

A narrative analysis of the experiences of teachers with disabilities in the Philippines

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of International Master in Education Policies for Global Development

1 September 2022

Thesis authenticity form



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to give a general idea on the lives of public school teachers with disabilities teaching in the Greater Manila of the Philippines. More specifically, it intended to acquire a qualitative understanding of how they grew up, and how these experiences influenced not only their decision to become teachers, but their present personal and professional lives as well. As a result of a reflexive thematic narrative analysis, I highlighted several experiences from their childhood to their present lives, and discovered the profound effects of Filipino beliefs and attitudes regarding disability, and the teachers' own socio-economic conditions to their journey as teachers. Using the social-relational model of disability as a framework, this study also discussed how the external events influenced the teachers internally – particularly in the way they saw themselves. These were described as manifestations of internalized oppression, fear of failure, and constantly feeling the need to prove themselves to others – to society, to their non-disabled teachers/professors, and to their peers. On the other hand, this study also showed that the teachers were and are not simply receivers of negative judgement and discrimination, but are active decision makers. They fought their way through the system by supporting themselves in their studies, by rising up the ranks in their profession, and currently by also encouraging their students to do the same. Their personal motivation to be role models in the lives of their students (and their students' parents) is rooted in the personal understanding of what it means to be disabled in Filipino society.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks is warranted to the teachers who participated in this study, and gave me the privilege of knowing their lives. Thank you as well for the additional input you provided to make this study more relevant for other teachers with disabilities in the Philippines. To all the teachers working tirelessly to provide education to all learners, thank you.

Second, I'd like to thank Professor Helen Phtiaka for guiding me throughout this journey. Your insights, especially during the planning and analyzing stages of this thesis, were a huge help in clarifying my thoughts and concerns.

Third, to my GLOBED colleagues with whom I have shared wonderful memories these past two years, and whose friendship I will always treasure. I am especially grateful to the two special families we formed in Barcelona and in Glasgow.

Fourth, to my family, Mama, Papa, and Bryan, whose constant support has allowed me to reach where I am today. To Simon, especially, for his constant encouragement and support in all ways possible.

Lastly, a special thanks to my friends and mentors from the Philippines who also provided guidance to me during this time: Ms. Lovelaine Basillote, Mr. Chito Salazar, and Mr. Rogin Eribal.

Terms used and operational definitions

<p>Disability</p>	<p>As defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, n.d.), disability “is a result of the interaction between individuals with a health condition or physical impairment” (such as cerebral palsy, Down’s syndrome, visual, auditory, or mobility impairments) “with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support.”</p> <p>In this study, “disability” is used to show precisely the interaction of both the physical impairments of the teachers, and the social environment in which they belong/live</p>
<p>Impairment</p>	<p>Also taken from the WHO definition, impairment “is the absence of or significant difference in a person’s body structure or function, or mental functioning.”</p> <p>In this study, when referring only to the physical condition (i.e. being blind, wheelchair-bound) of the teacher, the term “impairment” is used.</p>
<p>Person/s with disability</p>	<p>In the Philippines, as well as among the teachers in this study, the preferred term is “persons with disability,” as opposed to “disabled persons.” The latter puts emphasis on the person (“person-first” language) rather than disability.</p> <p>In this study, persons with disabilities or teachers with disabilities is used when referring to the participants, as well as to the disabled community in the Philippines.</p>

List of abbreviations

DepEd	Department of Education
IE	Inclusive education
LSEN	Learners with special needs
NCDA	National Council on Disability Affairs
PWD	Person/s with disability
SPED	Special Education
SRM	Social Relational Model of Disability
TWD	Teacher/s with disability
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.2 Background and Context

Inclusion and inclusive education (IE) have been a constant feature of international discussions since the 1990s, and their definitions, as well as the use of the terms, have also evolved throughout the years. Although education as a right for all has been present in international policy statements such as the 1948 United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it wasn't until 1990, during the World Declaration for Education for All, that equal access to education for disabled persons was specifically mentioned.

In 1994, during the World Conference on Special Needs Education, it was concluded that, “regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all” (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994). In addition, the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007, which focused exclusively on rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs), including their right to education and employment, also opened new conversations on inclusivity (Foreman, 2020).

During and between these times, a number of other international and national conferences, declarations, and commitments that aimed to further define what inclusion meant and how inclusive education could be practiced emerged. As such, inclusive education has come to mean anything from the physical integration of students with disabilities in “regular classrooms,” to the transformation of entire education systems (Bjarnason, 2013).

At present, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines “inclusive education” as such:

“...all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded – not only children with disabilities, but speakers of minority languages too” (as quoted by Slee, 2020).

In the evolving definition of inclusion, many persons with disabilities and their advocates have demanded the right to fully participate in society. In education, this has come to mean moving students with disabilities in scenarios where they receive little to no education or segregated education (“special schools”) to regular classrooms, where they receive additional support, but nonetheless maximize educational and social outcomes by being exposed to non-disabled students (Foreman, 2020).

One of the core elements of inclusive education has been on teacher preparation. Most, if not all, higher education institutions now offer Special Education programs or include courses on “inclusive education” within their curricula to train future educators to teach more diverse populations (Ashby, 2012; Slee, 2020). However, greater progress in ensuring inclusive education is not just about teaching and learning methods, but about a diversified teaching force as well. Research and discussions on teacher diversity in countries tend to focus on race, gender, and ethnicity, but little on disability (Keane et al., 2018; Singal et al., 2020).

The arguments for the study of disabled teachers in discourse acknowledge that their experiences can contribute to removing negative perceptions on disability, transforming curriculum and teaching practices, and the process of building truly inclusive learning systems (Anderson, 2006; Parker & Draves, 2017; Singal et al., 2020).

1.2 Inclusion and disability in the Philippines

Among others international agreements, the Philippines is also a signatory of the UNCRPD, and it does not lack in local and national laws and policies recognizing, outlining, and implementing the rights of PWDs.¹ The National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), the government agency mandated to “formulate policies and coordinate the activities of all agencies, whether public or private, concerning disability issues and concerns” lists over 50 national and local policies covering various government offices, private businesses, and local government units (NCDA, n.d.). Despite the abundance of laws and policies pertaining to the rights of PWDs, a number of barriers and bottlenecks still hinder the full inclusion of PWDs in Philippine society. Among others, concerns about poverty and access to basic social services such as education, healthcare, and employment remain to be the biggest issues (Jaucian, 2017; Lasco et al., 2021; Sol Cruz et al., 2021).

¹ All relevant national laws which specifically mention and pertain to the education and employment of persons with disabilities are outlined in Annex A.

According to United Nations Children’s Fund Philippines (UNICEF) and other non-government organizations, there are an estimated five million children with disabilities (CWDs) in the Philippines (Hernando-Malipot, 2021; Jaucian, 2017; UNICEF, 2018). Although the Department of Education (DepEd) has made numerous steps to include CWDs in basic education, data showed that the majority are still not reached by the public education system (Coram International, 2018). Recent data from DepEd showed that only an estimated 444,000 were enrolled in previous years, and that only approximately 112,000 enrolled for the school year 2021 (Ismael, 2021; Romero, 2021).

At present, three options exist for the placement of learners with special needs (LSENs) in the Philippine basic education system (Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program, 2021):

1. Full inclusion in the general education classroom – If they are determined to be “ready” and able to cope with the required activities. All classes are taught by general education teachers.
2. Partial inclusion with resource room services – For LSENs assessed who can cope with at least 50-75% of activities. They will spend most of their time in the general education classroom, with specific periods in the “resource room” where services can include specific instructional interventions (i.e. practical skills), therapy, and academic tutorials. The special periods are led by special education (SPED) teachers.
3. Self-contained class – Managed mainly by SPED teachers, this is exclusively for LSENs diagnosed or assessed with “severe to profound disabilities.” They are non-graded, and classes are focused on basic essential skills (literacy and numeracy), self-help, daily living skills, and social and communication skills

From the above, it is quite clear that a huge chunk of the responsibility in ensuring the education of LSENs rests on the teachers. DepEd policies on IE have included guidelines for teachers, including teacher training. Despite this, many teachers still feel that they lack training in IE and SPED to fully support LSENs (Ecoben, 2019; Faragher et al., 2021). At the same time, many schools also remain underfunded, and are beset with concerns on physical infrastructure (Coram International, 2018; Muega, 2016; Sol Cruz et al., 2021). In addition,

little to no data exists on the diversity of teachers, specifically in terms of disability or ethnicity) in the Philippine education system.

1.3 Significance of the study

By doing this study, I aim to contribute to two research gaps in disability studies in the Philippines: (1) the lack (or absence) of studies on the situation of teachers with disabilities in the Philippines; and (2) the lack of studies regarding inclusive education not focusing on children with disabilities. Oftentimes, in-depth narratives/inquiries on the lives of PWDs are limited to features or articles in the media, and are mainly angled as stories of hope and triumph. This study aims to offer first-hand perspective on both the education and employment of PWDs, specifically those in the teaching profession.

1.4 Research questions and structure

This research is meant to give a general idea on the lives of teachers with disabilities teaching in the Greater Manila of the Philippines. The goals are to acquire a qualitative understanding of how they grew up, and how these experiences influenced not only their decision to become teachers, but their present personal and professional lives as well.

The main research question is: *What are the experiences of teachers with disabilities in the Philippines?*

I broke this down further into more specific sub-questions in order to aid in my data collection and analysis:

1. What were the teachers' experiences from childhood and adolescence that shaped their current lives as adults with disabilities?
2. How did their experiences when they were younger lead them into the teaching profession?
3. What were their experiences studying in the university and in applying for a job? How did these shape their current roles as teachers?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will focus on reviewing existing literature on two major topics: teachers with disabilities, and inclusion in the Philippines. Many studies have already been done within the general areas of inclusive education and disability studies in education. However, as several authors in this review have also pointed out, they have focused on special needs education, more specifically in establishing where and how children with disabilities should be educated.

In ensuring an inclusive education, the role of teachers has come to the spotlight. Much of the literature has focused on the need for additional training for teachers, starting at the preservice level, and has led to a restructuring of teacher education programs to enhance the learning and participation of all students (Barton, 2003). But little is known about teachers with disabilities, and their inclusion in the teaching workforce.

Neca, Borges and Pinto (2020) have already done systematic review of research on teachers with disabilities. Their selection criteria focused on articles published in English in international peer reviewed academic journals from 1990 to 2018. They found a total of 376 articles, but only used 53 in their final analysis. These studies focused on the main theme of teachers with disabilities. Most of the selected studies were qualitative in nature, and the main themes that dominated were: (1) teachers' life trajectories; (2) teacher training; (3) perspectives about teachers with disabilities; and (4) under-representation of teachers with disabilities in the teaching staff. Particular to this systematic review is also the prevalence of studies about teachers with learning disabilities.

Some of the research from the systematic review is also used in this chapter. However, I also sought to find more work on teachers with physical disabilities, and studies from outside the US and the UK. All of the literature in this chapter also recognized the huge role social and cultural norms play in the lives of persons with disabilities, and how these norms have affected and shaped their experiences and identities.

2.1 The case for disabled teachers

Anderson (2006) is often quoted in establishing the need for persons with disabilities (PWDs) to be included in the teaching workforce. In his essay, he noted that pedagogy, the method and practice of teaching, is shaped by life experiences. As such, teachers with disabilities (TWDs) are able to offer new and different knowledge through bodies, and embody values relevant for students such as independence, justice, and respect for differences. He also opened the discussion regarding “impairment,” and “disablement,” while ultimately focusing on disability as an effect of social practices. Specific to TWDs, he noted that their encounters with students in the classroom also allow students to question policies and practices in relation to PWDs based on their political and ethical implications. Key to his arguments is that the stories told by PWDs in pedagogical spaces offer numerous possibilities not just for the advancement of knowledge, but also towards the transformation of the learning environment as truly inclusive. Disability must be recognized as a “valuable source” of experiences, rather than “something to be accommodated.”

Meanwhile, Pritchard (2010) expressed similar sentiments in her essay, writing as a teacher with disability from Australia. She began by pointing out that issues in education equity in Australia have focused on provisions of opportunities for students, but in many cases, “minority” has not come to include persons with disabilities, noting the “appallingly low rates” of disabled students and academic staff in Australian higher education institutions. She argued that disabled teachers have “indisputable knowledge” of disability and inclusion. Although not a homogenous group (i.e. different disabilities have different needs), having faced similar experiences of discrimination, ostracization, and fear allows them to bring to light issues within social justice and social inclusion that can strengthen the value of disability knowledge and recognize exclusive practices and attitudes. Her own experience of making her voice heard, and making herself visible as a disabled woman has enabled the discussion of diversity and social and educational justice across programs and staff in her university.

She went on to discuss some policy implications and recommendations for Australian higher education. Key to this was providing support for disabled persons to pursue higher education or vocational opportunities, and even to begin a career in the teaching profession.

2.2 Growing up with an impairment

In discussing teaching experiences, some studies delved into childhood experiences. Green (2010) in her personal essay wrote of her struggles growing up as a visually impaired student at a time the school “was never entirely sure what to do with my difference.” Meanwhile in Hankebo's study (2018), deaf teachers from Ethiopia recounted that they learned sign language in primary school, but never used it again throughout high school and university. “Painful memories” was how teachers with learning disabilities in Israel described their struggles in writing during their early school days (Vogel & Sharoni, 2011).

But two common themes also emerged from these stories: (1) the presence of support systems and “champions,” and (2) the development of their coping mechanisms and strategies to be recognized.

Common to the abovementioned studies were classmates and teachers who respected their impairments, made accommodations, and assisted them in different ways. Green sought help from classmates to read to her and worked closely with her professors at university to advocate for her to the administration. The Ethiopian teachers were supported by friends who provided them additional notes.

None of the studies, however, fully delved into these previous experiences and the impact these had on the teachers’ decision to become teachers, and in their current professional lives.

2.3 Teaching with an impairment

Most of the literature found by the author and eventually included in this chapter focused on the actual experience of being a teacher with (a) disability(ies). One of the recurring themes and arguments in these studies was whether the impairment in any way negatively impacted a person’s capacity to become a teacher and perform their duties as so. This was mainly attributed to already prevailing negative attitudes and stereotypical views of disabled persons (Aldakhil, 2020; Grenier et al., 2014; Sheridan & Kotevski, 2014).

Particularly for teachers with learning impairments (i.e. dyslexia), studies most commonly explored the question of disclosing their impairments to their administrators and colleagues (Burns & Bell, 2010; Valle et al., 2004; Vogel & Sharoni, 2011). In Vogel and Sharoni, all 12 Israeli teachers with learning disabilities reported that they had only disclosed to their fellow

teachers, while five also informed their principals. But all agreed that it was not an easy thing to do. As the authors pointed out, “disclosure usually took place after the teachers felt they had proven their own worth” (p. 490).

Valle et al (2004) particularly explored the topic of disclosure and “coming out” by interviewing four teachers with learning disabilities teaching K-12 in the US. Considering schools as powerful political and social institutions, central to their discussion was how discourses of disability circulate and (most often) separate label students. Ultimately, they concluded that,

“The choice to disclose one’s learning disabled status is significantly influenced by how learning disabilities are understood and talked about—or not—by professional colleagues, students, and parents of students” (p. 15).

For teachers with physical impairments, issues of accessibility intertwined with societal attitudes and social processes. In Parker & Draves' (2017) narrative inquiry on the lives of two visually impaired pre-service music teachers, one issue highlighted was the effect of the wide belief that sight is essential for teaching. In both narratives, the teachers pointed out that their schools still relied heavily on visual evaluation methods. At the end of this study it was also discussed that both teachers had decided not to pursue teaching in their public schools due to a number of needs that their schools could not accommodate, and expectations that they each felt were unrealistic.

In a study specifically on “disableism,”² the participants of the study, disabled teachers from Saudi Arabia mainstream schools, identified the school administration itself as “exploiting” disabled students by using the funds provided by the Ministry of Education to support disabled pupils’ learning for activities of the non-disabled students (Aldakhil, 2020). According to the teachers, it was the school administrators’ belief that, “it is better to invest such resources in non-disabled pupils than to waste them on disabled pupils” (p. 543).

This insight from the Singal et al. (2020) study sums up these experiences:

² The author of this study used the following definition of disableism: “Different forms of barriers, discrimination and oppression that disabled people encounter in their daily lives” (p. 536).

“Teachers spoke about how the responsibility for adjusting to a disability was placed on them as an individual rather than focusing on barriers in the workplace. Our teachers reported the need to continually reiterate their needs and advocate for their own reasonable adjustments... Also evident was a clear lack of understanding among non-disabled colleagues, especially senior management, about their experiences and struggles” (p. 17).

Some studies also showed the unfortunate reality of material conditions in certain classrooms. For example in Hankebo (2018), deaf teachers in Ethiopia faced the issue of teaching large classes, which gravely affected their communication and interaction in the classroom. According to the study, the lack of resources, facilities, and technologies were further exacerbated by the inadequate support and incentives the teachers received from the school. This “made deaf teachers demotivated and develop negative feelings toward inclusive education” (p. 487).

2.3.1 Inputs from students and administrators

Despite a number of challenges, however, a number of studies also showed the positive outlook towards disabled teachers within their schools, especially by their students. Teachers generally received positive feedback and considered excellent teachers, despite their impairment (Lamichhane, 2016; Singal et al., 2020).

Lamichhane’s study (2018) of teachers with visual impairments teaching at mainstream schools in Nepal revealed a number of more positive characteristics compared to their non-disabled peers. The student survey data showed that they perceived teachers to be better at explaining subject matters, and motivating students, among others. Students also stated that their teachers with visual impairment “care for and respect them more” (p. 22).

In the same study, interviews with the principals of these teachers also revealed that the administrators were generally happy and satisfied with the performance and involvement of the visually impaired teachers in their schools. The teachers were also found to make “extra effort” to provide students with accurate information. Within these school communities, cooperation between the visually impaired and non-visually impaired teachers was evident.

Sheridan & Kotevski's study (2014) also reported positive feedback from students. Different from most research included in this chapter, this study examined the learning experiences of university students who were tutored by a teacher with quadriplegia mixed-type cerebral

palsy, through an analysis of handwritten student evaluations, and online evaluation surveys. It was inspired by Pritchard's essay arguing that disabled teachers can deliver both content and "other" learnings for students. Sheridan and Kotevski particularly highlighted the students' realization and transformation in thinking after an entire semester with the tutor that "disability does not automatically equate to a reduced capacity to complete tasks or work objectives" (p. 1170). On the contrary, their tutor constantly exceeded their expectations, and they felt that having a disabled mentor actually motivated and inspired them to want to achieve more.

2.4 Disability studies in the Philippines

In an exploratory study, Nasir et al. (2019) found that disability research is "progressively developing" in the country, based on the input of their three informants. Two of the participants agreed that the work of advocacy groups as well as academic institutions have contributed to the heightened interest. At the same time, the study lamented the fact that access to information about disabled persons, and access to research regarding disabled persons remains limited. But since the study was exploratory, the research did not go too much beyond the responses of the three key informants.

In 2019, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) released the National Disability Prevalence Survey, also called the Model Functioning Survey (NDPS/MFS 2016). It was the first and, so far, the only nationwide disability survey "aimed at providing information on the different dimensions of disability." The study also used the ICF definition of disability which recognizes disability as an "outcome of the interaction between a person's health-related status and the physical, human-built, attitudinal and socio-political environment in which the person lives" (PSA, p. 1).

Based on the survey, the prevalence of severe disability³ in the Philippines among 15 years and older is 12%; moderate disability at 47%; mild disability at 22%; and no disability at 19%. It also found that approximately 25% of those with severe disability find it "very problematic" to receive an education, and about 34% of the same group experience

³ The survey, adapted from WHO's Model Disability Questionnaire, defined a person with severe disability as "one who experiences extreme difficulty in at least one of the eight functioning domains (mobility, self-care, pain, cognition, interpersonal relationships, vision, sleep and energy, affect), and has at least one of the five chronic conditions (arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, asthma or respiratory disease, and depression or anxiety)."

difficulties both in applying for and getting a job. In terms of attitudes of others towards them, persons who have severe disability regarded the aspect of “getting involved in society due to attitudes of people around him/her” as most problematic. The survey also noted a pattern that the higher the level of the respondents’ perceived level of disability, the lower level of confidence they have with regards their future.

The NDPS/MFS 2016 was a general population survey that covered almost 11,000 households, and more than 10,000 individuals aged 15 and over in the Philippines. These numbers were deemed sufficient by the PSA to provide reliable data at the national level. In order to determine level of disability, respondents were asked to place themselves in a continuum ranging from zero to 100, and then classified them into four categories: no disability, mild disability, moderate disability, and severe disability

Meanwhile in 2021, The Asia Foundation (TAF) released its Philippine Disability Sector Research. The study sought to give an overview of the sector through an analysis of various factors such as the extent to which PWDs’ rights are being met, the existing barriers that prevent them from experiencing full inclusion and accessibility, as well as the roles of various stakeholders (government, NGOs, disability and civil society groups) on these matters (Sol Cruz et al., 2021).

In the area of education, the study outlined various initiatives by the national government to provide for children with disabilities. In-service teacher training programs have been implemented to discuss inclusive education. Meanwhile, pre-service training also requires teacher education students to take a foundational three-unit course on “Special and Inclusive Education” as part of their coursework. However, the study also found that in-service teachers still need improving in their capacity to teach diverse learners within inclusive classrooms. At the same time, in the Philippines, segregated classes still host a majority of children with disabilities, even though the UNCRPD promotes disability inclusion as a main approach for teaching and learning. Bullying and discrimination were also found to be rampant among children with disabilities, and is one reason they drop out of school.

The study was qualitative, making use of interviews and focus group discussions from representatives of key government agencies, NGOs, and disability groups. In total, the inputs of 58 unique participants were included in the study.

Another study which aimed to give a wider perspective on PWDs was Tacadao & De Luna (2016) from the Institute of Labor Studies. Their study attempted to create a profile of PWDs from three select regions in the Philippines with the highest number of recorded PWDs based on the 2010 census. The results showed that most PWDs who were surveyed were either self-employed or employed in the informal economy. The leading occupations included health care professionals (e.g. masseurs), elementary occupations (e.g. manufacturing/factory laborers, cleaners, household helpers), and office clerks. Having a “good educational background” and/or “high quality skills” were critical factors in gaining stable employment (p. 28). From the survey of 150 individuals, approximately 25% completed tertiary level education, while 29% completed high school. About 6% underwent technical-vocational training, while the remaining quarter stopped education at various levels.

2.4.1 Inclusive education in the Philippines

Studies regarding disability within the context of IE have focused on children/students, and the practice of inclusive education in the classroom, while also acknowledging that “very little is known about the practice of inclusive education in the Philippines” (Muega, 2016, p. 6).

In her Master’s thesis, Domingo (2020) sought to determine factors which affect the implementation of IE in the country. She concluded that five factors have a positive relationship to implementation – policy, resources, beliefs and attitudes, community support, and implementation structure. The data implied that survey respondents generally agreed that these five factors are present in their schools. However, the study also noted that “beliefs and attitude” obtained the lowest mean, potentially because of disagreement of the respondents that all children should be taught in a regular classroom (Domingo, 2020, p. 76). Among others, respondents’ answers to the open-ended questions revealed that both teachers and parents could still benefit from a deeper understanding of inclusive education.

Another important finding in this thesis is the indication that as poverty level and school population increased, the number of children with special needs in the classroom decreased. The research posited that this “may be attributed to the inability of families to send their children to school because of the cost of education” (Domingo, 2020, p. 52). She also noted

that due to the large class sizes, schools are unable to or are having difficulty implementing IE.

Domingo's thesis was a survey research design, where she gathered both quantitative and qualitative data using closed and open-ended questions. She analyzed her data using descriptive statistics and open coding. 200 school heads and teachers from schools with special education centers in the National Capital Region answered the survey.

Meanwhile, a smaller sample of 91 parents, teachers, and school administrators allowed Muega (2016) to find out the knowledge and involvement of stakeholders on the implementation of inclusive education to children with special needs in private schools in Quezon City, Metro Manila. The study revealed that participants have an awareness of IE (e.g. they could distinguish what "non-inclusive" settings are), but also expressed doubts in their conceptions and practice of it (particularly teachers and school administrators). Participants also agreed that the implementation of inclusive education must be a collaborative effort of the school community because of their concerns to the outcomes of the training and education of CSN.

2.5 Methodologies and research methods

Different types of studies require different types of methodologies. In explaining and understanding experiences of disabled teachers, the studies included in this chapter are qualitative in nature, with small sample sizes of less than 10 (Aldakhil, 2020; Burns & Bell, 2010; Grenier et al., 2014; Hankebo, 2018; Parker & Draves, 2017; Valle et al., 2004). Vogel and Sharoni (2011) were an exemption who had 12 participants. All of them used semi-structured interviews, some specifically through narratives, to draw data from. In order to support data from interviews, some studies (Grenier et al., 2014; Parker & Draves, 2017) also used additional field texts such as journals, and formal and informal communications (i.e. phone calls and e-mails), and classroom observation (Hankebo, 2018). Thematic analysis was used in most of these studies, combining elements of narrative inquiry, and critical discourse.

Meanwhile, the quantitative studies were more exploratory (rather than explanatory), and included larger samples. Particular to the Philippines, these were the studies that attempted to give a general overview of the situation of specific groups of PWDs or CSNs in the country (Domingo, 2020; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019; Sol Cruz et al., 2021; Tacadao & De

Luna, 2016). They relied on survey questionnaires distributed through purposive sampling to obtain data.

Two of the studies included in the chapter used a mixed methods approach for data triangulation. These studies explored students' reactions to teachers with disabilities through close-ended survey evaluations (Lamichhane, 2016; Sheridan & Kotevski, 2014), complemented by separate interviews and open-ended evaluation questions.

Lastly, the selection of studies also included personal essays where the authors argued for the presence of disabled teachers in the education system (Anderson, 2006), but also reflecting on their own experiences as a disabled teacher (Pritchard, 2010).

2.6 Summary and conclusion

All the authors in the first part of this review agreed on the value of including the voices of disabled teachers in academic research. As the definitions of “inclusion” and “inclusive education” constantly evolve, disability studies in education has also aimed to expand its scope, to include not just the learners, but other members of the school community as well. Without a doubt, teachers, particularly, disabled teachers, are an important part of this community.

The literature included in the first part has also opened up a number of conversations regarding disabled teachers. More than anything, key to understanding their situations are the social and material conditions which have shaped their lives. It can even be argued that what has had the biggest impact in shaping their identities are the opinions and beliefs of society (which could include those people close to them, and the wider society) about what they can do. “Stereotyping” was a common conversation in these studies, particularly the negative connotations towards persons with disabilities. Because of this, the disabled teachers included in the studies have often felt the need to “go beyond” expectations and perform “better” than their non-disabled counterparts to prove that they can do the job. Whether it be family members, colleagues and classmates, or their own students, it was also emphasized in these studies that the presence of support systems and advocates were essential in the success and motivation of the teachers.

Meanwhile in the Philippines, much of the focus remains to be on children with special needs, and the debates have centered around how they should be educated. That very few classrooms are inclusive, and Special Education classes still exist in the elementary level puts into question the level of inclusivity the country has achieved in education.

But similar to the other studies in this chapter, disability research in the Philippines has also brought to the spotlight two major issues: (1) the presence of policies vs their actual implementation; and (2) the material realities which affect the implementation of inclusion in the country. Like in many other countries, the Philippines is not short on laws and policies that guarantee inclusion. However, for many reasons such as a lack of budget, a lack of planning, or even the general disregard for disability issues, much is wanting in their implementation.

The Philippines is also ripe for research providing more organized data about disabled persons – specific to this research, in education. But as already emphasized by international studies, it is also worth looking into the lives of disabled teachers here. They can provide insight not only about the education of children with special needs, but also about labor conditions in schools. Looking at the trajectory of adults in education can also show how disability ideas have evolved in schools, and how systems can be further improved to improve both the education and the employment of persons with disabilities.

To quote Ballard (2020),

“...inclusion is not, and never been just about 'place,' achieving a presence in existing classrooms. Its origins and ongoing challenge involve the politics of identity and difference, a struggle over fundamental beliefs about disability and about education” (p. 173).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will discuss the Social-Relational Model of Disability (SRM) that will be used for this study. In the first part I give a brief overview of the two models from which SRM evolved. In the next, I define the SRM, and provide justification as to why this was the most appropriate framework to use for this study.

4.1 Two models of disability

There are two known “opposing views of disability” that have emerged over the years.

The Medical Model deems disability as a biological or physiological limitation, emphasizing individual deficit and treatment (Mallett & Runswick-Cole, 2018). It focuses on what is externally (or internally) lacking in an individual, and therefore requiring individual medical attention in order to improve the individual’s quality of life. As such, responsibility was placed on doctors to determine who were considered not abled. In education, the medical classification of children has been the policy norm perhaps as early as the 18th century (Triano, 2000), and has developed throughout the years, paving the way for segregated schools or segregated programs within schools. A major critique of the medical model is precisely its focus on the individual, and disregarding any other factors that may contribute to an individual’s supposed poor quality of life (such as poverty or discrimination). In the same manner, it attributes the educational problems experienced by children solely to their disability, and not any potential issues with the education system itself (Triano, 2000).

In the wake of civil rights movements both in the UK and the US, as well as the growing criticisms of the medical model, because of its limited and individualistic view of disability, the Social Model of Disability was developed. Social modelists sought to “break” the link between disability and impairment, whereby the former is constructed and reproduced by society (Parker and Draves, 2017). It recognizes that people are disabled because of “discrimination and prejudice [by society], not by their impairments” (Riddick, 2001). Further, the social model recognizes that the conversation about disability provides an opportunity to question the nature of our existing society – “why and how a society excludes particular individuals or groups” – and the kind we hope or desire for (Barton, 2003).

The social model has successfully challenged discrimination and marginalization of PWDs, and has been considered powerful in terms of producing social and political changes (“Routledge Handbook of Adapted Physical Education,” 2020). However, a number of critiques have also arisen regarding the model, a major one being its extreme position of disregarding the variety of “embodied experiences (ibid).

In summary, the critiques of both models are quite similar:

“Both the medical model and the social model seek to explain disability universally, and end up creating totalizing meta-historical narratives that exclude important dimensions of disabled people's lives and of their knowledge.” (Shakespeare, 2002, as quoted by Thomas, 2004, p. 26)

4.2 Defining the Social Relational Model

According to Thomas (2004), a social relational perspective “predated and inspired the social model” (p. 28). This involved an understanding of disability both as a quality and product of social relationships “between those socially constructed as problematically different because of a significant bodily and/or cognitive variation from the norm and those who meet the cultural criteria of embodied normality” (ibid., p. 28). Thomas also argued that in this perspective, disability is still considered social in origin, however, unlike the social model, the SRM does not categorically deny the restrictions of activity that arise directly from the impairments.

As another author has summarized it, the SRM recognizes that “disability is a contingent phenomenon imposed on the individual by social hindrances and restrictions on top of the social effects impairment may bring about for the individual” (Reindal, 2008, p. 144). Such hindrances and restrictions are what result in discrimination and oppression against disabled people. Similar to sexism and racism, these behaviors and actions have come to be known as “disablism” (Hankebo, 2018; Reeve, 2004; Thomas, 2004).

At the same time, SRM sees disability operating from both the public and personal levels, and affects not just what people can do, but who they can *be* (Reeve, 2004). For this study, I will be using Thomas’ “extended” definition of SRM, in which she discusses two dimensions of disability and disablism: structural and psycho-emotional.

The structural dimension involves “barriers to doing” (Hankebo, 2018, p. 537), and is one of the more commonly researched and discussed areas in disability studies. Structural barriers are often evident at the public level and operate on the “outside.” These can include physical barriers such as in inaccessible buildings (i.e. lack of ramps for wheelchair-users or absence of braille messages and signages for the visually impaired), or attitudinal problems such as the hesitation of school administrators to hire teachers with disabilities, as mentioned in Lamichhane (2016), Parker and Draves (2017), and Singal, Ware and Groce (2020).

On the other hand, the psycho-emotional dimension involves “barriers to being” (Hankebo, 2018, p. 537), and operates more on the internal level. Thomas (2004) argued that the oppression disabled people experience affects their sense of value and worth, and as such, must be paid as much attention to. The psycho-emotional dimension of disability looks into to the “inner world” of disabled people – how they view their mind and body, and how they act and interact with the world, and can be as “damaging and disabling” as structural barriers (Hankebo, 2018; Reeve, 2004; Thomas, 2004).

Both structural and psycho-emotional dimensions operate hand-in-hand. The physical or external exclusion of disabled people from spaces and job opportunities can leave them feeling “unwanted.” Their negative dealings with others, which can include family, friends, colleagues and the wider society, also contributes to psycho-emotional disability. Negative judgements, being questioned about their abilities, or even being stared at (particularly for the physically impaired) are all “acts of invalidation,” which contribute to emotional distress (“Routledge Handbook of Adapted Physical Education,” 2020). Finally, there is “internalized oppression,” the disabled person’s relationship with oneself, which is a result of the internalization of the prejudices they experience (Reeve, 2004). As Haegele, Hodge and Shapiro (2020) pointed out,

“Disabled people can devalue disability, lower self-worth and intrinsic value as a consequence of living in a culture that relentlessly views disability as negative. For example, internalizing ableist norms can be seen in behaviors such as disabled people positioning themselves in hierarchies relative to other disabled people (dispersal), hiding impairment to avoid negative reactions of others (emulation), or overachieving in order to prove they are better than “normal” (supercrip stereotype).” (p. 54)

4.3 Analysis using SRM

For this study I have found the Social Relational model most appropriate as a framework for analysis. My study focuses on the social aspects of disability, and through the narratives, find out how society has impacted the lives of teachers with disabilities. I found the SRM to be more encompassing compared to the Social Model primarily because of the attention given to the psycho-emotional dimension, the internal effects of how society has viewed and acted towards persons with disabilities.

Chapter 4: Methodology

By way of review, my main research question for this study, and its sub-questions are: *What are the experiences of teachers with disabilities in the Philippines?*

1. What were their experiences from childhood and adolescence that shaped their current lives as adults with disabilities?
2. How did their experiences when they were younger lead them into the teaching profession?
3. What were their experiences studying in the university and in applying for a job? How did these shape their current roles as teachers?

It was my intention to go beyond the surface and dig deeper, wanting to know about different stages of these teachers' lives, and how these moments, put together, contributed to their decision making and identity shaping. These experiences are deeply personal, and I believe should not be separated from the contexts in which they are part. Each person's reality is shaped by their environment – the social, cultural, sometimes, even political contexts in which they belong (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Similarly, in choosing to use the Social Relational Model of Disability as an overarching framework for this study, I acknowledged that disability is a result of a complex set of actions and beliefs within the context of the society, and not simply the individual.

This is not to say, however, that the individual has no active role in the construction of their reality. On the contrary, I also believe that as individuals continue to live in and interact within their contexts, they are also actively shaping their realities; an ongoing process which is continuously negotiated (Bryman, 2012). As the literature has suggested, there are commonalities in what persons with disabilities experience. However, their situations, and the ways in which they navigated their circumstances could be vastly different.

It is based on these considerations that I decided to do a qualitative study, through narrative inquiry. As Creswell (2012) suggested, qualitative research is meant to explore a problem (that there has been no research done on teachers with disabilities in the Philippines), and develop a detailed understanding of a topic (what the lives of teachers with disabilities in the

Philippines look like). I add as well that doing qualitative research is most suitable to capture the potential complexity and richness of the teachers' lives and experiences.

In this chapter, I will discuss my personal circumstances which led me to this research, the use of narrative inquiry as a method of study and analysis, the interview process to gather the data, and my analytical process to come up with the findings and discussion.

4.1 Positionality

As defined by Holmes (2020), "positionality both describes an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context" (p. 1).

I have already discussed above my assumptions about the nature of my study, and how these led me to decide on my methodology. Now I will briefly discuss my individual view in relation to the topic of disability, and my chosen participants, teachers with disabilities.

On the role of "insider" or "outsider," I use a pluralistic lens to say that in certain aspects, I am both. As Holmes (2020) suggested, it is rarely a case of belonging to one or the other, but "that of the researcher residing in several positions" (p. 7).

I am not a teacher (in that I received formal training to be one), nor a PWD. I also have no experience within the public school system per se, but I was made aware of its various issues (including the issues of teachers) thanks to my previous jobs and years of volunteer work. My knowledge of the disability situation in the Philippines is also limited, save for one class in university where I researched and reported on the deaf community in the country. This was also where I first encountered the discussion about "person with disability" and "disabled person," where the PWD Filipino community preferred the former (and in this study, I found out they still do). It is important for them to be recognized as humans first; and being disabled second. This is why I have also decided to use "person" or "teacher with disability" throughout when referring to my interviewees, instead of "disabled person" or "teacher," which is more commonly used in Western contexts.

As I began preparing the proposal for this study, I realized I was coming from a biased perspective on the poor quality of the public school system in the Philippines, and particularly about the issues surrounding the hiring of teachers. Having focused on advocacies and

policies related to the teacher development pipeline (i.e. teacher education, professional training, hiring) in my previous job right before this Master's, I knew quite a lot from different standpoints. But at the same time, I knew that I needed to be careful about these biases making themselves apparent throughout the course of my research. That is why I have chosen semi-structured interviews, only following-up with questions based on what my participants said, rather than what I already (or think) I know. I have also endeavored for my coding process to be based on the literature as much as possible.

Ultimately, however, my interpretations and analyses of my participants' narratives are not (and could not be) totally devoid of the values and beliefs about the nature of research and reality I have already outlined above.

4.2 Research method

Narrative inquiry is the study and understanding of experiences through stories. As a way of knowing, the narrative, the particular way the stories are retold, will allow me "to attend to the personal, the specific, and the particular" (Kramp, 2004, p. 108) to interpret the experiences and events of the "storytellers." Using the narrative as a mode of inquiry is both a process and a product, thus, it serves as a means for data gathering, and discourse formation (ibid. p. 105). As evidenced from the literature, the use of narrative inquiry in the field of education has produced significant studies on the lives of teachers and of the teaching profession.

By looking at disability through the stories of my participants, my intention was to better understand and to share how society and social processes affected the interactions and experiences of persons with disabilities in the teaching profession, both externally (structural dimension), and internally (psycho-emotional dimension). By eliciting information about their past, present, and future, I sought to give them the opportunity to re-tell their experiences.

Barton (2003) emphasized the "fundamental importance of the voices of disabled people," (p. 3) especially in the recognition that disability as a social construction has meant different things in different historical periods and reflect particular socio-economic and cultural interactions. Further, he noted that in seeking to understand the voices of disabled people, it

is necessary to “[understand] the contexts in which they are expressed, the content of these voices and the purposes of such expressions” (p. 4).

4.3 Data gathering

4.3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were seven female teachers with physical impairments, teaching in public schools in the Greater Manila Area of the Philippines.

I decided to control specific variables, namely: (1) type of impairment, (2) sex, (3) location, and (4) type of school to allow for a more “homogenous sample” (Creswell, 2012). This was not, in any way, meant to undermine or disregard the experiences of potential participants outside of these parameters. Rather, due to the limitations of this study, and my own, I intended to focus my questions, interpretations, and analyses from limited lenses. The location of the study was chosen out of convenience as well – it was where I had more contacts, and where I could use Filipino to comfortably conduct interviews (as opposed to other languages in the country, which I did not know). At the same time, by interviewing only public school teachers, I was also able to look into how the unified policies of the Department of Education affected the teachers.

I used a convenient sampling method to gather my participants. I first reached out to my existing network of teachers in order to begin my search. I initially targeted 10 participants from a smaller area within the capital. However, when I was reaching a lower number of individuals than I intended, I expanded my search area which also increased my potential interviewees. Since all my interviews were in-depth, lasting for approximately two hours each, my supervisor and I agreed that seven, instead of 10, was enough.

I acknowledge that this sample is not necessarily representative and there are inherent biases in relation to the sample being self-selecting. However, it is typical in qualitative research to only study a few individuals. At the same time, given the limited research about teachers with disabilities in the Philippines, this research can still offer new findings of those marginalized in the education system, and in general academic research (Singal et al., 2020).

The profiles of my participants are summarized in Table 1 below. Some of the participants have chosen to use their actual nickname for this study.

<i>Participant name</i>	<i>Type of impairment</i>	<i>No. of years teaching in the public school</i>	<i>Grade level/s taught</i>	<i>Type of school</i>	<i>Subject/s taught</i>	<i>Qualification</i>
<i>Irene*</i>	Visual	6 years	Elementary	Regular public	Special Education: self-contained ⁴	Bachelor in Secondary Education, Major in Biological Science Master's in Education in Special Education
<i>Jen</i>	Visual	5 years	Elementary	Regular public	Special Education: self-contained and mainstream	Bachelor of Science in Business Administration Certificate in Teaching Program ⁵ Ongoing: Master's in Education in Special Education
<i>Carla</i>	Mobility	9 years	Elementary	Regular public	Special Education: self-contained and mainstream	Bachelor of Education, Major in Special Education Master's in Education in Special Education
<i>Leah</i>	Mobility	16 years	Senior High School (Grades 11 and 12)	Special public school for orthopedically challenged	English and Social Sciences	Bachelor in Secondary Education, Major in English Master's in Education in Special Education

⁴ Refer back to Introduction (p. 10) for the structures SPED programs in the Philippine public school system.

⁵ The Certificate in Teaching Program (CTP) is a special course offered by a number of universities for non-Education degree holders who want to become professional teachers. The programs offer a minimum of 18 units in Education, the minimum required to take the Board Licensure Exam for Teachers (BLEPT). In the Philippines, all applicants for public school teachers must be BLEPT passers.

<i>Lara*</i>	Visual	7 years	Elementary	Regular public	Special Education: self-contained (particularly visually impaired)	Bachelor in Secondary Education, Major in English Ongoing: Master's in Education in Special Education
<i>Bella*</i>	Visual	4 years	Junior High School (Grades 7 and 8)	Regular public	English and Values Education	Bachelor of Arts, Major in English Certificate in Teaching Program Master of Arts in Education, Major in English Studies and Instruction
<i>Naide</i>	Visual	4 years	Elementary	Regular public	Special Education: self-contained and mainstream	Bachelor of Education, Major in Special Education Ongoing: Master's in Education in Special Education

Table 1. Demographics of research participants.

*As per their preference, these participants' names have been changed.

4.3.2 Ethics and interview process

Before proceeding with the actual interview, I organized initial calls with each of my participants to explain the purpose of my study. I had also sent them an e-mail prior, so that we could discuss any potential questions or concerns they had during the call. Most of them had no questions, and those that had concerns only requested that they be given a list of questions prior to the interview. After explaining further the nature of the study which would rely on their storytelling through a semi-structured interview, they agreed to receive themes instead of specific questions. Once the participants gave a verbal consent to be part of the study, we agreed on a schedule for the interview. Prior to our scheduled date, I sent the themes that would be discussed, as well as an informed consent form. The participants could either sign and send the form before the interview, or I would discuss it with them on the day. The consent form (Annex B) emphasized, among others, the voluntary nature of the study, the guarantee of anonymity should they choose, and the confidentiality of their personal data. It was also expressly stated that the interview would be recorded for analytical purposes. Two of the visually impaired participants gave their verbal consent on the day of the interview, while the rest submitted digitally signed forms beforehand.

All of the interviews were done online, via Zoom. Due to the travel restrictions still in place throughout the Philippines at the time of data collection, virtual interviews were the best and most practical way to gather my data. They were conducted between October to December 2021. As previously mentioned, all the interviews lasted for approximately two hours, and were recorded through Zoom's internal recording function.

The interviews were semi-structured, and based on the literature and my research questions, covered the following themes:

- experiences growing up and general struggles with impairment;
- influences to becoming a teacher and decision to become a teacher;
- experiences in teacher education and training;
- experiences in teacher application and as a current teacher;
- formation of one's identity as a teacher; and
- perceptions of inclusivity and inclusive education in the Philippines.

I also asked my questions in this order, to get a better sense of their narratives, from childhood to adulthood. I started off with a general question, and proceeded to let them share their experiences. I noticed that some participants needed more prodding, so I tended to ask more follow-up questions so as to get the full gist of their stories.

4.4 Data analysis

4.4.1 Transcription

All the interviews were transcribed using nVivo 12 for Mac, with free access granted from the University of Glasgow. I began my transcription after completing the first three interviews. This allowed me to check and reflect on the quality of the interviews, and at the same time, prepare better for my succeeding ones. Some of the interviews were also scheduled weeks apart, thus it was actually practical to begin transcriptions during this time.

I used the opportunity while transcribing to start familiarizing myself with the data, and throughout the process already noticed the similarities and differences in how my participants answered the interview questions. The process of transcribing also helped me reflect on my own positionality in the research, which I discussed previously.

As emphasized in a narrative inquiry methodology, collaboration is necessary between researcher and participant (Creswell, 2012). Once I had finished the transcripts towards the end of December 2021, I sent both the transcript and the recording to the participant for review. Once I had gotten all their approvals, I began coding.

4.4.2 Coding and analysis

I also used nVivo for the coding process. Following other qualitative studies on the lives of disabled teachers (Grenier et al., 2014; Parker & Draves, 2017; Valle et al., 2004; Vogel & Sharoni, 2011), I went through each transcript individually first (a “vertical analysis”). After going through the data individually, I proceeded to do a “horizontal analysis” (Flores & Day, 2006), where I compared the interviews to one another to look for patterns and differences.

In this phase, I also reviewed all my codes and decided how to best organize them.

Reflexive thematic analysis was used, and focused on what the narratives communicated.

I watched out for who was involved in each of the experiences that they shared, and instances when it was not their physical impairment per se that caused something (and vice versa, if it was what hindered something from happening), but rather because of another impediment outside of them. Some of the questions I had asked myself during this process were: *What were the ways in which structures of inequality and power (in aspects such as gender or social class) made themselves apparent in these narratives? How did these structures insinuate themselves in the consciousness of my interviewees, shaping their experiences?* My interviews were also structured in a chronological sense, so as I went through them again, the concept of time and how things happened over time, within their particular contexts, was of particular importance for my analysis.

Throughout the coding process, I made notes using Microsoft OneNote. A portion of these notes were included as Annex C to show my thought process, as well as some realizations I had while coding. They also show the initial ideas for themes that would be further developed later on.

As Riessman (2008) pointed out, “in a narrative study, particularities and context come to the fore” (Ch. 1), and “the reading process always involves viewing the text through a perspective that is continually on the move” (Ch. 5). As I read and re-read my transcripts, I was aware that I could employ different ways of reading the data. First, as a researcher viewing the narratives from an “objective” point of view. Second, as an individual who has experience working within the administrative side education system in the Philippines, but at the same time a non-disabled person and has never taught in the public school system.

To ensure the reliability of my analysis, I kept coming back to the full transcripts, to the available literature, and to my theoretical framework. I also provided my interviewees the first draft of the results and discussion sections, to give them the chance to make any clarifications or comments regarding how they were portrayed.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter details the research findings, presented in three major themes: (1) the socio-economic dimensions of disability; (2) the influence of “others” in the teachers lives; and (3) on becoming and being a teacher with disability. Included within each theme are select experiences from their interviews. The purpose of this is to be able to answer how aspects of the teachers’ pasts have shaped them; and give a general picture of their present lives.

5.1 Theme 1: Socio-economic dimensions of disability

The first dominant theme from the teachers’ early years were their family’s economic situation. All of the teachers noted during their interviews that they did not grow up in “well to-do” families (sizes varying from having one sibling to as many as nine), with most of them having only their fathers who worked full-time.

Some of them were not fully aware of the extent of their impairments until their adolescent (Irene, Carla) or even adult years (Lara, Naide) because their families could not take them to see doctors when they were younger.

But the biggest influence that their families’ financial situations had was on their education. Most participants had known early on that if they wanted a chance at completing their studies, they needed to seek external support such as scholarships and jobs. For Jen and Lara, in particular, priority was given to their non-impaired siblings who could financially support the family after studying. But not being able to graduate was simply not an option for any of the teachers. “*Pangarap ko talagang makapagtapos*” [It was my dream to graduate [from university]] was a statement almost all of them had emphasized during the interview.

In the next two sub-sections, I outline some experiences of the teachers during their high school and university years.⁶

⁶ During the years the teachers were in school, the Philippine schooling system was structured as follows: Six years of basic education (Grades 1-6), and four years of high school (Years 1-4). Since 2012, the country has been using the K-12 system: Basic education from Kinder to Grade 6, Junior High School from Grades 7-10, and Senior High School from Grades 11-12.

5.1.1 Entering and completing high school

Most of the teachers received (mostly private) scholarships to continue high school, because otherwise, they would not have been able to continue.

Lara obtained a scholarship to study high school, and lived in a dormitory run by nuns of a Catholic order. Carla moved to a special government school for orthopedically challenged children, and was also granted free stay in a dormitory run by a non-government organization. Leah had completed her high school in the same special school, but her journey took almost 10 years, after a painful bullying incident (one among many other reasons) which stopped her schooling for eight years. She and Naide also both decided to work as household helpers so they could finish.

“Ako ay naging kasambahay nung high school. Kasi nga hindi naman ganun ka-ano sina mama. Mahirap lang talaga yung buhay. So ako nagpursigi talaga ako makatapos ng pag-aaral.”

[I became a household helper in high school because we were not too well off. Life was hard. So I worked hard to complete my studies.] -Naide

5.1.2 Entering and completing university

After high school, the next challenge was university. Jen and Bella had both lost their mothers due to illness just as they were beginning their university years, and it was put into question whether they could afford to go at all. Lara’s and Jen’s families had also prioritized the education of the abled children who would be able to support the family after graduation. All of the teachers understood that it was up to them to find their own means to be able to continue their studies.

Jen joined a singing contest organized by a government agency (which her family did not know about until she won), and obtained a partial scholarship.

“Yung contest na yun, sabi ng SPED teacher ko, ‘mommy medyo concentrated ka dun sa anak mong pangalawa, kaya nagtry lang naman si Jen, nakiusap sa amin na baka sakaling manalo. Kasi gusto daw talaga niyang mag-aral.’ Mas priority nila yung kapatid ko, kasi yun nga yung maaasahan.”

[The teacher told my mom later on, ‘Mommy, because you’ve been quite concentrated on your second child, Jen asked us if we could help her join this contest

and possibly win. She told us she really wants to continue her studies.’ At the time, my parents’ priority was my brother because he could be relied on [financially].]

Carla was sponsored by the same organization that gave her the privilege of studying in the United States for two years in high school. But both she and Jen received additional financial support from other groups to cover for living expenses. Meanwhile, Bella was offered a scholarship by the university itself, and her tuition was fully covered.

But not all of them had proceeded into university right after graduating from high school. Lara began university seven years after graduating high school with money awarded to her by a television show. Naide, on the other hand, went into a two-year pause after her freshman year (the aspects of this will also be further explored later on), and continued to work throughout university so she could sustain herself.

5.2 Theme 2: The influence of others

A key part in the teachers’ lives were (and are) the people around them. As previously mentioned, their families played a key role in their lives. However, a lot of their decisions, and even how they saw themselves, were highly influenced by their friends and colleagues, and the general, bigger society.

5.2.1 Bullying, discrimination, and negative judgements

Six out of the seven teachers recounted episodes of bullying, experienced throughout their schooling years, that had profound impacts on their lives. They attributed this to society’s general aversion to people who look different, and a general negative attitude towards persons with disabilities. Participants also recounted a number of incidents where they were doubted on what they could do, and when their parents were asked if it was still worthwhile for them to be sent to school. These findings aligned with those of Hankebo (2018), Vogel and Sharoni (2011), whose participants also recounted experiencing negative experiences from their classmates and low expectations from their own teachers.

Lara’s high school years in particular highlighted the physical limitations brought about by her impairment, coupled with the non-inclusive practices in her school.

“I could not participate in all activities, *kasi dun very active sila physically*. The girls participated sports like basketball, swimming, track and field. *Hindi ko naman kaya yun. Wala rin akong masyadong natutunan kasi pag may mga activities or pinapabasa, hindi ko naman siya mabasa. Hindi naman ako pwedeng basahan ng mga kasama ko kasi they will create noise, and hindi pwede yun. Marami kasi silang rules doon na you have to follow, very strict sila. Kung hindi mapaparusahan ka.*”

[I could not participate in all activities because they were physically very active. The girls participated in sports like basketball, swimming, track and field. I could not do those. I also didn't learn much because if there were activities or reading assignments, I could not read. I could not ask my classmates to read for me because that would create noise, and that wasn't allowed. They had very strict rules [in school] that you needed to follow, otherwise you will be punished.]

Irene, Jen, and Naide said they were being “boxed” – especially as visually impaired individuals, whose common profession within the larger society were massage therapists. This is not just the case for the Philippines. As Lamichhane (2016) pointed out, even in Japan and South Korea, many of the visually impaired are engaged in the massage and acupuncture professions.

Naide recalled visiting different universities with two other visually impaired students, and being rejected on multiple occasions.

“May discrimination. Ako nakapasok lang ako kasi kahit papaano, kaya ko pang makipag sabayan. Pero kung ang vision ko ay ganun din, malamang sa malamang, hindi rin. Kasi mahirap makahanap ng school na public na tatanggap. Kasi lagi nilang sinasabi na, 'kulang yung facility namin. Hindi kami ready. Walang magtuturo. Paano babasahin yung braille?’”

[There was discrimination. I was only accepted because I could still keep up. If my eyesight had been worse [like the other two], I probably would not have been accepted either. It was difficult to find a public university that would accept us. They would tell us that, ‘Our facilities are lacking. We are not prepared. No one will teach. How can we read braille?']

There were also many instances when they struggled to ask for assistance or experienced being ignored. Leah recounted that despite studying in a supposedly “PWD-friendly” university, much was lacking in terms of infrastructure, and made it difficult for her to transfer in-between classes.

“Minsan sasabihin ko sa mga gwardiya, 'kuya, may klase ako, patulong, pabuhat.' So araw-araw or every other day... So syempre mararamdaman mo rin naman na

napapagod sila. At pag napapagod sila, pag alam na yung oras, nawawala na sila. That is the reality. Kasi ang klase ko pa, at the same time, may klase ako sa kabilang building tapos magwewheelchair ako dun sa susunod na building. Eh ang layo, magwewheelchair ka sa kalsada. Kaya pagdating mo dun, minsan yung mga kaklase mo, nasa taas na.”

[Sometimes I would tell the guards, ‘Sir, I have a class. Please help carry me up the stairs.’ That was every day or every other day. Of course, at some point, you would feel that they would get tired. And when they do, when they know the time you will be there, they would disappear. That is the reality. Sometimes my class would be in a different building, and I’d have to travel some distance on my wheelchair along the road. When I arrive in the classroom, my classmates would be upstairs already.]

5.2.2 Support and positive influences

Despite negative experiences, all participants also received positive support and encouragement from different people in their lives: family, friends, and for some, even their school environment. Most of the participants (Jen, Leah, Lara, Bella, Naide) also mentioned their faith and beliefs in a religious being gave them strength and meaning. Bella, in particular, not only struggled with the bullying of her classmates, but also with the demands of studying in a science high school, and her mother’s poor health condition.⁷

“Faith was really a core; not only academics. If not for the faith, or the Christianity taught in the school, I would not have survived [high school]. If it was purely academics, I would not have survived the pressure. But thankfully, [with] values and faith infused into the curriculum, I was able to survive it. And it helped me a lot to adjust. The prayers, practices, helped me cope with the pressure and bullying.” -Bella

Meanwhile, Carla was the only participant who had a generally positive overview of her adolescent years. She attributed this to having studied and lived within an environment which she described was “aware of PWDs.”

“Nung high school kasi the advantage that I had, yung community where I lived and studied, very aware na sila sa mga PWDs. Para sa kanila normal kami, they treat us as normal. We are not a burden. Then kahit isang kampanya lang sa tricycle andyan na kaagad. Walang issue sa kanila kasi marami kami sa community.”

[When I was in high school, my advantage was that I lived and studied in a community that was aware of PWDs. For them, we are normal and we are treated as normal. We are not a burden. With just a wave of a hand, a tricycle makes itself

⁷ In the Philippines, science high schools implement a special curriculum designed to prepare students for careers in science and technology.

available right away. There were no issues because we were a lot [of PWDs] in the community.]

She was also given the opportunity to do two years of schooling in the United States where, according to her, “diversity and inclusivity was a bit better than the Philippines” because of the accommodations and physical infrastructure available for wheelchair users like her.

The university choice of Jen, Carla, and Leah were influenced by recommendations from physically impaired friends and colleagues. The said private university was known to be one of the “friendliest universities in the Philippines for PWDs,” and thus would best accommodate their needs.

The visually impaired teachers, in particular Irene, Jen, Lara, and Naide, whose conditions were far advanced, had a mix of professors who gave them special accommodations, such as making them sit in front of the class, making a special test paper in large font, or changing certain aspects of a lesson or activity to suit them, and those who left them on their own. But the teachers mainly considered their classmates their “advocates” in the classroom. Irene shared instances when her professors would “forget” her condition (which, arguably, could be interpreted as a positive thing), and her classmates would remind them and request for an adjustment of the activities.

“Sila yung nagsasabi dun sa teacher na, ‘ibahin niyo po yung sa kanya.’ Or sila na yung nagvolunteer na, ‘ma’am yung test paper po niya hindi niya nakikita, babasahin ko nalang po sa kanya.’ I have advocates inside the classroom. Yun din naman ang ikinaganda ng iba-iba kayo ng kakayanan sa classroom, nagtutulungan.”

[They would be the one to tell the professor to change the activity for me. Or they would volunteer to read for me because I could not do it on my own. I have advocates in the classroom. That was the good thing about having different abilities in the classroom, you helped each other.]

For the most part, however, the teachers took it upon themselves to be as least disruptive as possible, and developed their own ways to manage, with continued support from family or friends.

“I have my recorder and typewriter na binili ng kuya ko. Yung recorder ginagamit ko siya para magrecord sa school. Tapos at home I use my typewriter to encode lahat. And then later on, yung nasulat ko, ipabasa ko ulit sa mother or sa ate ko. And then yun na yung pakikinggan ko pag nasa jeep kami. And then sa school naman, kapag

may mga exams, ako yung nagsusulat ng sagot ko using a writing guide. Binabasa lang ng nanay ko.” - Lara

[I have a recorder and a typewriter that my brother bought for me. I would use the recorder to record lessons in school, and then use the typewriter at home to encode everything. Later on, I would ask my mother or my sister to read what I have written, and would listen to the recording while commuting to school. During exams, my mother would read the questions, but I will write the answers using a writing guide.]

5.3 Theme 3: On becoming and being a teacher

Among the teachers, only Lara first entered university as an Education major. The initial degree choices of some of the participants was also highly influenced by an awareness of how people viewed them.

Jen started out in Business Management because she wanted to be an entrepreneur who would provide decent employment for other PWDs like her. Carla and Leah chose Computer Science and Accountancy, respectively, because there would be minimal movement for them in the wheelchair once they started working. Naide majored in Business Administration upon the recommendation of her former employer because the degree was “in-demand” at the time. Meanwhile, Irene, who chose Communication Arts, and Bella, who majored in English, made their decision based on their own hobbies and interests.

For four of them (Irene, Carla, Leah, Naide) who eventually ended up shifting to Education, the reasons were a mix of peer influence and some unfortunate circumstances, coupled with the teachers’ realizations about what they wanted to do.

Irene and Carla had friends at the time who were also studying Education, and talked of their experiences. Irene’s shift sprang out of a curiosity to learn more about special needs education, and what it meant to educate others who were also visually impaired in a separate schooling system. Meanwhile, Carla had learned that many of the physically disabled graduates in Computer Science had difficulties getting jobs after graduation, and was encouraged to study Education instead.

Meanwhile, Leah’s initial scholarship donor had gone bankrupt, and ceased scholarship funding after her first year. She applied to different scholarships, with assistance from her mother who accompanied her, and her friends who informed her of the different

opportunities, until she eventually landed one that only provided funding for Education majors.

5.3.1 Becoming part of the public school system

During their licensure exam, Irene, Jen, and Lara received special accommodation from the licensing board to have readers during the exam. They were also asked to bring a recorder which will record the entire duration of the exam. Bella and Naide took the exam with the rest of the takers because they did not declare their impairment during application.

Because the exam is also standardized, Irene noted that some parts of it “are not accessible because they are too graphic.” In multiple questions her reader urged her to “just guess the answer.” Lara also remembered questions that were a bit more complicated, which she thought would have been easier to understand and answer if she had been able to complete the test on her own. Despite some challenges, all of the teachers passed the licensure exam on their first take.

On the other hand, there were no special accommodations given to some of the teachers in their application to become public school teachers. This was not necessarily an issue for any of them, however Jen noted that she had difficulty compiling the amount of paperwork needed for the application, at the same time, struggled with going back and forth to her division office just to check for announcements regarding the placements.

5.3.2 Teaching in the public school system

Once in the system, new challenges emerged. Teachers being overworked and underpaid is a situation that the Philippines shares with many other countries. Some of them teachers (Bella, Leah, Naide) experienced being assigned to teach subjects not in their area of specialization. This is a particularly common phenomenon especially for subjects where there is a shortage of teachers (i.e. Values Education, Music and Arts, Home Economics) (Co et al., 2021; Malahay, 2021).

For the five teachers (Irene, Jen, Carla, Lara, and Naide) who teach in the Special Education program, the work entails handling students of various ages and various disabilities, primarily in self-contained classes. They also have additional learning sessions with students already

included in the regular classes. The teachers mentioned both positive and negative experiences in terms of the SPED system in the public school.

“Mahal talaga, Ms. Zarina yung mga ano ng blind. For example, ang braille paper sa Pilipinas, 1.50 dito malapit sa amin. Tapos ang paper for embosser palang ay 4 pesos pala, pag bibilhin mo. Pero meron naman pinamimigay ang DepEd na parang isang box lang. Pero tignan mo yung ratio, kung ilan yung estudyante, kung ilan yung elementary. Hindi siya tatagal. So magrequest ka pa, susulat ka pa, fofollow-up ka pa...” – Jen

[It is very expensive, Ms. Zarina, the [materials] for the blind. For example, braille paper costs 1.50 here, and the paper for embosser is 4 pesos. The DepEd gives us paper, but it is only one box. If you look at the ratio, the number of students, it is not enough. [So if you run out] You would need to write to make a request, then follow it up...]

“...we keep on promoting inclusive education by conducting seminars or orientations to regular teachers on how to handle these students, and being open for possibility to work with them. So pag may mga bago na mga teachers, dun namin nilalagay ang mga pupils namin kasi sila ang eager pa. They are very much interested and willing to learn. Unlike with the other traditional... di naman ako against sa mga traditional teachers. Siguro dahil sa tagal nila in service, naging fixed na sila sa ganung system. So sometimes hindi madali sa kanila mag-adjust na magturo ng bata na may disability, dahil na rin siguro sa limited knowledge nila.” – Carla

[We promote inclusive education [in the school] by conducting seminars or orientations to regular teachers on how to handle these students, and being open for possibility to work with them. So if we have new teachers, we put our pupils with them because they are still eager. They are very much interested and willing to learn. Unlike with the other traditional... I am not against the traditional teachers. But perhaps because of their years in service and limited knowledge, they are fixed in their own system, and it is not easy for them to adjust to teach kids with disability.]

The issue mentioned by Carla is a common issue the other teachers teaching SPED experienced as well. According to them, there is still a general “fear” in accepting learners with special needs in regular classrooms because of supposed lack of training and knowledge in inclusive education.

Some of the teachers also spoke of accessibility issues at work. Irene lamented that the system of reporting for teachers is not friendly for visually-impaired teachers like her, and that some of her colleagues and even her principal simply brush the issue off, telling her to simply “ask family for help.” Meanwhile, Leah shared about difficulties at her school.

Sa loob lang, kung saan ka nagtatrabaho. And that particular place is not suited for you as a wheelchair-bound person. *Minsan ang nagiging biro ko,* 'how come this is like this? *Ito ay paaralan ng may kapansanan.* And then you have an employee or a teacher who is wheelchair-bound. How come this place is not accessible for me?' *Minsan inaayos. Minsan naman* because of the space, the space is not enough, so *wala.* You have to accept. *Siguro kung marami kayo, ang needs ninyo nakikita kaagad.*

[Where I work is not suited [for me] as a wheelchair-bound person. Sometimes I joke, 'How come it is like this? This is a school for [orthopedically challenged] disabilities, and you have an employee who is wheelchair-bound. How come this place is not accessible for me?' Sometimes they fix it. But sometimes because there is no space, there is nothing you can do. But if you [teachers with disabilities] are a lot, your needs will be noticed right away.]

Transportation was also a common concern between some of the teachers. Especially for those who live some distance away from where they teach, traveling was both expensive and difficult. Some participants shared experiences of getting turned down by cabs or jeepneys, or often needing to use the more costly private ride-hailing services in order to get to work. In the Philippines, public transport remains inaccessible, with only limited and specific buses that have wheelchair ramps and provide spaces for wheelchairs (Junio, 2018). Transportation was also one of the highly rated “hindering aspects” of the general environment for PWDs in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019).

In terms of relationships in and out the classroom, the experiences were also both positive and negative. Although all of them have supportive colleagues, and even supportive supervisors, some (Irene, Jen, Carla, Leah) also experience prejudice in the assumptions of others that they “used” their disability to “get ahead” (i.e. be promoted). Meanwhile, Bella noted how there still seems to be a stigma surrounding the recognition of disability in the profession.

“Parang may stigma kasi na inamin mo sa sarili mo na impaired ka, hearing impaired or visually impaired, as a teacher, it will make you less of a person. Dapat ma-break yung stigma within the organization of DepEd... Unfortunately, kulang yung focus sa visual impairment, sa hearing impairment, sa mental health.”

[There seems to be a stigma that if you admit to yourself, as a teacher, that you have an impairment, it will make you less of a person. This stigma within DepEd should be broken... Unfortunately, there is a lack of focus on [dealing with] visual impairment, hearing impairment, and mental health.]

Regarding their students and their parents, the experiences recounted by the teachers were mostly positive, although some of them admitted to having considered moving to another country or doing another profession, in hopes of better opportunities. Similar to the inputs of the participants from Burns and Bell (2010), Singal et al. (2020), and Vogel and Sharoni (2011), most of the teachers in this study clearly saw themselves as role models to their students and to their parents. Especially for the six teachers who also teach learners with special needs, their motivations were and are rooted from personal experiences and deep desire for their students to experience better.

“I stay because of the students... Because I feel like they need some kind of support from the kind of environment they are living now... *Kasi natatakot sila... yung sinasabi ko na, 'huwag niyo ikahon yung sarili niyo. Kasi if people doesn't believe in what you can do, the only person left to believe in you is yourself.'*” – Irene

[I stay because of the students... Because I feel like they need some kind of support from the kind of environment they are living now... Sometimes they are scared... But I tell them, ‘don’t box yourselves. Because if [other] people don't believe in what you can do, the only person left to believe in you is yourself.’]

Chapter 6: Discussion and Limitations

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings, using the structural barriers experienced by the teachers as an anchor to the psycho-social disablism they experienced throughout their entire lives. The second part discusses the limitations of this study.

6.1 Discussion: From the external to the internal

The teachers were faced with structural barriers throughout their lives, from the inaccessibility of buildings and transport services (such as Leah's experiences in university and in the workplace), to negative attitudes from peers (relating to the bullying experienced by most of the teachers growing up), and unfriendly workplace practices (as in the cases of Irene and Jen). The power relations present have also been evident, between the teachers and their families deciding on their future, and the structure of society itself which leads to parents needing to decide between the education of one child or the other. These experiences align with one of the findings in Domingo (2020) that the costs of education affected the families' (in)ability to send their children with special needs to school.

The structural barriers in schools for visually impaired teachers have also been discussed in the writings of Lamichhane (2016), and Parker and Draves (2017). Some of the concerns, similarly experienced by the teachers in this study, included lack of materials in braille or support for braille learning, and inaccessibility of teaching materials or paperwork.

In the studies by Burns and Bell (2010), Grenier et al. (2014), and Parker and Draves (2017), the participants' psycho-emotional well-being, which included feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, or insecurity, were briefly explored. As Thomas (1999) noted, the "inner world" dimension closely interacts with the external, socio-cultural processes that PWDs experience daily.

In this study, the varied experiences of the teachers from childhood to their professional lives all had profound effects on the way they saw themselves, and to a certain extent, accepted their impairments, leading to experiences of internalized oppression. Haegele, Hodge and Shapiro (2020) described some of the manifestations of internalized oppression as:

positioning themselves in hierarchies relative to other disabled people (dispersal), hiding impairment to avoid negative reactions of others (emulation), or overachieving in order to prove they are better than “normal” (supercrip stereotype).” (p. 54)

While recounting their pasts, Jen, Leah, Naide, and Bella made particular mention of being “in denial” of their conditions, and the journeys they underwent to accept what had become a major part of their identity, as individuals and as teachers. This for them was an emotional journey that had a number of manifestations externally. For example, some of them chose not to reveal their impairments during university, and while job hunting out of fear of judgement or discrimination.

“I’ve always felt that I can be part of the crowd. I was late in realizing that my needs were really different from others...*Hiyang-hiya ako na, 'bakit hindi ko agad tinanggap? Marami palang makakatulong sa akin.'* Parang may stigma kasi na *inamin mo sa sarili mo na* impaired ka, hearing impaired or visually impaired, as a teacher, it will make you less of a person.” – Bella

[I’ve always felt that I can be part of the crowd. I was late in realizing that my needs were really different from others...I was so ashamed about why I didn’t accept [my condition] right away. I also realized that many people would be able to help me. It’s because there’s a stigma that if you admit to yourself that you are physically impaired as a teacher, it will make you less of a person.]

“*Nagtuturo na ako nung natanggap ko nang buong-buo ang sarili ko bilang guro na may kapansanan. Dahil sa araw-araw na nagtuturo ako sa mga bata, ako’y nagiging modelo para sa kanila. So kung hindi ko gagawin yung ganun, paano ako magiging magandang modelo sa kanila? Lalo’t higit, ang hawak ko ay SPED.*” – Leah

[I was already teaching when I fully accepted myself as a teacher with disability. In teaching them everyday, I also become their role model. So if I am unable to accept myself, how can I fulfil this role, especially when I am teaching [in] SPED?]

In addition to the high value Filipino society has placed on graduating with a university degree above all other educational pathways such as technical-vocational courses or other trainings (Pagulayan et al., 2021), Filipino society’s stereotypes of and prevalently negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities also resulted in the teachers’ constant struggle to “prove” themselves as “beyond” their disability. During the experiences they recounted from childhood to present, some of the teachers also described feelings of “aloofness,” and crying on multiple occasions because they could not participate in many school activities. Because of the perceived negative judgements they will receive, there were also two manifestations of

fear that the teachers experienced: (1) the fear of revealing their impairment in school or in job applications; and (2) the fear of failure in whatever aspect of their lives.

“Some of them magcocomment ng ganun na, 'bakit pa pinag-aaral? What's the use?' Ganun ang impression about disability...Tapos alam ko naman ang dahilan kung bakit ako bumagksak, kasi nga malabo ang mata ko, talangang nagkakaroon talaga ako ng anxiety. Paano ba yun talagang hindi na yata ako makakatapos...” – Irene

[Some people would comment, ‘Why make her study? What’s the use?’ That was the impression about disability... And I knew that I failed [the exams] because of my poor eyesight. I experienced anxiety. [I thought] It looks like I really won’t be able to finish schooling...]

“... mahirap din sabihin sa ibang tao yung situation mo lalo na kung hindi naman sila aware kung paano ka i-treat. Hindi naman yung special treatment, kundi yung discrimination na mararanasan mo. During college naman, parang ang hirap lang ilabas kung ano yung meron kang disability. Kumbaga, ang hirap lang siyang i-express, kasi nga.. laging tinatanong nila sa akin, 'kaya mo ba 'to? Kaya mo ba 'to, Ate Naide?' Ako naman, gusto kong itry lahat.”

[..it was also difficult to tell others about your situation, especially if they did not know how to treat you. It wasn’t about [receiving] special treatment, but more about the discrimination you would experience. During college it was difficult for me to talk about my disability because I would always be asked if I could do something. But I wanted to try everything.]

However, as Thomas (1999) also pointed out, PWDs are not “simply passive recipients or ‘victims’ of disablism,” but rather “exercise agency and resist” (p. 47). The teachers in this study have developed their own ways of expressing resistance that is fueled by the value they see in themselves, at the same time a result of different relationships – particularly with a few positive influences, and to some, their faith. They actively sought scholarships to financially support their studies, and did all the required work at university, and continue to fulfil their duties as teachers the best way they can. One can even argue that their determination to excel and prove others wrong, as much as a manifestation of psycho-emotional disablism, is also an active decision not to be let down and undermined.

“...ambisyosa ako. Sa family ko, either magtinda nalang, maging artista. Talagang ginawa ko, viniolate ko. Ayokong makilala...na kumakanta lang o kaya pwede naman sa tindahan. Kasi ang perspective ko yung pagkanta kasi kumukupas yun, parang katulad ng kagandahan kumukupas. Pero yung karunungan, hindi.” – Jen

[I was ambitious. In my family, it was either [I] watch over the store or become an actress. I violated those. I did not want to be known simply as a singer or a

storekeeper. Because in my perspective, singing, much like beauty, fades. But knowledge does not.]

“Alam mo sa public... at first kasi very supportive sila... Then... I finished my Master's degree and then na-promote ako, nagkaroon ng... indifference yung iba. But... I went through regular procedure. Wala naman ako naapakan, na-earn ko yun. I worked hard for it... Kasi ang focus ko yung mga pupils ko, yung parents. And dun sa ibang colleagues ko na very friendly naman sa akin, dun ako nagfocus. Dinisregard ko na rin yung mga feel ko ay hindi ako feel. Parang feeling nila ginamit ko yung disability ko just to get the position...” – Carla

[You know, in the public [school system], they were very supportive at first. Then... I finished my Master's degree and got promoted, and some of them became indifferent. But... I went through regular procedure. I did not step on anyone. I earned that [promotion]... So I focused on my pupils, their parents, and on my other colleagues who remained friendly towards me. I disregarded those whom I felt did not like me because they had a feeling that I used my disability just to get the position...]

One of the teachers, Lara, eventually founded her own organization specifically to help blind students to gain necessary education and life skills, after the school she had first worked for closed due to lack of funds.

“Kasi nung nagclose yung school... I felt pity sa aking mga estudyante kasi they will all have to go back sa kani-kanilang mga bahay. Wala silang gagawin, kung ano-ano lang. Back to tagapag-alaga ng anak ng may anak, habang ang kamag-anak nila ay nagtotong-its. Tagalinis ng bahay, alila. And then ako as a teacher, sana meron akong pera para sama-sama nalang kami. So that I can teach them.”

[When the school [for the blind] closed, I felt pity for my students because they would all have to go back to their homes. They will go back to doing random things – taking care of the children of someone else's children while their relatives are betting in card games; house cleaners; servants. Me as a teacher, I wanted to have some money so we can stay together, and I can continue teaching them.]

It was also in a deep sense of responsibility and personal motivation that the teachers ended up choosing and staying in their current profession, in spite of the doubts and difficulties that come with it, especially as teachers with disabilities. Having themselves experienced the hardships of growing up with an impairment, their desire to help improve the lives of their students also continued to develop. And it is the same sense of responsibility and motivation that they want to inculcate in their students.

As Reeve (2004) and Thomas (1999) have emphasized, including both structural and psycho-emotional dimensions of disability can provide a more in-depth understanding of the

experience of disability. The teachers in this study not only shared about the issues and challenges they experience/d as PWDs, but also how these affected them internally. What I have shown in this study are teachers with disabilities who were and are not simply receivers of negative judgement and discrimination, but also active decision makers who choose to stay hopeful and motivated. At the same time, inasmuch as they recognize the improvements regarding inclusion and inclusive education, they also acknowledge that much still needs to be done, and take an active part in fighting for these changes.

6.2 Limitations

In terms of methodology, this study drew from a small sample size with quite a homogenous sample, mostly being visually impaired teachers. At the same time, this study relied on a single in-depth interview of the teachers only. I was unable to do a triangulation of sources, such as doing other interviews (with school administrators, students and their parents, their families); classroom observations; or even journals. In narrative studies, it is recommended to do a series of interviews with the participants, actively involve them in the re-storying process, and include other sources of narratives (Creswell, 2012 and Riessman, 2008) in order to provide a deeper understanding and amount of experiences.

As this study was meant to be exploratory, the results and discussion of this thesis also did not cover the full extent of the interviews that were done. That is to say, the complexities of each of the teachers' life stories could not be fully explored. Although an attempt was made to provide commonalities in the lives of the teachers, it is important to note that the results of this study cannot be generalized for all. As established by previous studies, it is also quite evident in this one that different type of impairments have different needs, and people experience differing challenges.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter of this study provides a summary of the findings and the discussion. The goals of this study were achieved, and the research questions answered. In view of the limitations discussed in the previous chapter, recommendations are given in this chapter.

7.1 Summary and conclusion

This research was meant to give a general idea on the lives of teachers with disabilities living and teaching in the Greater Manila of the Philippines. The goals were to acquire a qualitative understanding of how they grew up, and how these experiences influenced not only their decision to become teachers, but their present personal and professional lives as well.

For this study, I conducted online interviews with seven female public school teachers with physical disabilities. As a result of a reflexive thematic narrative analysis, I highlighted several experiences from their childhood to their present lives, and discovered the profound effects of Filipino beliefs and attitudes regarding disability, and the teachers' own socio-economic conditions to their journey as teachers.

Most of their experiences growing up were actually shaped by society's attitudes towards PWDs. The teachers' education was a prime example of this. Apart from the reality because of their parents' or family's situation they could not afford their education, it was also the long-held belief that PWDs could not be productive (and thus, simply meant to stay at home) that forced most of them to find their own means to fund their education. While in school, most of them also experienced being bullied by their peers, in addition to dealing with the hardships of studying in an environment that did not and could not cater to their needs as physically impaired students. They had limited choices in universities due to accessibility reasons, and some of them even experienced being turned away from where they wanted to study for the same. The circumstances that led them to decide to become teachers varied, and only one of them had known early on that she wanted to teach.

As teachers they continue to experience challenges such as the inaccessibility of the workplace, and of the required paperwork for teachers. There are also colleagues who

continue to disbelief in their skills and capabilities. At the same time, they find themselves also sharing similar concerns with other “regular” teachers in the public school system of being overworked and underpaid.

Apart from summarizing these experiences, this study also determined how the external events influenced the teachers internally – particularly in the way they saw themselves, and to a certain extent, accepted their impairments. Because of the way they knew society treated and misunderstood PWD, most of the teachers had initial difficulties accepting their physical conditions. Described by authors (Haegele, Hodge and Shapiro, 2020; Reeve, 2004) as manifestations of internalized oppression, some of the teachers often felt aloof, lonely, and ashamed because they could not fully participate in a number of activities. At the same time, most of them feared failure, and constantly felt the need to prove themselves to others – to society, to their non-disabled teachers/professors, and to their peers.

However this study has also shown that teachers with disabilities were and are not simply receivers of negative judgement and discrimination. In exercising agency and resisting (Thomas, 1999), they became active decision makers who choose to stay hopeful and motivated. Inasmuch as the disablism manifested in fearing failure and constantly needing to prove themselves they also made active decisions not to be let down and undermined. They fought their way through the system by supporting themselves in their studies, by rising up the ranks in their profession, and currently by also encouraging their students to do the same. Their personal motivation to be role models in the lives of their students (and their students’ parents) is rooted in the personal understanding of what it means to be disabled in Filipino society.

In summary, this study provided insights as to both the personal and professional lives of teachers with disabilities in the Philippines. Although the sample was small, I am hopeful that the inputs resulting from this study will help in deepening the understanding of PWDs who work in the teaching profession, as a way of understanding (and potentially improving) inclusion both in education and in the workplace. Teachers, in particular, are enablers of our education system, and if we are unable to provide for their needs, then it would also continue to be difficult to fully achieve an inclusive teaching and learning environment in the country.

This study has also shown that a lot still has to be done to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in Philippine society as a result of little or poor understanding regarding who PWDs and what they can do. Lastly, challenges in education and employment do not exist in vacuums. Rather, there are intersectionality across many sectors (health, housing). As such, in being able to provide for those in most need, developments are needed and should be implemented simultaneously across different sectors.

7.2 Recommendations for policy and for further study

In general, more research has to be done both qualitative and quantitative in nature regarding teachers with disabilities in the Philippines. For one, updated data regarding the number of and profiles of PWDs in the country is long overdue.

On a more specific note, this data on the experiences of TWDs can contribute to both policy and practice within the increasing importance being given to inclusion. The personal, first-hand experiences they shared allows us to potentially learn more about how best to support learners with special needs. At the same time, it opens up insights regarding the workplace and the academe, and how schools can better facilitate and support diversity.

In taking this study further, attention can be paid to specific types of impairments, and drawing on bigger samples for each. After all, despite certain generalizability in the experiences of PWDs, it cannot be denied that physical impairments interact with and affect individuals differently. It would also be helpful to get insights from other members of the community: school administrators, parents, other family members/carers, and even policy implementers themselves. As previously mentioned, the Philippines is not lacking in laws and policies regarding inclusion, but little is known about how such policies are implemented.

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Annexes

Annex A: Inclusion laws in the Philippines

Law	Title	Scope
1987 Constitution Article XIV Sections 1-2	Education, Science and Technology, Arts, Culture and Sports Education	Right of all citizens to quality education at all levels
Presidential Decree 603	The Child and Youth Welfare Code	Various rights of the child, including the handicapped
Republic Act No. 344	An Act to Enhance the Mobility of Disabled Persons By Requiring certain Buildings, Institutions, Establishments, and Public Utilities to Install Facilities and Other Devices	Requires contractors of public buildings, roads, highways, educational institutions, commercial establishments, places of sports and leisure and any private establishment used for public purpose to install facilities and features for the access of persons with disabilities
Republic Act No. 3562	An Act to Promote the Education of the Blind in the Philippines	Establishment of the Philippine National School for the Blind, and a Teacher Training Center for the blind
Republic Act No. 7277	Magna Carta for Disabled Persons	The access of persons with disabilities to education, suitable employment, health services, social services, telecommunications, and political and civil rights
Republic Act No. 8371	Indigenous People's Rights Act	Rights of indigenous cultural communities and indigenous peoples in the Philippines, including full participation in education, and equal opportunity in employment
Republic Act No. 9710	Magna Carta for Women	Seeks to eliminate discrimination through the

		recognition, protection, fulfillment, and promotion of the rights of Filipino women, especially those belonging in the marginalized sectors of the society
Republic Act No. 11650	An Act Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners with Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education	Ensures that learners with disabilities will not be denied admission in any public or private school based on their disability

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM⁸

Research project title: Experiences of teachers with disabilities in the Philippines

Name of researcher: Ma. Zarina San Jose

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this thesis! This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement, and that you agree to the conditions of your participation, listed below:

1. During the course of your interview, you may choose not to answer a question should you feel uneasy to do so.
2. The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced.
3. You will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors.
4. The recorded interview and the final transcript will be analyzed by the researcher, and will be used as main material for her thesis.
5. You may ask the researcher regarding any questions or doubts about the research, at any point before the thesis has been finalized.
6. Your participation is purely voluntary, and you have a choice to withdraw participation at any moment before the thesis has been finalized.
7. You will not be given any compensation, monetary or in-kind, for participating in this interview.
8. The recorded interview and the final transcript will not be used for any other purpose outside of this thesis, without your consent.
9. The researcher will not release your information, including your name, e-mail address, and other personal information, to external parties without your consent.

Please also mark any of the following statements that you agree to:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be quoted directly using my own name, and all other names I mentioned will also be quoted in their original.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be quoted directly only if my name and all other names I mentioned are changed/pseudonyms are used.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be recorded in both audio and video.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be recorded in audio only.

Name of interviewee and signature:

Date signed:

Contact number:

E-mail address:

⁸ The interview themes outlined on p. 34 was also included in a second page in the file sent to participants.

Annex C: Screenshot from my notes (using Microsoft OneNote)

03 March

- First attempt at coding
- Thought about making *a priori* codes but I'll just go blank for now
- Research question details: experiences (shaping and influencing in teaching)
- Social model: not the impairment, but society

04 March

- Coding 2nd day
- Realizing: some new codes are about the impairment (not the social effects)
- Need to work on: structural analysis
- Finished first interview: total 36 codes

08 March

- 2nd interview
- Answers questions indirectly? Storytelling as if you were there
- New code: references to faith/religion

09 March

- Because of the way the story is told, coding can be confusing.
- Encountering quotes/text that can be in multiple codes

11 March

- Some parts of the interview were just clarificatory: would not have been necessary
- ^Is this necessary to code?
- 2nd interview has a lot of potential in structural analysis but should it be pursued?
- In this interview there were assumptions about what I knew (0.49.16 minutes)

14 March

- How to code this? Something is wrong (in my opinion) but to her it is pretty normal/okay
- Completed 2nd interview: total 49 codes
- Began 3rd interview
- Some codes and some of my coding is already value-laden (me already making a judgement). Is that okay?

16 March

- When should I start reviewing my codes? Probably after 4th interview?
- Should also write a brief description when I clean them up
- Finished coding 3rd interview: this was a bit easier, but also it was about 30 mins shorter than the rest
- 3rd interview: generally positive inputs because she had a generally positive experience
- Total codes 51

17 March

- Coding 4th interview
- This interview has a lot of "internal struggles"
- New codes for "experiences" but I might need to make these more specific later on