

The Power of Sports: Untold Stories of Paragames Athletes Towards The Physical Education Development Program

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Publication Date: May 23, 2025

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15501930

Abstract

Paragames athletes are individuals with disabilities who compete in sports, demonstrating their abilities in events like the Paralympic Games. This study explored their experiences and challenges to improve Physical Education programs, making them more inclusive for students with disabilities at Engracia L. Valdomar National High School. Using a qualitative-phenomenological research design, the study involved 15 randomly selected participants, including Special Needs Education learners, teachers, and parents. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study identified key themes shaping the experiences of Special Needs Education (SNED) athletes, coaches, and parents. These included the importance of family-like support, commitment to inclusive education, finding joy in victories, overcoming challenges, and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Participants were also experienced personal growth, changes in perspective, emotional responses, and increased awareness of their roles and physical well-being. Their involvement in Paragames not only influenced their own lives but also positively impacted their families and communities,

fostering greater understanding and inclusivity. Looking ahead, participants expressed a strong commitment to lifelong learning and continued involvement in inclusive sports. They highlighted the need for further program development, greater stakeholder support, and stronger research-based advocacy to secure approval for inclusive education programs. In conclusion, the study emphasized the crucial role of inclusive sports in shaping the lives of SNED athletes, coaches, and parents. Supportive environments, personal growth, and overcoming challenges were central to their experiences. The findings highlighted the importance of collaboration among educators, families, and policymakers to enhance inclusive Physical Education programs. With stronger advocacy, research, and community involvement, these programs can be further developed to ensure lasting impact and accessibility for all learners. It is recommended that schools strengthen support systems by providing more training for coaches and teachers, increasing parental involvement, and ensuring better communication with stakeholders to enhance the inclusivity and sustainability of SNED athletic programs.

Keywords: Power of Sports, Untold Stories of Paragames Athletes, Physical Education Development Program

Introduction

Paragames athletes are individuals with disabilities who exhibit exceptional athleticism, determination, and resilience by competing in elite sports events like the Paralympic Games. These athletes not only defy physical limitations but also confront and challenge societal stereotypes about disability. Their participation serves as a powerful narrative of perseverance and empowerment. This study explores their lived experiences to inform and improve Physical Education (PE) programs. By understanding these journeys, educators and policymakers can design inclusive, adaptive, and supportive PE curricula that ensure equitable access and meaningful participation for all students, regardless of ability.

Since their inception, the Paralympic Games have grown significantly—from 400 athletes in 1960 to over 4,520 participants from 163 nations in the 2020 Summer Games (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). The event, rooted in Dr. Ludwig Guttman's 1948 Stoke Mandeville Games for veterans with spinal injuries (National Geographic, 2021), underscores athletic achievement over disability. Globally, para-sports have shown benefits in enhancing inclusivity and empathy among students (Pérez-Torrallba et al., 2019), and initiatives like ASEAN's Youth Sports for Development have promoted inclusive participation (Indrawagita, 2020). However, persistent challenges remain, including inadequate accessibility in sports infrastructure (Reina, 2019) and negative attitudes within educational settings (Cagas, 2023). These barriers highlight the need for sustainable, long-term solutions in educational systems.

In the Philippine context, inclusive PE is gaining traction through legislative efforts such as Republic Act No. 10533 and the Department of Education's inclusive education initiatives. Still, research reveals gaps in implementation and training (Palad et al., 2023; Benitez et al., 2025). In places like General Santos City, Paragames athletes are active in competitions, yet logistical and structural obstacles persist (Benitez et al., 2025). While there is general support for inclusion among Filipino PE teachers, many lack the necessary resources and training to implement inclusive practices effectively. Furthermore, research by Lagundino et al. (2024) underscores the need to consider how cultural and social factors shape the identities of Filipino para-athletes. Despite growing advocacy for inclusion, there is limited research on how para-sports can be systematically integrated into PE curricula to transform school culture. This study addresses this gap by examining how incorporating Paragames into PE can foster inclusivity, empathy, and social integration at local, national, and global levels.

The study explored the experiences and challenges of Paragames athletes and how their stories can improve Physical Education programs and answered the following questions: (1) What are the lived experiences (life world/worldviews) of Special Needs Education athletes, coaches and parents? What are the live experiences of the Special Needs Education learners in various events in athletics? (2) How do Special Needs Education athletes, coaches and parents describe the contexts of their lived experiences (lifeworld/worldviews)? (3) How do Special Needs Education athletes, coaches and parents view themselves in the future? and (4) What is the educational program probability for approval?

Methodology

The study utilized a transcendental phenomenological research design. Qualitative research is a systematic approach that seeks to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or human phenomenon. It typically occurs in natural settings and involves data collection methods such as observations, interviews, and document reviews to develop a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The study used this approach to explore SNED learner's experiences, motivations, and challenges, particularly with skill development and emotional resilience (Neubauer et al., 2019).

The research participants were purposely selected. For the IDI and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), there were five (5) Special Needs Education learners, five (5) teachers, and five (5) parents. Additionally, to give further emphasis to its validity, three experts with Master's and Doctorate degree in Engracia L. Valdomar National High School in General Santos City handling classes of the purposely selected participants were invited for cross-validation. The selection of the number of participants was based on the suggestion of Vagle (2016) that the participants for the phenomenological study ranged between 6 and 10.

Additionally, experts invited for cross-validation held a Master's or Doctorate degree in a relevant field such as Special Education, Physical Education, or Psychology and were familiar with teaching or working with learners with special needs, which is consistent with validation practices that require expert input to ensure credibility and accuracy in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study used In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for data collection and cross-validation. IDIs involved one-on-one interviews with a small group of participants to gather detailed insights about their perspectives on a specific topic or program. These interviews were useful for exploring personal thoughts and behaviors in depth (Boyce et al., 2018). The interview questions were developed by the researcher, reviewed by the adviser, and validated for content. Audio recordings of the interviews were made with the participants' consent using a phone to ensure accurate and unbiased responses for later transcription and analysis. The student participants were interviewed to share their actual experiences, particularly related to feedback. The researcher also used instruments such as a questionnaire validation tool, interview protocols, an assent and informed consent form, and a transcription writing guide.

Data are facts gathered through systematic scientific techniques. This study's data collection process was carefully structured to ensure thorough and reliable data gathering. The researcher sent official letters to the Schools Division Superintendent and the School Principal of Engracia L. Valdomar National High School of DepEd General Santos City. Additionally, the researcher sought permission from the participants to ensure their voluntary participation.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with an interview guide and probing questions to gather in-depth data. The responses were recorded and transcribed. The transcription followed a guide adapted from Protacio (2021). To ensure accuracy, the interview transcripts were validated by the participants, allowing them to review and confirm their responses. The transcription conventions were adapted from Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) and Silverman (2016). The finalized transcripts were then reprinted and used for thematic analysis.

The researcher employed thematic analysis in conducting data analysis for this study. According to Moustakas (1994), thematic analysis emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within the data. This was also employed in various studies in the Philippines (Barroga & Tampus, 2023; Dela Cruz et al., 2023; Felongco et al., 2022; Protacio, 2022; Sonza et al., 2022; Tacogue et al., 2022; Alfaro & Protacio, 2025; Dela Cruz & Amarillo, 2022). It organizes and describes all data in detail. Thematic analysis has six (6) steps. First, the researcher reads and re-reads the data to become familiar with what the data needs and to pay attention to the patterns that occur. Second, it generated the initial codes by documenting where and how patterns occurred. Third, codes were combined into overarching themes that accurately depict the data. Next, it examined how the themes support the data and the overarching theoretical perspective, then it represented each theme, which aspects of data were being captured, and what was interesting about the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Results and Discussions

The following themes emerged after a rigorous process of thematic analysis.

Lived Experiences of Special Needs Education Athletes, Coaches, and Parents

ET 1: Nurturing, Family-Like Support for SNED Athletes

Nurturing a family-like environment for Student-Athletes with Special Needs (SNED) was pivotal in fostering their holistic development. When coaches and educators extended care and mentorship akin to familial support, it cultivated a sense of belonging and inclusion among these athletes. This supportive atmosphere significantly enhanced their motivation, confidence, and overall well-being, ensuring they thrived both in sports and academics.

Recent initiatives underscored the profound impact of such environments. For instance, the Texas A&M International University women's volleyball team's visit to Clark Middle School aimed to inspire learners by sharing personal stories and life lessons, emphasizing confidence and resilience (Jimenez et al., 2025). Similarly, Coach Beulah Osueke's tenure at West Catholic Prep in Philadelphia highlighted the power of sports as a tool for empowerment, teaching her players their worth and how to respond to discrimination (Osueke, 2025). Moreover, programs like Girls on the Run focused on developing competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution in young girls through lessons that incorporated running and other physical activities, delivered by caring and competent coaches (Girls on the Run International, 2025).

These examples illustrated that when educators and coaches treated their athletes like family, they built strong relationships that not only enhanced athletic performance but also contributed to the athletes' personal growth and academic success. Such environments ensured that each student received the encouragement and guidance needed to excel in all facets of their lives.

ET 2: Commitment to Inclusive Education

Educators' unwavering commitment to fostering inclusive education for learners with special needs (SNED) was pivotal in creating equitable learning environments. Their dedication transcended traditional teaching roles, encompassing the development of adaptive learning strategies, individualized support, and advocacy for equal opportunities. By embracing diversity and acknowledging the unique challenges faced by SNED learners, educators ensured that teaching methods catered to varying abilities, promoting acceptance, patience, and encouragement. This approach cultivated a classroom atmosphere where every student felt valued and empowered to succeed. Moreover, educators' collaborative efforts with parents, specialists, and administrators continuously enhanced inclusive practices, making education more accessible and effective for all learners.

Recent developments underscored this commitment. For instance, in Texas, lawmakers were advancing private school voucher programs aimed at empowering families to choose suitable educational settings for their children with special needs. However, concerns have been raised about the potential impact on public school funding and the adequacy of support for special education learners in private institutions (Serrano & McGee, 2025). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the number of secondary school learners receiving support during state exams has significantly increased, reflecting a growing recognition of the need for accommodations and inclusive practices in mainstream education (Horan, 2025). Additionally, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education is emerging as a game changer for learners with disabilities, offering assistive technologies that support diverse learning needs (Gecker, 2025). These initiatives highlighted the ongoing efforts and challenges in creating inclusive educational environments that support the success of all learners.

ET 3: Finding Joy in Victories and Growth

Coaches and educators derived profound satisfaction from witnessing their athletes' and learners' progress, whether through competitive victories or personal development. Each achievement, regardless of scale, reinforced their dedication and underscored the value of their efforts. Beyond the tangible rewards of medals and trophies, mentors found fulfillment in observing increased confidence, perseverance, and skill advancement among their protégés. The joy of seeing individuals overcome challenges, celebrate milestones, and developed a passion for their pursuits fostered a meaningful connection between mentors and learners, strengthening their commitment to nurturing future champions.

Recent examples highlighted this dynamic. Valentina Torres, a freshman at Texas A&M Kingsville and former standout track athlete from United High School, organized a two-day track clinic for elementary learners in her hometown. Motivated by her own experiences and the support from her coaches, Torres aimed to teach the fundamentals of running, often overlooked until high school. She emphasized perseverance and consistency, reflecting the deep satisfaction mentors experience when inspiring young athletes (Laredo Morning Times, 2025).

Similarly, Trent Dalton, a renowned journalist and author, credits his high school English teacher, Shirley Adams, for recognizing his potential during his troubled teenage years. Her dedication and belief in his abilities inspired him to pursue education and achieve success, showcasing the profound impact educators have on personal growth (The Australian, 2024).

These instances illustrated that the true reward for mentors lied not just in their learners' external accomplishments but in their holistic development and passion for their endeavors.

ET 4: Facing Setbacks and Challenges

Athletes, coaches, and parents inevitably faced various obstacles, including losses, injuries, and moments of self-doubt. While defeats can be discouraging, they served as valuable opportunities for learning and growth. Coaches played a pivotal role in emphasizing resilience, encouraging athletes to view setbacks as stepping stones toward improvement. Parents provided essential emotional support, helping their children stay motivated despite challenges. Through teamwork, perseverance, and a strong support system, they navigated difficulties together, reinforcing the importance of determination and a positive mindset in both sports and life.

Sharlene Mawdsley (2025) shared her journey of overcoming imposter syndrome and self-doubt after not being selected for the Tokyo Olympics despite qualifying. With the helped of a sports psychologist and support from her team, she regained confidence, leading up to the 2024 Paris Olympics. Mawdsley emphasized the importance of focusing on controllable aspects and staying true to oneself (The Sun). Similarly, Kellie and Chris Gimenez (2025) highlighted the significance of parental support in sports, emphasizing how their "rules" for their athletic children reflected the universal challenges parents face. Their approach underscored the importance of helping children navigated sports-related obstacles and embracing the fleeting nature of these experiences (Parents Magazine). Meanwhile, John Wooden and Pat Summitt (2025) exemplified resilience by overcoming significant challenges through determination and adaptability. Their leadership emphasized maintaining a positive outlook, learning from failures, and fostering an environment where teams focused on solutions rather than blame (Investors' Business Daily). Furthermore, Osueke (2025) emphasized how sports served as a powerful tool for grassroots empowerment, particularly in underprivileged communities, where coaches played a critical role in guiding young athletes to overcome adversity (Associated Press News). Lastly, Harden (2023) discussed the importance of controlling the controllable aspects of life and thriving despite setbacks, reinforcing the core values of resilience and perseverance.

These examples illustrated that setbacks and challenges were an integral part of the athletic journey. With the combined efforts of coaches, parents, and athletes themselves, obstacles can become catalysts for personal growth and success.

ET 5: Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle Through Sports

Engaging learners in sports is a vital strategy for fostering a healthier lifestyle, as highlighted by Psychology Today (2024), which emphasized that sports contributed to improved mental health by reducing stress and anxiety among teens. Similarly, Mind Groom (2024) underscored the numerous benefits of sports for learners, including enhanced physical fitness, better time management, and increased discipline. JASSB Biomed Central (2024) further reinforced the importance of structured physical activity in schools, noting that active lessons positively impacted learners' academic performance and musculoskeletal health.

Beyond individual benefits, sports served as a tool for social empowerment, as discussed by AP News (2024), which detailed how a Philadelphia basketball coach has used sports to instill resilience and life skills in teenage girls. Our Midland (2024) advocated for the adoption of regular exercise routines, emphasizing their role in preventing sedentary behaviors and promoting long-term well-being. Additionally, My Journal Courier (2024), through the insights of Brian Hainline, calls for a revival of youth sports in America, stressing the necessity of structured physical activities in shaping healthier, more engaged individuals.

By promoting an active lifestyle through sports, educators, coaches, and parents played a crucial role in instilling lifelong healthy habits in learners, ensuring both physical and mental well-being while fostering discipline, teamwork, and resilience.

Contexts of the Lived Experiences of Special Needs Education Athletes, Coaches, and Parents

ET 1: Significant People and Influences

Family, mentors, and peers played pivotal roles in shaping the experiences and commitment of athletes and educators involved in Paragames and inclusive sports. According to the Special Olympics organization, family members provided essential emotional support, enhancing athletes' self-esteem and encouraging their participation in sports (Special Olympics, n.d.). Mentorship programs, such as Athletes for Kids, emphasized the importance of guidance from experienced individuals, fostering personal growth and confidence in young athletes (Athletes for Kids, n.d.). Peer support was also crucial; as highlighted by AP News, camaraderie among teammates fostered motivation, teamwork, and a shared sense of purpose (AP News, 2024).

Additionally, initiatives like the Black Swimming Association (BSA), co-founded by Olympian Alice Dearing, illustrated how mentorship in sports served as a powerful tool for empowerment, with dedicated mentors instilling perseverance and leadership skills in young athletes (The Sun, 2024). Such support systems were vital in maintaining long-term engagement in physical activities and fostering determination and advocacy among participants.

Collectively, these influences inspired individuals to persist in their athletic and educational endeavors and reinforced their commitment to advocating for and supporting learners with special needs in education (SNED) in sports and education, ensuring a more inclusive and empowering environment.

ET 2: Changes in Perspective and Personal Growth

Participation in Paragames has been a transformative experience for many, fostering patience, empathy, and a deeper understanding of inclusivity in sports and education. According to Sherrill (2004), engagement in adapted physical activities enhanced social awareness and fostered meaningful connections between athletes and learners with special needs. Lieberman and Houston-Wilson (2017) emphasized that inclusive sports programs challenge traditional perspectives on disabilities, promoting advocacy and appreciation for diverse abilities. Moreover, Block (2016) highlighted how exposure to adaptive sports led to improved teaching strategies, encouraging educators and coaches to develop individualized approaches that catered to different learning needs.

Furthermore, Rimmer and Rowland (2008) discussed the broader societal benefits of inclusive sports, illustrating how they contributed to breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of belonging for all participants. DePauw and Gavron (2005) noted that participation in disability sports reshaped attitudes, reducing stigma and increasing awareness about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Lastly, Goodwin and Rossow-Kimball (2012) emphasized that these experiences instilled resilience and determination, benefiting not only the athletes but also educators, coaches, and peers who worked closely with them.

This journey of personal growth has not only enhanced teaching and coaching approaches but has also enriched the lives of participants, equipping them with the tools to create a more supportive and empowering environment for learners with special needs.

ET 3: Influence on Family and Others

Participation in Paragames extended beyond athletes and coaches, positively influencing their families and communities. According to Hutzler and Barak (2017), family involvement in adaptive sports fosters a greater appreciation for inclusivity and empathy, enhancing relationships and support systems at home. Smith and Green (2018) highlighted that exposure to inclusive sporting events encouraged open conversations, leading to increase awareness and acceptance of individuals with special needs. Moreover, Shields and Synnot (2016) emphasized that inclusive sports participation challenges societal stereotypes, promoting advocacy and reshaping community perspectives on disability.

Additionally, Darcy, Lock, and Taylor (2017) discussed how adaptive sports served as a catalyst for broader social change, empowering families to advocate for accessibility and equal opportunities. Goodwin and Rossow-Kimball (2012) noted that inclusive sports created lasting community impacts by fostering collaborative efforts among educators, parents, and local organizations. This collective commitment strengthened inclusive education and sports, ensuring a more supportive and accepting environment for individuals with special needs.

ET 4: Emotional Responses

Participants experienced a range of emotions while supporting SNED learners, navigating both exhaustion and deep fulfillment. According to Dunn and Shields (2020), educators and coaches working with learners with special needs often faced emotional and physical challenges, yet their perseverance was fueled by the gratification of witnessing student progress. Martin and Whalen (2019) highlighted that while inclusive education can be demanding, the sense of accomplishment and purpose derived from facilitating student success strengthened educators' commitment. Furthermore, Block et al. (2018) emphasized that emotional investment in inclusive sports fostered resilience, empathy, and professional growth among educators and coaches.

Additionally, Goodwin, Johnston, and Gustafson (2021) discussed how witnessing the achievements of SNED learners cultivated a profound sense of purpose, reinforcing the importance of advocacy in inclusive education. Haegele and Kirk (2022) noted that while fatigue was a common challenge, the emotional rewards of fostering inclusivity outweighed the difficulties, leading to long-term dedication. This emotional journey enhanced not only personal well-being but also the collective commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

ET 5: Key Reflections on Role

Participants recognized the depth of their responsibilities in guiding and supporting SNED learners, acknowledging both the challenges and rewards of their role. According to Forlin et al. (2019), educators working with learners with special needs must continuously adapt their teaching strategies to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Florian and Spratt (2020) emphasized that patience and adaptability were essential in meeting the diverse needs of learners, ensuring that inclusive education remained effective and meaningful.

Moreover, Sharma and Sokal (2021) highlighted the importance of collaboration among teachers, families, and specialists in enhancing student learning experiences. The fulfillment educators derived from witnessing student progress reinforced their commitment to inclusion, as noted by Ryndak et al. (2022), who found that long-term involvement in special education increased educators' advocacy for equal opportunities. Additionally, Lindsay et al. (2023) argued that continuous professional development and reflective practices helped educators refine their approaches, strengthening their ability to provide meaningful learning experiences for learners with special needs.

Through these reflections, participants reaffirmed their dedication to fostering inclusivity, advocating for SNED learners, and ensuring that every student has access to supportive and enriching educational opportunities.

ET 6: Awareness of Bodily Changes

Participants became more aware of their physical well-being as they engaged in training and support SNED athletes. Research by Warburton and Bredin (2019) highlighted that regular physical activity improved cardiovascular health, endurance, and muscular strength, which many participants experience as they engaged in inclusive sports. Similarly, Guthold et al. (2020) emphasized that maintaining an active lifestyle contributed to long-term well-being, reducing the risk of chronic diseases.

However, some participants also faced challenges such as weight fluctuations, fatigue, and the physical toll of balancing training with caregiving responsibilities. According to Smith et al. (2021), individuals who took on dual roles as caregivers and athletes often experience increased stress and physical exhaustion, requiring strategies for energy management. Furthermore, studies by Wicker and Frick (2022) suggested that structured recovery routines and balanced nutrition played a crucial role in sustaining long-term physical engagement in sports.

This heightened awareness encouraged participants to adopt healthier habits and managed their energy levels more effectively, reinforcing their commitment to inclusive sports while prioritizing their own well-being.

ET 7: Sources of Joy

Participants found deep fulfillment in witnessing their athletes' victories, both in competitions and in personal growth. According to Deci and Ryan (2020), intrinsic motivation played a crucial role in fostering joy and satisfaction among educators and coaches, as they saw the impact of their efforts on student development. Similarly, Hodge et al. (2019) highlighted those inclusive sports provided a sense of belonging and purpose, reinforcing participants' dedication to supporting SNED learners.

Beyond achievements, simple moments of fun, laughter, and shared experiences with learners became meaningful sources of joy. Research by Shapiro and Martin (2021) suggested that positive social interactions in sports settings enhanced emotional well-being and resilience, creating lasting bonds between coaches and athletes. Moreover, Coates and Vickerman (2022) emphasized that fostering inclusive and supportive environments contributed to personal fulfillment, making the journey as rewarding as the outcomes.

These emotional rewards highlighted the depth of participants' commitment to inclusive sports, as their joy stemmed not only from victories but from the everyday moments of connection and growth.

ET 8: Challenges and Issues

Participants faced difficulties in managing the behavior of SNED learners, including moments of unpredictability, communication barriers, and varying levels of engagement. According to Florian and Spratt (2019), inclusive education required adaptive teaching strategies to address the diverse needs of learners with special needs, particularly in sports and physical activities. Similarly, Lieberman et al. (2021) highlighted that communication challenges, such as limited verbal expression or sensory sensitivities, can impact participation, requiring educators and coaches to implement alternative methods like visual cues and structured routines.

Despite these challenges, participants emphasized the importance of teamwork, patience, and support from fellow teachers, coaches, and families. Research by Black et al. (2020) suggested that collaborative approaches, including peer mentorship and parental involvement, significantly improved the effectiveness of inclusive sports programs. Moreover, Vickerman and Maher (2022) stressed that professional development and continuous learning played a crucial role in equipping educators with the necessary skills to manage behavioral complexities effectively.

By working together and sharing strategies, participants created a more inclusive and supportive environment that helped both learners and educators navigate these difficulties, ultimately fostering a positive and empowering sports experience for SNED learners.

ET 9: Sharing Experiences

Participants enjoyed sharing their journeys, challenges, and triumphs with others, believing that their stories can inspire and motivate both fellow educators and the broader community. According to McGonigal (2019), storytelling was a powerful tool for fostering social connections, enhancing motivation, and promoting a sense of shared purpose. Similarly, Armstrong et al. (2021) highlighted that educator who shared their experiences contributed to a collective learning environment, where peers can gain insights into best practices for supporting SNED learners.

They took pride in celebrating even the smallest victories, recognizing that every step forward—whether in skill development, confidence, or inclusivity—was meaningful. Research by Sherrill (2020) emphasized that incremental progress in adaptive physical education played a significant role in boosting self-esteem and engagement among learners with disabilities. Moreover, Côté and Hancock (2019) stressed that recognizing personal and student achievements enhanced job satisfaction and long-term commitment among educators and coaches.

Through storytelling, participants fostered a sense of camaraderie, raise awareness about SNED learners, and encouraged more people to support inclusive sports initiatives. As noted by Ratten and Ferreira (2021), personal narratives about inclusion in sports can serve as catalysts for policy change and increased community involvement, reinforcing the importance of shared experiences in promoting broader acceptance and advocacy.

Future Self-Perceptions of Special Needs Education Athletes, Coaches, and Parents

ET 1: Acquiring Lifelong Insights and Growth

Participants gained profound lessons from their experiences, deepening their understanding of SNED learners and their unique abilities. According to Bandura (2020), engagement in inclusive education fostered social learning, allowing educators to develop adaptive teaching strategies while enhancing their empathy and patience. Similarly, Florian and Spratt (2019) emphasized that inclusive pedagogical practices not only benefitted learners with special needs but also contributed to the personal and professional growth of educators by encouraging reflection and continuous learning.

They developed greater patience, empathy, and resilience, which not only enhanced their teaching and coaching skills but also impacted their personal lives. Research by Sharma and Sokal (2021) highlighted that educator working with SNED learners often experience increased emotional intelligence and problem-solving abilities, which contribute to their long-term professional development. Moreover, Tomlinson (2020) asserted that adaptive teaching approaches encouraged lifelong learning, as educators must continuously refine their methods to meet the evolving needs of their learners.

This journey fostered a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to grow alongside their learners, reinforcing their commitment to inclusivity and lifelong learning. As noted by Booth and Ainscow (2019), inclusive education created reciprocal learning opportunities, where both educators and learners benefit from shared experiences, strengthening the foundation for a more equitable and supportive educational system.

ET 2: Envisioning Future Roles and Participation

Many participants aspired to continue their involvement in Paragames, whether as coaches, mentors, or advocates for inclusive sports. According to Sherrill (2020), sustained participation in adaptive sports fosters long-term personal and professional growth, encouraging individuals to take on leadership roles that promote inclusivity. Similarly, DePauw and Gavron (2019) emphasized that individuals engaged

in disability sports often transition into mentorship and advocacy roles, leveraging their experiences to support emerging athletes with special needs.

They recognized the long-term impact of their work and were motivated to take on official roles that further support SNED learners. Research by Brittain (2021) highlighted that inclusive sports programs contributed to a shift in societal attitudes toward disability, reinforcing the importance of continued advocacy in ensuring equal opportunities. Furthermore, Rimmer et al. (2020) noted that the integration of individuals with disabilities into mainstream sports settings required ongoing commitment from educators and policymakers to create sustainable, inclusive frameworks.

Their commitment extended beyond competition, as they sought to promote a culture of acceptance, understanding, and equal opportunities for all athletes, regardless of abilities. As Bailey and Morley (2021) argued, inclusive sports not only empowered athletes but also transformed the broader sporting community by fostering social cohesion and breaking down barriers to participation.

Education Program Approval Likelihood

ET 1: Challenges to Program Approval

Participants highlighted several obstacles that could delay or prevent the approval of the program. A major concern was the lack of awareness about the benefits of inclusive sports, which can lead to hesitation from school administrators and stakeholders. According to Darcy et al. (2020), misconceptions about the capabilities of learners with disabilities often result in limited institutional support for inclusive sports initiatives. Similarly, Goodwin and Watkinson (2019) found that a lack of awareness among educators and policymakers contributed to the slow adoption of adaptive physical education programs.

Limited support from parents, who may have concerns about their children's participation, also posed a challenge. Research by Haegele and Kirk (2021) suggested that parental concerns often stemmed from safety considerations and a lack of familiarity with inclusive sports, leading to reluctance in allowing their children to participate. Furthermore, Shields and Synnot (2020) emphasized the need for parental education and engagement to foster greater acceptance and support for inclusive sports programs.

Additionally, insufficient resources, including sports equipment and funding, further complicated the implementation of the program. As highlighted by Rimmer et al. (2020), financial constraints and inadequate infrastructure are major barriers to the expansion of inclusive sports, requiring targeted policy interventions and resource allocation. Addressing these barriers through advocacy, awareness campaigns, and resource investment were crucial to gaining approval and ensuring the program's success.

ET 2: Stakeholder Support and Reaction

Despite the challenges faced, participants generally perceived strong support from key stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, and the broader community. Research by Lieberman et al. (2020) emphasized that administrative backing was crucial in the successful implementation of inclusive sports programs, as school leaders played a key role in resource allocation and policy-making. Administrators acknowledged the value of inclusive sports and were open to initiatives that promote engagement among SNED learners, aligning with findings by DePauw and Doll-Teppe (2021), who highlighted that institutional commitment fostered sustainable inclusive practices.

Teachers expressed willingness to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse needs. As noted by Block and Obrusnikova (2019), professional development in adaptive physical education significantly enhanced educators' confidence and effectiveness in implementing inclusive sports activities. Additionally, Haegele and Kirk (2021) stressed the importance of teacher collaboration and training in ensuring that inclusive programs meet the needs of all learners.

The community also recognized the program's potential to foster inclusivity and social integration. Research by McConkey et al. (2020) suggested that community involvement strengthened inclusive education efforts by increasing awareness and encouraging a culture of acceptance. This positive response

reinforced the importance of collaboration and advocacy in ensuring the program's successful implementation.

ET 3: Aspects for Further Development

Participants emphasized the importance of increasing awareness about the program's benefits among stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and the broader community. Research by Black and Williamson (2021) indicated that parental involvement significantly enhanced the success of inclusive sports programs, as families played a vital role in supporting SNED learners' participation. Similarly, Lieberman and Houston-Wilson (2020) suggested that teacher training and community engagement initiatives can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment.

To ensure the program's effectiveness, participants highlighted the need for structured monitoring and evaluation systems. As noted by Sherrill (2019), ongoing assessment through data-driven approaches allowed for timely adjustments and improvements in inclusive physical education programs. Regular feedback mechanisms were crucial, aligning with findings by Goodwin and Watkinson (2020), who stressed that feedback from learners, parents, and educators enhanced program design and effectiveness.

Additionally, continuous training for coaches and educators was recommended to improve implementation. According to Block and Obrusnikova (2019), professional development in adaptive physical education strengthens educators' ability to create inclusive learning experiences. Haegele and Kirk (2021) further emphasized that specialized training fosters teacher confidence and improves instructional strategies for SNED learners.

By addressing these aspects, the program can ensure long-term success and a greater impact on SNED learners, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and evidence-based decision-making in inclusive sports initiatives.

ET 4: Data or Research for Approval

Participants emphasized the importance of collecting comprehensive data and conducting research to support the program's legitimacy and effectiveness. According to Black et al. (2021), evidence-based research played a critical role in securing administrative approval for inclusive sports initiatives, as it demonstrated measurable benefits for SNED learners. Statistical findings and success stories provided concrete proof of the program's positive impact, aligning with recommendations by Block and Obrusnikova (2019), who stressed the need for continuous assessment and reporting in adaptive physical education.

Additionally, expert recommendations and policy alignment strengthened the program's foundation. Research by Haegele and Kirk (2021) suggested that integrating inclusive sports programs within existing educational frameworks enhanced their acceptance and sustainability. Establishing a legal foundation was also crucial, as emphasized by Lieberman and Houston-Wilson (2020), who highlighted the importance of aligning programs with disability rights laws such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and national inclusive education policies.

By ensuring that the program was backed by solid research and legal frameworks, participants believed they can secure stronger support from administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. This strategic approach not only enhanced program approval but also promoted long-term sustainability and wider adoption of inclusive sports initiatives.

ET 5: Involving Parents and Community

Participants recognized that the active participation of parents and the broader community played a vital role in the success of inclusive sports programs. Research by Turnbull et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of family engagement in special education, emphasizing that regular communication, orientations, and consultations helped foster parental understanding and support. Involving parents in decision-making ensured that they felt valued as partners in their children's development, which aligned with the principles of inclusive education (Smith et al., 2020).

Beyond parental involvement, community partnerships significantly contributed to the program's sustainability. According to Sherrill (2018), collaborations with local organizations, stakeholders, and advocacy groups provided essential resources, increased program visibility, and promoted broader social inclusion. These partnerships also created opportunities for learners with special needs to participate in community-based activities, reinforcing their skills beyond the school setting (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 2020).

By fostering a collaborative environment, inclusive sports programs ensured that SNED learners received holistic support both in and out of school. This approach not only enhanced the effectiveness of the program but also cultivated a culture of inclusivity and acceptance within society.

Conclusions

This study examined the lived experiences of Paragames athletes with disabilities to enhance the inclusivity of Physical Education (PE) programs at Engracia L. Valdomar National High School. Using a qualitative-phenomenological approach with 15 participants including SNED learners, teachers, and parents; the study identified key themes such as family-like support, commitment to inclusion, and challenges faced in para-sports. These findings aimed to guide improvements in PE programs for learners with special needs.

Emerging themes reflected the emotional and developmental journey of SNED athletes and their support systems. Themes included influences from significant people, emotional responses, and personal growth, which highlighted the deep impact of inclusive sports. Future perceptions revealed a desire for continued involvement in para-athletics, along with increased empathy, patience, and dedication from coaches and families.

Approval of inclusive education programs was influenced by stakeholder support, challenges in implementation, and the need for community involvement. The study recommended more training for teachers, stronger family engagement, and better communication to boost inclusivity. It also suggested that schools gather data to support program approval and called for further research on the long-term impact of SNED athletics on learners' development.

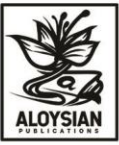
Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

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