

Original Article

Challenges and Support Needs of Stakeholders in Caring for Learners with Special Educational Needs: A Managerial Perspective

Demetria A. San Juan¹, Jannie SJ. Manimtim², Marites A. Balaguer^{3*}

1. Tomas Claudio Memorial College, G6FP+F4R, Morong, Rizal, Philippines.
2. University of Rizal System, J.P. Rizal St, Brgy. Sampaloc, Tanay, Rizal, Philippines.
3. Maybancal Sped Center, G. Robles Street, Barangay Maybancal, Morong, Rizal, Philippines.

* Correspondence: jannie.manimtim@urs.edu.ph

Abstract: Through the interaction of environmental (physical and social) and genetic triggers, many children with different forms of disabilities are born daily. Several others, by the same environmental and genetic factors, develop disabilities of diverse kinds every day after birth. While many parents accept carrying fetuses with the potential for developmental challenges to term, many others, for personal and other reasons, terminate pregnancies with risks of development deficiencies. The descriptive mixed-method study aimed to capture the managerial, instructional and societal challenges confronted by parents, guardians and teachers' roles in aiding Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) in Rizal Province. Embedded within Fullan's (2007) Change Leadership Theory and Systems Approach to Educational Management, the study focused on 35 educators participating in educational and community organizations. Quantitative data was analysed through frequency and percentage distribution, while qualitative data were thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's six step approach. The study identified on-going behavioural management challenges, financial constraints and institutional inadequacies that compromise inclusive practice. The paper highlights the importance of managerial responsiveness, rationalized inter-agency collaboration and continuous competence enhancement to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education policies. Strong leadership, fiscal devolution, and community involvement are key to translating inclusion from policy rhetoric into reality.

Keywords: inclusive education, educational leadership, systems, leadership, management of inclusive schools

1. INTRODUCTION

Through the interaction of environmental (physical and social) and genetic triggers, many children with different forms of disabilities are born daily [1,2]. Several others, by the same environmental and genetic factors, develop disabilities of diverse kinds every day after birth [3,4]. While many parents accept carrying fetuses with the potential for developmental challenges to term [5], many others, for personal and other reasons, terminate pregnancies with risks of development deficiencies [6]. Consequently, the conceptual boundaries of disability become puzzling [7]. Nonetheless, there are two broad conceptualizations of disability: instrumentalism and conceptualize. The increment lists' view

operates along the medical model, which symbolizes negativity, assuming that there is a deficiency within an individual that must be “fixed”, “cured”, “accommodated” or “endured”. For instance [8], aligning with the instrumentalists, describes disability as “deprivation in terms of functioning(s) among persons with health deprivations”. The other perspective—advanced by re conceptualists, asserts that disability is a social construct, which “resides more in the minds of the beholders than in the bodies of the beheld” [9]. The re conceptualist view faults incrementalists for ignoring the wider social and environmental influences in producing disability perceptions on children with special needs [10]. Put together, disability arises from the extent of interaction among resources, personal and structural environments, and health deprivations. Since the onset of many disabling conditions among children can be sudden, parents of children with a disability may experience exceptional life circumstances. Parents and caregivers may have to begin adjusting and re-adjusting their priorities, including financial, material, and emotional resources, to navigate the new challenges. At the emotional level, ample evidence illustrates pessimism, hostility, shame, denial, blame, guilt, grief, withdrawal, rejection, helplessness, anger, anxiety, shock, disbelief and self-blames [11]. Simply, a section of parents who have CwSNs may have strong negative notions and feelings about themselves (e.g., self-blaming) as well as their children [12]. In Ghana, there are strong beliefs in witchcraft and magic [13] and perceived to be a cause or consequence of disability [14]. On the other hand, there is a fledgling body of knowledge that demonstrates positive experiences among parents/caregivers of children with different disabilities and levels of severity [15]. For instance, [16] study of fathers of children with autism revealed positive recollections on individual qualities, strong emotional bonds with children and father’s personal development on taken-for-granted events in parenting abled children. In a different study focusing on mothers of children with special needs, [17,18] found that having children with disabilities was viewed as empowering as they became more sensitive and conscious of people with disabilities, enriched their tolerance of life events, and deepened beliefs in life’s purpose for all people. The literature on parenting and social support/services for CwSN is growing, but they are limited in two main respects. First, much of the existing evidence focuses on one or another form of disability, with considerable focus on autism [19,20], cerebral palsy [21], intellectual disabilities [22,23], and hearing impairment [24]. Second, limited attention has been paid to community and institutional support systems (health and education particularly) for parents/caregivers of children with special needs/disabilities. Inclusive education is a fundamental manifestation of social justice and promoting equality in access to quality learning for all children, including those with special educational needs, disabilities and differences (UNESCO 2020). Philippines that outlook has been demonstrated in the Republic Act No. 11650 and Department of Education (2023) Inclusive Education Policy Framework, which guarantee children with disabilities a place in regular school settings. Inclusive education (IE), the practice of addressing the diverse needs of all learners in mainstream classrooms, is recognized by international standards as key to enabling children with disabilities to realize their right to full participation in the community, as per the United Nations’ Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ministries and Departments of Education across sub-Saharan Africa strive to promote IE, through education policies (and action plans, although only 42% of Sub-Saharan African countries have IE policies. Beyond policies, IE has yet to be fully implemented in sub-Saharan Africa. While some strategies relevant to pupils with DD are proposed in action plans, so far, implementation efforts are mainly focused on providing equipment and infrastructure accommodations for children with physical and sensory disabilities, such as books in Braille [25]. Resources for severe DD, which lead to more complex needs, are limited, as reported for example in South Africa and Nigeria [26]. Implementation science evidence shows that the successful implementation of any innovation is influenced by factors intrinsic to the innovation and the implementation process and by contextual factors at the individual, organization and broader socio-political levels [27]. The direct experiences of relevant stakeholders can provide important information on factors that facilitate or hinder innovations in general [28], and IE

specifically. In addition, understanding the potential opposition of some stakeholders to IE is needed to develop implementation strategies to overcome that potential barrier. For instance, DD in Africa is often considered a curse or punishment, leading community members and school staff to hold negative attitudes towards pupils with DD [29]. In turn, these can hinder effective inclusion, while its success requires the commitment of all stakeholders [30]. A strong plan for implementing IE for pupils with DD in sub-Saharan Africa, therefore, requires appropriate consideration of the experiences, views and attitudes of diverse stakeholder groups. In spite of these legislative achievements, implementation flaws are apparent at the level of implementation. An author [31] study findings all indicate that teachers and families who are associated with LSENs remain to experience challenges because of systemic barriers including poor training, lack of resources in the institution, and stigma from the community. Managerially speaking, special education is more about getting the job done than it is about pedagogical innovation; finally managing to accomplish that task doesn't always scale up and down from for small town school districts to big city ones. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine challenges and support for stakeholders involved in LSENs and how managers need to manage these problems in order that inclusive education can be fully implemented. Specifically, the study described the demographic composition of respondents, challenges experienced in the facilitation of LSENs and Identified the perceived needs of support from parents/guardians and teachers, and Advised management of interventions to promote effective inclusive practices at the level of local education authorities.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study followed a mixed method descriptive design, integrating quantitative analysis of the survey data and qualitative thematic analysis to explore rich and in-depth information. Thirty-five (35) respondents were involved: parents (71.43 %), teacher (22.86 %), and guardians (5.71 %) from different municipalities of Rizal Province. The sample was largely female (80%), reflecting the care work in Filipino homes limited to one sex. The Feedback Form on Challenges in Supporting Learners with Special Needs was designed and content-validated by three educational management and SPED experts. The instrument was composed of close-ended and open-ended items. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize qualitative data. Open comments (qualitative data) were thematically analyzed according to the six-phase process outlined by [32]; familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining/ naming the theme and reporting2.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 01: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	28	80.00
	Male	7	20.00
Role	Parent	25	71.43
	Teacher	8	22.86
	Guardian	2	5.71
Currently caring for a child with special needs	Yes	29	82.86
	No	6	17.14

Table 02: Perceived Difficulty in Sending a Child with Special Needs to School

Response	f	%
Sometimes	19	54.29

No	10	28.57
Yes	2	5.71
No response	4	11.43

More than half reported occasional difficulty, primarily financial and behavioral in nature.

Table 03: Teaching Experience with Learners with Special Educational Needs

Response	f	%
Yes	13	37.14
No	5	14.29
No response	17	48.57

Only about one-third had prior experience, indicating limited exposure to inclusive teaching.

Table 04: Perceived Community Awareness and Support for LSENs

Response	f	%
Yes	18	51.43
Somewhat	11	31.43
No	2	5.71
No response	4	11.43

Community awareness was moderate; however, stigma and misconceptions persist.

Table 05: Emergent Themes from Qualitative Responses

Theme	Core Idea / Description	Illustrative Evidence
Behavioural and Emotional Challenges	Difficulty managing tantrums, attention deficits, sensory issues	"Managing emotional outbursts or meltdowns is very challenging."
Financial and Logistical Constraints	High cost of therapy, transportation, medical care	"Financial difficulties for therapy and medical needs."
Institutional Gaps	Lack of SPED-trained teachers, unclear policies	"No teacher trained to handle special learners."
Capacity Building Needs	Desire for trainings on behavioural management	"We need workshops and trainings for teachers and parents."
Stigma and Community Awareness	Discrimination and lack of understanding	"Some neighbours still make fun of children with disabilities."
Collaborative Support Systems	Call for LGU-school-NGO coordination	"The barangay and DepEd should have programs for children with special needs."

From a managerial perspective, these results uncover the gap between policy making and policy enactment. The scenario is marked by behavioural and economic constraints, mirroring the conclusion of [33] according to which: lacking institutional scaffolding, families hold a particular responsibility for inclusion. The inadequacy of SPED-trained teachers mirrors deficiencies in human resource development planning—one of the major responsibilities of educational management. Teacher preparedness is directly related to outcomes of inclusion [34]. Accordingly, school administrators will

need to incorporate SPED training into on-going professional development systems and performance-based assessment. Institutional holes indicate deficiencies in governance of the organization. An author [35] advocates for the part played by being a distributed leadership for success where positions in administration and instruction are shared so that inclusiveness can be sustained. Communities of Stigma further point to the cultural aspect of inclusion. Inclusiveness, according to UNESCO (2020), must move from developmental agendas to being a community standard. Public leaders therefore must embrace advocacy, social marketing and participatory campaigns as tools of management for change. In short, inclusion requires systems coherence - the synergy of policy, leadership and resources organized around a common core of fairness and responsibility.

4. CONCLUSION

While such policies are strengthened, inclusive education is still challenged by attitudinal, financial and structural barriers. Parents are in emotional and financial distress; teachers are unprepared for their students, and for the protections afforded to them by institutions; communities are ambivalent at best, ashamed at worst. Inadequateness of integrated management systems and sector coordination undermines policy implementation. It will be aspirational unless consciously governed and lead inclusive mechanisms.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create Capacity-Building Programs for teachers and parents on LSEN management that orient within School Improvement Plans.
- Reinforce Inter-Agency Partnership between DepEd, LGUs, and NGOs with signed memorandum of understanding to ensure unified responsibility.
- Establish SEC-Special Education Centers in every district with qualified SPED coordinators.
- Enact the Fiscal Decentralization for therapy subsidies and parental education.
- Undertake the Community Mobilization on Stigma and Discrimination.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems should be mainstreamed through managerial performance indicators (e.g. teacher preparedness, stakeholder satisfaction, learner participation).

REFERENCES

- [1] Agbo, N., & Boamah, S. Y. (2026). Experiences of parents of children with special needs: Educational services, challenges and recommendations from parents' perspectives. *British Journal of Special Education*.
- [2] Sun, Y., Skouteris, H., Tamblyn, A., Berger, E., & Blewitt, C. (2026). Cross-disciplinary collaboration supporting children with special educational needs in early childhood education: A scoping review. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 54(1), 381-398.
- [3] Wong, C. L., Chan, D. F. Y., Chong, Y. Y., Yu, H. T., Lee, Y. W., & Li, H. (2026). A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words—Using Photovoice to Unravel the Caregiving Experiences of Parents of Children With Special Education Needs. *Nursing Open*, 13(2), e70399.
- [4] Bakhytzhamal, S., Dinara, Y., & Gao, C. (2026). Social and Pedagogical Support for Children With Special Educational Needs: A Systematic Review of Inclusive Practices, Instructional Strategies and Support Measures in Mainstream Schools. *European Journal of Education*, 61(1), e70429.
- [5] Wang, W. (2026). Socio-Pedagogical Support for Students with Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Mainstream Schools: A Systematic Review. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 1-17.

- [6] Ackah-Jnr, F. R. (2026). Enabling inclusive education: the leadership ecosystem in an early childhood-school-community context. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 29(2), 275-293.
- [7] O'Connell O, Meaney S, O'Donoghue K. Anencephaly; the maternal experience of continuing with the pregnancy. Incompatible with life but not with love.
- [8] Blakeley C, Smith DM, Johnstone ED, Wittkowski A. Parental decision-making following a prenatal diagnosis that is lethal, life-limiting, or has long term implications for the future child and family: a meta-synthesis of qualitative literature.
- [9] Grossman TB, Chasen ST. Abortion for fetal genetic abnormalities: type of abnormality and gestational age at diagnosis. *American Journal of Perinatology Reports*. 2020;10(01):e87–e92.
- [10] Mahdavi SA, Jafari A, Azimi K, Dehghanizadeh N, Barzegar A. Therapeutic abortion in Iran: an epidemiologic study of legal abortion in 2 years. *BMC*
- [11] Stokke, H. S., Ims Lied, S., Larsen, K., & Wermke, W. (2026). Interprofessional cooperation in inclusive education: perspectives and challenges. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 1-12.
- [12] Abdullah, N., Lajuma, S., Jafar, M. F., Ishak, M. N., & Khairon, S. S. (2026). Leadership strategies for inclusive education systematic review: how school principals support special needs students. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 20(2), 985-997.
- [13] Ghanouni, P., & Kavanaugh, P. (2026). Navigating healthcare among Canadians with ASD during transitions to adulthood: How does it look like from the perspectives of stakeholders?. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 169, 105222.
- [14] Findler L, Jacoby AK, Gabis L. Subjective happiness among mothers of children with disabilities: The role of stress, attachment, guilt and social support. *Research in developmental disabilities*.
- [15] Shahwan, Y., Abuhussein, A., & Al-Tarawneh, A. (2026). Public–Private Partnerships in Education: Governance and Management Perspectives on Collaborative Models. In *Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Innovation Management and Risk Management: A Systems (and Network) Perspective* (pp. 1803-1818). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- [16] Aijaz, R., Shafique, K., Akash, S., & Ahmed, N. (2026). Enhancing Special Education Through Learning Technologies: A Case Study in Chiniot, Pakistan. *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Özel Eğitim Dergisi*, (Advanced Online Publication), 1-20.
- [17] Miranda A, Mira A, Berenguer C, Rosello B, Baixauli I. Parenting stress in mothers of children with autism without intellectual disability. Mediation of behavioral problems and coping strategies. *Frontiers in Psychology*.
- [18] Avramidis, E., Kampadeli, I. K., & Woodcock, S. (2026). Inclusion climate perceptions of secondary students with and without SEND and their association with motivation for academic engagement. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 26(1), e70059.
- [19] Brempong O. They have used a broom to sweep my womb: The concept of witchcraft in Ghana. *Institute of African Studies Research Review*.
- [20] Acheampong E, Nadutey A, Anokye R, Agyei-Baffour P, Edusei AK. The perception of healthcare workers of People with Disabilities presenting for care at peri-urban health facilities in Ghana. *Health & Social Care in the Community*. 2022;30(4):e944–e52.
- [21] Irshad, S., & Amjad, A. I. (2026). Bullying experiences and coping strategies of special needs students in inclusive education: A qualitative study from a resource-constrained country. *Acta Psychologica*, 262, 106101.
- [22] Doulami, E., & Dimitriou, A. (2026). Leadership and internal policy in sustainable schools: Exploring the perceptions of primary education executives in Greece. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, 22(1), e2606.
- [23] Basualto, P., Senevirathna, A. M., Seth, A., Dimitropoulos, G., & Zwicker, J. D. (2026). Improving Equitable Access to Disability Services and Support for Children With Neurodevelopmental Disabilities: Service Provider and Decision-Maker Perspectives. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 52(1), e70213.

- [24] Dinamarca-Aravena, K. A., & Retamal-Walter, F. (2026). Telepractice during school closures: Strategies of support professionals to sustain educational continuity for students with special educational needs in Chile. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 26(1), e70039.
- [25] Ackah-Jnr, F. R. (2026). Enabling inclusive education: the leadership ecosystem in an early childhood-school-community context. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 29(2), 275-293.
- [26] Mu'alimin, M. A., Muhith, A. M., & Hepni, H. (2026). School principals' and teachers' perspectives on school quality management in Islamic schools: insights from Indonesia. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 40(4), 727-741.
- [27] McLaughlin, A., Walls, J. H., & Kruse, S. (2026). Principal discipline decision-making: Choices and challenges. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 54(4), 1389-1407.
- [28] Washington-Nortey P-M, Serpell Z. Parental expectations for children with intellectual disability or autism in Ghana and Zambia: A concept mapping study. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*.
- [29] Mbamba CR, Ndemole IK. "I paused my life": Experiences of single mothers caring for their autistic children in Ghana. *Journal of Social Service Research*.
- [30] Agyekum H. Challenges of parents with autistic children in Ghana. *Brain Disord Ther*.
- [31] Dogbe JA, Kyeremateng JD, Opoku MP, Nketsia W, Hammond C. 'There is family tension, but they understand...': familial and sibling relationships following the diagnosis of cerebral palsy in children in Ghana. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*.
- [32] Oti-Boadi M. Exploring the lived experiences of mothers of children with intellectual disability in Ghana. *Sage Open*.
- [33] Mundiri, A., Julaiha, S., Duraesa, M. A., & Embong, R. (2026). Exploring The Transformative Zone of Tolerance in Indigenous Education: Insights from Pesantren-Based Services. *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 7(2), 448-464.
- [34] Opoku MP, Nketsia W, Banye MA, Mprah WK, Dogbe JA, Badu E. Caregiving experiences and expectations of parents with in-school children with intellectual disability in Ghana. *Research in developmental disabilities*.
- [35] Oti-Boadi M, Osei-Tutu A, Mate-Kole C. Challenges and support needs of parents of children with developmental disabilities (DD) in Accra, Ghana. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*.