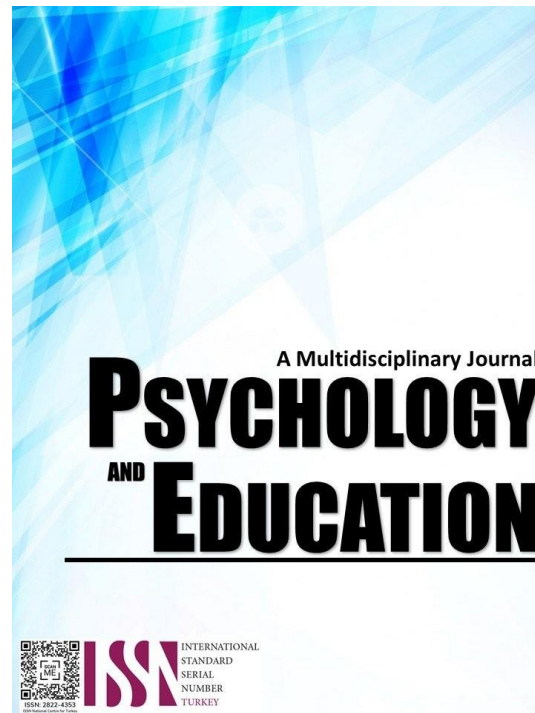


EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MAPEH TEACHERS IN EDUCATING LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (LSEN): A STUDY OF CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND INSIGHTS



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 37

Issue 8

Pages: 914-926

Document ID: 2025PEMJ3616

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.370810

Manuscript Accepted: 05-04-2025

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Mapeh Teachers in Educating Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN): A Study of Challenges, Strategies, and Insights

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Abstract

DepEd Order No. 26, s. 2013 promotes inclusive education by ensuring equitable access for all learners, including those with special needs. While MAPEH subjects are interactive and physical, they provide opportunities for LSEN to engage, express themselves, and develop essential skills. This study explores the lived experiences of MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) teachers in educating learners with special educational needs (LSEN) in Kabacan National High School, Osias High School and Aringay High School, Kabacan, North Cotabato. Using a qualitative-phenomenological transcendental research design, the study involved ten (10) randomly selected participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study highlights the challenges and strategies in teaching LSEN in MAPEH. Teachers face difficulties in managing diverse classrooms, handling emotional and behavioral issues, and overcoming communication barriers. Teachers must balance the needs of LSEN and other students while managing behavioral and communication challenges, especially in movement-based activities like Physical Education. Teachers use Differentiated Instruction (DI), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), visual aids, and assistive tools to enhance engagement. They balance flexibility and structure while providing individualized support through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Ongoing training, collaboration with experts, and access to resources are crucial for effective inclusive education. Strengthening these areas will enhance MAPEH instruction for LSEN, ensuring a more inclusive learning environment. It is recommended that schools should provide continuous training, resources, and support for MAPEH teachers to effectively manage diverse classrooms, implement inclusive teaching strategies, and enhance learning experiences for LSEN.

Keywords: *MAPEH teachers, lived-experiences, learners with special education needs, challenges, strategies, insights, qualitative, Philippines*

Introduction

MAPEH subjects—Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health—present unique challenges in special education due to their hands-on and interactive nature. This study explored the experiences of MAPEH teachers in addressing these challenges while promoting inclusion for learners with special educational needs (LSEN), highlighting how they adapted and fostered inclusive classrooms.

Globally, teachers struggle with inclusive education due to limited training and emotional stress (Devi et al., 2024). In the U.S. and U.K., many support inclusion in principle but feel overwhelmed by its demands (Sharma & Salend, 2021; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Common issues include lack of resources and burnout, highlighting the need for better support systems. While some see inclusion as promoting diversity, others find it stressful (Williams-Brown & Hodkinson, 2020).

In the Philippines, similar challenges exist. Gumaod et al. (2022) found that many MAPEH teachers in Surigao del Norte, Dinagat Islands, and Camarines Sur lacked practical training for teaching LSEN, particularly in dance and digital tools. Although they had theoretical knowledge, applying it was difficult. Solano (2024) noted the lack of proper facilities for learners with special needs, often leading to their neglect. Basalan (2024) added that non-specialist MAPEH teachers in Davao del Sur faced difficulties with unfamiliar content but gradually developed adaptive strategies.

In Kabacan, Cotabato, no studies have focused on the challenges MAPEH teachers face in handling LSEN. Local data from SNED Coordinators and SMEPA (2024) show a lack of training and LSEN-supportive facilities in schools like Kabacan National High School, Osias High School, and Aringay National High School. While past studies have addressed general inclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Basalan, 2024; Gumaod et al., 2022), they often overlook the unique demands of MAPEH.

Given these gaps, this study was timely and important for shaping future inclusive education strategies. It highlighted the challenges MAPEH teachers face, pointed out areas needing support, and offered a basis for better training and practices. The findings aim to guide policies, improve teacher development, and support LSEN learners in MAPEH subjects.

Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences of MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) teachers in educating learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Specifically, the study sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. How do MAPEH teachers navigate the challenges of teaching learners with special educational needs (LSEN), and what impact do these challenges have on their teaching practices and student engagement?
2. What strategies do MAPEH teachers employ to adapt their teaching methods for LSEN, and how do they perceive

the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing learning outcomes?

3. How do MAPEH teachers perceive their level of preparedness and professional development in teaching LSEN, and what support systems (e.g., training, resources, collaboration) do they identify as necessary for enhancing inclusive education within their practice?

Literature Review

Challenges Faced by MAPEH Teachers

Lack of Training and Resources

Many studies have shown that MAPEH teachers often lack proper training to effectively teach learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Smith et al. (2020) found that limited professional development made it hard for teachers to adapt lessons for diverse learning needs. This lack of preparation can lead to student disengagement. Jones and Brown (2021) linked low teacher readiness to poor use of differentiated instruction, while Williams (2022) noted that barriers like funding issues and weak institutional support make it hard for teachers to access needed training. Taylor (2023) also pointed out that the lack of instructional resources forces many teachers to use outdated, one-size-fits-all methods, especially in underfunded schools, which hinders inclusive education.

Classroom Management and Inclusion

Classroom management is a major challenge for MAPEH teachers, especially when working with LSEN students. The active and creative nature of MAPEH subjects—like music, arts, and physical education—makes it difficult to maintain discipline while also supporting diverse learning needs (Johnson, 2021). Teachers often feel overwhelmed as they try to balance engagement, creativity, and inclusivity. The varied demands of these subjects require flexible strategies, but this can lead to inconsistent behavior management (Johnson, 2021). Adapting lessons for LSEN is particularly hard in physical and performance-based tasks that are not easily modified. Research shows that while inclusive education has made global progress, MAPEH teachers still struggle to apply inclusive policies in such dynamic settings (De Vroey et al., 2016; Cruz & Pinho, 2019; Tan et al., 2021). Many feel unprepared to adjust activities without losing educational value (Forlin & Sin, 2017; Lalvani, 2020; McKay et al., 2021), highlighting the need for ongoing training and stronger institutional support.

Emotional and Social Barriers

Emotional and social barriers significantly affect teaching learners with special educational needs (LSEN) in MAPEH. Emotional challenges, such as students' anxiety, aggression, or withdrawal, hinder participation and disrupt classroom dynamics, particularly during collaborative activities (Garcia, 2022). Teachers also experience emotional strain, including stress, burnout, and feelings of inadequacy, due to limited training and the pressure to meet diverse needs in performance-based subjects (Lim & Lim-Ratnam, 2019; Barros et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2020). Social barriers further complicate the situation, as LSEN students often struggle with peer interaction, leading to exclusion, while teachers face institutional challenges like lack of involvement in decision-making and support (Poon-McBrayer & Wong, 2016; Bai & Martin, 2019; Siuty et al., 2020). Additionally, the lack of professional development and mentorship leaves teachers feeling unprepared and unsupported, which can reduce motivation and the effectiveness of inclusive practices (Hwang et al., 2017; Shevlin et al., 2019; Wang & Li, 2021).

Strategies Employed by MAPEH Teachers

Differentiated Instruction

MAPEH teachers use differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs (LSEN) by adapting lessons to individual skills, interests, and learning preferences (Thompson, 2023). This approach fosters inclusivity and promotes student engagement and success (Hall et al., 2015; Prast et al., 2018; Subban & Round, 2021). Teachers employ various methods such as visual aids for visual learners, hands-on activities for kinesthetic learners, and technology integration to enhance learning (Thompson, 2023; de Jager & Reezigt, 2019; Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2022). Flexible grouping is also used to group students by abilities or interests, promoting collaboration and social inclusion (Tomlinson & Strickland, 2015; Gheysens et al., 2020; Spencer, 2023). Ongoing formative assessments help teachers monitor progress and adjust lessons to ensure all students are supported and appropriately challenged (Rasmussen et al., 2018; Prast et al., 2018; Subban & Round, 2021).

Collaborative Teaching Practices

Collaboration with special education professionals is essential for MAPEH teachers in promoting inclusive education. Lee et al. (2021) found that MAPEH teachers who worked with special educators were better able to implement inclusive practices and tailor instructional techniques to the needs of learners with special educational needs (LSEN). This partnership allows for the sharing of specialized knowledge and strategies, which is particularly useful for adapting performance-based activities, such as movement routines and artistic expression, to be accessible for LSEN (Poon-McBrayer & Wong, 2016; Giangreco, 2016; Siuty et al., 2020). Collaborative teaching also enhances the professional development of MAPEH teachers by exposing them to specialized techniques like behavioral supports and assistive technology (Scruggs et al., 2017; Bai & Martin, 2019; Sharma et al., 2022). This builds teacher confidence and competence, particularly in creative and flexible subjects. Additionally, sustained collaboration helps create a school-wide culture of

inclusion, improving outcomes for LSEN and fostering shared responsibility among educators (Florian et al., 2016; Wang & Li, 2021; Gonzales et al., 2023).

Building Relationships

Building strong relationships between teachers and students is crucial in MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) for fostering engagement and motivation. Martinez (2020) stressed that trust and rapport create a positive classroom atmosphere, essential for students to participate and take creative risks. For learners with special educational needs (LSEN), strong teacher-student connections help reduce anxiety, improve behavior, and enhance academic and social outcomes (Davis et al., 2019; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017). De Jong et al. (2021) also noted that empathetic teaching leads to better success, especially in MAPEH, where collaboration and self-expression are key. Effective teacher-student relationships require active listening and care, crucial when working with diverse learners like LSEN.

Insights Gained from Experience

Reflective Practice

MAPEH teachers use reflective practice to improve their teaching, especially for learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Reflective practice helps teachers assess their teaching methods, classroom interactions, and student outcomes. Patel (2023) noted that regular reflection allows teachers to identify effective strategies and areas for improvement. Schön's (2017) model of reflection highlights that ongoing self-evaluation makes teachers more adaptive and creative in dynamic environments like MAPEH. Farrell (2015) emphasized that reflection strengthens decision-making, aiding the inclusion of students with disabilities. Additionally, O'Connor and Michaels (2020) found that reflective dialogue within professional communities promotes peer support and fosters inclusive teaching innovations. This ongoing reflection enhances teaching effectiveness and supports a culture of professional growth.

Advocacy and Awareness

MAPEH teachers are increasingly becoming advocates for learners with special educational needs (LSEN), promoting inclusivity within the educational community. Advocacy involves raising awareness of LSEN's needs, pushing for policy changes, and ensuring equal access to resources. Robinson (2022) highlighted that by sharing classroom experiences, MAPEH teachers shape public and institutional views on inclusive education. Research by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2016) and Sharma and Sokal (2016) shows that teacher advocacy leads to the implementation of inclusive practices, resource allocation, and curriculum adjustments. Advocacy also strengthens institutional support, encourages professional development, and fosters collaboration, as noted by Avramidis and Norwich (2019). Through advocacy, MAPEH teachers ensure LSEN are meaningfully included and supported.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design, specifically transcendental phenomenology, to explore MAPEH teachers' experiences with learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Phenomenology, as explained by Moustakas (1994), focuses on understanding the essence of lived experiences. Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes the participants' perspectives, using Husserl's epoche (bracketing) to set aside researcher biases (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This approach allowed the researcher to focus on the authentic voices of MAPEH teachers, identifying the challenges, strategies, and insights they encountered in teaching LSEN students.

Participants

The participants of this study were ten (10) MAPEH teachers with over two years of experience teaching learners with special educational needs (LSEN) and a willingness to engage in open, reflective interviews. The selection was based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure participants had sufficient experience and insight into inclusive education challenges and strategies. Creswell (2013) and other researchers (Polkinghorne, 1989; Dukes, 1984) recommend sample sizes of 3 to 10 for phenomenological studies, considering the depth and focus of the inquiry. Given the limited number of MAPEH teachers teaching LSEN in the selected schools, a sample of 10 participants was both manageable and appropriate. The inclusion criteria were: (1) MAPEH teachers with at least two years of experience teaching LSEN; (2) willingness to participate in in-depth interviews; and (3) ability to offer valuable insights into inclusive education in the MAPEH curriculum.

Instrument

This study used in-depth interviews (IDIs) to gather data, allowing for detailed exploration of participants' views on teaching learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Five research instruments ensured reliability and validity: Interview Guide Questions, Interview Protocols, Questionnaire Validation Tool, Informed Consent Form, and Transcription Writing Guide. These instruments helped maintain consistency and credibility (Langkos, 2014). The semi-structured interview was validated by content experts, and the interview transcripts were analyzed by a data analyst (Gibbs et al., 2015). The process was confidential, ensuring ethical participation and a secure environment for interviews.

Procedure

Data collection in this study involved several stages, starting with obtaining permission from the Dean of Graduate School at Sultan Kudarat State University and the Schools Division Superintendent – North Cotabato. The researcher sent communication letters to school principals and MAPEH teachers, ensuring proper coordination and voluntary participation (Cresswell, 2009; Langkos, 2014; Protacio, 2019). Ethical considerations were emphasized, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw (Creswell, 2014; Protacio, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol, were used to explore MAPEH teachers' pedagogical practices. The interviews were transcribed by a designated transcriber following protocols from Protacio (2021) and checked for accuracy by participants (Flick, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2016; Rowlands, 2021). The transcripts were then analyzed using thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, this study used thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify and report patterns and themes in the data. The process involves six steps: 1) Familiarizing with the data, where the researcher reads and re-reads the data to identify emerging patterns. 2) Generating initial themes, where the researcher creates codes by condensing data into manageable groups. 3) Searching for clustered themes, where codes are organized into broad themes that represent the data. 4) Reviewing themes, to ensure the themes align with the data and theoretical framework. 5) Defining and naming emerging themes, specifying the characteristics of each theme. 6) Producing the report, where the researcher highlights the most significant themes to provide insights into the data.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting the survey, the researcher ensured that the respondents voluntarily participated in the study, and that no harm inflicted to the respondents. The survey questionnaire used in this study did not ask for any personal information from the respondents to ensure the anonymity of the data. In addition, the gathered data were treated with confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's results and deliberates the implications of data gathered through an interview guide questionnaire during the interview conducted with the participants.

Emerging Themes on Challenges and Impacts on Teaching Practices and Student Engagement When Working With LSEN

Emerging Theme 1: Managing Heterogeneous Classrooms

This theme focuses on how teachers handle different groups of students, including those with special needs, within the same class. They deal with Balancing diverse pacing, where some learners need lessons slowed down or explained more deeply, and others are ready to move quickly. They also deal with Handling large class sizes, which makes individual attention difficult but still necessary for learners who need extra support.

The participants navigate the complexities of managing diverse classrooms by continuously adjusting their instructional approaches, balancing the needs of students with different learning paces, and striving to provide individual support despite the challenges of large class sizes and limited training in special education.

Emerging Theme 2: Emotional and Behavioral Complexities

Teachers describe meeting the emotional needs of LSEN. Handling emotional outbursts involves students who may show strong reactions in class, and Addressing trauma triggers covers those who have experiences that cause sudden changes in behavior. Maintaining peer engagement means preventing disruptions from isolating the student or leading to bullying, while encouraging the class to stay unified.

The participants navigate the emotional and behavioral complexities of LSEN by managing outbursts, addressing trauma triggers, and fostering an inclusive environment that prevents isolation and promotes peer engagement while ensuring that all students feel valued and supported.

Emerging Theme 3: Communication and Physical Barriers

This theme examines obstacles such as being deaf or mute, and other conditions that affect learning. Overcoming deaf/mute challenges includes using visual aids or sign language. Coping with speech impediments & physical constraints points to tasks like writing with limited hand mobility or speaking with difficulty. Recognizing cognitive delays involves adjusting the lesson pace when students struggle with memory or understanding.

The participants navigate communication and physical barriers by adapting instructional strategies, utilizing visual aids, modifying lesson delivery, and providing individualized support to ensure that students with hearing, speech, and physical challenges can actively engage in learning.

Emerging Theme 4: Transforming Teaching Practices and Engagement

Teachers change their methods and approach to reach LSEN effectively. Shifting instructional methods shows how they try new strategies to accommodate different learning styles. Increasing patience and empathy highlights the mindset shift they need, repeating explanations more often or remaining calm during disruptions. Involving peers in support underscores the importance of classmates helping each other, such as interpreting instructions or offering encouragement.

The participants transform their teaching practices by adopting inclusive strategies, fostering patience and empathy, and encouraging peer support, ensuring that LSEN students receive the necessary accommodations while creating a more accessible and supportive learning environment for all.

Emerging Themes on Adapted Teaching Strategies for LSEN and Their Perceived Effectiveness

Emerging Theme 1: Differentiating Content & Tasks (DI & UDL)

Teachers adjust lessons based on students' needs and preferences. Modifying or simplifying content involves breaking down lessons into more basic steps. Tailoring tasks to interests/capabilities ensures activities appeal to each learner's strengths, like focusing on music for those who enjoy it. Offering multiple means of representation covers using different formats (visual, audio, or practical demos) so that students can choose how they learn.

The participants implement Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by modifying content, tailoring tasks to student interests, and providing multiple ways to engage with lessons, ensuring all learners can access and understand the material in ways that suit their strengths and needs.

Emerging Theme 2: Supportive Teaching Methods & Tools

This theme deals with specific resources and approaches teachers use. One-on-one or small-group instruction allows closer attention to each student. Use of visual aids and technology includes slides, handouts, and videos to reinforce lessons. Contextualization and real-life connections means linking topics to what students experience daily or to their culture. Providing alternative performance tasks addresses variations in exams or projects so students can work at their own level. Motivational and behavioral support encourages them to participate without feeling pressured. Use of explicit or repeated instructions stresses giving directions multiple times or at a slower pace. Encouraging peer or buddy system prompts classmates to work together and help one another learn.

The participants employ supportive teaching methods and tools by using individualized instruction, visual aids, contextualized learning, alternative performance tasks, and peer collaboration to create an inclusive environment where LSEN students can engage meaningfully and succeed at their own pace.

Emerging Theme 3: Assessing or Measuring Effectiveness

Teachers look at different signs to see if their strategies are working. Monitoring engagement & attendance involves watching if LSEN show up regularly and stay involved in class. Observing performance improvements focuses on scores and progress on tasks. Gathering feedback from students/families covers hearing about whether methods are helping in class or at home. Using paper-and-pen or written assessments benefits those who communicate better through writing. Observing social & emotional growth helps teachers see if students are more confident or less frustrated.

The participants assess the effectiveness of their strategies by monitoring engagement and attendance, tracking performance improvements, gathering feedback from students and families, using written assessments, and observing social and emotional growth. These indicators help them refine their approaches to better support LSEN students.

Emerging Theme 4: Balancing Flexibility & Structure

Educators want to adapt, yet keep a clear and organized environment. Maintaining inclusivity for all learners makes sure no one is ignored, while also informing others why adjustments matter. Keeping classroom rules but adapting shows that the same guidelines apply, but with suitable changes for LSEN. Avoiding singled-out or special treatment aims to treat LSEN as part of the group, rather than making them feel separate. Applying the same inclusive methods to the whole class can lift everyone's understanding. Maintaining structure with clear routines establishes reliable patterns in teaching, so students know what to expect.

The participants shared that balancing flexibility and structure means adapting teaching while maintaining inclusivity and clear rules. Teachers adjust without isolating LSEN, apply inclusive strategies to all, and ensure consistent routines for a supportive learning environment.

Emerging Theme 5: Significance of Individualized Support (ZPD)

Teachers reflect on how personal guidance helps students progress. Offering personal attention means focusing on each learner's growth and gaining their trust. Peer tutoring or home support highlights that classmates or family can help in ways a teacher might not be able to. Boosting motivation & independence allows students to feel capable of taking on tasks themselves. Teacher's expanded role & empathy means being ready to give extra care or adapt. Peer support as less intimidating indicates that students often feel more

comfortable getting help from friends, and Direct teacher guidance for non-hearing LSEN emphasizes how important it is for teachers to give time and attention to learners who struggle with hearing or speech.

The participants support fosters student growth by balancing teacher guidance, peer assistance, and motivation, ensuring LSEN gain confidence and independence in learning.

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Emerging Themes on Teacher Preparedness, Professional Development, and Support Systems for Inclusive Education

Emerging Theme 1: Teacher Confidence & Preparedness

Many teachers mention limited backgrounds in LSEN teaching. Limited or no formal training points to a lack of seminars or workshops on this topic. Confidence from experience refers to those who rely on everyday teaching skills. Self-initiated or personal approach includes using internet research or informal chats with coworkers to fill knowledge gaps. Need for specialized knowledge shows a desire for deeper understanding and better techniques.

The participants feel underprepared for LSEN instruction due to limited training, relying instead on experience, self-learning, and a strong desire for specialized professional development.

Emerging Theme 2: Professional Development Experiences

Educators discuss what training they have received. No or minimal formal PD means some have not attended any LSEN-focused training at all. Partial or not specific to LSEN describes general programs that covered broad teaching ideas but did not address special needs thoroughly.

The participants have received little to no LSEN-specific training, relying on personal research, while others have attended general or brief professional development sessions that lack a focused approach.

Emerging Theme 3: Needed Resources & Training

Teachers list the kinds of help they believe would support inclusive education. Specialized or in-depth teacher training means workshops or programs that offer detailed approaches for LSEN. Better facilities, smaller classes expresses how a dedicated space or fewer students in class might help. Materials for MAPEH & specific needs highlights the need for adapted resources in subjects like music and arts. Extended or face-to-face PD approach mentions wanting more hands-on, long-term programs instead of quick or online-only seminars. Comprehensive school support system includes structured meetings and enough teaching materials.

The participants emphasize the need for specialized LSEN training, better facilities, smaller class sizes, adapted learning materials, hands-on professional development, and a comprehensive support system to enhance inclusive education.

Emerging Theme 4: Collaboration & Support Systems

This theme covers how team efforts help LSEN. Interdisciplinary or departmental collaboration looks at teachers and administrators planning together. Sharing strategies & teacher synergy means exchanging ideas about what works well. Puzzle-like or all-in approach reminds us that input from teachers, parents, and others all matters. Monitoring across subjects & advisers helps track a student's growth across different classes. Parental involvement & broader community underscores the importance of parents and the community at large, since they know the student's habits and can support the learning process in many ways.

The participants highlight the importance of teamwork in supporting LSEN, emphasizing collaboration among educators, administrators, parents, and the broader community to share strategies, monitor progress, and create a unified support system.

Emerging Themes on Challenges and Impacts on Teaching Practices and Student Engagement When Working With LSEN

Emerging Theme 1: Managing Heterogeneous Classrooms

Managing diverse classrooms requires flexible strategies to meet students' different needs, learning speeds, and class sizes. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) help by offering varied ways to teach and assess students (Baumann & Melle, 2019). Co-teaching, where regular and special education teachers work together, supports DI and fosters inclusion (Swicegood & Miller, 2015), aligning with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which values classroom relationships. Group work boosts peer support and social skills (Coppola, Woodward, & Vaughan, 2019), while technology, like AI tools, personalizes learning (Phuong & Berkeley, 2017). Teacher training is also vital to manage classrooms well and improve learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Success stories from Saints College and San Antonio show how inclusive strategies can create fair learning environments.

Emerging Theme 2: Emotional and Behavioral Complexities

Supporting the emotional and behavioral needs of LSEN students requires a caring and structured approach. Teachers used de-escalation techniques and personalized support to manage outbursts triggered by frustration or sensory issues (Greene, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory guided the use of trauma-informed practices by considering home, school, and community influences (Perry & Daniels, 2016).

To encourage peer inclusion, teachers used social-emotional learning (SEL) to build empathy and reduce bullying (Durlak et al., 2011). Positive Behavior Support (PBS) promoted good behavior without punishment (Sugai & Horner, 2020), while Differentiated Instruction (DI) allowed behavior strategies to be tailored to individual needs. Teacher training in emotional regulation also improved classroom management (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Together, these strategies helped create a safe and supportive space for LSEN students to grow emotionally and academically.

Emerging Theme 2: Communication and Physical Barriers

Addressing communication and physical barriers in education requires tailored strategies to ensure equal learning access for all students. For deaf or non-verbal learners, using visual aids, sign language, and assistive technologies aligned with universal design principles is vital (DO-IT Center, 2024). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights how environmental tools and accessibility influence student engagement. Students with speech impediments or physical disabilities benefit from AI-powered tools like speech-to-text apps that support classroom communication and participation (AP News, 2024). Early recognition of cognitive delays also enables timely interventions; educational psychology services, such as those in Hillingdon, stress collaboration with teachers to build supportive environments (The Guardian, 2024). Differentiated Instruction (DI) complements these efforts by promoting personalized teaching approaches. Through these combined strategies, educators can overcome communication and physical barriers to create inclusive, equitable classrooms.

Emerging Theme 4: Transforming Teaching Practices and Engagement

To effectively support learners with special educational needs (LSEN), MAPEH teachers adapted their practices by using flexible instructional methods aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) frameworks (Moore, n.d.). They cultivated patience and empathy, calmly managing disruptions and reinforcing lessons as needed—practices supported by Stankeviciene (2024), who emphasized early intervention and strong teacher-student relationships. These strategies reflect Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, recognizing how supportive environments and relationships influence learning. Peer involvement also enhanced inclusivity, as seen in programs like PGL's outdoor education, which fostered collaboration and resilience among students (PGL Education, 2025).

Emerging Themes on Adapted Teaching Strategies for LSEN and Their Perceived Effectiveness

Emerging Theme 1: Differentiating Content & Tasks (DI & UDL)

Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) help teachers create inclusive classrooms by addressing students' diverse needs and learning styles. Breaking lessons into smaller steps and using clear, simple content supports understanding, following UDL principles that remove learning barriers (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Tailoring tasks to student interests—like using music-based activities for music lovers—boosts engagement and motivation (Tomlinson, 2017). Providing information in different formats, such as visuals, audio, or hands-on tasks, ensures access for all learners (Hall et al., 2012). Together, DI and UDL foster flexible, supportive environments that promote equity and academic success.

Emerging Theme 2: Supportive Teaching Methods & Tools

Supportive teaching methods like one-on-one or small-group instruction helped address specific learning challenges and deepen understanding (Emerick, 2025). Visual aids and technology—such as slides, videos, and handouts—engaged multiple senses to improve comprehension and retention (Seach, 2007). Making lessons relevant through real-life connections and cultural contexts further enriched learning (Seach, 2007). Offering alternative tasks allowed students to show understanding in ways that fit their strengths (Short, 2025), while motivational and behavioral support promoted stress-free participation. Clear, repeated instructions aided students needing more processing time, and buddy systems encouraged peer collaboration and support (Wehmeyer & Zhao, 2020).

Emerging Theme 3: Assessing or Measuring Effectiveness

Assessing or measuring the effectiveness of teaching strategies for learners with Supporting learners with special educational needs (LSEN) required various strategies. Monitoring attendance and engagement helped track student interest (Smith & Tyler, 2019), while observing academic progress ensured instruction matched learning needs (Tomlinson, 2017). Feedback from students and families improved collaboration and guided effective teaching (Turnbull et al., 2020). Written assessments helped evaluate understanding for students who communicate better through writing (Hallahan et al., 2018), and watching for emotional and social growth showed if students were becoming more confident and involved (Wehmeyer & Zhao, 2020).

Emerging Theme 4: Balancing Flexibility & Structure

Balancing flexibility and structure in inclusive classrooms was crucial for supporting all learners, including those with special educational needs (LSEN). Rose and Meyer (2002) emphasized that structured routines, along with necessary adaptations, helped educators meet diverse needs without losing classroom order. Cartledge (2024) stressed that inclusivity could be fostered by integrating social skills instruction into the curriculum. Moore (2024) noted that consistent rules, along with tailored adjustments, ensured fairness and understanding, particularly through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Rose et al. (2024) supported the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which made content accessible for all students. Baldassarre (2024) argued that differentiated instruction and technology-enhanced learning benefited the entire class, while Ghedin (2024) highlighted the importance of clear routines in reducing anxiety and providing security for students.

Emerging Theme 5: Significance of Individualized Support (ZPD)

Teachers played a key role in student progress by providing personalized guidance based on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD), which emphasized targeted support to help learners surpass their current abilities. Connor (2023) found that Individualized Student Instruction (ISI) improved students' reading skills by adapting teaching strategies to individual needs, with students in ISI settings showing greater progress than those in traditional classrooms. Peer tutoring and home support also enhanced learning, with Johnson (2024) reporting that schools in Compton, California, employed over 250 tutors, leading to significant gains in reading and math. Anderson and Kim (2024) added that peer support could be less intimidating, making students more open to help from classmates.

Emerging Themes on Teacher Preparedness, Professional Development, and Support Systems for Inclusive Education

Emerging Theme 1: Teacher Confidence & Preparedness

Many educators expressed concerns about feeling underprepared to teach learners with special educational needs (LSEN) due to a lack of formal training and professional development opportunities. Florian and Spratt (2024) noted that educators often relied on general teaching experience rather than specialized training, while Sharma et al. (2023) highlighted that confidence in LSEN instruction was built through trial and error. Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory emphasized that a teacher's confidence was shaped by successful teaching experiences, which many teachers lacked, leading to self-doubt. To bridge gaps, teachers often turned to self-initiated learning methods, such as online research and discussions with colleagues, but these did not always provide sufficient depth (Norwich & Lewis, 2024). Tomlinson (2024) stressed the importance of differentiated instruction in creating inclusive classrooms, yet without formal training, teachers struggled to apply these strategies effectively. The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) further suggested that environmental factors, such as school culture and administrative support, influenced teachers' self-efficacy. Forlin (2024) concluded that targeted professional development, mentorship, and access to evidence-based resources would help educators feel more confident and capable in teaching LSEN students.

Emerging Theme 2: Professional Development Experiences

Many educators reflected on the limited training they had received regarding learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Florian and Rouse (2024) found that many teachers reported insufficient formal professional development (PD) specific to inclusive education, leaving them unprepared for the diverse needs of LSEN students. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2023) noted that general PD sessions often lacked targeted strategies for LSEN. Tomlinson (2024) highlighted that many PD programs focused on broad teaching methods but neglected specific strategies for supporting LSEN students. Norwich and Lewis (2024) observed that inclusive education was often covered superficially, resulting in limited practical knowledge. To address these gaps, teachers often engaged in self-directed learning through research or peer discussions (Forlin, 2024). Avramidis and Kalyva (2024) emphasized the need for specialized PD, including hands-on workshops and mentorship opportunities. From an Ecological Systems Theory perspective, PD was most effective when supported by a collaborative school culture, where administrators and peers reinforced inclusive teaching strategies.

Emerging Theme 3: Needed Resources & Training

Teachers acknowledged the need for targeted resources and training to improve inclusive education. Avramidis and Kalyva (2024) emphasized that specialized training, such as workshops and professional development programs, was essential for equipping educators with effective strategies for learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Florian and Rouse (2024) noted that smaller class sizes and better facilities allowed for more individualized attention, promoting an inclusive environment. Forlin (2024) highlighted the importance of adapted materials in subjects like Music, Arts, PE, and Health (MAPEH) to cater to diverse learning needs. Norwich and Lewis (2024) found that many teachers preferred extended, face-to-face professional development (PD), as it provided more practical, long-term applications compared to brief or online seminars. Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2023) emphasized the importance of a comprehensive school support system, which included structured meetings, adequate teaching materials, and collaborative strategies for effective inclusion. Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory suggested that access to proper resources and training boosted teachers' confidence in implementing inclusive practices, ultimately improving student outcomes.

Emerging Theme 4: Collaboration and Support Systems

Collaboration and support systems are essential for enhancing the education of learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Cook and Friend (1995) highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, especially through co-teaching models, where general and special education teachers work together to provide personalized learning. Frederickson and Turner (2003) found that peer support models like the Circle of Friends improved social inclusion for students with disabilities. Parental and community involvement also plays a crucial role, with the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (2023) emphasizing the need for strong parent-school partnerships. The Guardian (2024, December 16) and The Guardian (2024, December 4) stressed the importance of continuous monitoring and additional funding to support LSEN services. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) underlines the value of collaboration between teachers, parents, and administrators in creating effective support systems. Together, these strategies lead to improved outcomes for LSEN.

Conclusions

The study concluded that while teachers faced challenges in implementing inclusive education within MAPEH, such as managing diverse classrooms and addressing emotional, behavioral, and communication barriers, they developed effective strategies to engage

students. These strategies included Differentiated Instruction (DI), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), structured assessments, and individualized support through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The study also emphasized the importance of teacher preparedness, ongoing professional development, access to resources, and collaboration among educators in creating an inclusive environment. Strengthening training programs and support systems would improve MAPEH instruction for learners with special educational needs (LSEN) and foster a more equitable educational system.

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