

# Lived Experiences of Sped Teachers on Working with Parents in the IEP Process

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## ABSTRACT

Inclusive education emphasizes the significance of collaborative relationships between educational institutions and families in the support of learners with disabilities in particular through the proficient implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). This research investigated the lived experiences of general and special education instructors concerning their collaboration with parents throughout the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process within select schools in Cebu City during the 2024–2025 academic year, thereby informing proposed implications for practice. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological research design, this study included ten (10) purposefully selected participants: five general education teachers and five special education teachers. These individuals possessed direct experience in the planning and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Data were collected utilizing a researcher-designed semi-structured questionnaire comprising open-ended questions, which were further supplemented through in-depth interviews. The collected data were examined through thematic analysis to accurately reflect the core of participants' experiences. Findings indicated that teachers utilized several essential strategies to enhance collaboration between teachers and parents in the IEP process, specifically: establishing consistent and open communication, engaging parents in planning and decision-making, and providing support and training to parents. The difficulties faced by educators encompassed: restricted parental involvement, conflicting perceptions and expectations, and communication and cultural barriers. Furthermore, educators designated efficacious collaborative practices as critical to achieving successful Individualized Education Program (IEP) outcomes, specifically: coordinated monitoring and implementation, the cultivation of relationships founded on mutual trust and respect, and the establishment of explicit and universally understood goals. This phenomenological investigation emphasizes that the efficacy of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is principally determined by ongoing, trust-driven collaboration between educators and parents, which elevates inclusive education from mere procedural adherence to a mutually engaged, responsive partnership that supports students with disabilities.

**Keywords:** Special Education, Individualized Education Program, General and Special Education Teachers, Thematic Analysis, Cebu, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Parent–guardian collaboration is widely recognized as a cornerstone of effective special education practice, particularly in the development and implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP serves as both a legally mandated and pedagogical framework designed to address the

unique learning needs of students with disabilities through individualized goals; instructional accommodations, and support services. Central to the effectiveness of this process is the meaningful involvement of parents, whose intimate knowledge of their child's abilities; needs, and contextual background complements the professional expertise of educators. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that strong teacher–parent collaboration; characterized by shared decision-making, transparent communication, and mutual respect, enhances the quality, relevance, and sustainability of IEPs and contributes to improved academic and developmental outcomes for learners with disabilities (Rossetti, Sauer, Bui, & Ruiz, 2021; Haines et al., 2022).

Special education teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating parental engagement across all phases of the IEP process, including; assessment, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation. Despite its acknowledged importance, international research suggests that effective collaboration remains difficult to achieve in practice. Rossetti et al. (2021) reported that although many parents perceive IEP meetings as beneficial, they frequently experience challenges related to unfamiliar technical terminology, limited opportunities to voice concerns, and the perceived professional dominance of educators. Similarly, Suwarni and Chamidah (2023) found that parental involvement in inclusive schools in Indonesia was constrained by time limitations, differing educational perspectives, and parents' limited understanding of special education concepts. Means (2023) further noted that while both educators and parents recognize the value of collaboration, the absence of systematic preparation and training often prevents parents from engaging meaningfully in IEP decision-making. Furthermore, these studies highlight persistent barriers related to communication breakdowns, unequal power relations, and insufficient institutional support within the IEP framework.

Comparable challenges are evident in the Philippine context, where systemic and contextual constraints further complicate teacher–parent collaboration. According to the Department of Education (2022), more than 231,000 learners with disabilities are enrolled in public schools nationwide. However, only a small proportion of these learners benefit from fully functional and collaboratively developed IEPs, largely due to limitations in teacher preparation and parental participation. A regional study by Barco (2023) in Camarines Norte revealed that many parents possessed limited awareness of the IEP and were often marginalized during its formulation, while teachers reported difficulties in sustaining parental engagement. Likewise, a phenomenological study conducted by Gallarde, Gatera, Buscato, and Villaries (2022) among Special Education (SPED) teachers in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) identified socioeconomic constraints, low parental educational attainment, and limited understanding of special education procedures as significant barriers to effective collaboration. These findings suggest that despite policy mandates emphasizing shared responsibility in IEP development, their enactment in Philippine public schools remains uneven and constrained by structural and contextual realities.

At the school level; these systemic issues manifest in everyday instructional practice. SPED teachers frequently report low parental attendance at IEP meetings or participation that is insufficiently informed to support collaborative decision-making. Even when parents are present; disagreements regarding student progress, instructional goals, and appropriate accommodations commonly arise. Educators are frequently tasked with translating technical information into accessible language, managing parental expectations, and mediating diverse perspectives, all while fulfilling extensive instructional and administrative responsibilities. Such conditions not only undermine the effectiveness of IEP planning and implementation but also weaken the collaborative relationships essential to supporting learners with disabilities.

In response to these challenges, this study explores the lived experiences of SPED teachers in collaborating with parents during the IEP process in selected public elementary schools in Cebu City during the school year 2024–2025. Guided by a qualitative perspective, the study seeks to answer the following questions: What strategies do SPED teachers use in collaborating with parents during the IEP process? What challenges do SPED teachers encounter in working with parents in IEP planning and implementation? How do SPED teachers perceive the role of parents in supporting IEP goals? What collaborative practices do SPED teachers consider most effective in ensuring successful IEP outcomes? Lastly, what implications for practice can be proposed to strengthen teacher–parent collaboration in the IEP process?

Ultimately, this research aims to generate contextually grounded insights that bridge the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities. By foregrounding the voices of SPED teachers, the study seeks to inform evidence-based practices that strengthen teacher–parent partnerships, enhance the implementation of Individualized Education Programs, and contribute to the development of more inclusive and responsive special education services within Philippine public schools.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

In the realm of special education; the Individualized Education Program (IEP) serves not merely as a document but as an essential support system. This signifies an educational system’s formal commitment to providing learners with disabilities equitable opportunities for autonomy, participation, and achievement. The effectiveness of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is not determined solely by its written content, but rather by the quality of the collaborative relationship established between the special education teacher and the parent. When this relationship is strong; the learner benefits from a cohesive and supportive educational ecosystem; conversely, when collaboration is weakened by miscommunication, technical terminology, or systemic barriers, the learner’s developmental potential often remains underdeveloped. As the Philippines continues to address the complexities of inclusive education during the 2024–2026 academic period, the role of the SPED educator has increasingly evolved into that of a “navigator”, a professional responsible for reconciling legal mandates with the emotional, cultural, and socioeconomic realities of Filipino families (Fish, 2008; Means, 2023). This study examines phenomena grounded in Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) and Epstein’s Framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1995), and is further informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533; Violan & Geronimo, 2022; Cruz & Cruz, 2019). Bowen’s Family Systems Theory (1978), conceptualizes the family as an integrated emotional unit in which the functioning of each member influences the stability and well-being of the whole system. Within this framework, children’s learning outcomes are significantly shaped by parental stress levels, coping mechanisms, and patterns of engagement in education. In the IEP process, parents often serve as primary decision-makers and advocates for children with disabilities. For collaboration to be meaningful, educators must recognize family dynamics and cultivate supportive relationships that empower parents to participate actively in planning and decision-making (Nillos, 2019). The theory further emphasizes transparent communication and the equitable distribution of responsibilities between educators and families. When parents experience marginalization during IEP meetings, family tensions may increase, impairing both teacher–parent collaboration and parent–child interactions (Trainor, 2010). Conversely, the inclusion of parents as equal partners promotes family resilience and supports the sustainability of children’s educational growth, reinforcing the view that parental

involvement is central rather than supplementary to effective IEP implementation.

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory (1995) emphasizes the interconnected roles of school, family, and community in shaping children's academic and social development. The model proposes that when these spheres overlap intentionally, shared responsibility for student learning is strengthened. The IEP process in special education exemplifies this collaborative overlap, as parents and educators jointly establish goals, monitor progress, and implement individualized instructional modifications. Research grounded in this framework suggests that strong family-school partnerships lead to improved learning outcomes and greater satisfaction for both families and educators (Epstein, 2011). The model further highlights two dimensions of collaboration: external structures, such as school policies and formal mechanisms that encourage parental involvement, and internal psychological structures, reflected in shared goals, expectations, and commitments between parents and teachers. Empirical studies indicate that students benefit academically and socially when parents are actively involved in educational decision-making (Thornby & Lafaele, 2011; Pascua & Dulos, 2023–2024). Within a rights-based perspective, such collaboration also reflects ethical and institutional responsibility in inclusive education practice (Kotzmann & Johnson, 2020).

Parental involvement has long been recognized as a crucial factor in students' academic achievement and overall development. In special education contexts, such involvement extends beyond routine communication to include participation in individualized planning processes such as the IEP. Nillos (2019) found that parental involvement exhibited high levels of communication and decision-making, although these levels varied according to the child's age. While parental involvement did not demonstrate a direct correlation with academic performance, parents were more actively engaged in decision-making during early educational stages. This finding suggests that involvement in special education reflects how parents and educators negotiate responsibilities related to long-term planning and support rather than immediate academic outcomes.

Barten et al. (2022) conducted a study in Philippine SPED centers and reported high levels of parental involvement in school-related activities across socio-demographic profiles. Despite positive parenting behaviors and willingness to engage, participation in formalized processes such as the IEP was constrained by systemic and structural barriers. These challenges were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Manguilimotan and Pinili (2021) observed that teachers assumed additional responsibilities during remote learning to compensate for limited parental engagement caused by household obligations, technological constraints, and limited instructional capacity. Although Villareal et al. (2022) noted that collaboration during the pandemic fostered increased flexibility and mutual understanding, the transition back to face-to-face IEP planning during the 2024–2025 school year presents new challenges in sustaining collaborative relationships within conventional school settings. From the parental perspective, Estojero (2022) found that parents of children with disabilities in the Philippines frequently reported feelings of exclusion from school-led planning processes, largely due to the use of technical language and procedural complexity. Although parents viewed themselves as actively involved in their children's education, their participation in formal IEP planning was often limited. This pattern reflects a recurring theme in both local and international literature, wherein parental involvement is valued in principle but constrained in practice by communication barriers and professional power dynamics. Rossetti, Sauer, Bui, and Ruiz (2021) and Haines et al. (2022) similarly identified professional authority, lack of structured parent training, and technical terminology as key obstacles to meaningful parental participation. Rossetti et al. (2021) further described instances of

“professional silencing,” wherein regulatory compliance takes precedence over dialogic engagement during IEP meetings.

Despite these challenges, local studies in Cebu highlight the positive impact of effective family–school collaboration. Caban et al. (2024) and Vistar, Pinili, and Capuno (2024) found that strong familial support and clear home–school communication contributed significantly to children’s academic, behavioral, and attitudinal development. Supporting evidence from Lapuhapu and Oco (2024) further demonstrates that parental engagement positively influences literacy and learning outcomes. These findings underscore that when spheres of influence converge effectively, learners with special needs are more likely to attain holistic developmental milestones.

In conclusion, while the importance of teacher–parent collaboration is widely acknowledged in both policy and practice, significant gaps remain in understanding how such collaboration is experienced by SPED teachers within specific local contexts. In Cebu City, few studies have examined the lived experiences of teachers who navigate systemic constraints, parental capacities, and individualized learner needs during the IEP process. Addressing this gap, the present study documents the lived experiences of SPED teachers in selected public and private schools in Cebu City during the 2024–2025 academic year, with the aim of generating practice-oriented insights that may strengthen collaborative approaches in special education.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological methodology to examine the lived experiences of ten specifically chosen teacher participants; consisting of five general education teachers and five special education (SPED) teachers from Cebu City, concerning their strategies, challenges, perceptions, and collaborative practices in interactions with parents throughout the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Phenomenological research seeks to elucidate the core of participants’ viewpoints and the interpretations they assign to their experiences (Creely, 2018), thereby rendering it suitable for investigating teacher-parent collaboration as a lived and context-dependent phenomenon. Data were gathered employing a semi-structured questionnaire devised by the researcher, comprising ten open-ended questions centered on collaboration strategies, encountered challenges, perceptions of parental roles, best practices, and suggestions. Face-to-face interviews, approximately 30 to 45 minutes in duration, were carried out in environments conducive to open dialogue, enabling participants to articulate their experiences, insights, and emotions concerning IEP collaboration. Before initiating data collection, all participants received detailed orientation regarding the study’s objectives and procedures and provided informed consent to affirm voluntary participation and uphold ethical standards. Thematic analysis, informed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework, was employed to analyze the data. This process involved systematic transcription, iterative reading to achieve immersion, coding of salient statements, the aggregation of codes into overarching patterns, and the subsequent formulation of themes directly addressing the research questions. The identified themes were analyzed in relation to extant literature and theoretical frameworks, resulting in contextually grounded findings and practical implications aimed at enhancing teacher–parent collaboration and improving the effectiveness of the IEP process.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **STRATEGIES SPED TEACHERS USE IN COLLABORATING WITH PARENTS DURING THE IEP PROCESS**

#### **Theme 1: Establishing Consistent and Open Communication**

Establishing consistent and open communication emerged as a central strategy in strengthening teacher–parent collaboration during the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. This approach prioritizes continuous, clear, and accessible exchanges of information to ensure that parents remain informed, engaged, and aligned with their child’s educational goals. Teachers reported using multiple communication channels, including weekly progress reports, messaging applications, direct phone calls, and scheduled parent–teacher conferences, to accommodate parents’ varying schedules and needs. One participant shared, “I make sure to send progress notes every week so parents feel updated” (P1). Another explained, “We always use messaging apps for quick communication because parents are busy” (P3). A teacher noted the importance of immediacy by stating, “I call parents directly when an immediate concern comes up” (P4). Similarly, another participant emphasized structured engagement, saying, “Regular parent–teacher conferences help align expectations” (P2). One respondent highlighted the relational aspect of communication, remarking, “Parents respond well when they feel communication is honest and ongoing” (P6).

These assertions emphasize the significance of communication not solely as a conduit for information dissemination but also as the fundamental basis for fostering effective collaboration. These pedagogical approaches collectively demonstrate educators' intentional strategies to mitigate misinterpretations, diminish obstacles to engagement, and cultivate a sense of collective responsibility for student achievement. Recent scholarly literature underscores the critical significance of transparent communication within the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Rossetti, Sauer, Bui, and Ruiz (2021) highlighted that deficient communication and an overdependence on technical terminology frequently contribute to parental feelings of marginalization during Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Similarly, Means (2023) discovered that systematic and continuous communication bolsters parents' confidence and ability to engage substantively in educational planning. Within the Philippine context, research conducted by Barco (2023) and Gallarde et al. (2022) demonstrated that limited parental engagement is often associated with communication deficiencies and socioeconomic barriers, thereby emphasizing the importance of deliberate and accessible communication approaches within inclusive educational environments. In addition to resolving logistical matters, regular communication reinforces the relationship between family and school. Epstein's (2011) framework of overlapping spheres of influence posits that communication serves as the principal facilitator of shared responsibility in fostering student development. Based on a systems theory framework, Bowen's Family Systems Theory, as operationalized by Nillos (2019), posits that transparent and respectful communication mitigates parental stress and fosters family-school balance, consequently augmenting parents' ability to engage constructively in the IEP process.

#### **Theme 2: Involving Parents in Planning and Decision-Making**

Involving parents in planning and decision-making emerged as a vital strategy that strengthens the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and ensures that educational programs remain realistic, relevant, and responsive to each learner’s needs. Teachers emphasized that parental insights are indispensable in setting appropriate goals and determining priorities, as families possess firsthand knowledge of their child’s abilities, routines, strengths, and behavioral patterns. By actively engaging

parents in discussions about skill development, proposed accommodations, and home-based strategies, teachers foster a collaborative environment where decisions are shaped by shared understanding rather than unilateral professional judgment. One participant stated, “Parents’ inputs guide us when setting realistic goals” (P5). Another explained, “I ask parents what skills they want to prioritize for their child” (P7). A teacher shared, “We encourage parents to approve modifications before implementing them” (P1). Similarly, another participant noted, “They are given the choice on strategies they can apply at home” (P4), while one emphasized, “We make sure parents feel like equal partners in the IEP process” (P6). These responses demonstrate deliberate actions undertaken by educators to transition parents from passive recipients of information to active contributors in the development and execution of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Enabling parents to communicate their priorities, endorse instructional adjustments, and choose strategies suitable for implementation at home enhances the practicality and consistency of interventions across educational and domestic settings. Rossetti, Sauer, Bui, and Ruiz (2021) highlighted that parents frequently experience marginalization during IEP meetings when professional authority prevails over discussions and parental viewpoints are inadequately acknowledged. Means (2023) further observed that structured opportunities for participation substantially enhance parents’ confidence, sense of agency, and readiness to engage in collaborative decision-making. Within the Philippine context, Barco (2023) determined that parents’ limited awareness and participation in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process are primarily due to insufficient opportunities for substantive involvement, whereas Gallarde et al. (2022) emphasized that socioeconomic limitations increasingly hinder parents’ capacity to engage comprehensively in educational planning. The strategies detailed by the educators in this research represent deliberate initiatives to mitigate these obstacles by guaranteeing parental consultation, information dissemination, and empowerment throughout the decision-making procedure. In addition to pragmatic advantages, the engagement of parents in the processes of planning and decision-making is consistent with recognized theoretical principles and legal statutes that undergird inclusive educational practices.

### **Theme 3: Providing Assistance and Training to Parents**

Providing assistance and training to parents emerged as a significant strategy for strengthening teacher–parent collaboration and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Teachers emphasized that parents often require explicit guidance to understand interventions, apply strategies accurately at home, and use assistive tools with confidence. By offering demonstrations, visual materials, workshops, and coaching sessions, teachers help bridge the knowledge gap that frequently limits consistent implementation of IEP goals beyond the school setting. This approach reflects the recognition that meaningful parental involvement extends beyond participation in meetings and requires equipping parents with the skills and understanding necessary to support their child’s learning. One participant shared, “We demonstrate strategies so parents know how to do it correctly” (P3). Another explained, “I give visual materials parents can use at home for routines” (P1). A teacher noted, “Workshops help parents understand interventions more deeply” (P7), while another added, “I encourage them to attend coaching sessions on behavior management” (P8). Similarly, one respondent emphasized, “We guide parents in using assistive tools properly” (P4).

These practices exemplify educators’ proactive endeavors to empower parents as capable collaborators in the Individualized Education Program process. Demonstrations and coaching sessions facilitate parental observation and accurate practice of strategies, whilst visual aids serve as accessible references that reinforce consistency within the home environment. Rossetti, Sauer, Bui, and Ruiz (2021) emphasized

that parents frequently encounter difficulties in actively participating in the IEP process when technical terminology and instructional methods are not explicitly articulated. Suwarni and Chamidah (2023) similarly observed that inadequate parental comprehension of special education principles and intervention methods serves as a significant obstacle to effective collaboration. Means (2023) further underscored that systematic training and guidance substantially improve parents' confidence, competence, and willingness to engage actively in educational planning and execution. In the Philippine context, Manguilimotan and Pinili (2021) noted that numerous parents encountered challenges in supporting their children's learning during the pandemic due to inadequate guidance from schools, highlighting the ongoing necessity for capacity-building initiatives even within face-to-face instructional environments. The support strategies outlined by participants in this study thus constitute intentional responses to these identified gaps, offering parents practical tools, straightforward explanations, and ongoing guidance. Offering support and training to parents also corresponds with essential theoretical and policy frameworks that underpin inclusive education. Epstein's (2011) Framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence proposes that when schools deliberately enhance parents' capabilities, the intersection between home and school environments becomes more significant and effective.

## **CHALLENGES SPED TEACHERS ENCOUNTER IN WORKING WITH PARENTS IN IEP PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Theme 1: Limited Parent Engagement**

Limited parent engagement emerged as a persistent challenge experienced by SPED teachers during the planning and implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Teachers emphasized that meaningful collaboration becomes difficult when parents are unable to participate consistently, respond promptly to follow-ups, or reinforce interventions at home. Although many parents express willingness to support their children, external demands such as work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, and limited familiarity with special education processes often hinder sustained involvement. These constraints disrupt the continuity and alignment of interventions across school and home settings, making it challenging for teachers to establish shared accountability and ensure the effective implementation of IEP goals. One participant shared, "Some parents don't show up during meetings due to work schedules" (P2). Another noted, "Follow-ups sometimes take multiple attempts before they respond" (P9). A teacher remarked, "Not all parents are willing to be hands-on with interventions" (P6), while another observed, "Home-based activities are not always completed" (P10). One participant further reflected, "Parents rely too much on school and forget it should be teamwork" (P4).

The findings are consistent with existing literature that emphasizes obstacles to maintaining ongoing parental involvement in special education. Barco (2023) indicated that numerous Filipino parents engage minimally in the IEP process due to limited awareness and competing work and family commitments. Gallarde et al. (2022) also determined that socioeconomic limitations, low educational achievement, and inadequate comprehension of special education procedures substantially impede parental involvement. International research further corroborates these findings. Kim and Sheridan (2015) observed that parental work obligations and restricted access to school resources frequently diminish their potential for sustained involvement. Concurrently, Park and Holloway (2017) highlighted that parental ambiguity regarding their duties in special education may foster passive engagement. Suwarni and Chamidah (2023) similarly identified time limitations and varying educational viewpoints as primary factors constraining parental engagement in inclusive environments. These studies collectively indicate that constrained involvement

is influenced by wider structural and contextual elements, rather than a lack of parental interest. From a policy perspective, international and national mandates, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and Republic Act No. 10533; emphasize schools' obligation to foster active and meaningful parental participation. However, the educators' experiences documented in this study illustrate the persistent challenge of implementing these mandates effectively amidst practical constraints in real-world contexts.

### **Theme 2: Conflicting Perceptions and Expectations**

Conflicting perceptions and expectations emerged as a significant challenge encountered by SPED teachers during the planning and implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Teachers reported that differences in understanding, priorities, and beliefs about a child's needs often lead to disagreements or prolonged negotiations. These conflicts commonly arise when parents expect rapid progress, prioritize academic achievement over functional or behavioral goals, or rely on recommendations from external professionals that may not fully align with the school's assessment. Such discrepancies complicate the collaborative process and require teachers to carefully balance professional judgment with parental preferences while safeguarding the integrity and feasibility of individualized interventions. One participant shared, "A few parents expect progress to be instant" (P6). Another noted, "Some disagree with recommended goals, especially behavior goals" (P3). A teacher explained, "They sometimes want academic performance prioritized over functional skills" (P5). Another reflected, "Expectations differ when parents are influenced by other professionals" (P2), while one emphasized, "Proper negotiations are needed before finalizing the IEP" (P1).

These instances demonstrate the potential for incongruent expectations to impede teacher-parent collaboration and protracted consensus-building during the Individualized Education Program (IEP) development process. Haines et al. (2022) found that disparities in interpretations of student advancement and anticipated outcomes frequently contribute to disagreements during Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, especially when parents and educators utilize dissimilar informational frameworks. Means (2023) similarly underscored that dissonance in expectations frequently originates from asymmetrical information access and inadequate parental preparation for participating in technical decision-making procedures. Within the Philippine context, Estojero (2022) determined that parents' challenges in comprehending technical terminology and assessment outcomes contribute to perplexity and resistance during the process of educational planning. Barten et al. (2022) additionally found that parental beliefs, values, and exposure to varying professional guidance influence expectations, potentially hindering collaboration even when parents express a willingness to participate. Gallarde et al. (2022) similarly recognized limited understanding of SPED procedures as a contributing factor to the tension between families and educators. From a theoretical standpoint, this idea embodies the intricacy of home-school interactions within the framework of the IEP process.

### **Theme 3: Communication and Cultural Barriers**

Communication and cultural barriers emerged as a significant challenge affecting teachers' ability to collaborate effectively with parents during IEP planning and implementation. Participants reported that misunderstandings frequently occurred when parents struggled to comprehend technical SPED terminology, spoke different dialects, or hesitated to express concerns openly during meetings. Teachers also observed that cultural beliefs surrounding disability influenced how parents interpreted assessment results and intervention recommendations, sometimes resulting in resistance or uncertainty. As one participant shared, "Parents struggle to understand technical SPED language" (P4), while another noted,

“Families with different dialects need more effort for clarity” (P8). Others emphasized parental hesitation and cultural sensitivity, stating, “Some parents hesitate to express concerns openly” (P5) and “Cultural beliefs sometimes affect their receptiveness to disability labels” (P6). Participants further reported that reliance on messaging platforms occasionally led to misinterpretations, limiting the depth of discussion and shared understanding required for effective IEP decision-making (P7).

These findings concur with contemporary scholarly literature suggesting that distinctions in communication and culture substantially impact parental engagement in the formulation of special education plans. Estojero (2022) observed that Filipino parents of children with disabilities frequently encounter perplexity and uncertainty during school-facilitated planning processes, stemming from unfamiliar professional terminology and apprehension regarding the comprehension of expert recommendations. In a similar vein, Suwarni and Chamidah (2023) recognized linguistic and cultural factors as principal impediments to substantive parental involvement within inclusive educational contexts. Villareal et al. (2022) further highlighted that trust and openness diminish when parents experience intimidation or uncertainty regarding the objectives of interventions, especially within culturally diverse settings. From a theoretical standpoint, Epstein's Framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence emphasizes communication as the fundamental mechanism for maintaining collaboration; when communication is ambiguous or culturally incongruent, the overlap between home and school diminishes (Epstein, 2011). These findings indicate that overcoming communication and cultural obstacles demands more than mere information dissemination, it requires culturally sensitive dialogue, clear and straightforward explanations, and deliberate trust-enhancement strategies to ensure that parents perceive themselves as respected, understood, and empowered to engage substantively in the Individualized Education Program process.

## **SPED TEACHERS PERCEIVE THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN SUPPORTING IEP GOALS**

### **Theme 1: Parents as Active Partners in Learning**

Parents as active partners in learning emerged as a central perception among teachers, emphasizing the indispensable role families play in ensuring the effectiveness of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Teachers consistently described parental involvement as extending beyond attendance in meetings to include reinforcing skills at home, sharing contextual information, and collaborating continuously with educators to support the child's holistic development. Participants highlighted that when parents engage actively, teachers are better able to design interventions that are realistic, culturally responsive, and aligned with the child's daily experiences. As one participant stated, “We depend on parents for consistent learning opportunities at home” (P9), while another shared, “Parents' involvement significantly affects the child's progress” (P2). Others emphasized collaboration, noting, “We recognize parents as essential members of the team” (P10), “The IEP works best when the family participates actively” (P6), and “Parents provide information that helps us modify plans” (P4). These accounts illustrate teachers' shared view that active parental participation strengthens continuity between school and home, thereby enhancing the implementation of IEP goals.

These results are consistent with recent research that emphasizes parental involvement as a crucial element in enhancing the learning and developmental progress of children with disabilities. Barten et al. (2022) determined that Filipino parents exhibit significant potential as collaborative collaborators when schools purposefully integrate them into educational planning initiatives. Similarly, Estojero (2022) underscored that parents hold invaluable insights into their children's behaviors, daily routines, and learning

preferences, which can substantially enhance the formulation of individualized education plans when effectively incorporated. Recent investigations conducted by Lapuhapu and Oco (2024) and Caban et al. (2024) corroborate the finding that sustained parental engagement yields a beneficial impact on scholastic achievement and developmental advancement. Furthermore, these findings suggest that parents function not merely as supporters of instruction but as co-constructors of learning within the IEP process. Their active engagement enables the translation of school-based goals into meaningful home practices, strengthening continuity across learning environments. This reinforces the view of parent involvement as a relational and systemic practice, particularly significant within resource-constrained and culturally diverse special education contexts.

### **Theme 2: Parents as Reinforcers of Behaviors and Skills**

Parents as reinforcers of behaviors and skills emerged as a critical perception among teachers, emphasizing the indispensable role families play in ensuring the continuity and generalization of learning beyond the classroom. Teachers consistently noted that while structured instruction occurs in school, meaningful progress depends on parents' ability to reinforce behaviors, routines, and functional skills within real-life home contexts. Participants highlighted that consistent practice at home strengthens skill acquisition and supports the transfer of learning across environments. As one teacher stated, "Parents must reinforce what was learned in class" (P3), while another shared, "Real-life routines at home help generalize skills" (P9). Others emphasized consistency and monitoring, noting, "Parents are key to maintaining consistency" (P2), "Skills strengthen when practiced every day" (P5), and "We rely on parents to track behaviors outside school" (P6). These responses reflect teachers' shared belief that parental reinforcement is essential to sustaining progress and ensuring the practical effectiveness of IEP goals.

These findings are corroborated by contemporary scholarly literature emphasizing the significance of home-based reinforcement in the field of special education. Vistar, Pinili, and Capuno (2024) determined that active familial engagement and sustained communication demonstrably enhance children's behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive development, thereby underscoring the importance of daily reinforcement outside of the educational setting. In the same vein, Pascua and Dulos (2023–2024) found that consistent collaboration between educators and parents; specifically in the reinforcement of established routines and the monitoring of student behaviors, is associated with enhanced student achievement and a more cohesive alignment of expectations. Recent studies further suggest that parents' capacity to reinforce skills proficiently is enhanced when educational institutions offer explicit guidance and coordinated strategies, thereby facilitating consistency across various learning settings (Means, 2023). Based on a theoretical framework, Bowen's Family Systems Theory posits that family dynamics significantly impact children's learning and development, thereby establishing home-based reinforcement as a crucial element in skill acquisition (Nillos, 2019). These collective findings underscore that parents are not simply ancillary to instruction; rather, they are fundamental collaborators whose consistent reinforcement facilitates the translation of Individualized Education Program objectives into significant, practical results within authentic environments.

### **Theme 3: Parents as Advocates for Their Child**

Parents as advocates for their child emerged as a compelling perception among teachers, reflecting recognition of parents' critical role in ensuring that learners with disabilities receive appropriate, equitable, and responsive educational services. Teachers described advocacy as parents' active assertion of their child's rights, strengths, and needs during the IEP process, ensuring that individualized programs reflect a holistic understanding of the learner. Participants emphasized that parental advocacy enhances visibility

of the child's experiences and strengthens collaborative decision-making. One teacher shared, "They ensure their child receives appropriate services" (P4), while another noted, "Parents push for improvements in programs when needed" (P7). Others highlighted advocacy's role in inclusion, stating, "Advocacy gives children stronger visibility in decision-making" (P2), "Parents remind us of the child's unique strengths and needs" (P1), and "Their voices matter to ensure fairness and inclusion" (P8). These accounts illustrate that teachers perceive advocacy as a constructive force that enriches IEP planning rather than as opposition to professional judgment.

These findings align with contemporary scholarly literature that highlights parental advocacy as a fundamental mechanism for promoting equity and inclusivity within special education. Estojero (2022) determined that parents of children with disabilities frequently perceive advocacy as a mechanism for protecting their child's welfare, especially when educational choices potentially disregard specific requirements. Villareal et al. (2022) further illustrated that parental advocacy bolsters trust and guarantees that school decisions are guided by lived experiences rather than exclusively by technical evaluations. Means (2023) likewise found that parental advocacy, when executed with confidence, mitigates power disparities within Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, thereby fostering more equitable and cooperative collaborations. From this perspective, parental advocacy reframes the IEP from a mandated procedure to a collaborative, rights-based process that promotes equity, enhances inclusion, and prioritizes the child's welfare.

## **PRACTICES OF COLLABORATION SPED TEACHERS CONSIDER THE MOST EFFECTIVE IN ENSURING SUCCESSFUL IEP OUTCOMES**

### **Theme 1: Joint Monitoring and Follow-Through**

Joint monitoring and follow-through emerged as a critical practice that strengthens the continuity and effectiveness of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Teachers emphasized that regular, shared communication about learners' progress—whether improvements or regressions; enables timely instructional adjustments and more accurate tracking of goals. Participants described how shared monitoring between home and school provides a clearer picture of the child's daily performance, behavioral patterns, and responses to interventions, ensuring consistency across environments. As one teacher stated, "We review the child's progress with parents regularly" (P1), while another noted, "Parents update us when they see progress or regression at home" (P9). Others emphasized the practical impact of collaboration, sharing that "Adjustments are faster when monitoring is shared" (P4), "Consistency is the main key to successful skills development" (P6), and "Parents who follow through help us meet goals on time" (P2). These accounts highlight teachers' shared view that joint monitoring reinforces accountability and supports sustained progress toward IEP goals.

These findings are consistent with recent scholarly literature emphasizing the significance of coordinated monitoring within special education. Vistar, Pinili, and Capuno (2024) found that consistent communication and collaborative implementation between families and educators substantially improve learners' developmental progress and sustain advancement toward educational objectives. Similarly, Pascua and Dulos (2023–2024) observed that collaborative monitoring enhances the coherence between household and educational institution expectations, thereby fostering a more consistent application of interventions. Means (2023) additionally underscored that the collaborative and active monitoring of progress by parents and educators enhances the responsiveness of instructional decisions and promotes a child-centric approach. From a theoretical standpoint, Epstein's Framework of Overlapping Spheres of

Influence delineates shared monitoring as a fundamental mechanism for strengthening collaborative responsibility in education, whereas inclusive educational policies such as the UNCRPD (2006) and Republic Act No. 10533 officially recognize parents' right to continuous engagement in educational planning. These viewpoints indicate that collaborative monitoring and subsequent implementation convert the IEP into an evolving, cooperative procedure that fosters consistency, responsiveness, and continuous advancement for the student across various environments.

### **Theme 2: Relationship Building Based on Trust and Respect**

Relationship building grounded in trust and respect emerged as an essential practice that sustains meaningful collaboration between teachers and parents throughout the IEP process. Teachers emphasized that when relationships are built on mutual trust, parents are more willing to communicate openly, share concerns, and participate actively in decision-making. Respect for parents' perspectives and lived experiences was viewed as critical in validating their role as equal partners in planning and implementing interventions. Participants noted that positive relationships reduce misunderstandings and conflicts, allowing collaboration to become more solution-oriented and focused on the child's needs. As one teacher shared, "Parents cooperate more when they trust the teacher" (P2), while another stated, "Having a positive relationship reduces conflicts" (P5). Others emphasized openness and respect, noting, "Trust encourages parents to share openly during meetings" (P6), "Respecting parents' ideas strengthens teamwork" (P1), and "Listening sincerely builds strong collaboration" (P4).

These findings align with contemporary scholarly literature emphasizing trust and respect as fundamental components of effective collaboration between educators and parents in the context of special education. Estojero (2022) observed that parental participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning is heightened when interactions with educators are marked by transparency, understanding, and reciprocal regard. Also, Villareal et al. (2022) documented that relationships founded on trust facilitate collaborative navigation of challenges between parents and educators, especially in situations where interventions necessitate adaptability and joint problem-solving. Barten et al. (2022) subsequently found that positive relational dynamics promote increased parental participation and more substantive engagement in school-related activities. Theoretically Epstein's Framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence underscores that robust relational connections between home and school foster collaborative environments and positively impact student outcomes. Inclusive education policies, such as the UNCRPD (2006) and Republic Act No. 10533, underscore the significance of engaging families as esteemed collaborators in the development of educational strategies. In aggregate, these viewpoints affirm that trust and respect are not auxiliary elements of collaboration but are fundamental catalysts that convert the Individualized Education Program into a collective, learner-focused dedication rooted in cooperation and reciprocal accountability.

### **Theme 3: Clear and Shared Goal Setting**

Clear and shared goal setting emerged as a vital practice for strengthening teacher–parent collaboration in the IEP process. Teachers emphasized that when goals are jointly defined; integrating professional assessments with family priorities—IEP plans become more realistic, meaningful, and attainable. Participants described shared goal setting as a process that aligns developmental needs, family values, and long-term aspirations into a unified direction for intervention, fostering shared responsibility and commitment. As one teacher explained, "Goals are more attainable when both sides agree on priorities" (P5), while another noted, "Parents' dreams for their child should guide planning" (P7). Teachers also highlighted collaborative finalization of goals, stating, "We finalize goals together before implementation"

(P2), “The IEP becomes meaningful when aligned with family values” (P6), and “Shared decision-making leads to higher commitment” (P8). These accounts indicate that teachers view shared goal setting as essential for ensuring consistency, follow-through, and sustained engagement across home and school contexts.

These findings are corroborated by recent scholarly literature highlighting collaborative goal setting as a fundamental element of successful IEP implementation. Estojero (2022) determined that parents report increased empowerment and motivation to engage when their viewpoints substantially influence the development of IEP objectives, which subsequently fosters enhanced participation and more explicit expectations. Barten et al. (2022) additionally documented that parental participation in the determination of objectives augments coherence between institutional interventions and familial routines, thereby increasing the pertinence and durability of educational strategies. Means (2023) further emphasized that shared decision-making enhances parents’ dedication and confidence in supporting interventions, while Suwarni and Chamidah (2023) observed that cultural values and parental expectations markedly affect the prioritization and comprehension of objectives. In total, these perspectives indicate that explicit and collaboratively established goal setting redefines the Individualized Education Plan from a predominantly school-centric mandate into a joint strategic framework rooted in common objectives, responsibility, and dedication to the child's comprehensive growth.

## CONCLUSION

This study illustrates that successful teacher–parent collaboration within the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process is inherently relational and maintained through a series of interconnected practices that function across both school and home environments. Explicit and coherent communication, trust-dependent relationships, collaboratively established objectives, joint oversight and accountability, parental advocacy, and the persistent reinforcement of skills beyond the classroom collectively constitute the fundamental basis of substantive collaboration. When these practices are implemented, the IEP transcends its procedural function and evolves into a dynamic framework that fosters the comprehensive development of students with disabilities. Parents who function as active partners, learning facilitators, and advocates provide crucial contextual insights, reinforce learning within authentic environments, and contribute to the alignment of interventions with a child's proficiencies, requirements, and everyday experiences. Consequently, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) become more cohesive, contextually relevant, and practically executable, thereby enhancing the probability of enduring advancement.

In spite these beneficial practices, the study also identifies enduring obstacles that continue to impede collaborative endeavors. Limited parental involvement, divergent perceptions and expectations, and communication and cultural obstacles often hinder continuity and shared responsibility within the IEP process. Parental involvement can be impeded by competing obligations, a lack of familiarity with special education terminology, and culturally-based perspectives on disability. Simultaneously, educators are frequently tasked with reconciling professional judgment with parental preferences and external pressures. These challenges emphasize that collaboration is neither a straightforward nor an inevitable consequence of policy directives; rather, it constitutes a complex, negotiated process influenced by relational dynamics and contextual factors. The results corroborate that the effective execution of Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation transcends mere adherence to procedural directives and statutory mandates; instead, it is primarily contingent upon the caliber of family-school collaborations. Therefore,

fortifying these collaborative relationships is essential to actualizing inclusive, learner-centered special education that is attuned to educational objectives and individual experiences.

In view of these findings, educational institutions are advised to establish formal frameworks and procedures that facilitate ongoing collaboration between teachers and parents throughout the entire IEP process. This involves implementing culturally responsive communication strategies that clarify technical terminology, honor family values, and promote open and respectful dialogue. Shared goal-setting mechanisms should be incorporated into Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning to ensure that professional evaluations and familial priorities are synthesized into a cohesive and purposeful direction for intervention. Consistent and responsive implementation can be further enhanced through the systematic, collaborative monitoring of student progress, supported by regular communication between home and school.

Continuous professional development for educators is advised, with a specific focus on strategies for family engagement, collaborative decision-making processes, and culturally responsive communication within special education environments. Enhancing educators' proficiency in these areas bolsters their ability to address interpersonal challenges, reconcile divergent expectations, and cultivate trust-centered collaborations with families. Educational institutions can augment collaborative efforts through the implementation of parent orientation programs, coaching sessions, and structured follow-up systems. These initiatives are designed to cultivate parental capacity in reinforcing academic concepts, monitoring behavioral conduct, and facilitating the generalization of acquired skills within the home environment. At the policy and leadership levels, dedicating adequate time, resources, and administrative backing to collaborative initiatives is imperative for the perpetuation of these endeavors. Future initiatives should prioritize collaborative partnerships as a fundamental element of inclusive education. This approach ensures that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) serve as shared, dynamic frameworks that promote equity, responsiveness, and substantive engagement for students with disabilities and their families.

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