



## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: MULTIPLE CASE STUDIES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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**Publisher's note:**

**Prof. Jeric Escosio Suguis submitted another article entitled:**

*Physical Exercise and Socio-Emotional Skills as Predictors to Academic Productivity among College Students*, <https://zenodo.org/records/13768741>.

**After its acceptance, the author published it in another publication:**

<https://www.efsupit.ro/images/stories/august2024/Art%20208.pdf>

**Abstract:**

This multiple case study examined the experiences of students with special needs while they took Physical Education courses at the tertiary level, exploring their challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights. The findings revealed several challenges faced by these students: limitations in participating in classroom activities, difficulties with classroom management, fear of judgment and discrimination from peers and instructors, and communication barriers. Despite these difficulties, the students managed to address them through open communication with their peers and instructors, maintaining a positive mindset and optimism, and fully accepting and adapting to their situation. This demonstrated their resilience in striving to achieve their goals. In their eagerness to reach these goals, the students also offered recommendations for institutions and educators. They suggested that institutions should provide additional facilities and equipment for

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students with special needs and develop programs and activities to highlight their talents and potential. They also emphasized that educators should incorporate differentiated instruction in Physical Education to offer more opportunities for students with special needs to showcase their abilities in various activities.

**Keywords:** student with special needs, acceptance and adaptation, classroom management, physical education courses, tertiary level

## 1. Introduction

The experiences of students with special needs and a lack of communication between administrators, instructors, specialists, staff, parents, and students affect the inclusive program. The obstacles facing inclusive education are in the areas of funding, inadequate personnel, facilities, and materials. Counseling has the potential to shift public attitudes, fostering a sense of inclusion and value for pupils with special needs within our society (Fareo, 2020). In integrated physical education settings, it is now common practice to teach both students with and without disabilities together. Despite this, issues such as bullying, exclusion, and discrimination remain prevalent among students with disabilities in these settings. However, there is limited understanding of their experiences when participating in physical education classes independently (Pellerin *et al.*, 2022).

Inclusive education aims to provide learning opportunities for students with special needs to interact with their peers. However, increasing these opportunities necessitates addressing their specific needs more effectively. While implementing the principles of inclusive education in higher education can be challenging, these principles are already established and practiced at the primary level. As more students with disabilities progress from elementary to higher education, there is an urgent need for inclusive methods to be adopted at the tertiary level. The objectives of education for children with disabilities align with those for all students: to enable them to reach their full potential, lead fulfilling lives, and contribute to their communities. Often, students with disabilities require specialized services and support to effectively learn the curriculum (Moriña, 2019).

The study by Rekaa *et al.* (2019), which systematically analyzed 27 studies, explores the participation of students with disabilities in physical education (PE), local factors that support or hinder inclusion, and the impact of attitudes on these processes. Out of the 27 studies, 10 focused on the experiences of students, while 17 examined the attitudes of teachers. The findings reveal that students with disabilities often feel excluded and unwelcome in PE classes. However, more recent research indicates that these students actually "love" physical education. The study also highlights that while PE teachers generally endorse the normative goal of inclusion, they consider it impractical due to resource limitations, gaps in skills, and systemic challenges. The ideal "normate" PE student represents the shared objective among teachers, but they perceive achieving this goal as difficult due to these constraints.

In most of the studies about students with special needs, the majority of students with special needs are negative about participating in physical education activities. The previous study discovered that physical educators' positive attitudes may be a crucial component in ensuring that students with disabilities have meaningful learning experiences. By making adjustments and accommodations during activities, creating a welcoming physical education atmosphere, and giving students the option between an inclusive and a segregated learning environment, meaningful learning experiences can be built (Bertills, 2019).

In Davao de Oro, researchers have investigated the lived experiences of students with special needs, but there has been no study specifically focusing on their experiences with physical education instruction. This research aims to address this gap by examining the challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of students with special needs regarding physical education instruction. Furthermore, it appears that no research has been conducted in our country on the experiences of students with special needs in physical education at the tertiary education level.

## **2. Literature review**

This section presents related studies that support the researcher's investigation. It includes articles focusing on the experiences, coping strategies, and insights of students with special needs within the context of physical education instruction. Additionally, the section encompasses research on the experiences of educators who work with students with special needs in teaching physical education.

### **2.1 Experiences of students with special needs in physical education instruction**

All students benefit from inclusive physical education. In the study of School Specialty (2021), Inclusive physical education benefits all students. According to a study by School Specialty (2021), integrating students with disabilities into general education settings helps them develop essential social skills. Regardless of their abilities, all students learn proper behavior through interactions with a diverse group of peers. In an inclusive PE setting, compared to adaptive PE, students with disabilities have more opportunities to engage in age-appropriate physical activities. They also get to interact with their general education classmates, which fosters higher expectations and encourages them to work harder, build confidence, and achieve more. When general education students interact with peers who have disabilities, they often develop a better understanding and more positive attitudes toward people who are different from themselves. This interaction helps them view disability not as a barrier, but as simply another difference. Furthermore, allowing students to become peer tutors or "experts" in certain areas not only benefits those with disabilities but also enhances the skills of all students. Providing diverse learning opportunities benefits everyone, not just those with disabilities (School Specialty, 2021).

The Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) was established in India in 1987 through a collaboration between UNICEF and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Its primary objective was to facilitate the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. Over time, the concept of inclusive education has expanded to include not only children with disabilities but also other students facing various disadvantages. The goal is to ensure that all students, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, receive education in an inclusive environment designed to maximize their potential and address diverse learning needs. By leveraging technology, inclusive and adaptive learning environments can offer flexible educational experiences that overcome learning barriers and cater to each student's needs. Technology enables the continuous updating and customization of educational materials, ensuring that the inclusive learning environment effectively supports every learner (Bhola & Khanna, 2023).

Learners with special needs, who frequently struggle with social and communication skills, frequently or never engage with peers who are not disabled. Thus, it would be excellent to create and implement a program that promotes possibilities for social interaction skills development as well as access to peers of the same age. Peer mentorship, in particular, is a highly effective means of offering ideas for these opportunities through peer-mediated training (Vargo, 2021). According to research, being a member of such a program will foster new connections, abilities, and personal development, alter the structure present chances for inclusion, and boost a person's sense of community and belonging. More so, Athamanah *et al.* (2020) elaborated that participating in social events in the community exposes peers to one another's viewpoints, domains of expertise, and shared interests, reducing prejudice and bias.

The study by Alves *et al.* (2021) stated that students with disabilities have described issues related to participating in activities during physical education (PE) classes with feelings of being excluded. This study investigates the inclusive process of deaf or hard-of-hearing students in school in the specific context of PE class. The results show that to lessen bullying, teachers and paraeducators need to be informed about appropriate changes to class structure, assessment procedures, and sports and physical exercise. The benefits of inclusive education for students with special educational needs (SEN) are widely acknowledged, as evidence has grown in recent years. Given that learning interactions among diverse students are a crucial component of educational inclusion, this study aims to determine the effects on students without SEN of receiving an education in shared, inclusive, interactive learning environments with students with SEN. However, the extension and universalization of an inclusive approach will also be enhanced with additional evidence of the benefits that inclusion has for all students, including those without SEN (Molina Roldan *et al.*, 2021).

Special education, the availability of educational services, and broader social contexts significantly impact teaching practices. Despite these challenges, teachers must demonstrate professionalism and perseverance in adapting to inclusive education, which requires them to maintain resilience and creativity in a demanding educational

environment. Effective inclusive education calls for continuous professional development and the provision of instructional aids and services. Schools should implement diverse training modules and seminars for general education teachers to meet the standards of inclusive education programs. Addressing the challenges of inclusive education also necessitates collaborative efforts among local community education committees, parents, teachers, and school staff (Macabenta *et al.*, 2023).

While much of the literature concentrates on students with identifiable physical and intellectual disabilities, some authors emphasize the importance of addressing the needs of students whose special socio-cultural circumstances require educators to adopt approaches that are sensitive and responsive to their unique experiences. Additional research underscores the necessity for systemic approaches to support students with intellectual and other disabilities, considering factors such as school policy, contextual culture, and operational climate. It is also crucial to establish policies and procedures for evaluating the social and emotional experiences of all members of the school community, including students with special needs (Haynes, & Yavuz, 2023).

Most studies emphasize the crucial role of both school and societal support in ensuring that students receive the inclusivity they deserve. According to Alaba *et al.* (2022), several issues hinder effective support for students with special needs: inadequate administrative attention, insufficient resources, the need for improved technical proficiency among special education teachers, emotional challenges and uncertainties faced by these instructors, and limitations in monitoring and assessing students' learning and development. Addressing these gaps is essential for enhancing the quality of special education.

## **2.2 Coping mechanism of students with special needs in physical education instruction**

Including students with disabilities in physical education (PE) classes is a widely accepted practice in schools. However, there is limited understanding of how students' participation and interaction in these settings impact the effectiveness of PE instruction. Observations have revealed patterns in student involvement and engagement. Advanced PE teaching techniques—such as comprehensive whole-group instruction, increased communication between students and teachers, and more detailed directions—significantly enhance student engagement (Augustine *et al.*, 2019).

In the research conducted by Sedar and Korkmaz (2023), students with special needs, particularly those with orthopedic disabilities, engage in customized physical education programs designed to enhance their motor and physical skills. This specialized approach ensures that physical activities are tailored to address each child's unique needs and abilities. The program is overseen by specialized physiotherapists, sports trainers, or special educators, who consider the specific limitations and circumstances of the students. The curriculum includes a variety of exercises aimed at improving mobility, balance, coordination, muscle strength, and flexibility. Additionally, participation in adapted sports, such as wheelchair basketball, wheelchair tennis, wheelchair swimming,

and athletics, is crucial for developing students' social, cooperative, and competitive skills.

According to the study by Umar (2021), to optimize the educational experience for children with special needs, parents should address both their personal and educational needs. It is crucial for society to offer robust financial, emotional, and medical support to help these students adapt successfully to the school environment. Additionally, school counselors should consistently provide emotional support and anxiety-reduction strategies to help students manage their concerns about the future and achieve academic success. Umar's findings revealed that children with special needs employ various coping mechanisms, such as putting in considerable effort to tackle challenges independently, accepting their conditions as part of a greater plan, and attempting to avoid focusing on their special needs situations.

In physical education, students with special needs engage in balancing activities to assess the impact of various instructional and feedback methods on their learning outcomes. The study aimed to explore how students' verbal and visuospatial working memory capacities influenced these outcomes. Between the pre-test and post-test, students showed significant improvements in their perceived competence and performance in balancing, with no differences observed between groups. The results indicated that verbal working memory capacity, rather than visuospatial working memory, played a significant role in shaping the relationship between the type of teaching and feedback methods and the learning results (Kok *et al.*, 2021).

Globally, the concept of "inclusive education" (IE) has gained considerable momentum, driven by the increasing student population and the need to embrace diversity in the classroom. The focus extends beyond academic achievement to include the holistic development of each learner, highlighting their strengths and providing necessary support to overcome challenges. This shift toward inclusive education reflects a deliberate effort to create a supportive and adaptable educational environment where every student is empowered to succeed. It underscores the commitment of educational institutions and stakeholders to celebrate and utilize the richness of diversity, ensuring that each individual's unique potential is recognized, celebrated, and nurtured (Nunez & Rosales, 2021).

The survey results reveal that characteristics such as age, marital status, and years of teaching experience did not significantly affect the coping strategies of the respondents. Teachers demonstrated robust coping mechanisms, including adaptive strategies, cooperation, emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and the development of individual educational plans (IEPs). Among these, collaboration with colleagues emerged as a key strategy, essential for fostering resilience and effective teaching. Despite the difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, these teachers remained deeply committed to their profession and to providing high-quality education to learners with special educational needs (LSENs). These findings highlight the need for ongoing support and resources to sustain the well-being of special education

teachers and to ensure the continued success of inclusive education programs (Abellana, 2023).

#### **2.4 Insights of students with special needs in physical education instruction**

Inclusive education, both in theory and practice, represents a transformative ethos that goes beyond conventional teaching methods. Central to this approach is the creation of an environment where every child feels a sense of belonging, believes that challenges can be overcome, and appreciates the value of diversity. Inclusion is not just a set of teaching strategies; it is a comprehensive philosophy that influences the entire educational system, recognizing and valuing each individual's unique strengths and abilities. By embracing diversity, schools and educators foster a more accepting and supportive atmosphere, leveraging differences to enhance the overall learning experience. Exploring the strategies and interventions used to support children with special needs is crucial for grasping the complexities of special education (Kushwaha, R., 2023).

In addition to coping with their disabilities, children with special education needs and learning difficulties face an increased risk of bullying and exclusion. Research highlights two critical factors that influence these risks: the relationships between students and teachers and the children's social status among their peers. The student-teacher dynamic is crucial in shaping a child's experience in the educational setting, where supportive, understanding, and inclusive teaching practices can significantly enhance a student's sense of belonging and safety. Educators who cultivate an environment of empathy and acceptance play a vital role in reducing the likelihood of bullying and exclusion for children with special needs (Berchiatti, 2022).

Children with special education needs and learning difficulties face an increased risk of bullying and exclusion, in addition to managing their disabilities. Research identifies two key factors influencing these risks: the quality of student-teacher relationships and the child's social standing among peers. The student-teacher dynamic is crucial in shaping a child's school experience, with supportive and inclusive teaching practices significantly enhancing their sense of belonging and security. Educators who foster an environment of empathy and acceptance play a vital role in mitigating the risk of bullying and exclusion. Such efforts are essential for creating a safer and more inclusive educational environment for these children (Berchiatti, 2022).

In the study by O'Neil and Olson (2021), the extent of participation by students with disabilities in regular physical education classes serves as a crucial measure of inclusive practices. This participation extends beyond mere presence to include the overall quality of their experience. Teachers are vital in this process, as they must use effective instructional methods and promote social acceptance to facilitate inclusion. Educators need to continually reflect on and address each student's individual needs, abilities, and learning styles, which may involve adapting activities, providing extra support, and fostering an environment of understanding and collaboration. Moreover, a deep understanding of various disabilities and their impact on physical activity participation is essential for achieving genuine inclusion.

In Shanghai, they conducted a study on the perceptions of the learners toward inclusion. The majority of children with special needs do not support their inclusion, according to the results of the interviews, and limited involvement in physical education activities is typical. Their study identified personal factors (i.e., impairment and self-efficacy), physical context (i.e., architectural barriers and provision of modified facilities), and social context (i.e., teacher support, peer support, and modification) that facilitated or inhibited the inclusion level of these students using a social relational model of disability as a theoretical framework. The study concluded that government and educational institutions need to intervene to remove physical obstacles, provide funding, and provide customized training programs (Wang, 2019).

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Inclusive physical education (PE) is widely accepted in schools, yet the connection between student participation and interaction remains underexplored. High-level PE teaching techniques, such as whole-group instruction, frequent student-teacher communication, and the use of technology and music, can enhance student engagement and involvement. These methods benefit all students by fostering social skills, teaching proper conduct, and setting higher expectations. Although the Lieberman-Brian Inclusion Rating Scale (LIRSPE) evaluates the inclusion of students with disabilities in PE, it does not fully capture the extent of inclusiveness. Programs like Paralympic School Day help raise disability awareness and promote social change, but a study in Shanghai indicates that many children with special needs do not support inclusion, highlighting the need for better-prepared teachers, government intervention, funding, and tailored training programs.



### **3. Research instrument**

This research method uncovered patterns, causation, and underlying principles, providing a foundation for informed decision-making and offering the potential to derive broader implications or lessons applicable to similar scenarios or contexts (Corner, 2023). Additionally, a case study aimed to collect extensive information about a person or group to generalize the findings across a wide range of situations (Cherry, 2022).

However, the study included more than one single case, necessitating a multiple-case study approach. Given that the research focused on students with special needs, various types of disabilities were incorporated. Multiple-case studies offered an invaluable opportunity for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the topic, especially when significant information was available. This approach enabled the researcher to assess the validity of conclusions by cross-referencing and comparing findings across different cases. One of the primary advantages of using multiple-case studies was their ability to guard against bias and narrow perspectives, as including diverse cases ensured a range of viewpoints, experiences, and contexts within the studied relationships. Each case served as a unique lens to observe different aspects of the relationship dynamics, ultimately enhancing the reliability and robustness of the conclusions and providing a more comprehensive insight into the complexities of the studied relationships (Gustafsson, 2017).

To achieve the intended outcomes, in-depth interviews (IDI) involve conducting extensive, face-to-face interviews with a strong focus on content. This method is considered one of the most effective ways to gather detailed and nuanced information. Unlike questionnaires, in-depth interviews facilitate the exploration of participants' opinions and perspectives through probing, open-ended questions, allowing for a deeper understanding of their views (Showkat, 2017).

#### **3.1 Data analysis**

For analyzing the qualitative data, we will employ thematic analysis, a technique designed for identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within the data. This approach allows us to draw inferences and develop new insights about the study's subject or topic of interest (Caulfield, 2023). Thematic analysis is particularly effective for understanding people's beliefs, opinions, knowledge, experiences, and values through various data sources, such as interview transcripts, social media profiles, or survey results. To ensure the accuracy of our data, we will review and listen to the recorded audio interviews with participants, as the automatic transcription will be used for initial encoding. By repeatedly listening to the responses, we will become familiar with the content and identify common themes and answers provided by the participants.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section details the participants' experiences, including their challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations for students with similar experiences, as well as

suggestions for physical education instructors and school administrators. The study utilized three primary research questions, each with three sub-questions, to guide the in-depth interviews. These questions shaped the data collected from participants and provided direction for the analysis.

- 1) What are the lived experiences of students with special needs in physical education instruction?
- 2) What is the coping mechanism of students with special needs in physical education instruction?
- 3) What are the insights of students with special needs in physical education instruction?

Each participant was provided ample time to prepare their responses to ensure the collection of comprehensive data during the in-depth interviews. All responses were recorded, and strict measures were taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identities and information. The study involved three key informants: students from Davao de Oro State College with special needs who were enrolled in physical education courses.

**Research Question No. 1:** What are the lived experiences of students with special needs in physical education instruction?

This question has three sub-questions to generate a broad discussion for the above problem. What challenges have you experienced when taking physical education courses in terms of teaching-learning activities, classroom management, communication, and assessment tasks? Among all the difficulties you experience, which is the most crucial in taking physical education classes? What other factors aside from the teaching-learning process do you find challenging, especially in taking physical education classes? As to the data collected from the experiences of the three participants, four themes emerge. These themes are:

- a) limitations in classroom activity participation;
- b) difficulty in reading texts and images;
- c) fear of judgment and discrimination; and
- d) challenges in communication.

#### **a. Limitations on classroom activity participation**

Participation is essential in the learning process, as the instructor helps the student learn in a way that everyone can engage in the activities. However, some students are able to or could only perform less due to the difficulties they encounter. Participant 2 finds it challenging when it comes to outside activities, while Participant 1 can't handle rigorous activities since she gets tired easily because of her situation. Participant 3 observed that when it comes to sports, there are limited resources that affect the elaboration of the sport and may also result in not discussing that sport.

**Table 1:** Essential themes and thematic statements on the experiences of students with special needs in Physical Education instruction

Essential Theme	Thematic Statement
Open communication towards peers and instructors	<p><i>"I manage to respect them, but it seems my shyness towards them is gradually disappearing. As their sister, it seems that the barriers between us are also gradually dissolving during our interactions." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"Good communication and other positive coping mechanisms motivate me to pursue my studies. I always remind myself that what I do is for my future, and it will have a positive impact not just on me but also on others." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"Among the coping mechanisms, I think the most significant is good communication. When you have good communication with your peers, classmates, and instructors, it brings a positive impact not just for yourself but also for the people around you." (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"... also, with the guidance of my instructor and the support of my fellow students, who offer help without hesitation, I find hope to face challenges and gain the confidence needed to overcome them. This support helps me improve in any situation." (P3)</i></p>
Positive mindset and optimism	<p><i>"...impact on myself, such as enhancing my self-esteem and confidence despite my physical disability." (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"By keeping myself motivated and fully trusting myself in every aspect." (P3)</i></p> <p><i>".. be positive in all aspects of life." (P3)</i></p> <p><i>"It would encourage me to gain more confidence in all aspects, even with my disability. I would rather become strong enough to face those challenges without hesitation. I aim to transform my weaknesses into strengths, which will guide me to become a more independent woman. This will also motivate me to pursue my studies, achieve my dreams, and become a successful person." (P3)</i></p>
Acceptance and adaptation of the situation	<p><i>"I'm holding on to the idea that acceptance is hard for me because it doesn't come naturally. It might have been easier to accept if I were born with it as a child, but now that I'm older, it's much more difficult. I need to figure out how to adapt to this challenge. This is what motivates me—to remind myself that acceptance is growing in our society, which is becoming more inclusive and understanding." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"For me, acceptance and adaptation are essential aspects of coping with my acquired disability." (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"... making practical adjustments to accommodate my needs and ensure that I can continue to thrive academically, socially, and personally despite the challenges posed by my disability." (P2)</i></p>

**b. Difficulty in reading texts and images clearly**

The participants also faced challenges with reading text and images. Participant 1 stated that she needed to get closer to the board when the instructor presented text or pictures during the teaching process. This was challenging, as some discussions required

presentations and demonstrations on the board, which might not have been clear to some students.

### **c. Fear of judgment and discrimination**

Institutions promoted inclusivity within the classroom; however, there were still instances where some students felt fear of judgment or discrimination. Participant 2 stated that she felt shy about participating in the activity. It took time to adapt to the learning environment since the students in the classroom were diverse not only by race but also by their individual needs, which needed to be acknowledged during the teaching and learning process.

### **d. Challenges in communication**

Communication is a channel to learn, understand, and distribute information. Another challenge that students with special needs encountered was communicating with their peers. The participants faced situations where they could not communicate effectively due to shyness (Participant 1), a preference for solitude (Participant 2), and fear that their classmate might not understand their message (Participant 3).

**Research Question No. 2:** What is the coping mechanism of students with special needs in physical education instruction?

This question has three sub-questions to generate a broad discussion for the above problem. How do you manage the challenges you have encountered in taking PE classes? Among all the coping mechanisms, which do you think is the most significant? How do these coping mechanisms motivate you to pursue your studies? In the data we collect, three themes emerge. These themes are:

- a) open communication towards peers and instructors,
- b) positive mindset and optimism, and
- c) acceptance and adaptation of the situation.

### **a. Open communication with peers and instructors**

Communication is essential, especially with the students, when it comes to coping with the challenges they encounter. This will help them to have support in their learning process. Thus, good communication does not just help you but also has an impact on the people around you (Participant 2). Additionally, through communication, other students and instructors can guide them in fostering confidence in them to solve the difficulties they encounter (Participant 3). This helps them to be motivated to pursue their studies (Participant 1).

### **b. Positive mindset and optimism**

Positive mindsets and optimism in individuals' lives foster a healthier self-image. Two out of the three participants said that to cope with the difficulties they encountered, they needed to be confident and learn to maintain a positive outlook in all aspects of their

lives. This enhances their self-esteem despite the situation they are in. Additionally, this encourages them to pursue their studies to reach their dreams and become successful people. Participant 3 stated without any hesitation that she would fight all the battles she encounters and convert her weaknesses into strengths in achieving her goals in life.

**c. Acceptance and adaptation of the situation**

The first person who must accept you for who you are is yourself. Embracing your own differences will make it easier to accept and appreciate the differences in others. While those without disabilities might find this challenging, learning to accept and adapt to one’s own unique circumstances can significantly aid in self-understanding and personal growth (Participant 1). Additionally, despite all the challenges they have, they still make practical adaptations to their needs to help them accommodate their needs and ensure they continue to thrive socially, academically, and personally (Participant 2).

**Table 2:** Essential themes and thematic statements on how students with special needs manage the challenges they have encountered in taking Physical Education classes

Essential Theme	Thematic Statement
Open communication towards peers and instructors	<p><i>“I manage to respect them, but it seems like my shyness towards them is gradually disappearing, so as... their sister and what is it called when I communicate with them, it seems like these barriers are gradually disappearing.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“Good communication and other positive coping mechanisms motivate me to pursue my studies. I always say to myself that the things I do are for my future, and it will give me a positive impact not just for myself but also for everyone.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“Among the coping mechanisms, I think the most significant is good communication. Once you have good communication towards your peers, classmates, and instructor it brings positive impact not just for yourself but also to the people around you.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“...also with the help of the guidance of the instructor and my co-students without any hesitation, they give me hope to fight those challenges and become more confident to come up with those challenges that will make me improve in any situation.” (P3)</i></p>
Positive mindset and optimism	<p><i>“...impact to myself, such as enhancing my self-esteem or confidence despite my physical disability.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“By keeping myself motivated and fully trusting myself in any aspect.” (P3)</i></p> <p><i>“.. be positive in all aspects of life.” (P3)</i></p> <p><i>“It would encourage me to gain more confidence in any aspect, even if I have a disability. I would rather become strong enough to fight those challenges without any hesitation. To convert the weaknesses that I have into strengths that will give me direction to become a more independent woman, and that would encourage me to pursue my studies, reach my dreams, and become a successful person. (P3)</i></p>
Acceptance and adaptation of the situation	<p><i>“I’m holding on to. When I said that, acceptance is hard for me because it is not inborn, it will be okay if I am born with it because I’m just a child then I can accept it. But now that I’m old, it is very difficult for me to accept, and I must know how will I adapt to</i></p>

	<p><i>this, that's what I am holding onto to motivate me that it is okay with our society as well because it is getting better and it is inclusive." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"For me, acceptance and adaptation are essential aspects of coping with my acquired disability coping mechanism." (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"... making practical adapt adjustments to accommodate my needs and ensure that I can continue to try academically, socially, and personally despite the challenges paused by my disability so adaptation." (P2)</i></p>
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**Research Question No. 3:** What are the insights of students with special needs in physical education instruction?

This question has three sub-questions to generate a broad discussion for the above problem. What are the suggestions you can give to students who have the same experience in physical education? What do you suggest to your PE instructor if they encounter the same scenario as yours? What can you suggest to the school administrator in enhancing facilitating the student with special needs in physical education? As to the data collected from the insights of the students with special needs, three themes emerge. These themes are:

- a) incorporating differentiated instruction in physical education,
- b) facilities and equipment for students with special needs, and
- c) programs and activities to showcase the talents and potential of students with special needs.

**Table 3:** Essential themes and thematic statements of students with special needs regarding their insights in taking Physical Education class

Significant Theme	Thematic Statement
Incorporating differentiated instruction in physical education	<p><i>"Don't be shy about telling your instructor, especially the PE instructor, about your situation. If you feel hesitant to share your needs, the instructor might not be aware of them and may not address them appropriately. It's important to inform them in advance so that both the instructor and your classmates are aware of your specific needs. This way, they can understand what accommodations you may require and ensure that your needs don't hinder other classmates." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"... In terms of PE, which involves physical activities, I would suggest that we include activities that accommodate special needs. Sometimes, it seems that we should provide different activities tailored specifically for students with special needs, as they might not be able to participate in the more rigorous activities due to their disabilities. It is important that they still receive points or consideration for their efforts, as there are other teachers who may also implement such inclusive practices who just say that it's like they don't even acknowledge the difficulty." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"I need to inform the students before they present their topic because if they don't give advance notice, it might be difficult for the students to complete the</i></p>

	<p><i>tasks, similar to my situation. The instructor should notify the students in advance to determine whether they can complete the tasks or not.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“...they could acknowledge that students excel not only in academics but also in other areas of physical education. This doesn’t necessarily mean rigorous activities but rather moderate-level ones. Some students with special needs may not excel academically but might have moderate skills in other physical activities.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“... they must plan and observe which activities are perfectly suited for students with special needs and match their capacities. By doing so, it will encourage these students to participate in activities that help enhance their skills and promote a healthy lifestyle.” (P3)</i></p>
<p>Providing additional facilities and equipment for students with special needs</p>	<p><i>“There may be more facilities or equipment needed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, but I’m glad there are ramps available. I would suggest that they consider additional equipment that can be used by those with disabilities and take our needs into account.” (P1)</i></p> <p><i>“My suggestion to the school administrator is to enhance support for students with special needs in physical education.” (P2)</i></p>
<p>Program and activities to showcase the talents and potentials among students with special needs</p>	<p><i>“They can create a program that focuses on students with physical needs, especially for those like me, by emphasizing their specific requirements.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“I would suggest a program that focuses on meeting the physical needs of students.” (P2)</i></p> <p><i>“To enhance support for students with special needs in physical education, a program should be created that suits their needs. This program would encourage students with special needs to try activities they haven’t attempted before, helping them feel included. With the assistance of the school administrator, the program can offer these students the potential to improve their skills without hesitation. Being part of this program will help them adopt a healthier lifestyle.” (P3)</i></p>

**a. Incorporating differentiated instruction in physical education**

A classroom often includes students with diverse needs that instructors must accommodate effectively. Some activities may not be suitable for all learners, potentially causing difficulties in completing the tasks. For example, outdoor activities such as basketball and volleyball can be particularly challenging for students with disabilities, possibly leading to lower scores, as noted by Participant 1. To address this, Participant 1 suggested that the instructor could design alternative activities tailored to the specific challenges faced by these students. According to Participant 3, the instructor should carefully plan and observe to ensure that any adapted activities are well-suited to accommodate the varying capacities of all learners.

**b. Providing additional facilities and equipment for students with special needs**

Supporting students with special needs contributes to creating a more inclusive environment. Both Participant 1 and Participant 2 recommended providing additional

equipment tailored to meet the specific needs of these students. Such resources can help facilitate their participation and enhance their overall learning experience.

### **c. Program and activities to showcase the talents and potentials of students with special needs**

Extracurricular activities offer students a valuable opportunity to showcase their talents in specific areas. Two out of three participants expressed a desire for a program tailored to the unique needs of students with special requirements. As Participant 2 noted, while some students might not excel academically, they often have strengths in physical activities where they can shine. Highlighting these talents can help students view their challenges as sources of inspiration rather than obstacles, and it encourages them to explore and develop skills beyond their usual experiences (Participant 3). This approach not only broadens their skill set but also promotes a more inclusive and supportive environment.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study, the researchers employed a multiple-case study methodology to investigate the lived experiences of college students with special needs enrolled in physical education courses at Davao de Oro State College-Main Campus. The study aimed to identify the challenges these students faced during their PE classes and to understand their coping strategies. Additionally, the participants provided valuable suggestions for improving support for students with similar needs, offering insights for both PE instructors and school administrators. These recommendations are intended to enhance the effectiveness of physical education programs and facilitate better accommodations for students with special needs.

The first research question focused on identifying the challenges that students with special needs encountered. It highlighted four major issues: limitations in classroom activity participation, difficulties in reading texts and images, fear of judgment and discrimination, and challenges in communication. The study found that these challenges hindered the students' learning process, leading to reduced participation in classroom activities due to the difficulties they faced. This finding supported the study by Cartey *et al.* (2021), which indicated that lower participation reflected additional barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, including physical, personal, social, and environmental obstacles. Creating opportunities for inclusion in physical activities for people with disabilities helped to eliminate such barriers by changing perceptions, emphasizing strengths and abilities, promoting personal resilience, and positively impacting societal inclusion.

Some of the participants also shared that they encountered challenges in classroom management, particularly with reading text and images. Additionally, they experienced a persistent fear that their peers would judge and discriminate against them during their learning process. Discrimination within educational settings often manifests as social



isolation, bullying, and exclusion from extracurricular activities (Sarkar, 2023). They also reported difficulties in communicating with their peers and instructors. Communication was described as a means through which individuals establish social relationships, express themselves, learn and teach, understand signs, and integrate social norms (Generoso & Moriera, 2023). It was crucial for peers and instructors to be aware of the needs of students with special needs and to approach them with this awareness to ensure the success of inclusive education and improve the future prospects for individuals with special needs (Gökbulut *et al.*, 2024).

Moreover, the attitudes and understanding of instructors and peers significantly impacted the experience of students with special needs in physical education. If instructors were not adequately trained to accommodate diverse needs or if peers were not inclusive and supportive, it created social barriers that discouraged participation. Based on the results from the responses to in-depth interviews, researchers delved deeply into these challenges by gathering firsthand perspectives from students with special needs. By understanding the specific obstacles faced by students with special needs, educators and policymakers were able to develop tailored interventions and support mechanisms to promote inclusivity and ensure that all students had equal opportunities to participate in physical education.

The students with special needs were also able to build their coping mechanisms to overcome those challenges. Open communication with their peers and instructors was one coping mechanism they used to deal effectively with the challenges they encountered. This impacted not only themselves but also the people around them. Additionally, communication helped them ask for guidance from their peers and instructors on the things they needed assistance with. In this way, these individuals not only improved their skills more quickly but also enhanced their social abilities through interaction with their peers, increasing their likelihood of being accepted by society at large (Gökbulut, *et al.*, 2024). Having a positive mindset and being optimistic about their challenges helped them actively participate and collaborate in their learning process. Furthermore, acceptance and adaptation also played important roles in handling the situations they encountered. Through these strategies, these students not only participated in and thrived in physical education activities but also showcased their ability to overcome barriers with determination and resilience.

Hence, the third research question concerned the insights of students with special needs in dealing with limitations in physical education activities. These insights included incorporating differentiated instruction into the teaching and learning process, providing additional facilities and equipment for students with special needs, and creating programs and activities to showcase the talents and potential of students while acknowledging their needs. In the study by Moallemi (2023), elaborated that differentiated instruction was defined as the use of various course materials, activities, and evaluation methods to adapt instruction to each student's unique needs and interests. Educators could create an inclusive environment where all students could

thrive by incorporating differentiated instruction, providing the necessary resources, and developing programs that allowed students to share their talents.

In conducting this study, the researchers observed the challenges that students with special needs faced during physical education activities, particularly in areas such as participation in classroom activities, classroom management, communication, and peer judgment. Despite these difficulties, the students demonstrated resilience in overcoming hardships, driven by their desire to succeed in their chosen field. Key strategies identified included open communication, a positive mindset, acceptance, and adaptation. Furthermore, receiving the necessary support helped these diverse learners remain dedicated and compassionate toward their studies, allowing them to maintain a positive mindset despite the obstacles they encountered. The researchers suggested that educators could create an inclusive environment where all students could thrive by incorporating differentiated instruction, providing necessary resources, and fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.

### **Acknowledgements**

The researchers wish to express their profound gratitude and deep appreciation to everyone who contributed to the success of this academic endeavor. Special thanks are due to our Omniscient God, the Creator of all, for the precious gift of life and existence. His divine strength provided the researcher with the physical, mental, financial, and intellectual resources needed to overcome numerous challenges and complete this study. Despite facing various setbacks, faith in His guidance remained unwavering, ensuring the timely completion of this research. Additionally, heartfelt thanks are extended to Davao de Oro State College – Main Campus for granting permission to conduct this study and for the invaluable support provided throughout the process.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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