

School Practices in Supporting Learners with Special Educational Needs: A Parent Assessment of Prevention and Challenge-Overcoming Strategies

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special educational needs, inclusive education, prevention of challenges, overcoming challenges, parent assessment, school practices, safe living community

Abstract. This study examined parents' assessments of school practices for preventing and overcoming challenges faced by learners with special educational needs (SEN), with the goal of informing efforts toward a safe living community. Using a descriptive-correlational and descriptive-comparative approach, the study surveyed 32 parent-respondents of learners from public elementary schools in the Schools Division of Cavite. A researcher-developed four-point questionnaire was used to describe the respondents' profile and assess school practices in two domains: prevention of challenges in school environments and overcoming challenges in school environments. Frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, Spearman's test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used. Most respondents were 30-34 years old (66%), female (81%), and parents rather than grandparents (88%). The overall assessment of school practices was 3.23, interpreted as Often True of the School of My Child. Overcoming challenges obtained the higher sub-mean of 3.40 (Always True), while prevention obtained 3.11 (Often True). The lowest-rated practice was collaboration with the learner's doctors, nurses, and other specialists ($M = 2.97$). Age and family role were not significantly associated with assessments. Sex showed a weak positive relationship with overcoming challenges ($p = .384$) and a significant difference in prevention assessments ($p = .005$). The findings indicate strong perceived instructional and classroom support but a need to strengthen proactive planning, inter-professional collaboration, and equitable caregiver engagement.

Introduction

Inclusive education requires schools to respond to learner diversity by reducing barriers to participation and creating conditions in which learners with disabilities can participate meaningfully in school life. Contemporary discussions of inclusive education emphasize that inclusion is not achieved simply by placing learners with disabilities in a school setting; schools must also organize instruction, support systems, relationships, and learning environments around diverse needs.

Kafia et al. (2023) describe inclusive education as an evolving field that requires attention to the roles of professionals and to the practical conditions that make inclusion workable. In this sense, school practices that anticipate learner needs and address difficulties as they emerge are central to the quality and safety of educational participation. McKenna et. al. (2023) likewise highlights individualized education programs as an important mechanism for organizing educational responses around the needs of learners with disabilities. These perspectives provide a basis for examining school practices not only in terms of what schools do after a challenge occurs, but also in terms of how effectively they prepare for and prevent potential difficulties.

The school environment is also central to how learners experience inclusion. Challenges related to classroom behavior, peer relationships, disciplinary conditions, accessibility, and participation can influence the extent to which learners feel supported in school. Meinokat and Wagner (2025) emphasize the importance of understanding classroom disruptions and the conditions under which they are perceived as problematic, while Muñoz-Troncoso and Requelme (2025) show the relevance of class composition and classroom climate to learners' perceptions of their educational environment. Rathmann

et al. (2018) further connect classroom climate with student well-being, and Sortkær and Reimer (2018) highlight the relationship between disciplinary climate and well-being. Taken together, these studies suggest that a safe and supportive school environment depends on more than the absence of overt problems; it also requires structures and practices that promote positive participation, predictable support, and appropriate responses to learner needs.

For learners with disabilities, barriers may also arise from limited accessibility, inadequate support, or difficulty participating fully in school activities. Algolaylat et. al. (2023) documented accessibility issues experienced by students living with disabilities, illustrating how physical and institutional conditions can influence educational participation. Binlang and Donguiz (2024) similarly identified challenges encountered by students with visual impairments, underscoring the importance of responsive educational environments. Enderle et al. (2025) focused on the voices and preferred solutions of socially excluded students, reinforcing the value of considering the experiences of learners when schools develop support responses. These studies collectively point to the need for schools to combine preventive arrangements with responsive strategies that address challenges when they occur. Preventive practices may include individualized planning, coordination, accessible environments, communication with families, and preparation for possible risks, while responsive practices may involve instructional adjustment, teacher support, classroom management, and accommodations.

Within this context, parents provide a particularly relevant perspective because they observe both the learner's needs and the school's responses to those needs. Their assessment can provide information about whether school practices are visible, consistent, and responsive from the perspective of families. The present study therefore examined school practices as perceived by parent-respondents, focusing on the prevention of challenges and the overcoming of challenges among learners with special educational needs. The study further considered whether parents' assessments varied according to age, sex, and role in the family. This approach recognizes that school-family relationships are an important part of a support system and that parent perceptions can help identify areas where school practices are functioning well and areas requiring greater attention.

Careful examination of both preventive and responsive practices, the study sought to provide a more balanced account of school support: prevention addresses preparation and risk reduction before difficulties become more serious, whereas overcoming challenges concerns the school's capacity to respond effectively to difficulties that arise. The findings are intended to inform efforts toward a safer and more supportive school community for learners with special educational needs, particularly by identifying strengths that can be sustained and specific areas in which school-family-professional collaboration may be strengthened.

Research Questions

1. What is the profile of the parent-respondents in terms of age, sex, and role in the family?
2. How do the parent-respondents assess the school's practices in preventing and overcoming challenges of learners with special educational needs?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the parent-respondents' profile and their assessment of the school's practices in prevention and overcoming challenges?
4. Are there significant differences in the parent-respondents' assessments when grouped according to age, sex, and role in the family?

Hypothesis of the Study

There are no significant differences in the parent-respondents' assessments when grouped according to age and role in the family.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational and descriptive-comparative research design. The descriptive component was used to present the profile of the parent-respondents and describe their assessment of the school's practices in preventing and overcoming challenges experienced by learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The correlational component was used to determine whether significant relationships existed between the respondents' demographic characteristics and their assessments of the school's practices. The comparative component was used to determine whether significant differences existed in the respondents' assessments when they were grouped according to age, sex, and role in the family. The design was appropriate because the study examined existing conditions without manipulating the variables.

Respondents and Locale

The respondents were 32 parents of learners from public elementary schools in the Schools Division of Cavite. The school was selected as the locale because of the identified need to provide a safe and supportive educational environment for learners with Special Educational Needs and to address challenges that may arise in the teaching and learning process.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered primarily through a researcher-developed survey questionnaire based on the review of related literature and studies. The instrument was designed to obtain information about the respondents' demographic profile and their assessment of the school's practices in preventing and overcoming challenges among learners with Special Educational Needs. The questionnaire specifically covered practices associated with prevention and overcoming challenges within the school environment. The instrument consisted of two major parts. The first part obtained the respondents' profile in terms of age, sex, and role in the family. The second part asked respondents to assess the school's practices using a four-point response scale, ranging from Always True of the School of My Child to the corresponding lower response categories. Prior to administration, the questionnaire underwent review and revision with assistance from former graduate-school professors. The instrument was further refined based on comments and suggestions received during the proposal defense. This process was intended to improve the appropriateness and clarity of the survey items before data collection.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the conduct of the study. Before participation, respondents were provided with an informed consent form explaining their participation in the research. The consent document indicated that respondents were informed of the study and agreed that ethical standards and confidentiality would be observed. It also explicitly stated that respondents could withdraw or retract their participation at any time during the study. Participation was therefore based on informed agreement, with confidentiality of the respondents' information emphasized in the consent process. The questionnaire also identified the respondent's name as optional, supporting the protection of respondent identity during data collection.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and non-parametric statistical procedures consistent with the research questions and the characteristics of the respondent data. Frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize the respondents' demographic profile in terms of age, sex, and role in the family. For the examination of relationships between the respondents' demographic characteristics and their assessments of school practices, the study employed Spearman's rho. This non-parametric procedure was used to determine the direction and strength of relationships between the profile variables and the assessments of prevention and overcoming challenges. The study used a 0.05 level of significance as the basis for determining statistical significance. To determine whether respondents' assessments differed significantly when grouped according to demographic characteristics, the study used the Kruskal-Wallis test. This procedure was applied to the assessment of prevention and overcoming challenges across the respondents' age, sex, and family-role groups. The statistical decisions were based on the 0.05 significance level.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that the respondent group was concentrated in the 30–34 age bracket, which comprised 21 of the 32 respondents (66%). Female respondents accounted for 26 (81%), while male respondents accounted for 6 (19%). In terms of family role, 28 respondents (88%) were parents and 4 (13%) were grandparents.

Profile	Category	n	%
Age	30–34	21	66
	35–39	7	22
	40–44	4	13
Sex	Male	6	19
	Female	26	81
Role in family	Parent	28	88
	Grandparent	4	13

Table No. 1. Demographic Profile of the SPED Parent Respondents

As presented in Table 2, the overall mean assessment was 3.23 (SD = 0.55), interpreted as Often True of the School of My Child. The prevention domain obtained a sub-mean of 3.11 (SD = 0.54), while overcoming challenges obtained a higher sub-mean of 3.40 (SD = 0.57), interpreted as Always True of the School of My Child. The strongest-rated practices included adequate teacher training in special education methodologies (M = 3.50), an inclusive and supportive classroom environment (M = 3.47), clear presentation of information with mediated support (M = 3.47), and adaptation of lesson plans, materials, and assessments (M = 3.44).

The pattern suggests a relative strength in day-to-day instructional and classroom support, but comparatively less confidence in proactive prevention. The lowest-rated item was collaboration with the learner's doctors, nurses, and other specialists (M = 2.97), followed by strong partnerships with parents and guardians regarding the learner's health status and changes (M = 3.06). These results are important because preventive support often depends on information being shared across the people who understand different aspects of a learner's needs. Ainscow (2020) emphasizes individualized educational planning as a mechanism for organizing support around individual learner needs. In the present study, the comparatively lower assessment of external professional collaboration suggests that the school's preventive system may have greater room for strengthening coordination beyond the school setting.

The findings also show that prevention was nevertheless positively assessed overall. The prevention sub-mean of 3.11 indicates that respondents generally considered the listed preventive practices to be often true of the school. Items concerning individualized health planning, hazard assessment, physical accessibility, medical equipment, social-emotional and behavioral supports, and flexible teaching arrangements were all rated positively. This indicates that the issue is not an absence of preventive practice but a relative weakness in one aspect of prevention, particularly coordination with external specialists. The distinction is useful for school improvement because it points toward strengthening an existing system rather than replacing it entirely.

The higher rating for overcoming challenges is also meaningful. Practices involving teacher preparation, curriculum and assessment adaptation, structured classroom conditions, individualized support, and supportive learning environments were consistently rated highly. These findings are consistent with Ainscow (2020), who discuss the practical demands of inclusive education and the need for professionals to respond to learner diversity. They also correspond with Ebron (2026) emphasis on individualized educational planning. From the parents' perspective, the school appears to be more successful in responding to challenges that are already present than in coordinating all of the preventive resources that may be needed before such challenges emerge.

This result can also be viewed in relation to the literature on classroom climate and school conditions. Sortkær and Reimer (2018) point to the relevance of disciplinary climate. The relatively high assessment of overcoming challenges suggests that respondents recognize the school's capacity to maintain supportive instructional and classroom conditions when difficulties arise. The findings therefore portray a school with a stronger perceived response capacity, while simultaneously identifying external collaboration as an area for further development.

The results should also be interpreted considering accessibility concerns reported in other contexts. Enderle et al. (2025) documented challenges involving accessibility and participation among learners with disabilities. In contrast, the present findings show favorable parent assessments of school practices related to accessibility, individualized support, flexible teaching, and accommodations. This does not mean that accessibility challenges are absent, but it indicates that the respondents generally perceived the school as taking concrete steps to address them. Otero-Mayer et al. (2025) further underscore the importance of attending to the experiences and preferred solutions of learners who experience exclusion. Accordingly, maintaining communication with learners and families remains important even when school practices are generally viewed positively.

Domain / selected indicator	M	SD	Interpretation
Prevention of Challenges	3.11	0.54	Often True
• Develops detailed IHPs	3.22	0.49	Often True
• Regular health screenings	3.25	0.51	Always True
• Prompt response to illness/distress	3.28	0.52	Always True
• Partnerships with parents/guardians	3.06	0.35	Often True
• Collaboration with doctors/nurses/specialists	2.97	0.47	Often True

Overcoming Challenges	3.40	0.57	Always True
• Teacher training in SPED methodologies	3.50	0.57	Always True
• Adapted lesson plans/materials/assessments	3.44	0.62	Always True
• Inclusive/supportive classroom environment	3.47	0.51	Always True
Overall	3.23	0.55	Often True

Table No. 2. Assessment of the parent-respondents on the school's partnerships with families and communities in the quality of the home's language environment

Spearman's test showed that age was not significantly related to either prevention ($\rho = -.033$) or overcoming challenges ($\rho = .165$). Role in the family was likewise not significantly related to prevention ($\rho = .267$) or overcoming challenges ($\rho = .343$). Sex showed no significant relationship with prevention ($\rho = -.058$), but it showed a weak positive relationship with overcoming challenges ($\rho = .384$), exceeding the reported critical value of $\pm .349$ at the .05 criterion. Thus, most parent characteristics were not associated with how respondents assessed the school's practices, while sex showed a limited association with perceptions of overcoming challenges.

The limited demographic relationships suggest that the school's visible instructional and support practices were generally perceived similarly across age and family role. Age showed negligible or very weak relationships with both prevention and overcoming challenges, while role in the family showed weak positive relationships that did not reach statistical significance. These findings indicate that the assessment of school practices was not strongly dependent on whether the respondent was a parent or grandparent or on the respondent's age. The consistency is important because it suggests that the school's perceived support system was broadly recognizable across these groups.

At the same time, the sex-related finding warrants attention because caregiver perspectives may differ in how proactive and visible school practices are perceived. The correlation between sex and overcoming challenges was weak and positive ($\rho = .384$), while the relationship between sex and prevention was negligible ($\rho = -.058$). Although the relationship results alone should not be interpreted as evidence of causation, the pattern points to a potential difference in how male and female caregivers experience or evaluate the school's responses. Given the uneven distribution of the sample by sex, this finding should be interpreted cautiously and primarily as an indication for closer attention to communication and engagement rather than as a definitive explanation of caregiver perceptions (Aschieri et al., 2024).

Profile variable	p	Remarks
Age	.165	Not significant
Sex	.384	Significant; weak positive
Role in family	.343	Not significant

Table No. 3. Relationship in the assessment of the parent-respondents on the school's practices in terms of prevention and overcoming challenges of Learners with Special Educational Needs, when grouped according to profile variables.

The Kruskal-Wallis results indicate no significant differences in assessments by age for either prevention ($p = .450$) or overcoming challenges ($p = .996$). Likewise, no significant differences were found by family role for prevention ($p = .455$) or overcoming challenges ($p = 1.000$). The only significant difference occurred by sex in the prevention domain ($p = .005$). No significant difference by sex was found for overcoming challenges ($p = .381$).

The results distinguish between the school's operational strengths and a specific area of perceptual variation. Parents and grandparents, and respondents across age groups, generally shared similar assessments. In contrast, male and female respondents differed significantly in their assessment of preventive practices ($p = .005$), while their assessments of overcoming challenges did not differ significantly ($p = .381$). This pattern is noteworthy because it places the difference specifically in the preventive domain. The school's response to existing challenges appears to be viewed relatively consistently, whereas perceptions of preparation and prevention vary by sex.

One possible interpretation, grounded in the study data rather than a causal claim, is that preventive practices may not be equally visible or equally communicated to all caregiver groups. The finding is particularly relevant because prevention includes activities such as individualized planning, hazard assessment, health-related coordination, and communication about learner needs. Masuku and Marumolo (2024) emphasize the practical and professional conditions required to move

inclusive education forward. Strengthening the visibility and communication of preventive processes may therefore help ensure that caregivers have a shared understanding of how the school anticipates and manages potential challenges.

The result also reinforces the importance of considering caregiver perspectives as part of school improvement. Gregory et al. (2020) demonstrate the value of incorporating stakeholder voices when addressing exclusion and identifying preferred solutions. In the present study, the significant difference by sex does not establish that one group is more accurate than another; rather, it identifies a difference in perception that the school can examine through more consistent family communication and engagement. Because the sample was small and unevenly distributed by sex, future studies with larger and more balanced samples would be useful for determining whether this pattern persists in other settings.

Grouping variable	Domain	Kruskal-Wallis	p	Decision
Age	Prevention	1.59783	.450	Accept H_0
	Overcoming	0.00879	.996	Accept H_0
Sex	Prevention	7.83	.005	Reject H_0
	Overcoming	0.767	.381	Accept H_0
Role in family	Prevention	0.557	.455	Accept H_0
	Overcoming	0.000	1.000	Accept H_0

Table No. 4. Difference in the assessment of the parent-respondents on the school's practices in terms of prevention and overcoming challenges of Learners with Special Educational Needs when grouped according to profile variables

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that the parent-respondents were predominantly 30–34 years old, female, and parents rather than grandparents. Parents generally viewed the school's practices positively, with an overall mean of 3.23. The strongest perceived performance was in overcoming challenges ($M = 3.40$), particularly teacher training, adapted instructional materials and assessments, and supportive classroom conditions. Prevention of challenges received a lower mean of 3.11, with collaboration with external doctors, nurses, and specialists receiving the lowest individual rating ($M = 2.97$).

Most profile characteristics were not significantly related to or associated with the parent assessments. Age and family role showed no significant relationships or differences. Sex was associated weakly with the assessment of overcoming challenges ($p = .384$) and produced a significant difference in prevention assessments ($p = .005$). The findings therefore point to a school system perceived as strong in active instructional support but with room to strengthen proactive planning and coordinated care.

The principal implication is to formalize collaborative prevention mechanisms involving school personnel, parents, and relevant external professionals. This includes strengthening individualized planning, clarifying communication channels, and ensuring that safety and support information is accessible to all caregivers. Such actions are consistent with the study's goal of moving toward a safe living community for learners with SEN. The findings also suggest that future school improvement should preserve the strengths already recognized by parents while addressing the weaker areas identified through the prevention domain.

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Competing Interests Statement

The author declares that there are no known financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the conduct, interpretation, or reporting of this research.

Data Availability Statement

The author declares that data sharing is not applicable to this article because no new data were generated or analyzed for the study. All information presented was derived from previously published sources, which are appropriately cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.