

Original Article

Keeping Minds on Track: Perceptions of General Education Teachers on Learners with Difficulties in Sustaining Concentration

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Received: 21 May 2026; Revised: 30 June 2026;

Accepted: 02 July 2026; Published: 05 July 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66074/N7P3W5C2>

Abstract

Teachers' attentional control is crucial. I explored the teacher's attention control involving learners with disabilities. I interviewed eight general education teachers in selected private schools in Tagum City; I selected them through purposive sampling. The results showed that managing classroom distractions to sustain attention involved attention-directing strategies, positive reinforcement, structured routines, and teacher coping mechanisms for managing anger and stress. The findings on shifting focus to support learners with disability revealed the implementation of differentiated, flexible, and learner-centered approaches, adaptive instruction, multi-modal strategies, and experiential learning. Monitoring and revising information for learners with disability were reflected in motivating learners through rewards, revising instructional strategies, monitoring learner engagement behaviorally, and collaborating with parents. This study recommends that general education teachers continue to implement flexible, learner-centered instructional practices that accommodate the diverse attention and engagement needs of learners with disabilities. Teachers may strengthen the use of structured routines, positive reinforcement, differentiated instruction, multi-modal learning activities, and experiential approaches to sustain learners' focus and active participation in classroom activities.

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Keywords: Keeping minds on track, general education teachers, attention control, learners with difficulties, sustaining concentration

1. Introduction

In reviewing the literature, I found that global studies consistently reported that learners with disabilities often experience difficulties sustaining attention during learning tasks, posing recurring challenges for general education teachers across various educational contexts (Mokano & Letuma, 2025).

For instance, studies conducted in South Africa found that teachers encountered difficulties keeping these learners focused on classroom tasks amid various instructional demands (Ahmed & Pierre, 2024). Similarly, research in Turkey revealed that educators faced ongoing challenges with learners who frequently lost concentration and disengaged during instructional activities (Cicekci & Sadik, 2019). In the United States, studies also documented that teachers regularly struggled with learners' attention lapses, which disrupted the flow of instruction and affected learning continuity (Kraft & Monti-Nussbaum, 2021).

In the Philippine context, I found that similar concerns were documented in several local studies. A study conducted in Negros Oriental found that teachers consistently faced challenges related to learners' attentional difficulties during classroom activities (Patina & Bolongaita, 2024). Likewise, research in Mati City, Davao Oriental, showed that attention lapses among learners remained a persistent concern in everyday teaching practices (Oliveros et al., 2025). Studies focusing on inclusive education in public elementary schools also indicated that maintaining learners with disabilities' attention remained a pressing issue for teachers in mainstream classrooms (Rone et al., 2023).

These findings suggested that difficulties in sustaining attention often resulted in classroom disruptions, interruptions in instructional flow, and reduced academic engagement among learners (Ndou-Chikwena & Sefotho, 2025). Recognizing these persistent challenges, I saw the importance of conducting this study to provide contextual insights within the Philippine educational setting, where research on teachers' lived experiences in addressing attention-related difficulties among learners with disabilities remains limited compared to the global literature (Beltran et al., 2025). Through this study, I aimed to highlight the experiences of general education teachers and to provide localized evidence that could contribute to improving inclusive education practices in the country.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

I employed a qualitative descriptive design. In this study, I adopted a flexible approach to provide a detailed summary of my participants' perceptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Ayton et al., 2023). I prioritized their narratives and firsthand accounts, allowing their voices to guide my understanding of the perceptions rather than imposing external interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach offered several advantages, including enabling me to generate rich, detailed descriptions, capture authentic perspectives, and produce context-specific insights that can directly inform inclusive education practices and support teachers in addressing learners' attentional challenges.

2.2. Sample and Sampling

The participants in this study were eight (8) general education teachers employed during the School Year 2025–2026 who were handling learners with disabilities who experienced difficulty sustaining attention during classroom activities. These learners commonly struggled to maintain focus, follow instructions, complete tasks, regulate behavior, and remain engaged during learning activities, often requiring additional instructional support and classroom accommodations. The participants were teaching in general education classrooms at a private school in Tagum City and had at least 1 year of experience working with learners with disabilities in inclusive educational settings.

I used purposive sampling in selecting my study participants. This sampling technique is a non-probability sampling method that allowed me to intentionally select individuals who are most knowledgeable and experienced regarding the phenomenon I studied (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling technique was suitable for the study because it ensured participants could provide rich, relevant, and in-depth insights that directly captured the complexities of teaching learners with disabilities, thereby strengthening the credibility and depth of my findings.

2.3. Data Gathering Techniques

I utilized in-depth interviews to gather data from the selected participants. I chose in-depth interviews as a qualitative data collection method because they involved conducting intensive, one-on-one conversations with participants to explore their perspectives, experiences, and the meanings they attributed to the phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, providing sufficient time for participants to share detailed accounts of their experiences while allowing the researcher to probe for clarification and deeper insights. I used an interview guide questionnaire to ensure consistency and focus during the interviews.

while allowing participants to elaborate on their responses (Roberts, 2020). To enhance the validity and credibility of the data, the interview guide questionnaire was reviewed and validated by three experts prior to its administration: a qualitative research specialist with extensive experience in educational research, a faculty member holding a doctoral degree in education with expertise in qualitative methodologies, and an external validator experienced in conducting and evaluating qualitative studies. Their recommendations and suggestions were incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, coherence, and alignment of the interview questions with the study's objectives.

2.4. Data Analysis

I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six Phases of Thematic Analysis to analyze the interview data systematically. In the first phase, I became familiar with the transcripts by reading and re-reading them to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' accounts. The second phase involved generating initial codes by identifying significant statements and meaningful patterns within the data. In the third phase, I organized these codes into potential themes, grouping together those that represented shared perspectives among teachers. During the fourth phase, I reviewed and refined the themes to ensure that they accurately reflected the data and remained consistent with the research focus. The fifth phase involved defining and naming the themes to clearly articulate their meaning and relevance to the perspectives of the general education courses I studied. Finally, in the sixth phase, I integrated the findings into a coherent narrative, supported by verbatim excerpts, to present an in-depth account of general education teachers' perspectives on learners with attention difficulties.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

I adhered to the ethical standards outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The research proposal was also reviewed and approved by the Society of Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) of Holy Cross of Davao College, Inc., to ensure compliance with ethical, legal, and moral research standards. Credibility was achieved through close engagement with participants and careful interpretation of their narratives, while transferability was supported by providing rich contextual descriptions. Dependability was ensured through consistent documentation of research procedures, and confirmability was maintained by grounding findings in participants' responses and keeping an audit trail.

3. Results

3.1 Managing Classroom Distractions to Sustain Attention

3.1.1 Attention-Directing Strategies

As participants described their experiences, a consistent pattern emerged in which teachers actively redirected learners' attention whenever signs of distraction or disengagement became evident. The accounts reflected frequent use of verbal prompts, such as calling learners by name, asking questions related to the lesson, and providing immediate reminders to refocus on classroom tasks. These responses suggest that teachers remained vigilant in monitoring learners' attention and employed direct intervention strategies to maintain engagement during instructional activities. The narratives further revealed that attention redirection was often used as an immediate classroom management practice to address off-task behaviors and to encourage learners to refocus on the learning process.

"Call their attention or calling their names or asking questions about the topic." (IDI2Pg2L38-39).

Another participant similarly described this experience by stating:

"Gina call gyud nako iyang attention like 'stop doing that one.'" ("I really call out their attention, like, 'stop doing that.") (IDI7Pg4L121-122)

Several participants echoed this perspective, as one teacher shared:

"Gina call gyud nako ang attention nila, sometimes gapatindog ko sa ilaha, sometimes lang labaw na pag na loose na akong temper sa ilaha." ("I really call their attention; sometimes I make them stand, especially when I start to lose my temper with them.") (IDI6Pg4L116-167)

3.1.2 Positive Reinforcement

The use of positive reinforcement emerged as a meaningful strategy for sustaining learners' attention and encouraging appropriate classroom behavior. The narratives highlighted how teachers intentionally recognized students' efforts through praise, reward systems, and public acknowledgment of positive actions and achievements. These practices appeared to foster learners' confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate in classroom activities. The accounts further suggested that recognition not only encouraged individual learners to remain attentive and engaged

but also influenced other students to emulate positive behaviors, thereby contributing to a more focused and supportive learning environment.

“Hilig man jud ko muhatag sa ilaha ug reinforcements para mu boost ilang confidence. Sa akong students naa koy gina praise like star of the week kanang mga behave, after sa lesson every Thursday after sa assessment.” (“I really like giving them reinforcement to boost their confidence. For my students, I give praise like ‘Star of the Week’ for those who behave well, after the lesson every Thursday, following the assessment.”) IDI3Pg2L58-60

This shows how recognition is embedded within classroom routines to highlight students’ achievements and promote sustained attention during instructional activities. Another participant shared:

“So katong bata pud, muana siyag ‘teacher, I want to put my name’ I put iyang pangalan didto, kanang nag buy daw siya sa canteen, g punit daw niya ang basura. Ma ano sa iyang mind ba na buhaton ni niya para mabutang iyang name didto.” (“So that child would say, ‘Teacher, I want to put my name.’ I would write their name there, for example, when they bought something at the canteen or picked up trash. It motivates them to do those actions so their name can be included.”) IDI3Pg2L62-64.

Further, another participant echoed her perspectives:

“I also make it a point to praise those who are staying on task and behaving well, which often encourages others to follow.”
IDI4Pg3L77-78

3.1.3 Structured Routines

The importance of structured routines emerged as a key strategy for sustaining learners’ attention and promoting active engagement. The narratives reflected how teachers established clear expectations, simplified instructions, and utilized visual supports to help learners understand classroom procedures and instructional tasks. Participants emphasized the value of ensuring learners were aware of expectations before activities began, creating a sense of predictability and reducing confusion during lessons. The accounts further revealed that teachers used calming and self-regulation techniques when learners became distracted or overwhelmed, helping them regain focus and participate more effectively in classroom activities. These practices collectively contributed to a structured and supportive learning environment that fostered sustained attention and successful task completion.

“To help sustain attention, I set clear routines, simplify instructions, and use visual supports.” IDI1Pg1L8-9

One participant highlighted the importance of ensuring that students clearly understand procedures before activities begin, stating:

“Kanang before ka mag start sa klase kay dapat nakasabot na sila unsa ilang dapat buhaton.” (“Before you start the class, they should already understand what they are supposed to do.”) IDI3Pg2L42-43

Another participant noted:

“Pag mawala sa focus kay gunitan iyang nawng, inhale exhale, eyes on me, breathe the flower, blow the candle para ma kalma siya.” (“When they lose focus, I gently hold their face and guide them, inhale, exhale, eyes on me, breathe in like smelling a flower, blow out like a candle, to help them calm down.”) IDI8PgPg5L151-152

3.1.4 Teacher Coping Mechanism for their Own Anger/Stress

The narratives revealed that teachers incorporated short movement breaks and physical activities to address restlessness and provide learners with opportunities to refocus their attention. Participants also described the importance of managing their own emotional responses during challenging situations, recognizing that maintaining composure contributed to a more positive and supportive classroom environment. These accounts suggest that behavior management involves not only responding to learners’ needs but also exercising self-regulation to foster a calm, productive, and attentive learning atmosphere.

“I also allow short movement breaks like exercise to help students refocus.” IDI1Pg1L25-26

Another participant noted:

“Sometimes, mugawas ko sa classroom para mawala ang temper tapos after mu balik sa classroom.” (“Sometimes, I step out of the classroom to cool down, then I come back afterward.”) IDI6Pg4L117-118

3.2 Shifting Focus to Support Learners with Disability

3.2.1 Differentiated, Flexible and Learner-Centered Approach

The participants' accounts revealed that sustaining learners' attention often required teachers to move beyond predetermined lesson plans and respond to emerging classroom needs. Their experiences reflected a process of continual adjustment, where instructional decisions were shaped by learners' immediate reactions, levels of engagement, and learning readiness. Rather than adhering strictly to a single approach, teachers described modifying tasks, altering activities, and exploring alternative methods whenever existing strategies no longer captured learners' interest. These narratives underscored the importance of instructional flexibility, suggesting that effective support for learners with attention difficulties relies on a teacher's capacity to adapt, innovate, and make responsive decisions throughout the learning process.

"I usually pause and redirect their attention... breaking the task into smaller parts or changing the activity." IDI1Pg5L163-164

Another participant shared:

"Dapat flexible jud ka... mangita jud ka ug way." ("You really have to be flexible... you have to find ways.") IDI5Pg7L244-255

3.2.3 Adaptive Instruction

This subtheme reflects how teachers rely on creativity and improvisation to sustain students' interest and understanding. I sensed that participants view creativity as an essential skill that allows them to transform a lesson into something more engaging when the original approach becomes ineffective. Other participants also shared that being imaginative and resourceful helps them maintain a lively and responsive classroom environment. One of them said:

"Dapat creative ka... mu flick dayon into other way ingon ani nalang imong i lesson." ("You have to be creative... quickly shift to another way and adjust how you deliver the lesson.") IDI5Pg7L241-242

Another participant discussed her experience:

"Akong ginahimo ana kay actual na jud na switching sa method. Mukalit lang ug light bulb na "Ahh mag ing ani ta bi kay murag na bored namo". ("What I do there is actually switch methods on the

spot. It's like a sudden light bulb moment, 'Ahh, let's try this instead because they seem bored already.'") IDI7Pg9L301-302

3.2.4 Multi-Modal Strategies

While listening to the participants discuss the use of multi-modal activities such as games, I noticed the enthusiasm in their voices as they described how playful activities help capture students' attention. Teachers described intentionally integrating games into lessons to make learning more enjoyable and interactive. One participant shared:

"Akong mga strategies is kanang something na mga games... naa pud mi lucky box." ("My strategies include using games... we also have a 'lucky box.'") IDI3Pg5L194-195

Another participant reinforced this point, stating:

"Akong ginabuhay kay naa koy game gamay... duck race." ("What I do is include a small game... like a duck race.") IDI7Pg9L287-288

Further, another participant discussed:

"Pag makita na nako na ma bored na siya during discussion, mangita dayon ko ug lain na activity nga kanang maganahan siya na mubuhay ato na related sa among lesson. Usually game jud siya like 'trip to Jerusalem' style. Basta naa lang jud activity na makapal alive sa iyaha kay dali ra siya ma bored." ("When I notice that they're getting bored during the discussion, I immediately look for another activity that they'll enjoy doing that's still related to the lesson. It's usually a game, like a 'trip to Jerusalem' style. As long as there's an activity that can make them feel alive again, since they get bored easily.") IDI7Pg9L297-298

With the same experience, another participant shared:

"Akong gibuhay kay 'O sige, tan aw mo sa inyong notebook ha lumabanay' ni participate jud siya kay makita man niya sa iyang mga classmates na nag lumabanay maong ma active pud siya, 'okay, pangitaon ninyo kinsa na hero akong gi describe'" ("What I did was say, 'Okay, look at your notebooks, let's make it a race.' They really participated because they saw their classmates

competing, which made them active too. I also said, ‘Find which hero I’m describing.’”) IDI7Pg9304-306

3.2.5 Experiential Learning

As the participants described their use of hands-on activities, I noticed their strong commitment to making learning meaningful and relevant to students’ lives. Teachers emphasized experiential learning because it allows students to interact directly with materials and concepts, fostering deeper understanding. One participant shared:

“My classroom is more about thinking science classroom, hands-on activities and more on manipulatives.” IDI3Pg6L208-209

Another participant shared:

“I do more on activities... pag ma relate nimo in real life.” (“I focus more on activities... especially when you can relate them to real life.”) IDI6Pg8L266-267

3.3 Monitoring and Revising Information for Learners with Disability

3.3.1 Motivating through rewards.

As participants discussed rewards, I noticed their intention to motivate learners through simple yet meaningful recognition. Teachers described offering small incentives to encourage students to complete tasks and remain attentive during class. One participant shared:

“I add some reward system... I put star on their hands and they are happy.” IDI2Pg6L189-190

Another participant shared:

“If you finish this one, I have a reward for you.” IDI8Pg9L314-315

3.3.2 Revise Instructional Strategies

While listening to the participants share their strategies for supporting individual learners, I noticed their strong sense of responsibility in ensuring that no student is left behind. Teachers described intentionally providing closer guidance to learners who need additional assistance during tasks. One participant shared:

“Akong ginabuhay is taparan or lingkuran jud.” (“What I do is sit beside them.”) IDI7Pg8L279

Another participant shared the same experience:

“Tapos during discussion, sa front na nako siya ginapalingkod para dali ra ma catch iyang attention.” (“Then during the discussion, I seat them at the front so it’s easier to catch their attention.”) IDI7Pg9L299-300

Further, another participant noted:

“Now, when they still lose their interest or attention during class instruction, I walk towards them and tell them that they can do their thing after the class.” IDI4Pg7218-219

3.3.3 Monitoring Learner Engagement Behaviorally

As participants shared how they respond when students begin to lose focus or struggle with the lesson, I noticed their readiness to immediately adjust their teaching strategies. Teachers described remaining observant during instruction and quickly responding whenever learners show signs of disengagement. One participant explained,

“Kanang magtabi, mag tindog ug manghilabot ug gamit and mag gawas gawas sa classroom.” (“They talk to others, stand up, touch others’ things, and keep going in and out of the classroom.”) IDI6Pg13L430-431

Similarly, two of the participants shared,

“Kanang mag sulat-sulat ug mag dula-dula na siya kay not paying attention na jud.” (“They start scribbling and playing around, which shows they’re really not paying attention anymore.”) IDI7Pg13L444-445

“Mag suroy-suroy na ug daghan nag excuses like ‘pee, pee.’” “They start wandering around and making lots of excuses like ‘pee, pee.’” IDI8Pg13L460

3.3.4 Collaboration with Parents

As the participants discussed how they understand their learners' needs, I noticed that they actively involve parents to inform their instructional approach. One participant explained,

"Makig coordinate sa parents regarding sa ilang behavior sa klase." ("I coordinate with the parents regarding their behavior in class.") IDI6Pg11L426

Another participant highlighted keeping parents updated,

"Ga inform pud ko sa iyang mama about sa iyang anak sa school." ("I also inform the mother about her child's situation in school.") IDI7Pg13L440-441.

Similarly, a participant shared,

"I ask the parent and the student so I know what approach to do." IDI2Pg9L353-354

4. Discussion

4.1 Managing Distractions Among Learners with Disability

The findings indicate that when learners become off-task or inattentive, teachers employ attention-directing strategies such as verbal cues, calling learners by name, asking questions, establishing structured routines, and simplifying instructions to sustain focus and engagement. When learners exhibit restlessness or emotional dysregulation, behavior management techniques such as breathing exercises, short movement breaks, and positive reinforcement are utilized to support emotional regulation and maintain active participation in learning activities. These findings support Franklin and Harrington (2024), who emphasized that classroom management, along with verbal and nonverbal redirection techniques, enables teachers to address off-task behaviors while maintaining learners' engagement during instruction. Similarly, the findings affirm those of Alimahan and Ubayubay (2025), which highlighted that structured classroom routines create predictable learning environments in which learners understand expectations, thereby minimizing disruptive behaviors and promoting sustained attention throughout instructional activities.

However, the findings contrast with those of Yuliana and Sukinah (2025), who suggested that structured routines, behavior management techniques, and teacher-directed management strategies may not consistently lead to sustained engagement,

particularly in inclusive classrooms where learners have diverse educational needs and responses to instruction.

4.2 Shifting Focus to Support Learners with Disability

The findings emphasized that when learners with disabilities lost focus during reading, discussion, or other instructional activities, teachers responded by employing differentiated, flexible, and learner-centered approaches tailored to individual learning needs. Multi-modal strategies that incorporated visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile resources were utilized to enhance engagement and sustain attention through varied instructional experiences and structured participation. When learners demonstrated inattention during lengthy written tasks or abstract lessons, teachers adopted experiential learning opportunities and adaptive instructional practices that promoted active involvement, continuous guidance, and immediate feedback. These findings support Sankalaite et al. (2023), who highlighted that teachers often simplified tasks, introduced alternative activities, and modified instructional approaches when learners experienced difficulty or diminished interest, thereby sustaining participation and facilitating understanding. Likewise, the findings corroborate the work of Rajendran et al. (2024), who emphasized that multimodal and game-based strategies effectively increased learner motivation by transforming instruction into an engaging, participatory learning experience.

In contrast, the findings differ from those of Gkintoni et al. (2025), who argued that frequent modifications in instructional approaches may contribute to cognitive overload, particularly when learners are repeatedly required to adapt to new tasks, formats, and learning demands, potentially affecting comprehension and retention.

4.3 Monitoring and Revising Information for Learners with Disability

The findings of my study highlight that teachers can identify signs of disengagement, such as off-task behavior and inattentiveness. In response, they provide motivation through rewards, revise instructional strategies based on learners' needs, and closely monitor behavioral engagement during activities. They also collaborate with parents to better understand and address learners' behavior. Through these combined efforts, teachers are able to sustain learners' attention, appropriate behavior, and overall engagement throughout the lesson. This finding corroborates the view of Chew and Cerbin (2020), who suggested that effective teaching involved constant observation of students' responses and the ability to respond promptly when difficulties arose. Similarly, this finding substantiates Karasova and Nehyba's (2025) claim that teachers often made immediate adjustments during instruction by redirecting attention, modifying tasks, or introducing engaging activities to maintain students' participation in the lesson.

On the other hand, the current finding negates Hatiie and Clarke (2024), who claimed that while monitoring and feedback are essential, over-reliance on external

rewards and constant behavioral tracking may limit the development of learners' self-regulation and intrinsic motivation.

5. Conclusion

Based on the study, it can be concluded that general education teachers employed multiple, flexible instructional practices to sustain the attention and engagement of learners with disabilities who have difficulty maintaining focus. Teachers managed distractions through attention-directing strategies, structured routines, behavior management techniques, and positive reinforcement, while also adapting instruction through differentiated, learner-centered, and multi-modal approaches to address learners' diverse needs. The findings further revealed that teachers continuously monitored learners' behaviors, revised instructional strategies when necessary, and collaborated with parents to ensure consistent support for learners inside and outside the classroom. These practices demonstrated that sustaining attention in inclusive classrooms requires responsiveness, creativity, and continuous teacher adjustment. Overall, the study emphasized that effective support for learners with attention difficulties relies not only on classroom management but also on adaptive teaching practices and collaborative efforts that promote meaningful participation and learning.

6. Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is recommended that general education teachers continue implementing flexible and learner-centered instructional practices that accommodate the diverse attention and engagement needs of learners with disabilities. Teachers may strengthen the use of structured routines, positive reinforcement, differentiated instruction, multi-modal learning activities, and experiential approaches to sustain learners' focus and active participation in classroom activities. School administrators may provide continuous professional development programs, instructional resources, and mentoring opportunities that enhance teachers' competence in managing attention-related challenges within inclusive classrooms. Likewise, parents may maintain regular communication and collaboration with teachers to ensure consistency in behavioral support and learning strategies across home and school settings. Finally, future researchers may explore the effectiveness of specific intervention programs and attention-support strategies among learners with different disability profiles to further improve inclusive educational practices.

Acknowledgment

Sincere gratitude is expressed to Dr. Fernandez for the invaluable guidance, encouragement, and expertise provided throughout the completion of the study. Heartfelt appreciation is also extended to the panel members for the insightful comments and constructive suggestions utilized for the research to be greatly

improved. Deepest thanks are directed to family and friends for the unwavering support, understanding, and motivation received during the journey. Most importantly, the greatest gratitude is offered to God for the guidance, strength, wisdom, and countless blessings necessary for the achievement to be realized.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Author Contributions: Cabrera, D.; Study design, method conception, data collection, data analysis and manuscript writing.