

Self-Efficacy Towards Parental Denial of the Condition of Children with Disability

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Abstract-This study examined how special education teachers' self-efficacy influenced their management of parental denial regarding children with disabilities. While teacher self-efficacy is vital for effective communication and intervention, research specifically addressing its role in navigating parental resistance remains limited. This qualitative inquiry explored the lived experiences of teachers through in-depth interviews, investigating their efforts to guide families toward acceptance. Findings revealed that high self-efficacy is critical in alleviating parental emotional stress, specifically addressing self-blame and isolation. Furthermore, the research identified a reciprocal relationship: structured parental engagement and consistent dialogue not only mitigate denial but also enhanced teachers' professional confidence. Conversely, low self-efficacy often allows parental denial to persist, delaying essential support. The study underscores the necessity of professional development focused on communication and emotional intelligence, providing a framework for educators to foster collaborative, resilient partnerships with families in the special education context.

Keywords: Special Needs Teacher, Parents, Students with Special Needs, Denial, Coping

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INTRODUCTION

Special Needs Education (SNEd) is an essential instructional design that caters to the different learning needs of children who manifest signs of disability. In the educational field, SNEd teachers function as the first level of intervention to detect early signs of disability, make initial instructional adjustments, and consult with professionals and specialists to formally assess the student's condition (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). This professional role is related to the teacher's ability to work with parents, as their cooperation is vital to achieve successful educational outcomes.

Research studies prove that successful SNEd programs depend on parental involvement, which indicates that parental involvement creates a conducive learning environment that improves the academic performance of children with disabilities (Embang, 2024). In the Philippines, the significance of parental involvement in the educational field is emphasized in the Child and Youth Welfare Code, which recognizes the role of the family as the main support mechanism in a child's life (Bartolome et al., 2020). However, a major hindrance to successful collaboration between parents and teachers is parental denial, which is characterized by the parent's refusal to accept their child's condition, driven by their fear of social discrimination and explanation fatigue, as society misunderstands their situation (Embang, 2024; Sarmiento et al., 2024). Dealing with such emotional situations is not only dependent on the teacher's effectiveness as a teacher; rather, it is dependent on teacher self-efficacy. For SNEd teachers in the Philippines, self-efficacy is a key professional attribute which differentiates their handling of emotionally charged situations such as dealing with parental denial (Malik et al., 2021). Hence, the relationship between teacher efficacy and handling parental barriers is very important to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education in the country.

This study focuses on the self-efficacy of the Special Needs Education teachers when faced with the denial of the child's disability by the parents. This research aims to find out the experiences, mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states of the SNEd teachers that affect the self-efficacy of the teachers when dealing with the parents who are in denial of the disability of the child.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Efficacy

The term "self-efficacy" as defined by Albert Bandura (1994), is an individual's beliefs about their capability to perform at a certain level that influences events that affect their lives. He explains that self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave through four major psychological processes: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. Other authors define self-efficacy is concerned with judgements of personal capability. Self-efficacy is the belief that an individual can succeed in dealing with certain situations. Self-efficacy in teaching can be interpreted as a teacher's belief in his or her ability to conduct successful teaching and learning (Cole & Feng, 2015; Lampropoulos et al., 2019).

According to Sidenko Yu. (2025) self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to organize and execute the actions needed to achieve specific goals. Emphasizing that self-efficacy impacts an individual's motivation, performance, and psychological well-being and she describes it as a dynamic construct that influences persistence, resilience, and coping strategies in challenging situations.

In a study conducted to explore the inclusive education setting, self-efficacy was found to be significantly correlated with teachers' professional development, indicating that teachers who have high self-efficacy are more proactive in developing their instructional skills (Woodcock, 2025).

A qualitative study was conducted among special education teachers, indicating that the teachers' self-perceived competence was a factor that influenced the way they handled classroom behavioral challenges, which are usually associated with disability conditions among students (Mokano, 2025). This supports the argument that self-efficacy affects teachers' judgment and ability to handle student behavior, either constructively or destructively.

Another qualitative study highlights that teachers' self-efficacy in inclusive classrooms is shaped by mastery experiences, professional collaboration, emotional regulation, and training opportunities (Sitorus et al., 2026). Teachers who perceive themselves as capable are more confident in modifying instruction and managing diverse learner needs that is why having good self-efficacy is important.

A foreign study conducted by Alharbi, H., & Iqtadar, S. (2024) the findings reveal the importance of teachers' preparation, attitude and self-efficacy to support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms; the use of differentiated instruction strategies to meet the student's needs and increase their academic outcomes; and highlight the challenges, which include the lack of professional development, lack collaboration among teachers lack of parents' communication and lack of regular IEP meeting.

Similarly, according to a study done by Petersson-Bloom (2025), which found that many teachers experience challenges to their self-efficacy when teaching the disabled, especially those with autism. This implies that self-efficacy is not only an internal belief system but also a professional competence developed through experience and exposure to inclusive learning environments.

Parental Denial

The term parental denial according to Embang, S. I. (2024), it occurs when parents refuse to acknowledge their child's disability or downplay the severity of their condition, often stemming from fear that their child will face lifelong challenges or social exclusion.

As denial is a symptom when the parent or caregiver feels burdened, the parents are physically drained and emotionally drained to the point that they "deny" the child's situation simply because they cannot muster the mental energy to deal with the lifelong consequences of a diagnosis. (Shahali, S., et al., 2024)

A study conducted by Akmeşe, P. P., & Kayhan, N. (2019), focused on relating self-efficacy on professional development and found out that special needs education (SNEd) teachers who expressed a need for in-service training had different self-efficacy belief levels compared to those who did not express this need.

Teachers are critical actors in the communication of development concerns for the child but dealing with denial from the parent can be a daunting task for the teacher, especially where the teacher has a different understanding of the child's condition. A study conducted among teachers working in special education reveal that the teacher's psychological well-being and self-efficacy are critical aspects of the teacher's ability to handle difficult situations, such as parental denial (Abaya, 2025).

Studying the acceptance of parents towards their children's disabilities indicates that teachers may be the first to raise developmental issues, and this may evoke emotional responses in parents, including denial and non-acceptance (Paz, 2023). These may pose communication barriers for teachers and may demand the use of interpersonal skills.

The study is based on the Self-Efficacy Theory of Albert Bandura (1994, 1997), which refers to the belief of an individual about his or her ability to effectively organize and implement actions necessary for dealing with potential situations.

In the field of Special Needs Education, self-efficacy of teachers becomes a crucial factor because of the involvement of the needs of the disabled students. For teachers who have a high self-efficacy, they are more adaptive, resilient, and willing to be inclusive. While parental denial has also been defined as a defense mechanism of an individual where a parent consciously or unconsciously refuses to accept the disability of the child. It is indicated that parental denial usually happens during the early stages of identification and referral of the child for a disability and can be influenced by emotional distress, stigma, cultural, lack of information, and socio-economic factors Numerous literatures highlights the concept of teacher self-efficacy and parental denial, however these two concepts are mostly studied separately. There is a lack of literature that specifically investigates the relationship between the self-efficacy of Special Needs Education teachers and how this affects the handling of parental denial, especially at the stage when the child is merely suspected of having a disability. This highlights the importance of the present study that aimed to explore the self-efficacy of Special Needs Education teachers on handling parental denial of children suspected of having a disability.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative narrative design. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research design that uses stories to describe human action, configuring events into a temporal unity with a plot. This design studies and understands the stories and lived lives of individuals. It aims to capture rich accounts from participants and understanding how it make sense of their life experiences.

The respondents of this study will be comprised of 10 public school special needs education teachers in Zamboanga City. Purposive sampling was utilized in choosing the participants as to ensure that the SNEd teachers are relevant to the study. This ensured that the respondents have relevant information for the study, the teachers must have an experience of dealing parents who were in denial of the condition of their child. Further, participants were coded as R1-R10.

In conducting this study, a semi-structured interview was employed where participants will need to answer some questions in a one-on-one in-depth interview. The interview solely focused on special needs education (SNEd) teacher's self-efficacy towards their experience in dealing parental denial of the condition of children suspected with disability.

The data collection instrument was evaluated by three different experts. The remarks and comments of the experts was taken into consideration in polishing the data collection instrument-interview guide.

Before the actual data collection, the interview guide went through a pilot testing with the help of selected teachers who had similar experience and qualities of the target respondents. The purpose of pilot testing was to check whether the questions are clear, comprehensive, sufficient for the purpose and able to generate relevant responses for the test-respondents.

The reliability of this study was also established through consistent interview procedures. The researcher utilized the same set of interview questions to all participants, that ensured the process of interview is uniform. Peer debriefing was conducted during the study to further strengthen the trustworthiness of the results.

In analyzing and examining the data gathered through interviews, thematic analysis was employed. This method was an effective approach for analyzing the varied perspectives of the respondents and developing insights into their experiences and beliefs in their own capability to handle situations.

The participants' responses were recorded and transcribed to establish familiarity with the data. Through a careful process of coding, significant statements and ideas were grouped into categories and themes that reflected the parents' primary concerns in raising children with special needs.

The analysis focused on identifying common areas of experiences and self-efficacy, as well as other emerging themes that arose from the respondents' narratives. The findings were then interpreted in consideration of existing literature and relevant studies to provide a deeper understanding of the self-efficacy of Special Needs Education (SNEd) teachers in dealing with parental denial of the condition of children suspected of having a disability.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

When asked to describe their self-efficacy, all participants defined it through the lens of their professional knowledge, communication abilities, and emotional fortitude. Most participants emphasized that self-efficacy is deeply intertwined with their understanding of their specialized role, highlighting that it requires not only teaching skills but also the ability to communicate with parents professionally and calmly.

Participants description of self-efficacy:

R1 "...enough knowledge about my role as a SPED teacher, my skills, my strengthened skills".

R7 "...my belief on my own ability to effectively support my students to grow and succeed... trusting that I can make appropriate decisions".

Similarly, one of the participants stipulated that a comprehensive definition of self-efficacy as:

R5 "Self-efficacy means having a strong belief in my capacity to perform my role as a teacher effectively, especially when faced with challenging situations. It is my inner confidence that I make sound decisions, apply appropriate strategies, and respond professionally...".

This aligns directly with Bandura's definition of self-efficacy as a belief in one's capacity to organize and execute actions, affecting emotional well-being and persistence (Bandura, A. 1994).

One of the participants gave a much deeper perspective, that self-efficacy is not about having every answer, but rather

R9 "...the quiet, internal voice that says, 'I can find a way'... trusting that I can learn and adapt along the way".

Special needs education teachers also view self-efficacy as a multidimensional capability. It encompasses a thorough understanding of the special education curriculum, the capacity to maintain composure during stressful interactions, and the emotional resilience necessary to persistently advocate for the child's progress. This aligns with Sidenko's (2025) description of self-efficacy as a dynamic construct influencing resilience and coping strategies in challenging situations.

Traditional educational views often limit teacher self-efficacy strictly to instructional delivery within the classroom. However, these findings contend that in the context of inclusive education, emotional regulation and interpersonal communication with stakeholders are equally foundational to a teacher's perceived competence.

Special needs education teachers described their self-efficacy as a combination of deep knowledge of the SPED curriculum, the ability to communicate calmly, and high emotional resilience. They rely heavily on objective evidence, such as visual portfolios and anecdotal records, as their primary source of confidence during confrontations with denying parents. Furthermore, teachers protect their self-efficacy by clearly understanding their professional boundaries, focusing on observable data rather than offering medical diagnoses.

Teachers exhibited varying perceptions of their own effectiveness, which are heavily influenced by parental reactions. However, experienced teachers have learned to establish emotional boundaries. They do not expect immediate acceptance; instead, they view subtle shifts – such as parents asking questions or actively participating – as marks of effective intervention. Furthermore, they recognize that negative reactions are often rooted in fear or stigma rather than a reflection of their teaching inability.

Participants identified distinct indicators to measure their success. One of the participants noted that effectiveness is demonstrated when parents collaborate with them. Meanwhile other participant added that progress is often related to shift of perception.

R4 "...follow my rules," "actively participate," and engage in open communication."

R5 "Small progress, like a shift from resistance to curiosity, is also an important sign of effectiveness".

Rather than expecting immediate acceptance, most participants view subtle shifts in parental behavior as marks of effective intervention. This supports the literature by Embang (2024) which established that parental denial often stems from fear of social exclusion and stigma rather than an attack on the teacher's competence.

Parental reactions significantly shape the teachers' internal emotional states. Positive reactions boost confidence, while defensive reactions prompt reflection.

R8 "...defensive reactions makes me re-assess my approach".

Teachers actively reframe the concept of "success" when dealing with denial. Effectiveness is perceived through incremental, progressive collaboration rather than instantaneous parental acceptance. By attributing defensive parental reactions to external societal factors, teachers protect their professional self-esteem.

This is supported by Embang (2024) and Law et al. (2003), who established that parental denial often stems from a fear of social exclusion, lifelong challenges, and stigma, rather than an attack on the teacher's professional competence.

Defensive and dismissive parental reactions could easily diminish a teacher's self-efficacy. Yet, the findings reveal that teachers employ psychological framing to preserve their confidence, utilizing empathy for the parent's emotional state as a tool to sustain their own efficacy

Teachers perceive their effectiveness not through immediate parental acceptance, but through small indicators of openness, such as parents asking clarifying questions or participating in suggested home routines. When faced with negative or defensive reactions, teachers utilize emotional boundaries, perceiving these reactions as a natural defense mechanism caused by fear and societal stigma rather than a reflection of their teaching competence.

The cross-case analysis reveals that teacher self-efficacy is a developmental process. All participants reported a stark contrast in their confidence levels between initial encounters and subsequent follow-up meetings where a foundational

trust has been established. Over time, self-efficacy improves through continuous professional development, peer discussions, and mentorship.

R3 "I always feel nervous at first... I became more relaxed when I did follow-ups... That is when I became more relaxed".

R8 "I feel anxious about how the parents will react... Follow-ups are easier because there is already some level of familiarity."

Two of the participants also echoed this sentiment, explaining that first encounters as,

R5 "...the most delicate stage" fraught with uncertainty, whereas follow-ups allow for higher confidence because "there is already an established context".

R6 "I am cautious because I am still building the foundational trust... follow-up meetings, I become more confident..."

Over time, self-efficacy improves through continuous professional development and collaborative networks, directly mapping to Bandura's Vicarious Experiences and Verbal Persuasion. Participants emphasized the value of peer support, specifically mentioning and also stated that self-efficacy grows.

R2 "...discussing experiences with colleagues... sharing through LAC sessions... and seeking advice from our mentors".

R5 "...not because the situations became easier but because I became better prepared to respond to them".

Furthermore, self-efficacy improves through continuous repetition and experience in dealing situations.

Respondent 7

R7 "Experience builds knowledge, skills and confidence. The more situations I handle, the more prepared I become".

To build this confidence, teachers employ specific strategies over time. Focusing on building good strategies in dealing parental denial:

R10 "a good rapport with the parents, and always utilize the observation notes,"

R9 "making anecdotal notes/logbook... and continuous feedback to parents".

Dealing with parental denial is a learned skill that evolves over time. A teacher's self-efficacy fluctuates depending on the stage of the parent-teacher relationship, growing stronger as familiarity increases and as the teacher receives validation from their professional community. This validates the findings of Akmeşe and Kayhan (2019) and Woodcock (2025), confirming that professional development and collaborative inclusive environments actively bolster teacher confidence.

This challenges the perspective that self-efficacy is an isolated, innate individualistic trait. Instead, it highlights that a teacher's belief in their capability is highly socially constructed, relying heavily on Bandura's concepts of vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion from colleagues and mentors.

The experiences of self-efficacy among SNEd teachers vary significantly over time and across different stages of parent interaction. Initial meetings are frequently characterized by high anxiety due to a lack of foundational trust. Conversely, confidence develops significantly during follow-up meetings. Teachers build this sustained confidence through active participation in continuous professional development and strong collaborative networks, such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and peer mentorship.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study establishes that the self-efficacy of Special Needs Education (SNEd) teachers, when navigating the highly emotional landscape of parental denial, is a multidimensional and dynamic construct. Rather than being an innate personality trait or strictly limited to pedagogical competence, self-efficacy in this context operates at the intersection of objective preparation, emotional regulation, and systemic professional support.

Crucially, the findings reveal that teachers do not rely solely on internal confidence to manage confronting interactions; instead, their self-efficacy is heavily anchored in Mastery Experiences driven by concrete documentation. Objective

data—such as visual portfolios, anecdotal records, and behavioral checklists—serves as both an emotional buffer and a professional boundary, allowing teachers to advocate for the child without crossing into medical diagnosis. By relying on observable evidence, teachers successfully mitigate the anxiety associated with defensive parental reactions.

Furthermore, the study highlights a vital psychological reframing utilized by SNEd educators to sustain their professional self-esteem. Teachers redefine the parameters of "success" in parent-teacher interactions, shifting the expectation from immediate parental acceptance to incremental, progressive collaboration. By understanding that parental denial stems primarily from societal stigma and fear rather than a reflection of their teaching ability, educators construct essential emotional boundaries that protect their well-being and maintain their efficacy.

Ultimately, the research posits that the capability to effectively manage parental denial is a socially constructed, developmental skill. Confidence evolves over time, transitioning from initial anxiety to relaxed assurance through continued relational familiarity with parents and robust Vicarious Experiences and Verbal Persuasion. Systemic support mechanisms, particularly Learning Action Cells (LAC), peer mentorship, and continuous professional development, are not merely supplementary but foundational to building a teacher's self-efficacy.

For inclusive education to thrive, educational institutions must recognize the emotional labor inherent in special needs advocacy. Addressing parental denial must transition from being an isolated burden placed on individual teachers to a structurally supported competency, ensuring that educators are equipped not only to teach students with diverse needs but to confidently guide their families toward acceptance and intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study provide numbers of suggestions and ideas for future research:

1. For School Administrators (DepEd Officials and Principals)

Administrators should provide SNEd teachers with standardized, uniform templates for anecdotal records, behavioral checklists, and progress portfolios to assist them in evidence-gathering. Schools should organize regular Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions explicitly focused on conflict resolution, delivering sensitive news, and managing parent-teacher communication. Administrators must foster a supportive environment where teachers are encouraged to debrief with guidance counselors or mentors following difficult encounters with highly defensive parents.

2. For Special Needs Education (SNEd) Teachers

Teachers should approach initial parent meetings with the primary goal of building trust and raising awareness, utilizing follow-up meetings to discuss concrete interventions rather than forcing immediate acceptance. When communicating, teachers should consistently rely on observable, documented behavioral data, and avoid clinical labels to prevent triggering parental defensiveness. Teachers are encouraged to actively share experiences and seek advice from veteran co-teachers to regulate emotional stress and bolster their vicarious self-efficacy.

3. For Future Researchers

Future qualitative studies should investigate the phenomenon from the parents' perspective to determine which specific teacher communication strategies were most effective in helping them transition from denial to acceptance. Similar studies should be replicated in private school settings or other geographic regions to explore how different socio-economic statuses or school cultures influence the dynamics of parental denial and teacher self-efficacy.

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