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# Professional burnout of special education teachers in the Philippines

Filipinos have a deep regard for education. It is viewed as one of the pillars of society, influencing the nation's culture, economics, and policies. In fact, the Department of Education (DepEd) has the highest allocation from the previous year's national budget (2017 General Appropriations Act) and the second highest allocation in the current fiscal year (2018 General Appropriations Act). This is to ensure that every Filipino, including children with special needs, has access to free and appropriate education, as is their basic human right. While the Philippine educational system offers several programs to reach out to different learners (Department of Education Website, 2018), successful implementation of these programs are influenced by several factors, one of those is the teacher.

As the one responsible for carrying out the programs and facilitating learning in the classroom, the teacher plays a crucial role in ensuring that quality education is brought forth. The provision of this quality education, therefore, is dependent upon the retention of quality teachers in the classroom. Teaching is one of the most stressful professions, being one that requires a substantial amount of human interaction, along with other factors. "Burnout that occurs due to job-related stress and the physiological and psychological problems that come out with burnout decreases the quality of the profession of teaching" (Tugrul and elik, 2002 in Sahbaz, 2017). A decrease in the quality of teaching would eventually lead to a decrease in the quality of education. Regular and special education is geared towards achieving a common goal: to facilitate the optimal development of the skills in order for learners to achieve their highest potential as an individual and a member of society (Rabara, 2017).

Special education teachers indeed face the challenge to provide children with special needs the same opportunities to have a meaningful and fulfilling life. In their daily job in the classroom, a special educator meets children with a different blend of abilities and limitations in different domains of development with the mission of knowing each one and provide the necessary support. They also have to come up with paperwork and attend meetings. Literature from Zakrizevska's study (2015) further enumerates "environmental diversity, a wide spectrum of communication, emotional, and physical loads involving working with students... and their parents, and handling complex situations" as well as "limited due appreciation" for the special educators as some of the things that special educators are up against. All these factors expose a special education teacher to occupational risks that can lead to professional burnout.

As key researchers in the study of professional burnout, Maslach and Jackson (1981; in Sahbaz

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& Kuyuturk, 2017) defined it as a “syndrome that occurs by the reflection of feelings of physical exhaustion, long-term fatigue, helplessness, hopelessness with negative attitudes towards work, life, and other individuals who are exposed to intensive emotional demands and have to work face to face with other people”. Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined burnout in 3 stages: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal achievement. The questionnaire tool that they have devised has been used in various researches as well.

Several studies globally have been done on teacher burnout causing attrition. Western studies have also looked into demographic information of teachers, length of teaching, relationship with students, and support group systems and how it affects their job-related stress (Nuri et al, 2017; Rumschlag, 2017; Sahbaz & Kuyuturk, 2017; Brunsting et al, 2014; Miller, 1999) However, there were only a handful of thesis and dissertations that reflect the Filipino teachers’ burnout rate and none of it has been published yet.

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