

Voices From the Classroom: Stories of Special Education Teachers in Self-Contained Environment in Manatee County

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Abstract — This study explored the lived experiences of seven (7) special education teachers managing a self-contained class in public elementary schools in Manatee County, Florida. The study generated forward-thinking insights for enhancing inclusive classroom practices and teacher support. It takes perseverance, flexibility, and careful lesson planning to run a self-contained class in special education. In this environment, teachers collaborate closely with students who have a variety of learning requirements, skills, and behavioral issues. To promote both academic and social growth, they create tailored education, put differentiated strategies into practice, and offer a consistent framework. In order to create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment, teachers must strike a balance between individualized attention and group instruction. This requires effective classroom management. Using a phenomenological design, seven teachers were purposively selected for their direct experience managing students with disabilities, sharing detailed accounts of instructional strategies, classroom management, and collaboration with families, paraprofessionals, and specialists. Analysis revealed seven major themes: Organized and Optimal Learning, Scaffolded Systems for Behavior Success, Upgrading Engagement Through Digital Supports, Dynamic Partnership, Enduring Impact Through Personalized Teaching, Capacity Constrained in Individualized Support, and Forward with Purpose, with nineteen subthemes highlighting organization, behavior, and coping strategies. Findings demonstrate that effective self-contained teaching relies on the intentional alignment of instructional practices,

behavior supports, and collaborative partnerships to foster structured, engaging, and inclusive learning environments. Based on these insights, the study proposes the FOCUSED Model, a forward-looking framework that guides classroom management, instructional planning, and collaboration, offering teachers practical strategies to enhance student engagement, resilience, and holistic development while strengthening their professional growth and capacity to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Keywords: FOCUSED Model, inclusive teaching, lived experiences, self-contained classrooms, special education

I. INTRODUCTION

A teacher in a self-contained special education classroom responsible for delivering all core academic subjects, including Mathematics, Science, English, and Social Studies. The role involves designing and implementing differentiated instruction tailored to students' individual needs, abilities, and learning styles. Responsibilities also include managing classroom behavior, developing and implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and collaborating closely with parents, paraprofessionals, and other school personnel to support students' academic achievement and social-emotional development.

Having transitioned from a public-school setting in the Philippines to teaching internationally in the United States, the researcher has found a renewed sense of purpose in serving children with disabilities. This experience has deepened her commitment to inclusive education and strengthened my passion for supporting diverse learners. The researcher creates customized instructional materials aligned with IEP goals to ensure each student receives targeted and meaningful instruction.

Beyond the classroom, the researcher actively advocates for her students by initiating projects and writing grant proposals to secure additional resources that enrich their learning experiences. She also engages in action research to reflect on and enhance her teaching practices, ensuring continuous growth and effective support for my students. The researcher's ultimate goal

is to cultivate a positive, inclusive, and engaging learning environment where every child feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Special Education is a specialized branch of education that utilizes customized teaching methods, adaptive materials, assistive tools, and equipment to meet the distinct learning needs of students with disabilities (Special Education News, n.d.). These students require individualized educational programs and related services to fully develop their potential. The spectrum of disabilities includes speech and language impairments, intellectual disabilities, and, notably, specific learning disabilities—many of which are associated with psychological conditions (Fernández-López, Rodríguez-Fórtiz, Rodríguez-Almendros, & Martínez-Segura, 2013). A specific learning disability is characterized by a dysfunction in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, leading to difficulties in skills such as listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or performing mathematical calculations (Specific Learning Disability, 1997).

Public education systems in the United States face the growing challenge of meeting the diverse needs of students with varying cognitive abilities, behavioral conditions, and learning profiles. One key approach has been the implementation of self-contained classrooms, which provide specialized instruction for students who cannot be adequately served in general education settings (Hanson, 2025). These classrooms are typically smaller, led by certified special education teachers and supported by paraprofessionals, allowing for individualized attention, structured routines, and the integration of both academic and functional life skills. While self-contained classrooms offer benefits such as reduced distractions, tailored teaching strategies, and emotional stability, they may also limit peer interaction and access to broader school experiences (Chen, 2025; Wrightslaw, 2009). Under federal laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students with disabilities are guaranteed a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Wrightslaw, 2009). These legal mandates emphasize the importance of balancing individual needs with inclusive practices, a goal that continues to shape how self-contained classrooms are designed and implemented.

In Florida, state-level guidelines are provided by the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), which supports the development and regulation of Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs across districts (Florida Department of Education, 2025). Each district is required to submit plans that align with federal and state standards to ensure that services for students with disabilities are comprehensive, legally compliant, and student-centered. In Manatee County, self-contained classrooms are an essential part of public elementary education, serving students with a range of disabilities, including autism, intellectual disabilities, behavioral disorders, and specific learning disabilities. During school events such as open houses, these programs are widely recognized and appreciated by teachers, parents, and even students. Effective classroom management in these environments involves well-defined roles for support staff, the use of adaptive tools, individualized instruction guided by IEPs, and strong collaboration among educators (Aga, 2024; Hanson, 2025).

At the classroom level, the lived experiences of teachers in self-contained settings are crucial in determining the success and sustainability of these programs. Teachers must manage academic instruction, behavioral interventions, social-emotional learning, and administrative responsibilities, all while fostering a nurturing and stable classroom environment (Chen, 2025; Hanson, 2025). The researcher, a self-contained classroom teacher in Manatee County, has observed firsthand the complex demands and meaningful rewards that define this role. Despite the critical function self-contained educators play in achieving equitable education, limited research exists that captures their voices, perspectives, and day-to-day realities in Florida public schools.

As educational systems shift toward inclusivity and individualized support, understanding the firsthand experiences of self-contained classroom teachers is vital for improving practice and policy. Existing literature supports the importance of specially designed instruction for students with unique learning needs (Algozzine & Morsink, 2006), yet there remains a gap in qualitative research focusing on the practical and emotional realities faced by these educators. This study aims to explore the personal and professional experiences of special education teachers managing self-contained classrooms in Manatee County, Florida. Through in-depth investigation, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of effective teaching strategies, coping mechanisms, and the support structures necessary for both teacher and student success. The findings may inform

teacher training, administrative support, and policy development to ensure that self-contained classrooms continue to serve as nurturing, effective learning environments for students with exceptional needs.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored special education teachers' personal and professional experiences in Manatee County as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of managing self-contained classes. Specifically, it answered the following:

1. How do SPED Teachers describe their lived experiences in a self-contained class?
2. What core theme emerged based on the significant stories of Special Education teachers in Manatee County?
3. What insights were derived from the significant stories of Special Education Teachers in Mantee County?
4. What can be proposed based on the significant stories of the Special Education Teachers in Manatee County in a Self-Contained Class?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research design utilizing a narrative approach, which is both a method and a philosophical perspective shaped by various paradigms and disciplines. This approach was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how individuals interpret and experience particular phenomena within their specific contexts. Central to this design is phenomenology, which emphasizes that experiences—such as information literacy—are not universal or easily transferable but are instead shaped by content, situation, and context. In contrast to behaviorist approaches that focus on measurable skills and observable outcomes, phenomenology seeks to understand phenomena as they are lived, highlighting personal meaning and individual experience rather than standardized measurement.

Aligned with an emic perspective, the study focused on describing human experiences as they were lived, felt, and understood by the participants themselves. Similar to grounded theory, this approach did not impose preexisting theories or conceptual frameworks; instead, it allowed the phenomenon to emerge naturally from the participants' narratives without preconceived assumptions. Its distinctive feature lies in its focus on conscious, direct lived experience, examining both what participants experienced and how they experienced it. Unlike other qualitative methods that may aim to generate theoretical explanations, phenomenology remains grounded in participants' viewpoints, making it particularly effective for in-depth exploration of psychological constructs across diverse contexts.

The phenomenological approach guided the study toward uncovering the essence and structure of participants' lived experiences. By prioritizing first-hand accounts, the research moved beyond surface-level observations to capture deeper meaning-making processes. This enabled a rich and authentic understanding of the phenomenon strictly from the participants' perspectives, without extending into causal explanations beyond their lived realities.

In terms of data analysis, the study followed a systematic phenomenological procedure aimed at identifying essential meanings embedded in the participants' narratives. The analysis began with a holistic reading of the transcripts to gain an overall understanding of each participant's story. The data were then segmented into meaning units based on emerging themes or topics, which were examined individually for their psychological significance. These units were synthesized into a comprehensive descriptive narrative that reflected the underlying psychological structure of the phenomenon. When multiple participants were involved, individual accounts were compared to determine common or essential features that were consistently present across narratives.

Moreover, the study incorporated free imaginative variation as part of the analytical process. This involved the researcher's reflective use of imagination to explore possibilities beyond the empirically gathered data, moving beyond simple inductive generalization. Through this process, the researcher examined whether certain characteristics of the phenomenon could exist across all conceivable cases involving individuals with similar attributes. The purpose of this step was to identify the essential qualities of the phenomenon, thereby providing deeper insights

into its fundamental nature and ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences under investigation.

Data Generation and Selection of Co-participants

This section presents the step-by-step procedure undertaken in collecting narrative data and identifying appropriate co-participants consistent with the qualitative narrative research design. The procedure ensured that the data collection process was systematic, ethical, and aligned with the objectives of the study.

To initiate the data-gathering process, the researcher formally prepared and sent a Letter of Request addressed to the school administrator or principal of the selected school within Manatee County. The letter clearly explained the purpose, scope, and ethical considerations of the research. It was transmitted either through email or as a printed copy depending on the preferred communication method of the school. After sending the request, the researcher conducted follow-up communication through a phone call or a personal visit to seek approval to conduct interviews with Special Education (SPED) teachers handling self-contained classrooms. Once approval was granted, the researcher coordinated with the school administration to arrange suitable schedules for the interviews.

Following the approval process, the selection of co-participants was conducted using purposive sampling. This sampling technique allowed the researcher to intentionally select participants who possessed relevant experiences that could provide rich and meaningful narratives for the study. To qualify as co-participants, individuals had to meet the following criteria: they must be licensed Special Education (SPED) teachers, currently teaching or previously assigned to a self-contained classroom in Manatee County for at least three years, willing to share their professional and personal experiences related to the study, and able to provide informed consent to participate in the interview process.

After identifying potential co-participants, the researcher distributed a Letter of Invitation and Consent to each selected teacher. The letter explained the objectives of the research, the expected level of participation, confidentiality assurances, and the rights of the participants as

voluntary contributors to the study. Co-participants were also asked to indicate their preferred interview schedule and mode of communication, either through face-to-face meetings or through online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet.

The interviews were conducted at a time and place most convenient for the co-participants. Each interview session lasted approximately forty-five minutes to one hour, depending on the depth and flow of the discussion. Interviews were carried out either in person or through secure video conferencing platforms to ensure accessibility and safety. Before starting each interview, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study and reaffirmed the participants' informed consent. Audio recording was only initiated after explicit permission from the co-participants. They were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Throughout the process, strict measures were implemented to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Semi-structured and open-ended questions guided the interview sessions, allowing the participants to narrate their experiences freely while ensuring that the primary themes of the study were addressed.

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. In instances where participants used non-English words, local expressions, or culturally specific terms, careful translation was undertaken to preserve the original meaning and context. To ensure credibility and authenticity of the data, member checking was conducted by returning the transcribed narratives to the co-participants for review, confirmation, and validation.

After completing the transcription process, the researcher proceeded with constructing the narratives using narrative thematic analysis. Important events, emotions, and turning points within each participant's story were identified and coded. These codes were then analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns across the narratives. The findings were presented both as individual narrative accounts and as cross-case thematic summaries, allowing the researcher to highlight shared experiences while maintaining the uniqueness of each participant's story.

Finally, based on the insights and themes derived from the narratives, the researcher developed a proposed output for the study. This output included recommendations such as a

teacher support program focusing on professional training, wellness initiatives, or mentoring opportunities, a policy brief for school administrators, or a model of innovative classroom practices derived from the lived experiences of SPED teachers. The proposed output aimed to improve the level of support provided to SPED teachers managing self-contained classrooms in Manatee County. In accordance with ethical research standards, participation in the study remained entirely voluntary, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without providing a reason, thereby upholding the ethical integrity of the research process as emphasized by Bhandari (2021).

Thematic Analysis

Following a systematic thematic analysis procedure, this study adhered to a structured process to ensure that the findings remained grounded in the lived experiences of the participants and reflected the authenticity of their narratives.

Step 1: Reading and Familiarization. The researcher began by thoroughly reading each interview transcript multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. During this stage, initial impressions, recurring ideas, and emotional undertones were noted. This immersive process allowed the researcher to become deeply familiar with the participants' narratives, capturing both explicit statements and subtle meanings embedded in their experiences.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes. After familiarization, the researcher systematically reviewed the transcripts to identify significant statements relevant to the research objectives. These statements were highlighted and assigned initial codes representing key ideas, concepts, or issues raised by the participants. Coding was conducted carefully to ensure that important details were retained and accurately represented.

Step 3: Organizing Codes into Meaning Units. The identified codes were then grouped into meaningful units based on similarities and relationships. Each unit reflected a specific idea or experience expressed by the participants. This step enabled the researcher to organize large amounts of qualitative data into manageable segments while preserving the richness of the original narratives.

Step 4: Developing and Clustering Themes. The researcher examined the meaning units and grouped them into broader categories or themes. These themes represented recurring patterns across participants' experiences. Tentative labels were assigned to each theme, capturing their core essence. This stage helped reveal commonalities and connections among the participants' narratives.

Step 5: Reviewing and Refining Themes. The identified themes were carefully reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, consistency, and relevance to the research objectives. The researcher revisited the original data to verify that each theme was supported by sufficient evidence and accurately reflected the participants' experiences. Redundant or overlapping themes were merged, while unclear ones were redefined.

Step 6: Defining and Describing Themes. Each finalized theme was clearly defined and described in detail. The researcher developed comprehensive explanations supported by direct excerpts from the participants' narratives. This step provided a deeper understanding of the themes and illustrated how they represented the lived experiences of the participants within the context of the study.

Step 7: Validation through Member Checking. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher conducted member checking by presenting the identified themes and interpretations to the participants. They were allowed to review and confirm whether the findings accurately represented their experiences. Feedback from participants was incorporated to refine and validate the final analysis, ensuring that the results remained faithful to their perspectives.

Literature Comparison

The reviewed literature on narrative research, particularly the works of Mina (2024), Sowerby (2023), Koonkongsatian (2017), and Balgos and Albores (2025), provides a strong theoretical foundation for the methodological framework of this study. These scholars emphasize that narrative research extends beyond the mere collection of stories; it seeks to understand how individuals interpret and ascribe meaning to their experiences within specific contexts. This perspective aligns closely with the present study's aim to explore the complex and deeply personal

experiences of Special Education teachers in self-contained classrooms. By employing both structural and functional narrative analyses, the study aims to uncover how these teachers construct their daily realities—ranging from navigating instructional challenges and fostering student engagement to maintaining emotional resilience and implementing coping strategies.

Furthermore, literature addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of narrative interpretation, including insights from Aldosiry (2020) and Henke (2020), underscores the importance of situating individual stories within broader educational and institutional contexts. These perspectives enhance the study by highlighting the interaction between personal experience and systemic factors such as school policies, parental involvement, and available resources. As the study seeks to generate a nuanced understanding of what it means to be a SPED teacher in Manatee County, the reviewed literature serves not only as a methodological guide but also as a conceptual lens for interpreting narratives in a manner that reflects both individual and shared realities. Ultimately, these scholarly foundations ensure that the study produces meaningful, context-sensitive insights capable of informing policy, practice, and future research.

Ethical Consideration

To uphold ethical rigor and ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher implemented multiple safeguards throughout the research process. Member checking was conducted by returning interview transcripts to participants, allowing them to verify that the narratives accurately represented their experiences and that the interpretations reflected their intended meanings. This step reinforced the authenticity of the findings and ensured that participants' voices were faithfully preserved.

Triangulation was employed by comparing interview data with reflective field notes and relevant literature on SPED teaching and classroom practices, further strengthening the trustworthiness of the analysis. Additionally, peer debriefing with qualitative research experts provided critical feedback on analytic decisions, challenged assumptions, and ensured that emerging themes were grounded in genuine participant perspectives rather than researcher bias.

An audit trail documented every methodological choice, from initial coding of statements to revisions in thematic organization, allowing for transparency and potential replication by independent auditors. The researcher maintained detailed decision logs and theoretical memos to track the evolution of codes and themes, while reflexive journaling captured shifts in perspective and ensured that methodological adjustments remained traceable and transparent.

Participant anonymity and confidentiality were strictly protected. Pseudonyms were assigned, and all identifying information was removed from transcripts. Audio recordings and documents were stored on encrypted drives accessible only to the researcher. The study fully adhered to institutional and ethical guidelines for human-subjects research, including protocols for voluntary withdrawal and the provision of support if sensitive topics arose, ensuring both ethical integrity and participant protection.

III. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The following are the major findings of the study:

1. The participants' stories highlight their dedication to supporting students with diverse learning needs, particularly those with autism, intellectual disabilities, and emotional-behavioural challenges. Their narratives emphasize the importance of creating structured, predictable, and safe classroom environments where individualized instruction, visual supports, assistive technology, and sensory-friendly strategies help students engage, learn, and self-regulate. They consistently demonstrate patience, empathy, and flexibility in managing behavioural challenges while celebrating even small student achievements. Collaboration with co-teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and families emerges as a key theme, ensuring holistic support for academic, social, and emotional growth. The teachers' experiences also reveal the significance of fostering peer connections, nurturing social skills, and integrating culturally or contextually relevant practices,

reflecting resilience, commitment, and a profound dedication to inclusive and empowering education.

2. Seven (7) major themes emerged: Theme 1. Organized and Optimal Learning, Theme 2. Scaffolded Systems for Behaviour Success, Theme 3. Upgrading Engagement Through Digital Supports, Theme 4. Dynamic Partnership, Theme 5. Enduring Impact Through Personalized Teaching, Theme 6. Capacity Constraints in Individualized Support, and Theme 7. Forward with Purpose. Out of the seven (7) major themes, the researcher was able to create nineteen (19) subthemes: Subtheme 1. Overseeing a Self-Contained Class, Subtheme 2. Physical Classroom Set-up, Subtheme 3. Proven Classroom Management Practices, Subtheme 4. Harmony Between Behaviour Management and Teaching Time, Subtheme 5. Emotional Outbursts or Behavioral Crises, Subtheme 6. Supportive Classroom Management Strategies, Subtheme 7. Evidence-Based Behavioral Interventions, Subtheme 8. Team-Based Instruction with Paraprofessionals, Subtheme 9. Building Social Interaction Opportunities in an Isolated Classroom, Subtheme 10. Coordinate with Specialists and Employ Family Engagement Strategies, Subtheme 11. Collaboration and Parental Involvement, Subtheme 12. Perks of a Teacher, Subtheme 13. Triumphs of a SPED teacher, Subtheme 14. Training and Professional Development, Subtheme 15. Rewarding Aspect of Teaching in a Self-Contained Classroom, Subtheme 16. Challenges of SPED teachers, Subtheme 17. Key Obstacles in the Management of Self-Contained Classes, Subtheme 18. Strategies Employed to Maintain Students' Motivation and Interest, and Subtheme 19. Modify Instructional Materials and Impact of Unforeseen Schedule Modification.

3. It is evident that teaching in a special education setting involves balancing structure and flexibility to meet the unique needs of each student. Teachers rely on individualized instruction, visual supports, assistive technology, and sensory-friendly strategies to help students learn and manage their own self-regulation. Collaboration with co-teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and families plays a vital role in supporting the academic, social, and emotional development of students. Their experiences also show the importance of patience, empathy, and celebrating small successes, while creating safe, predictable, and engaging learning environments.

4. The researcher was able to create a proposed model for a self-contained class, the FOCUSED Model. The infographic uses a telescope observer, planner, and guide. Like a telescope

that requires precise alignment to produce a clear image, effective classroom management and instruction depend on the intentional alignment of goals, systems, and relationships. The FOCUSED model underscores that students' cognitive, behavioral, and social needs must be continuously addressed to achieve meaningful success in self-contained classrooms. By “flashing light” on essential themes, the model clarifies the core practices, challenges, and strategies that drive high-quality special education and teacher effectiveness.

The seven interrelated elements of the FOCUSED model are Forward with Purpose: goal-oriented, reflective, and resilient teaching guided by a clear mission and IEP-based planning; Organized and Optimal Learning: structured routines, predictable schedules, and supportive environments that promote safety and engagement; Capacity Constraints in Individualized Support: realistic acknowledgement of limits in time, resources, and caseloads, addressed through prioritization and collaboration; Upgrading Engagement Through Digital Supports: use of technology and assistive tools to enhance access, communication, and participation; Scaffolded System for Behavior Success: evidence-based, proactive behavior supports that foster self-regulation in a safe learning climate; Enduring Impact Through Personalized Teaching: individualized instruction that builds confidence, independence, and life skills; and Dynamic Partnership: collaboration among teachers, families, specialists, administrators, and the community. Overall, the FOCUSED model provides a comprehensive framework that captures the complexities and rewards of teaching in self-contained classrooms. By “flashing light” on these themes, educators and stakeholders can better understand, replicate, and strengthen the strategies that lead to student engagement, inclusion, and holistic success.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher was able to arrive at the following conclusions:

1. The experiences of Special Education teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusive and supportive learning environments. Through adaptability, evidence-based strategies, individualized instruction, and collaboration with family and professionals, they address students'

academic, social, and emotional needs. Their narratives highlight the importance of patience, empathy, and celebrating small successes, while emphasizing the need for continued advocacy and professional development. Overall, their experiences affirm that effective special education extends beyond academics, fostering resilience, independence, and a sense of belonging among learners.

2. Based on the analysis, the study revealed seven major themes with nineteen subthemes that collectively capture the experiences of special education teachers in self-contained classrooms. These themes emphasize the importance of creating an organized and optimal learning environment, implementing scaffolded systems to promote behavioral success, integrating digital supports to enhance engagement, and fostering dynamic partnerships with co-teachers, specialists, and families. Teachers' personalized approaches, evidenced through individualized instruction and evidence-based interventions, underscore their enduring impact on student growth. At the same time, capacity constraints, emotional outbursts, and unforeseen challenges reveal the complexities of managing diverse learner needs. Overall, the theme illustrates the balance between structured classroom management, instructional effectiveness, collaboration, and adaptive strategies, emphasizing both the rewards and challenges inherent in special education teaching.

3. Meaningful learning in a special education setting is grounded in recognizing each student's unique strengths, needs, and learning styles. Teachers provide individualized instruction, break tasks into manageable steps, and utilize visual supports, assistive technology, and sensory-friendly strategies to establish structured, predictable, and safe learning environments. Patience, empathy, and flexibility are essential for addressing behavioral challenges and promoting self-regulation. Collaboration with co-teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and families enhances academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Involving parents and the broader community further reinforces learning beyond the classroom. These experiences demonstrate that special education extends beyond academic achievement, fostering holistic growth, independence, resilience, and inclusion, ensuring that students thrive not only in school but in life.

4. The FOCUSED model highlights the key elements for success in self-contained classrooms. Effective teaching relies on purposeful planning, structured and predictable learning environments, and adaptive strategies to meet diverse needs, technology to enhance engagement,

evidence-based behavior supports, personalized instruction, and strong collaboration with families and professionals. Together, these practices promote academic, social, and emotional growth, fostering resilience, inclusion, and meaningful development for students.

Recommendations

Based on findings and conclusions, the researcher recommends the following:

1. The proposed FOCUSED model will be utilized by special education teachers who manage a self-contained class. This model will help them realize how to be strong and successful in managing a self-contained class.

2. To support Filipino Special Education teachers, schools may provide ongoing professional development in individualized instruction, behavior management, and assistive technology. Classrooms may be structured, sensory-friendly, and equipped with visual and adaptive tools. Collaboration with co-teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and families may be strengthened, and policies may be promoted smaller class sizes, additional support staff, and culturally responsive practices. These measures enable teachers to meet each student's unique needs, fostering holistic growth, social-emotional development, and inclusion.

3. To strengthen special education in a self-contained classroom, schools may provide professional development on individualized instruction, behavioral interventions, and digital supports. Adequate staffing and resources are needed to manage diverse learner needs effectively. Collaboration with co-teachers, specialists, and families may be fostered through structured communication and team-based planning. Training may also address strategies for handling emotional outbursts, schedule changes, and other challenges, helping teachers balance instruction, behavior management, and student engagement while promoting holistic growth and inclusion.

4. Schools and education programs may prioritize teacher training and support in individualized instruction, behavior management, and the use of visual and assistive technologies to meet diverse learner needs. Structured, sensory-friendly classroom environments with clear routines may be promoted to enhance student engagement, self-regulation, and safety.

Collaboration with co-teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, and families may be strengthened to provide holistic support, while parent and community involvement may be encouraged to extend learning beyond the classroom. Implementing these strategies can help students with special needs achieve academic, social, and emotional growth, fostering independence, resilience, and inclusion.

5. Schools and educational programs may provide ongoing support and professional development for special education teachers, focusing on individualized instruction, behavioral management, and the use of assistive and visual technologies. Classrooms may be structured and sensory-friendly, with clear routines and strategies to promote student engagement, self-regulation, and safety. Collaboration among teachers, support staff, specialists, families, and the community may be encouraged to provide comprehensive support for students. Prioritizing these practices can enhance learning outcomes, foster social-emotional development, and promote independence, resilience, and inclusion for students with special needs.

6. Future researchers are encouraged to further explore the experiences of special education teachers across diverse educational settings, focusing on strategies that enhance individualized instruction, behavior management, and the integration of assistive technologies. Investigating the impact of collaboration with co-teachers, specialists, families, and communities, as well as examining culturally responsive practices and classroom innovations, can provide deeper insights to improve special education programs and student outcomes.

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