cases when they believe more in their peers than in their parents. As a result, some children create a feeling that their parents are against them and, in turn, deprive them of what they want. Understandably, parenthood and raising offspring, especially in this modern world, is never easy. Parents who cannot fulfill their obligations frequently receive unfavorable feedback and even stereotypes children with broken families to be unsuccessful in the future.

Children with special needs, generally, have limited opportunities to be able to access education. Only a few children can undergo formal education through an inclusive and unique education setup. Luckily, parents with sufficient income are the ones who can afford to provide the much-needed education for their children with special needs. Often, private-run learning institutions offer this type of educational service. For those parents who are economically deprived, the education of their children with special needs is jeopardized.

In Tacloban City, the Philippines, children with special needs are enrolled in any of the three schools located in the city. One of these schools is the Sto. Niño SpEd Center. The center admits children with varied special needs. The researcher, a SpEd teacher herself, had observed that parents of these children usually have difficulty taking care of their children, from fetching them in school to attending to their needs while in school. On a lighter note, it was also personally observed that parents treat their children and their socialization needs and get involved with various activities. These are only a few observations of the researcher, but as to the exact feelings of these parents, this is still a hanging question. Given this, there is thus a compelling need to acquire in-depth knowledge regarding parental involvement in the academic preparation of their children as well as their experiences in handling children’s who require their much needed attention. This contention served as the basis to pursue this academic undertaking.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The researches that follow support the claims of the researcher for this study. Undeniably, studies concerning SpEd in all its facets abound. The topics of these studies include 1) teaching and learning in the SpEd class; 2) government and private entities support for children with special needs; and 3) teachers’ perception of an inclusive classroom.

First, on teaching and learning. Kayhan and Akmese (2018) reported that game and game teaching is best for learners in a SpEd class and recommended that they be used in the classroom to make the learning space inclusive and let learners feel mainstream in the regular classroom. On the
other hand, Johnson et al. (2019) developed an Explicit Instruction observation rubric deemed helpful in evaluating the performance of SpEd teachers in the delivery of the programs for children with a specific disability. The tool has a psychometric quality of complex, multifaceted performance assessments to ensure that teachers effectively and efficiently implement these programs.

Second, on government and private entities support for children with special needs. As regards novel developments in the provision of services for children with special needs, Chitio and Muwana (2018) listed legal provisions, funding, teacher preparedness, inclusivity of instruction, and attitudes towards children with special needs as among the novel support provided by Zambia and Zimbabwe government to the children in their countries with special needs. It hopes that these services will dramatically improve the quality of their lives. On the other hand, Cornelius and Sandmel (2018) listed the support provided to the neophyte SpEd teachers, which included specialized training in dealing with multiple disabilities and collaborative planning. Findings indicate that among the supports given to them include the respondents; however, they are wary about their working conditions because of voluminous paperwork and time consuming for lessons preparations.

Finally, studies also exist as regards teachers' perspectives on SpEd classrooms. So-Young and Lim (2016), for example, examined the correlations between virtues and well-being among Korean SpEd teachers and found out that this group of teachers possess interpersonal and theological virtues, which are both correlated to their Eudemonic and hedonic well-being. It implies then that their virtues highly influence the delivery of their functions as teachers of learners with special needs and not their emotions which are traced to their specific culture and values. Therefore, the researchers suggested the development of a strategy that would guide these teachers.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the narrative inquiry design. According to Givens (2018), narrative inquiry is a way of comprehending experience. Being such, it looks into people’s experiences as well as narratively inquire about these experiences. This, in turn, allows for an in-depth study of a person’s experiences over time and in context. When used as a research design, the researcher must account for the narrative view of experience. So, the researcher attends to place, temporality, and sociality. These components pave the way for inquiry into the participants’ storied life experiences and, in turn, fully understand the phenomenon under investigation. With the design as main anchor, a questionnaire with an open-ended format was designed to be able to induce the telling of the involvement, experiences, and challenges and let the parent-informants share their personal experiences in dealing with their children with special needs.

The informants of this study were the parents of the children with special needs. These informants were purposively chosen. The focus of this study was to look into the emerging themes about parental academic involvement and experiences in handling their children with special needs. Data obtained were coded and thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke (2019) thematic analysis technique.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Two themes emerged from the informants’ coded responses. These themes represent for both the academic participation and experiences of the informants as regards handling their children with special needs. The first theme on the academic participation is I am Always at Your Side. According to Barnard (2016), parents have a huge impact on the lives of their children. Reports of the various findings of the empirical studies conducted on this area reveal that parental involvement is an effective strategy to ensure learners’ success.

As a universal practice, academic institutions usually compel parent participation in classroom meetings, wellness activities, educational consultations and recognitions, and even home visitation. These activities suggest that schools need to perform the role of parents as an essential stakeholder for building strong relationships. The parents and caregivers usually give extra attention, time, and care to students with special needs.

Parental involvement typically commences even before the school calendar kicks off. Parents are usually requested to participate in significant events in the Philippine setting, including but not limited to Brigada Eskwela, and Parents-Teachers Conferences. The former is a nationwide activity that aims to prepare the schools’ physical facilities so that these could readily be used in time of the opening of classes. On the other hand, the latter is a classroom-based activity that intends to orient parents of their role for smooth delivery of the schools’ academic services to the advantage of the learners as a whole, including those with special needs.

Epstein (2019) corroborated this observation and said that since parents know the capabilities of their children, they, therefore, attend activities primarily to assist their kids physically and provide proper care. In essence, parents indeed do play a vital role in their children’s education. In the absence of the parents due to unavoidable reasons or circumstances, substitute caretakers or guardians come into the picture. This suggests that caretakers or guardians replace the parents of children with special needs when they are unavailable. While other parents do their best just to be present during school activities of their children with special needs when they are unavailable. While other parents do their best just to be present during school activities of their children with special needs based on the study, however, a common complaint of teachers and school administrators, however, is the lack of parental involvement in various academic activities (McKenna and Millen, 2016).

The second theme for parents’ experiences is called Worry No More, you are Under my Protective Mantle! Narratives from the participants proved that parents of children with special needs have to extend their respect for their children to avoid being the subject of bullying by their peers and the people in their immediate community. This difficulty is due to the parents’ limited knowledge in dealing with children diagnosed to have special needs and their abrupt behavioral changes.

Accordingly, they explained that children with varying levels of disability necessitate that their parents’ be familiar with various coping mechanisms to impose discipline alongside fundamental knowledge to treat their misbehavior.
Language serves as the main barrier that contributes to this menace. This also happens in schools. The parentinfo.org platform explained that the critical behavior of children with special needs prompts attention from their parents. This same platform also emphasizes that “children with intellectual disability may self-injure for several reasons.” One of the common causes is pain or discomfort. Children with severe intellectual disability, on the other hand, are more likely to experience health problems including epilepsy, osteoporosis, and gastrointestinal, skin, respiratory and cardiovascular disorders. They are struggling as well in communicating their pains which could result in undetected health problems.

Meanwhile, discrimination from the peers, groups, family members or schoolmates usually occur for children with disability. The issue of bullying does not only cause low morale on the part of the children but also serves as an insult to the entire family. Additionally, children with developmental disabilities tend to socially exclude themselves, while children with learning difficulties tend to experience socio-emotional behavioral disorders. Overall, bullying behavior happens especially with the presence of playmates during playtime and victimization by the absence of playmates during break and a limited number of friends in class (Andreou, 2019). Similarly, sending children with special needs to school is also a challenge among parents. They have to allocate a hefty budget for the education of their children making such exhausting and costly. The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2020), attributed this to transportation cost and other materials.

V. CONCLUSION

It is indeed very challenging to bring up children with special needs, as reflected in the narratives of the parents-informants of this study. These hardships, however, are testimonies that their children are under their protective mantle no matter what it takes for them and they are committed to provide their children the best education possible. A variety of components covered the challenges of parents. From the analysis made on the available data, the following are the challenges of having children with special needs: interaction, serving the food, activities to be given, completion of task, behavior, instructional materials be prepared for them, expenses in sending them to school, the time provided in taking care of them, siblings issues, and discipline. One of the ways by which government can help parents to children with special needs to support their education and special varying needs is to ensure that teachers are properly trained and that support are given to them. Studies like that of Kauma (2020) contested a need to have general education classrooms flexible to the point of having no limits in accommodating learners with disabilities, regardless of the severity of its conditions and education type. This is substantiated by Al-Shammari (2019) who argued that SpEd teachers need to utilize evidence-based metacognitive instructional strategies such as study skills, concept mapping, and reciprocal teaching strategy. The researcher believes that this is the ultimate way by which both parents and their children with special needs are given the needed they so deserve from the government.

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