



Teachers' and Parents' Perspectives on the Effectiveness and Importance of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) on Student Learning Outcomes

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Abstract— This study explored the perspectives of teachers and parents on the necessity of standardized Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for special education students in Cebu City's public schools. The participants consisted of 15 teachers and 15 parents of learners with special needs, selected through purposive sampling. A qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews was employed to explore teachers' and parents' perspectives on the effectiveness and importance of individualized education plans (IEPs) on student learning outcomes for special education learners in public schools. The findings showed that teachers and parents acknowledge the importance of standardized IEPs in promoting consistency and equity of SPED services. However, challenges such as limited training, resource shortages, and communication barriers hinder effective implementation. Furthermore, while there is a shared recognition of the value of standardized IEPs, substantial challenges remain in their practical application. Teachers often feel unprepared due to inadequate training and support from administration, while parents express frustration over their lack of involvement and understanding of the IEP process. It is concluded that addressing these issues through policy reforms, regular training for educators, and initiatives to engage parents more effectively is essential for fostering an inclusive educational environment. Finally, it is recommended that the output of the study be adopted.

Keywords— *Special Education, Individualized Education Plan, teachers' perspective, parents' perspective, Cebu City, Philippines*



I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for quality and inclusive education among learners with special needs calls for a closer examination of how Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are implemented, particularly in public schools within the Cebu City Division. Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are vital in addressing the specific learning needs of students with special educational needs (Rashid & Wong, 2023). These plans, when properly designed and implemented, provide a roadmap for academic progress, social integration, and personal development (Swayzer, 2025; ud Din, 2025). However, in Cebu City, the current

IEP process lacks consistency and standardization. While some teachers have created personalized IEPs for their learners, many do not follow the correct procedures, conduct the necessary assessments, or involve the necessary stakeholders. The absence of a fully functioning IEP committee and the inconsistent application of guidelines present major challenges that hinder the effectiveness of special education services (Shore, 2025; Wilson, 2025).

The researcher conducted this study to explore the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding the standardization of IEPs in Cebu City. With a growing number of learners requiring special education support, it is

essential to evaluate how IEPs are being developed and implemented. Recent studies emphasize the importance of standardized approaches in improving educational quality and ensuring equitable learning experiences (Tralli, 2024a). In the study of (Estrada, 2023), understanding the lived experiences and insights of those directly involved—teachers and parents—provides a valuable lens through which to view the current gaps and potential solutions.

This research aimed to determine the necessity, benefits, and barriers to standardizing IEPs by gathering qualitative data through interviews and focus group discussions. Using a phenomenological approach, the study focused on the in-depth experiences of participants, capturing their insights on how standardized IEPs could impact learners' outcomes, teacher workload, and parent involvement (Estrada, 2023; Felix, 2023; Gamboa, 2025). The findings were expected to highlight recurring issues, such as limited training, lack of resources, and miscommunication, while also identifying opportunities for improvement in the existing system (Shore, 2025; Villanueva, 2024).

Ultimately, this study sought to contribute to the enhancement of special education practices in Cebu City by offering evidence-based recommendations to policymakers, educators, and school administrators. The researchers hoped that through this investigation, teachers and parents would gain greater clarity and empowerment in the IEP process. Additionally, the research aimed to support the development of more inclusive, consistent, and student-centered IEP practices that align with legal mandates and educational standards—creating a pathway for all learners to achieve their full potential.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing quality education to learners with special needs means recognizing that one-size-fits-all approaches are ineffective (Halawa & Salmi, 2024; Khelifi & Hamzaoui-elachachi, 2024). This is where Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) come in. These plans are more than just documents—they are essential tools that help teachers tailor instruction to meet the unique strengths, challenges, and goals of each learner (Habib et al., 2021; Kumar & Madhuri, 2025; Xu & Kuti, 2024). More importantly, IEPs serve as a commitment to upholding the rights of learners with disabilities to an inclusive and equitable learning experience (McMahon, 2021; Siddiq & Maheswari, n.d.). To better understand why standardizing these plans is important—especially in public schools—this review examines key educational theories and Philippine laws that guide and support their development.

At the core of this study are time-tested theories about how children learn and grow. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, for example, emphasize that learning is not a passive process—it is something students actively construct through experiences and social interactions (Efgivia et al., 2021). Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes the importance of providing guided support that meets students where they are, helping them progress to the next step in their learning (Jawad et al., 2021; Rahman, 2024; Wibowo et al., 2025).

Adding to this perspective is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which consider the broader context. A child's learning is shaped not only by the classroom but also by the family, community, and society around them (Osher et al., 2021). This theory supports the idea that IEPs should be created through a team effort involving parents, teachers, and other professionals. Likewise, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, developed by Rose and Meyer, promotes flexibility in teaching, allowing all learners—regardless of ability—to access and engage with the curriculum (Cumming & Rose, 2022). UDL encourages multiple ways of presenting information, engaging learners, and allowing them to express what they know, making it a natural fit for IEP development (Anderson, 2022; Ann Bross & Craig, 2024).

While these theories explain why individualized plans are important, Philippine laws help put them into action. Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, promotes a learner-centered approach and emphasizes the importance of inclusive practices in schools (SITOY et al., 2025). IEPs are one way to make this vision real. Meanwhile, Republic Act No. 9442, also known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, protects the right of individuals with disabilities to receive the support they need in school. It ensures that schools provide accommodations and modifications so that every learner has a fair chance to succeed (Cabauatan, 2024; Jimenez & Cabaluna, 2021; San Luis, 2022).

Most notably, Republic Act No. 11650, the Inclusive Education Act of 2022, strengthens these protections. It goes a step further by requiring that learners with disabilities receive individualized support plans and that parents and professionals work together throughout the process (Almalki et al., 2021; Correia et al., 2021; Custodio, 2025). This law helps establish consistency and accountability—two key goals of standardizing IEPs in public education. In conclusion, both theory and law convey the same message: IEPs are vital and work best when applied thoughtfully and consistently. Theories remind teachers, parents, and others that the developmental and

social foundations of individualized learning are essential, while legal frameworks ensure that these practices are not optional, but necessary. Listening to the voices of teachers and parents—those closest to the learners—can provide meaningful insights into how standardized IEPs can truly improve the lives of students with special needs, particularly in Cebu City's public schools.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explored the perspectives of teachers and parents of special education students on the absence of standardized Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and how this lack of uniformity may contribute to inconsistencies in the quality and effectiveness of special education services in the Cebu City Division for the academic year 2024–2025. It specifically aimed to examine how teachers and parents perceive the importance and effectiveness of having standardized IEPs in public schools to student outcomes, their experiences and challenges with the current IEP process for students with special needs, and the potential obstacles they anticipate in implementing standardized IEPs across public schools in the division.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the perspectives of special education teachers, general education teachers, and parents on the necessity of standardized Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with special needs in public schools within the Cebu City Division during the academic year 2024–2025. A total of 30 participants—15 teachers and 15 parents—were purposively selected from Zapatera Elementary School and Guadalupe Elementary School, both of which offer special education programs. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, online consultations, direct observations, and written surveys. A self-developed interview guide instrument was used to capture participants' experiences, challenges, and views on the current and potential implementation of standardized IEPs. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and data privacy, were strictly observed throughout the research process. Thematic analysis was utilized to examine the data, involving transcription, coding, categorization, and verification to ensure accuracy and integrity of the findings.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the narratives of teachers and parents who participated in the study on the effectiveness and importance of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) as

summarized by themes. This section displays the teachers' and parents' responses about their viewpoints on the impact of learners with special needs on learning outcomes.

The IEP is a vital resource that significantly impacts the learning experiences of students with special needs. Research consistently shows that when IEPs are implemented effectively, they significantly improve both academic performance and overall development for these students. A research by Sharma and Sarkar (2024) highlights that IEPs improve academic achievement in core subjects and play a crucial role in mitigating behavioral issues and fostering positive school experiences for students with disabilities. These findings stress the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists in crafting and implementing IEPs that focus on academic goals and the overall growth of students with special needs. By ensuring that these students receive the tailored support they need, we uphold their right to a free and appropriate public education as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The first question the research participants sought to determine whether the participants' children had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and, if so, how familiar the participants were with the components and purpose of an IEP.

1. **Lack of Training and Knowledge.** Many teachers and parents face ongoing struggles due to limited training and understanding of IEPs and how to implement them effectively. Teachers often feel unsure if the IEPs they create truly meet their students' needs because they haven't been given the proper tools or guidance to design and evaluate them. This lack of preparation overwhelms educators, especially as they juggle the heavy demands of paperwork and the responsibility of addressing each student's unique challenges. Without adequate support, it becomes difficult for them to provide the tailored assistance their students deserve confidently.

2. **Communication Gaps.** Communication gaps significantly hinder the successful implementation of IEPs, leaving teachers and parents disconnected from the process. Parents often feel left in the dark about their child's IEP goals and progress, unsure of how they can support their child's academic journey. On the other hand, teachers struggle with limited communication and collaboration with parents and colleagues, making it challenging to create and execute effective plans. This disconnect prevents a unified approach to supporting students, ultimately affecting their success.

3. **Inconsistent Implementation and Support.** The inconsistency in implementing and providing support for IEP programs can significantly impact their effectiveness.

Teachers often struggle to apply strategies from the IEPs due to inconsistent support and guidance, leading to varied levels of assistance for students. This inconsistency can prevent students from receiving the necessary accommodations and support, affecting their academic progress.

The second question being asked by the research participants was whether Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) have been implemented for their students. If not, why haven't IEPs been developed or used in the classroom.

1. Insufficient Knowledge on SPED Program and IEP Implementation. Many teachers feel unprepared and lack confidence in their ability to support students with disabilities due to insufficient training and resources (Alharbi & Iqtadar, 2024; Chu et al., 2020; Gesel et al., 2022). Several have expressed uncertainty about creating and implementing IEPs, often describing them as informal or lacking necessary details. Meanwhile, parents frequently report not being informed about their child's IEP, leading to feelings of exclusion and anxiety regarding their educational needs. This lack of understanding and communication ultimately undermines the effectiveness of IEPs, resulting in inadequate support for students who need tailored educational interventions (Alharbi & Iqtadar, 2024).

2. Communication Gaps Between Educators and Parents. Communication gap between educators and parents regarding the IEP process is very important to the success of the IEP implementation and progress monitoring. The teacher-participants highlight the lack of communication contributes to feelings of exclusion and anxiety about their learner's educational support.

The school's lack of IEP implementation leaves uncertain about the impact on learning. Most of the teachers and parents-participants have expressed concern about their involvement in the IEP process.

3. Inconsistent Implementation and Support for IEPs. Inconsistency in IEP implementation within schools emerges as a critical theme affecting the support provided to students with special needs. The teacher participants emphasize that the absence of a consistent framework for implementing IEPs leads to varying levels of effectiveness in meeting students' needs.

4. Need for Collaboration Among Educators. The necessity for better collaboration among educators and special education staff. The teacher-participants expressed the need for collaboration and desire for more involvement in the development of their child's IEPs, indicating that stronger partnerships could enhance the effectiveness of these programs.

5. Concerns Over Measuring Success and Effectiveness. Finally, the challenges participants face in measuring the success and effectiveness of IEPs were taken into account. The teacher-participants highlight a critical need for clear metrics and guidelines to help educators and parents evaluate the impact of IEPs on student learning outcomes.

The challenges in implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in special education are largely rooted in a lack of knowledge and training among both educators and parents. Many teacher participants shared feelings of being unprepared, with several admitting they have not received formal IEP training, leaving them uncertain about effectively using this critical tool. Research reinforces these concerns, showing that inadequate training often results in poor IEP implementation, which can negatively impact student outcomes (Tralli, 2024b). All the above-mentioned deficiencies can lead to educational setbacks. In fact, in the Philippines, the education landscape adopted by public secondary schools has shown setbacks in implementing inclusive education. The scarcity or absence of SPED senior high schools catering to self-contained Special Education learners with hearing impairment is highly apparent and alarming. According to Rosal et al. (2024), there was a significant disparity between the absence of established senior high school (SHS) programs with complete SPED teachers and well-trained related services personnel, which are intended and carefully designed for learners with hearing impairments.

In addition to the lack of training, communication barriers between educators and parents pose another significant challenge. Teachers often feel disconnected from the IEP process due to limited collaboration with special education staff and minimal opportunities to discuss IEPs in team settings. While the above-mentioned are very prevalent, it is regrettable that the absence of comprehensive assessment, reinforcement, related services, IEPs, and other detailed documents is an issue overlooked by the DepEd and most Special Education program implementers (Rosal et al., 2024). A study by Jones et al. (2020) and Sreckovic et al. (2021) underscores the importance of building strong partnerships between educators and families to ensure IEPs are developed and implemented effectively. Strengthening communication channels, providing training, and fostering collaboration are essential to creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that empowers students with disabilities to thrive academically and socially (Manjur et al., 2025).

The third question posed to the research participants focused on how implementing IEPs has impacted their

students' academic progress, particularly on learners with special needs. Participants were then asked to provide a brief explanation to elaborate on their responses.

1. Lack of Awareness and Support for IEP Implementation.

Many teachers and parents have limited awareness of how to implement IEPs effectively. While some may have a basic understanding of IEPs, they often struggle to apply this knowledge due to insufficient resources, lack of personnel support, and overall low awareness of IEP standards. This gap in understanding leaves both educators and families feeling unprepared and disconnected from the process, ultimately hindering the support that students with disabilities need to thrive in their educational environments.

2. Insufficient Training and Professional Development for Teachers.

The absence of formal teacher training on IEP development and implementation is very prevalent. Teachers noted feeling unprepared, unconfident, and unsure of their role in supporting students with IEPs.

3. Limited Parental Involvement in the IEP Process.

Parents highlighted a lack of engagement or involvement in IEP meetings or processes. This exclusion left them feeling uninformed and disconnected from their child's educational journey.

4. Uncertainty About the Impact of IEPs on Student Learning.

Due to limited experience and inconsistent implementation, both teachers and parents struggled to assess the effectiveness of IEPs in improving academic outcomes for learners with special needs.

5. Absence of Structured IEP Implementation in Schools.

Teachers and parents reported that IEPs are not fully or consistently implemented in their schools. The lack of clear guidelines, collaboration, and administrative support further hindered effective implementation.

Based on a study, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a fundamental element of special education, crafted to provide students with disabilities a customized learning experience that caters to their specific needs. These legally binding documents outline clear goals, necessary accommodations, and the services each student requires, ensuring they have equitable access to education in an inclusive setting. Research shows that when IEPs are implemented effectively, they can lead to remarkable improvements in both academic performance and social skills for students with disabilities. A study revealed that students with learning disabilities who benefited from well-structured IEPs made significant progress in subjects like math and English Language Arts, highlighting how personalized educational plans can help level the playing field for these learners (Ozuna, 2024).

Additionally, IEPs foster collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists, creating a robust support system that enhances student success. They help track progress against specific goals and allow adjustments to be made as needed, ensuring that each student continues to grow and improve. Regular assessments and updates to IEPs are crucial for recognizing individual strengths and challenges, ultimately preparing students for life after school, whether that means further education or the workforce (Byrd & Alexander, 2020; Thoma et al., 2020). By focusing on the development and implementation of IEPs, schools can profoundly influence the educational journeys of students with special needs, empowering them to reach their full potential while nurturing a culture of inclusivity and support throughout the educational community.

The fourth question the research participants were asked was if they could share any specific examples of how an IEP has noticeably helped a student improve their learning.

1. Positive Impact of IEPs on Student Learning and Development. Both teachers and parents shared instances where IEPs have led to tangible improvements in students' academic performance, behavior, and confidence. This highlights the potential of well-implemented IEPs to influence student outcomes positively.

2. Barriers to Effective IEP Implementation and Parental Involvement. Many participants, both teachers and parents, highlighted challenges such as limited communication, lack of training, inconsistent implementation, and insufficient parental involvement, which hinder the effectiveness of IEPs.

The IEP plays a vital role in enriching the educational journey of students with disabilities by offering personalized plans designed to meet their unique needs. A well-implemented IEPs not only boost academic performance but also nurtures social skills and emotional resilience in students. With proper training and resources, educators can create inclusive and supportive learning environments that enable students to thrive and reach their full potential (Featherstone et al., 2024). However, inconsistent implementation and inadequate communication about IEPs can leave parents feeling excluded and teachers uncertain, diminishing the impact of these valuable tools in fostering student success (Johnson, 2024).

The fifth question asked of the research participants was what obstacles they have faced while trying to use IEPs to help students reach their academic goals.

1. Lack of Training and Preparedness for IEP Implementation. Many teachers reported feeling

unprepared to effectively implement IEPs due to a lack of proper training, which hinders their ability to adapt instruction and meet student needs.

2. Communication and Collaboration Gaps Between Schools and Parents.

Parents highlighted communication gaps that left them feeling excluded from the IEP process, while teachers expressed struggles collaborating with special education staff and families to develop effective IEPs.

3. Overwhelming Paperwork and Administrative Challenges.

Teachers expressed frustration over the administrative burdens of IEPs, including excessive paperwork, a lack of structured approaches, and insufficient support from school leadership.

4. Inconsistent Implementation and Effectiveness of IEPs.

Both teachers and parents highlighted the inconsistent implementation of IEPs and questioned their overall effectiveness in helping students achieve academic goals.

The obstacles and challenges that educators and parents face in implementing IEPs significantly hinder the ability to achieve students' academic goals. Many teachers feel overwhelmed and unprepared, often citing insufficient training and resources as major barriers that lead to unclear IEP goals and inconsistent application. This lack of clarity not only affects their confidence but also impacts the support they can provide to students. On the other hand, parents frequently express feelings of exclusion from the IEP process, which adds to their anxiety about their child's educational support. Overcoming these challenges is essential, highlighting that effective IEP implementation can lead to substantial improvements in student outcomes (Barnard & Henn, 2023; Nicolaysen, 2024). Furthermore, Schilling-Mansour (2024) emphasized the critical need for clear communication and collaboration between educators and families to ensure that IEPs are actively utilized to support students' unique learning needs. Addressing these obstacles is crucial for maximizing the potential of IEPs to deliver tailored educational interventions that promote success for students with disabilities.

The sixth question asked of the research participants was their perceptions on how to adjust and improve IEPs to support a student's academic growth better.

1. Need for Training and Professional Development on IEPs. Teachers and parents highlighted a lack of

knowledge, skills, and training about IEP formulation, implementation, and monitoring.

2. Administrative and Systemic Barriers.

Administrative challenges such as a lack of leadership support, overwhelming paperwork, and large class sizes hindered effective implementation.

3. Improving Collaboration and Communication.

Participants noted the need for more transparent communication and more collaboration between parents, teachers, and administrators.

4. Customizing and Refining IEPs for Individual Student Needs.

Participants expressed the need to make IEPs more practical, concrete, and tailored to meet the unique needs of learners

The obstacles and challenges that educators and parents face in implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) significantly hinder the ability to achieve students' academic goals. Many teachers feel overwhelmed and unprepared, often citing insufficient training and resources as major barriers that lead to unclear IEP goals and inconsistent application. On the other hand, parents frequently express feelings of exclusion from the IEP process, which adds to their anxiety about their child's educational support. Overcoming these challenges is essential, as research highlights that effective IEP implementation can lead to substantial improvements in student outcomes (Kurth et al., 2022; Yell et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is a critical need to have clear communication and collaboration between educators and families to ensure that IEPs are in place and actively utilized to support students' unique learning needs, together with the related services and accommodations. Suppose all of these factors are not carefully addressed. In that case, learners with hearing impairments and disabilities will not receive the best possible educational service, which is the goal of inclusive education (Rosal et al., 2024).

VI. THEMATIC CATEGORIES

Common Themes Emanating from the Perception of Key Participants

This section presents the common themes developed from the narrative perspectives or viewpoints of the teacher-participants and parent-participants on the effectiveness and importance of IEPs in addressing learners with special needs, in relation to their impact on student learning outcomes.

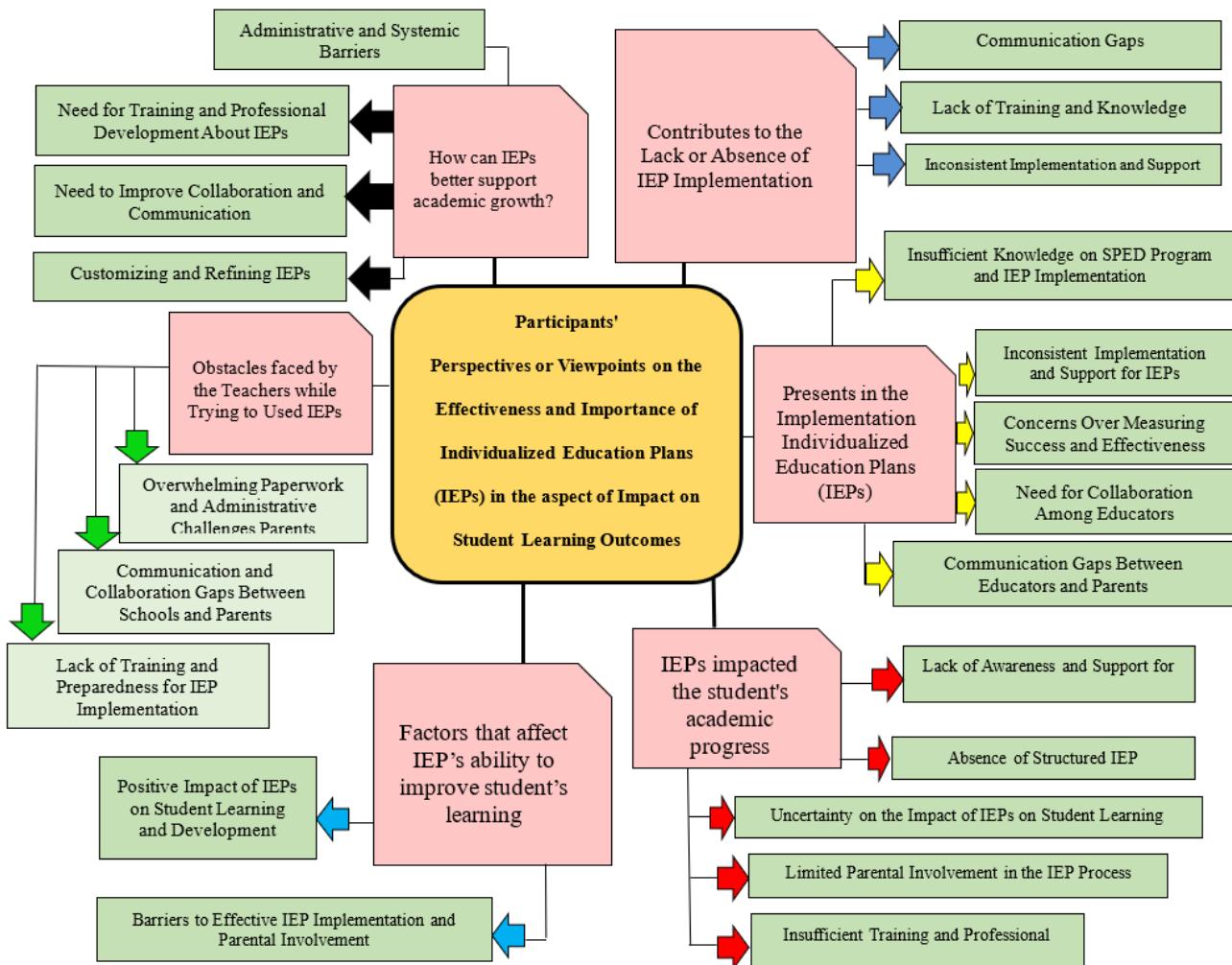


Fig.1: Participants' Perspectives or Viewpoints on the Effectiveness and Importance of IEPs in the aspect of Impact on Student Learning Outcomes

VII. FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that while both teachers and parents in Cebu City acknowledge the value of standardized Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for special education students, they face significant challenges in their implementation. Teachers view IEPs as essential for addressing diverse learning needs and promoting equity but often lack adequate training and resources. Meanwhile, parents—though supportive—are often unfamiliar with the IEP process and seek greater involvement. Existing IEP processes suffer from knowledge gaps, insufficient materials, and weak collaboration between educators and families. As for standardization, stakeholders anticipate further obstacles, including increased workload, limited flexibility, inadequate funding, and unclear policy guidance, all of which could hinder successful implementation.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that while teachers and parents value the role of IEPs in improving educational outcomes, substantial gaps in training, resources, and collaboration hinder their effectiveness. Standardizing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) holds significant potential for addressing inconsistencies and promoting educational equity; however, its effective implementation demands strong administrative support, adequate funding, and comprehensive capacity-building initiatives.

The findings highlight the need for policy reforms to establish clear guidelines and provide standardized resources for implementing IEPs. Regular training for teachers and awareness initiatives for parents is essential to enhance their participation. Improved collaboration models between teachers and parents are crucial for the effective development and execution of IEPs. Standardized IEPs have the potential to ensure equitable access to quality

education for students with special needs if implemented with adequate resources and support.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors further confirmed that there is no conflict of interest among the co-authors and all others involved in making this paper into its publication stage.

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