



Exploring the Caregiving Experiences of Grandparents of Learners with Disabilities

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Abstract

This study explored the caregiving experiences of grandparents who served as primary caregivers of learners with disabilities, focusing on their educational involvement, coping strategies, and emotional well-being. Parental migration, family disruption, and economic pressures increasingly compelled grandparents to assume expanded caregiving and educational responsibilities; however, their perspectives remained underrepresented in special education research. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological multiple-case design in the Davao Region during the 2025–2026 school year. Six grandparents who served as primary or co-primary caregivers were purposively selected. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method, followed by cross-case analysis. The findings generated ten themes: role expansion as primary educational caregivers; caregiving-centered daily life and sacrifice; physical, emotional, and psychological strain; financial vulnerability and limited resources; challenges in supporting learning and fostering independence; school–caregiver collaboration as a critical source of support; coping through faith, family support, and acceptance; emotional fulfillment derived from learners' small achievements; empowering perspectives on disability and education; and future-oriented anxiety and aspirations. The findings indicated that caregiving reorganized grandparents' daily lives and imposed sustained emotional and financial burdens, while faith, family support, and collaborative relationships with schools strengthened their resilience and sustained their caregiving roles. Grandparents functioned not only as de facto parents but also as essential educational partners whose well-being influenced the educational experiences of learners with disabilities. Based on these findings, the study proposed the Caregiving Support and Empowerment Framework for Grandparents of Learners with Disabilities and recommended the implementation of grandparent-inclusive school practices, targeted social protection programs, and coordinated multi-level support systems to enhance caregiver well-being and learner outcomes.

Keywords

Grandparent caregivers, learners with disabilities, caregiving experiences, phenomenology, special education

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Author Contributions

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Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards.

INTRODUCTION

Across many countries, grandparents increasingly assumed caregiving responsibilities as demographic, economic, and social changes reshaped family structures. Population aging, labor migration, parental employment, family disruption, and

changing household arrangements expanded grandparents' responsibilities beyond traditional caregiving roles to include educational support, health management, and emotional nurturing. Contemporary evidence indicated that grandparent caregiving had become an essential component of child development and family resilience, although intensive caregiving was frequently associated with declining physical health, psychological distress, and increased caregiving burden (Chan et al., 2023; Di Gessa et al., 2022; Gupta & Sengupta, 2025). Grandparents also contributed significantly to children's developmental outcomes by providing emotional security, promoting educational engagement, and supporting cognitive development, particularly among socioeconomically disadvantaged families (Tompkins & Feng, 2025). Despite these important contributions, sustained caregiving frequently compromised older caregivers' physical health, emotional well-being, and quality of life because of prolonged caregiving demands and limited support systems (Notter, 2022; Xia et al., 2023).

The demands of caregiving became more complex when grandchildren had disabilities because grandparents assumed responsibilities that extended beyond routine childcare. They often managed educational activities, attended school meetings, coordinated healthcare services, supervised therapy, and provided continuous emotional and behavioral support. Evidence consistently showed that grandparents caring for children with disabilities experienced considerable financial strain, psychological distress, caregiving burden, and uncertainty regarding future caregiving responsibilities (Gantner et al., 2023; Novak-Pavlic et al., 2021; Priboi et al., 2022). Grandparents of children on the autism spectrum likewise reported unmet needs for emotional support, respite care, specialized services, and family assistance while simultaneously coping with age-related physical limitations (Baena et al., 2024). Nevertheless, many grandparents maintained resilience through spirituality, family cohesion, adaptive coping strategies, and acceptance of their caregiving roles despite persistent emotional and socioeconomic challenges (Alsharaydeh et al., 2022; Giezek et al., 2025; Mendoza et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, grandparents increasingly assumed parental responsibilities because of overseas employment, family separation, financial hardship, illness, and other socioeconomic circumstances that limited parents' capacity to provide continuous care. The manuscript described that these caregiving arrangements were evident in Special Education centers throughout the Davao Region, where grandparents regularly attended school meetings, communicated with teachers, accompanied learners to therapy sessions, and supervised home-based learning activities. Although international research extensively examined grandparent caregiving, most studies originated from Western and other high-income countries. Existing Philippine studies primarily focused on kinship care and custodial arrangements rather than the educational experiences of grandparents raising learners with disabilities. Furthermore, previous investigations emphasized health, legal, and custodial concerns while giving limited attention to grandparents' educational involvement, school partnerships, emotional well-being, and lived experiences within special education settings (Clark et al., 2022; Gantner et al., 2023; Novak-Pavlic et al., 2021). These empirical and contextual gaps limited the development of evidence-based educational interventions and policies that recognized grandparents as primary educational caregivers.

This study explored the caregiving experiences of grandparents serving as primary or co-primary caregivers of learners with disabilities in the Davao Region during School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, the study described grandparents' educational involvement, caregiving challenges, coping strategies, and emotional well-being while identifying common patterns across multiple caregiving experiences. The findings were expected to provide localized evidence that could strengthen grandparent-inclusive educational practices, inform disability support services, and guide social welfare and educational policies. Although the study was limited to six cases within one geographical region and therefore produced findings that were transferable rather than statistically generalizable, it contributed a Caregiving Support and Empowerment Framework grounded in grandparents' lived experiences and situated caregiving within interconnected family, school, community, and policy systems.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological multiple-case design within an interpretivist research paradigm to explore the lived caregiving experiences of grandparents raising learners with disabilities. A phenomenological approach was adopted because it enabled an in-depth examination of the meanings that participants attached to their caregiving experiences and educational responsibilities, while the multiple-case design facilitated comparisons across individual caregiving contexts to identify shared and contrasting patterns. This methodological combination was appropriate because the study sought to understand both the common essence of caregiving and the influence of family, educational, and socioeconomic contexts on grandparents' experiences. Each participating grandparent represented a bounded case, and cross-case analysis was subsequently conducted to identify convergent and divergent experiences across the six cases. The design aligned with the study objectives by providing rich contextual descriptions while maintaining analytical rigor.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit six grandparents from the Davao Region who possessed direct and extensive caregiving experience with learners with disabilities. This sampling strategy was selected because it enabled the identification of information-rich participants capable of providing detailed accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were included if they had provided continuous care for at least one year, served as primary or co-primary caregivers, maintained regular direct caregiving responsibilities, cared for a grandchild formally identified as having a disability, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Individuals who provided only occasional assistance, cared for grandchildren without formal disability identification, experienced cognitive or serious health conditions that could limit meaningful participation, or were involved in ongoing custody disputes were excluded. The six cases represented variation in residence, socioeconomic background, disability category, and family structure, thereby strengthening the depth and

transferability of the findings. The six participants represented diverse caregiving circumstances while sharing the common experience of assuming substantial educational and caregiving responsibilities for grandchildren with disabilities. This diversity enhanced the study's ability to identify recurring themes across different family and socioeconomic situations.

Table 1
Participant Profile

Case	Age	Residence	Grandchild's Disability	Caregiving Context
1	60	Urban, Davao del Norte	Autism; developmental delay	Parent worked overseas; grandmother managed schooling, therapy, and daily care.
2	72	Rural, Davao de Oro	Autism	Parent migrated for employment; grandmother supervised schooling and promoted independence.
3	64	Rural, Davao de Oro	Hearing impairment	Parents separated; grandmother supported inclusive education with limited resources.
4	61	Rural, Davao de Oro	Autism; ADHD	Both parents were absent; grandparents provided daily educational and household support.
5	63	Rural, Davao de Oro	Cerebral palsy, epilepsy, intellectual disability	Grandmother served as long-term caregiver, tutor, and companion.
6	64	Rural, Davao de Oro	Developmental disability	Grandmother coordinated school communication and caregiving because of maternal illness.

Note. All participants were grandmothers. Pseudonymous case numbers were used to protect participant identity.

Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews following approval from the appropriate institutional authorities and ethics review committee. A researcher-developed interview guide was validated by experts in qualitative research and special education to ensure content relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a location selected by the participant to maximize comfort and confidentiality. Interviews were conducted in Cebuano, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. Selected excerpts were translated into English and reviewed by a bilingual individual to preserve semantic accuracy. Field notes documenting contextual observations, participant behaviors, and researcher reflections complemented the interview transcripts and enriched data interpretation.

Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method. The analytical process began with repeated reading of each transcript to achieve immersion in the data. Significant statements relevant to the caregiving experiences of grandparents were identified and extracted, after which meanings were formulated from participants' narratives. Related meanings were clustered into thematic categories, and comprehensive descriptions were developed to represent the essence of each participant's experience. These descriptions were synthesized into the fundamental structure of the phenomenon and subsequently validated through participant member checking. Cross-case analysis was then conducted to compare similarities and differences across the six cases, resulting in ten major themes that represented shared caregiving experiences. A hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis guided the cross-case interpretation, ensuring systematic and transparent coding throughout the analytical process (Xu & Zammit, 2020). An audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme development, and analytical procedures further strengthened the dependability of the findings.

Reflexivity

The primary researcher served as a licensed Special Education teacher with extensive professional experience working with learners with disabilities. This professional background facilitated rapport with participants and enhanced understanding of educational terminology and caregiving contexts. However, the researcher acknowledged the potential influence of prior professional assumptions on data interpretation. To minimize researcher bias, reflexive journaling, bracketing of personal assumptions, member checking, and continuous reflection throughout data collection and analysis were employed. Participants' interpretations of their experiences were consistently prioritized during the analytical process to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their lived experiences rather than the researcher's professional perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University's Ethics Review Committee before the commencement of data collection. Participants received both written and verbal explanations regarding the purpose of the study, research procedures, potential benefits, possible risks, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation. Participant anonymity was protected through the use of pseudonymous case numbers, while electronic records were encrypted and stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Printed documents were secured in locked storage cabinets. Data management procedures complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and all research records will be appropriately disposed of following completion of the study. Considering the participants' caregiving responsibilities and age, emotional support mechanisms were made available should participation generate psychological distress.

Limitations and Rigor

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the context of several methodological limitations. The investigation involved only six grandmother participants from one geographical region, limiting statistical generalizability while supporting analytical transferability to similar caregiving contexts. The study also relied on self-reported experiences obtained through single in-depth interviews, which reflected participants' retrospective accounts at a specific point in time. Despite these limitations, methodological rigor was maintained through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and

transferability procedures. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement, verbatim transcription, and member checking. Dependability was established through a comprehensive audit trail documenting all analytical decisions. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling and systematic bracketing of researcher assumptions, while transferability was supported through rich descriptions of participant characteristics, caregiving contexts, and cross-case comparisons that enable readers to determine the applicability of the findings to comparable settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the six cases generated ten major themes describing the caregiving experiences of grandparents raising learners with disabilities. These themes reflected grandparents' educational responsibilities, daily caregiving demands, coping mechanisms, emotional well-being, and aspirations for their grandchildren. Although all themes emerged across the six cases, variations were observed in the intensity and contextual expression of these experiences according to family circumstances, socioeconomic conditions, and the nature of the grandchild's disability.

Table 2
Cross-Case Distribution of the Emerging Themes

Theme	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
Role expansion as primary educational caregivers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiving-centered daily life and sacrifice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical, emotional, and psychological strain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Financial vulnerability and limited resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Challenges in supporting learning and independence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School-caregiver collaboration as key support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coping through faith, family support, and acceptance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Emotional fulfillment derived from small progress	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Empowering views on disability and education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Future-oriented anxiety and aspirations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note. A check mark (✓) indicates that the theme emerged from the participant's account.

The consistent appearance of all themes across the six cases demonstrated that grandparents shared similar caregiving realities despite differences in their personal and family circumstances. The succeeding discussion presents each theme by integrating the findings with relevant literature and explaining their implications for educational practice and caregiver support.

Theme 1. Role Expansion as Primary Educational Caregivers

The findings revealed that grandparents assumed responsibilities traditionally performed by parents. They prepared school requirements, supervised assignments, attended school conferences, communicated with teachers, monitored educational progress, and represented their grandchildren during school activities. These responsibilities extended beyond routine caregiving and positioned grandparents as primary educational partners.

"Ako jud naga-atiman sa tanan pag-eskwela, assignment, ug pag-follow-up sa eskwelahan."

"Dili na ang ginikanan ang naga-attend sa meeting, ako na gyud."

The expansion of caregiving responsibilities reflected substantial changes in grandparents' family roles. Rather than serving as secondary caregivers, participants assumed parental authority because parents were unavailable due to migration, illness, or family disruption. This transition required grandparents to perform educational, emotional, and decision-making responsibilities that extended beyond traditional grandparenting. These findings were consistent with previous studies reporting that grandparents increasingly assumed parental functions because of changing family structures and socioeconomic circumstances (Martin et al., 2021; Mansilla-Domínguez et al., 2024). Likewise, grandparents raising grandchildren frequently experienced expanded responsibilities that required them to coordinate educational activities and communicate directly with schools (Clark et al., 2022). The present findings further extended previous literature by demonstrating that grandparents of learners with disabilities became active educational partners who participated directly in individualized educational support rather than merely providing supplementary childcare. The findings suggest that educational institutions should formally recognize grandparents as legitimate educational stakeholders. Policies and school programs should therefore include grandparents in school-home partnerships, parent education activities, and individualized educational planning to strengthen educational support for learners with disabilities.

Theme 2. Caregiving-Centered Daily Life and Sacrifice

The findings indicated that grandparents reorganized their daily routines around the educational and personal needs of their grandchildren. Household responsibilities, employment opportunities, community participation, and personal leisure were consistently subordinated to caregiving obligations.

"Sayu kaayo ko mubangon para ihanda ang tanan sa eskwela."

"Makapahulay ra ko kung tulog na siya."

Participants described caregiving as an all-encompassing responsibility that required continuous supervision throughout the day. Several grandparents sacrificed employment, social activities, and personal interests because no alternative caregiver was available. Their daily schedules revolved around school attendance, therapy appointments, meal preparation, transportation, and home-based educational support. These findings supported previous evidence demonstrating that grandparents raising grandchildren frequently restructured their daily lives to prioritize caregiving responsibilities (Di

Gessa et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2021). Similar experiences were reported among grandmothers caring for grandchildren in multigenerational households, where caregiving responsibilities substantially reduced opportunities for personal activities and social engagement (Gupta & Sengupta, 2025). The present findings further illustrated that caring for learners with disabilities intensified these sacrifices because educational and therapeutic demands required continuous supervision. These findings imply that support programs should recognize caregiving as a full-time responsibility. Schools and community agencies should develop respite services, flexible educational consultations, and caregiver assistance programs that reduce the cumulative burden experienced by older caregivers.

Theme 3. Physical, Emotional, and Psychological Strain

The findings revealed that grandparents experienced persistent physical exhaustion, emotional distress, and psychological burden associated with prolonged caregiving responsibilities. Fatigue, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion were common experiences across all participants.

"Kabati kaayo ang kakapoy, usahay maghilak nalang ko."

"63 na ko, lahi na gyud ang kakapoy."

Participants associated their caregiving challenges with advancing age, explaining that prolonged caregiving became increasingly difficult because of declining physical strength and health conditions. Many also reported constant worry regarding their grandchildren's education, behavior, and future, contributing to emotional stress and disrupted sleep. These findings were consistent with previous studies reporting that grandparents caring for children with disabilities frequently experienced emotional distress, caregiving burden, and declining physical health (Baena et al., 2024; Xia et al., 2023). Similar findings demonstrated that intensive caregiving adversely affected grandparents' mental health and overall well-being, particularly among older caregivers with limited support systems (Chan et al., 2023; Notter, 2022). The present findings further illustrated that educational caregiving added additional emotional responsibilities because grandparents continuously monitored school participation, learning progress, and behavioral development. These findings highlight the need for integrated educational and psychosocial support services for grandparent caregivers. Schools, healthcare providers, and local government agencies should collaborate to establish caregiver wellness programs, counseling services, and regular health monitoring to promote caregiver well-being.

Theme 4. Financial Vulnerability and Limited Resources

The findings demonstrated that financial limitations significantly affected grandparents' caregiving capacity. Participants consistently reported difficulties meeting transportation costs, therapy expenses, school requirements, medical needs, and other disability-related expenditures.

"Lisod gyud ang kwarta, usahay mangutang para lang maka-eskwela."

"Mas unahon namo ang eskwela kaysa therapy."

Limited financial resources frequently required grandparents to prioritize immediate educational expenses over therapeutic interventions. Several participants relied on irregular financial assistance from family members, while others borrowed money to sustain their grandchildren's educational participation. These findings agreed with previous research indicating that financial hardship remained one of the greatest challenges experienced by grandparents raising grandchildren with disabilities (Gantner et al., 2023; Novak-Pavlic et al., 2021). Similar studies reported that economic difficulties increased caregiver stress and limited access to healthcare, educational resources, and specialized services (Fruhauf et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2023). The present findings demonstrated that financial vulnerability directly influenced educational participation because grandparents frequently made difficult decisions regarding the allocation of limited household resources.

Theme 5. Challenges in Supporting Learning and Independence

The findings revealed that grandparents experienced considerable difficulty in supporting their grandchildren's learning and developing independent living skills. Participants described challenges associated with repeated instruction, behavioral management, communication barriers, limited educational backgrounds, and unfamiliarity with contemporary instructional approaches. These difficulties became more pronounced when learners required individualized academic support and continuous supervision.

"Lisod kaayo mutudlo kay balik-balikon gyud."

"Usahay dili ko kasabot sa leksyon."

Participants explained that teaching their grandchildren required patience, repeated demonstrations, and constant encouragement because many learners experienced developmental, behavioral, or communication difficulties. Some grandparents also acknowledged that their own educational attainment limited their confidence in assisting with school activities, particularly when lessons involved unfamiliar concepts or instructional technologies. Consequently, they depended heavily on teachers' guidance to facilitate home-based learning and reinforce classroom instruction. These findings were consistent with previous studies indicating that grandparents raising children with disabilities encountered difficulties in providing academic assistance because of limited educational preparation, age-related challenges, and communication barriers (Novak-Pavlic et al., 2021; Gantner et al., 2023). Similar findings demonstrated that grandparents frequently struggled with behavioral management, technology-assisted learning, and adapting to contemporary educational expectations while simultaneously addressing disability-related learning needs (Baena et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2022). The present findings further demonstrated that these educational challenges were intensified when grandparents became the primary educational caregivers responsible for monitoring learning progress on a daily basis. These findings suggest that schools should develop grandparent-responsive educational support programs. Home-learning materials should be written in clear and accessible language, instructional guides should accommodate older caregivers' learning needs, and regular

parent education sessions should be extended to include grandparents serving as primary caregivers. Such initiatives may strengthen grandparents' confidence and competence in supporting learners with disabilities.

Theme 6. School-Caregiver Collaboration as Key Support

The findings indicated that collaborative relationships with teachers and schools served as one of the most important sources of support for grandparents. Participants valued teachers' guidance, encouragement, and regular communication because these interactions enhanced their confidence in assisting their grandchildren at home.

"Ginatudluan ko nila unsaon pagtabang sa balay."

"Mas mosalig ko kung naa koy makasabot sa eskwelahan."

Participants emphasized that teachers provided practical advice regarding classroom expectations, behavior management, and home-based educational activities. Regular communication strengthened mutual understanding between schools and caregivers, enabling grandparents to monitor their grandchildren's academic and developmental progress more effectively. However, participants also acknowledged that school responsibilities increased their caregiving workload because they attended meetings, coordinated educational activities, and maintained continuous communication with school personnel. These findings supported previous evidence emphasizing that effective school-family partnerships enhanced educational outcomes for children with disabilities while improving caregiver confidence and engagement (Clark et al., 2022; Novak-Pavlic et al., 2021). Similarly, grandparents caring for children with disabilities benefited from collaborative relationships with professionals who provided educational guidance and emotional support (Baena et al., 2024). The present findings extended previous research by demonstrating that school collaboration functioned simultaneously as a protective resource and an additional responsibility, requiring grandparents to balance educational participation with existing caregiving demands. These findings indicate that schools should strengthen grandparent-inclusive educational practices by providing flexible consultation schedules, simplified educational information, and continuous communication strategies that acknowledge grandparents' caregiving responsibilities while minimizing unnecessary burden.

Theme 7. Coping Through Faith, Family Support, and Acceptance

The findings revealed that grandparents relied primarily on faith, family support, and acceptance to cope with the demands of caregiving. Prayer, spiritual beliefs, emotional support from relatives, and acceptance of their caregiving roles enabled participants to endure persistent physical and emotional challenges.

"Mag-ampo lang jud ko pirmi."

"Mao man ni ang gihatag sa Ginoo."

Participants consistently described spirituality as a source of emotional strength that enabled them to interpret caregiving responsibilities positively despite significant hardships. Family members who shared caregiving tasks, provided emotional encouragement, or offered financial assistance further strengthened participants' resilience. Conversely, grandparents who received limited family support reported greater emotional exhaustion and social isolation. These findings aligned with previous studies demonstrating that spirituality, family cohesion, and adaptive coping strategies promoted resilience among caregivers of children with disabilities (Alsharaydeh et al., 2022; Mendoza et al., 2020). Likewise, positive coping strategies and strong family relationships were associated with improved psychological well-being and life satisfaction among grandparent caregivers (Giezek et al., 2025). The present findings further demonstrated that faith and acceptance enabled grandparents to reinterpret caregiving challenges as meaningful responsibilities rather than overwhelming burdens. These findings suggest that psychosocial interventions should recognize the importance of spirituality and family support within caregiver assistance programs. Community organizations, educational institutions, and social service agencies should develop culturally responsive support initiatives that complement the coping strategies already practiced by grandparent caregivers.

Theme 8. Emotional Fulfillment Derived from Small Progress

The findings revealed that grandparents derived emotional fulfillment from observing even modest improvements in their grandchildren's learning, behavior, communication, and independence. These developmental gains strengthened their motivation to continue providing care despite persistent physical, emotional, and financial challenges.

"Bisan gamay ra, dako na para nako."

"Makalimot ko sa kakapoy kung makita nako iyang kalamboan."

Participants perceived progress using functional rather than purely academic indicators. Simple achievements such as independently completing daily routines, following instructions, communicating effectively, or demonstrating improved behavior were considered meaningful milestones. These accomplishments reinforced grandparents' belief that their caregiving efforts positively influenced their grandchildren's development and encouraged them to persevere despite ongoing caregiving demands. These findings were consistent with previous studies indicating that witnessing developmental progress enhanced grandparents' caregiving satisfaction and strengthened resilience (Fruhauf et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2021). Positive developmental outcomes also increased caregivers' confidence by reinforcing their sense of competence and purpose despite prolonged caregiving responsibilities (Mendoza et al., 2020). The present findings further demonstrated that recognizing incremental achievements served as an important emotional resource that reduced psychological distress and sustained long-term caregiving commitment.

Theme 9. Empowering Views on Disability and Education

The findings revealed that grandparents viewed disability as a condition that should not prevent children from receiving education, developing independence, or participating meaningfully in society. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of educational opportunities despite the challenges associated with disability.

"Dili man dapat babag ang kapansanan."

"Ang edukasyon maoy kahigayunan."

Participants rejected discriminatory beliefs regarding disability and instead expressed optimism regarding their grandchildren's educational potential. They believed that appropriate educational support would improve future independence, social participation, and quality of life. Their caregiving responsibilities therefore extended beyond meeting daily needs to advocating for educational opportunities that promoted long-term development. These findings agreed with previous studies demonstrating that grandparents developed positive perceptions of disability through continuous caregiving experiences and active engagement with educational services (Baena et al., 2024; Novak-Pavlic et al., 2021). Similarly, grandparents who maintained empowering beliefs regarding disability demonstrated stronger commitment to educational advocacy and family resilience despite ongoing caregiving challenges (Gantner et al., 2023). The present findings further indicated that sustained collaboration with schools contributed to changing traditional perceptions of disability by reinforcing the importance of inclusive education and learner participation. These findings imply that schools and community organizations should continue promoting disability awareness and inclusive education programs that actively involve grandparents. Empowering grandparents as educational advocates may strengthen community acceptance of learners with disabilities while enhancing educational participation and inclusion.

Theme 10. Future-Oriented Anxiety and Aspirations

The findings revealed that grandparents simultaneously experienced hope for their grandchildren's future and anxiety regarding the continuity of caregiving. Participants consistently expressed concern about who would assume caregiving responsibilities as they advanced in age or became physically unable to continue providing care.

"Unsahon na siya kung wala na ko?"

"Gusto nako mahimong independent siya."

Participants recognized that their advancing age limited their long-term caregiving capacity. Although they remained committed to supporting their grandchildren, they expressed uncertainty regarding future educational, financial, and caregiving arrangements. At the same time, they aspired for their grandchildren to become increasingly independent so they could participate more actively in society and rely less on continuous assistance. These findings were consistent with previous studies identifying future caregiving uncertainty as one of the most significant concerns among grandparents raising children with disabilities (Gantner et al., 2023; Priboi et al., 2022). Similar evidence indicated that older caregivers frequently worried about succession planning, long-term care, and the availability of family or institutional support after they were no longer able to provide care (Chan et al., 2023; Novak-Pavlic et al., 2021). The present findings further demonstrated that these concerns extended beyond physical caregiving to include continuity of educational support, therapy coordination, and advocacy for learners with disabilities. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive long-term caregiving planning involving families, schools, healthcare providers, and social welfare agencies. Developing structured succession plans and coordinated support systems may reduce grandparents' anxiety while ensuring continuity of care and educational services for learners with disabilities.

Implications for Emotional Well-Being and Daily Functioning

Taken together, the ten themes demonstrated that grandparents' caregiving experiences were characterized by the simultaneous presence of burden, resilience, responsibility, and hope. Expanded educational responsibilities, financial hardship, physical exhaustion, and emotional distress substantially influenced their daily functioning and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, spirituality, family support, collaborative school relationships, and the grandchildren's developmental progress consistently strengthened grandparents' resilience and sustained their commitment to caregiving. These findings indicate that caregiver well-being cannot be understood solely through individual coping because structural conditions, institutional support, and family relationships collectively shape caregiving experiences.

Table 3
Implications of the Emerging Themes for Grandparents' Emotional Well-Being and Daily Functioning

Theme	Implication
Role expansion as primary educational caregivers	Increased responsibility heightened emotional accountability and caregiving demands.
Caregiving-centered daily life and sacrifice	Daily routines were reorganized around educational and caregiving responsibilities.
Physical, emotional, and psychological strain	Prolonged caregiving contributed to persistent physical and emotional exhaustion.
Financial vulnerability and limited resources	Economic hardship restricted access to educational and healthcare resources.
Challenges in supporting learning and independence	Educational responsibilities increased caregiver stress and reduced instructional confidence.
School-caregiver collaboration as key support	School partnerships strengthened caregiving capacity while expanding educational responsibilities.
Coping through faith, family support, and acceptance	Internal and interpersonal resources promoted resilience and sustained caregiving commitment.
Emotional fulfillment derived from small progress	Incremental learner achievements restored caregiver motivation and emotional well-being.
Empowering views on disability and education	Positive beliefs strengthened advocacy and commitment to inclusive education.
Future-oriented anxiety and aspirations	Concerns regarding caregiving continuity generated ongoing emotional uncertainty while encouraging aspirations for learner independence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the caregiving experiences of grandparents serving as primary or co-primary caregivers of learners with disabilities in the Davao Region. The findings revealed that grandparents assumed expanded parental and educational responsibilities while managing substantial physical, emotional, psychological, and financial challenges. Their daily routines were reorganized around caregiving responsibilities, and they encountered difficulties supporting learning and promoting

independence because of age-related limitations, limited resources, and the complex needs of learners with disabilities. Despite these challenges, faith, family support, school collaboration, and the grandchildren's developmental progress strengthened their resilience and sustained their commitment to caregiving. The study further demonstrated that grandparents viewed education as an important pathway toward improving the future of learners with disabilities while expressing concerns regarding caregiving continuity as they aged. These findings indicated that grandparents' emotional well-being and daily functioning were shaped by interconnected family, educational, institutional, and socioeconomic factors rather than by individual resilience alone. The study addressed the identified contextual gap by providing a localized understanding of educational caregiving among Filipino grandparents and contributed the Caregiving Support and Empowerment Framework as a practical guide for strengthening grandparent-inclusive educational practices, coordinated support services, and evidence-informed policy development.

Schools, educational leaders, and government agencies should recognize grandparents as primary educational partners by implementing grandparent-inclusive policies, flexible school-home communication systems, caregiver education programs, and simplified learning support materials. The Department of Education, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, local government units, and healthcare providers should strengthen interagency collaboration by expanding psychosocial services, transportation assistance, disability support programs, financial aid, and caregiver wellness initiatives. Families should likewise promote shared caregiving responsibilities and develop long-term caregiving succession plans to ensure continuity of educational and daily support for learners with disabilities. Future studies should include grandfathers and other kinship caregivers to provide a broader understanding of caregiving experiences across diverse family structures. Researchers should also employ longitudinal and intervention-based designs to examine changes in caregiving experiences over time and evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed Caregiving Support and Empowerment Framework and grandparent-inclusive educational interventions. Expanding investigations across different regions and educational settings would further strengthen the evidence base for developing sustainable policies and programs that improve the well-being of grandparents and the educational outcomes of learners with disabilities.

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