

Developing an Inclusive Education Framework: A Study of Local Education Authorities' Implementation

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Abstract

This study focused on the implementation of Inclusive Education in terms of curriculum, instruction, material resources and facilities, school leadership and school climate to develop an inclusive education framework for learners with special educational needs. A Descriptive-qualitative research design was utilized in the study employing in-depth interview, observations, and document analysis as methods of collecting data. The analysis of the findings revealed that schools included in the study seemed to be in the first base of the implementation of Inclusive Education. Several actions were done to advance inclusion in the sample schools but in an extremely limited manner. Based on the findings, an Inclusive Education Framework was developed. The framework outlines policy, guidelines, LSEN identification, assessment, placement, partnership with stakeholders, staff professional development, parental involvement, school components, curriculum, assessment, resources and facilities, and climate in ensuring effective Inclusive Education for learners with special needs.

Keywords: inclusive education, learner with special educational needs, descriptive-qualitative, implementation

INTRODUCTION

Filipinos value education as a means of social and economic advancement, with the Department of Education receiving the largest budget allocation annually, as mandated by the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Philippine Education for All, 2015). The 1987 Constitution likewise guarantees the right to education of every Filipino. It provide that:

The state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to qualify education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make education accessible to all (Philippine Constitution, Article XIV, Sec. 5, para. 5).

Republic Act 9115 or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, Republic Act 6655 or the Free Secondary Education Act and Republic Act 10931 or Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act emphasize the right of every Filipino to quality basic and tertiary education. These laws reaffirm the policy of the state to protect and promote the rights of all Filipinos by providing children and the youth free and compulsory education in elementary, high school and college.

As a response to make education accessible to all, along with the heightened awareness of both the government and the private sector in providing equal opportunities to children and youth with special education needs, a Special Education Program was offered. One positive development in Special Education (SpEd) is the implementation of Republic Act 7277, otherwise known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, which is an act that provides for the rehabilitation, self-development and self-reliance of disabled persons and their integration into the mainstream society. In support of this legislation, all school divisions in the country were mandated through DECS Order No. 26, s. 1997 to

establish Special Education Centers to help provide effective delivery of Special Education services, nationwide.

Hence in 1997, the Department of Education (DepEd) adopted the policy of Inclusive Education as a basic service for all types of exceptional children and youth (Andaya, et.al., 2015). The policy on Inclusive Education is the reaffirmation of the right to education of every individual as enshrined in the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a renewal of the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. It is in this context that the Department of Education has adopted the policy on Inclusive Education (Quijano, 1999).

There are specific legal mandates for Inclusive Education in the Philippines, and these are anchored on the world declaration on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtiem, Thailand in March 1990. These mandates give primacy for expanded vision and renewed commitment by providing basic education to all children, youth, and adults (Quijano, 1999). Among the legal mandates is the adoption of the Agenda for Action of Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons from 1993-2002, wherein it is declared that all children and young people have the right to education, equality of opportunities and participation in society.

Furthermore, the Secretary of Education has issued several implementing orders over the past years to promote inclusive education for learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs). These include the implementation of the Parent Learning Support System (PLSS) in 1990, the Regional Special Education Council (RSEC) in 1993, the establishment of a Regional SPED Unit in 1997, the institutionalization of SPED programs in all schools in 1997, the reclassification of regular teacher and principal items to Special Education (SpEd) teacher and special school principal items in 1998, and the 2009 Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children directive. These orders aim to provide equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities through special needs education, promote the adoption of inclusive education concepts, and ensure the rights of children with disabilities within inclusive classroom settings.

In Zamboanga City, although the Department of Education (DepEd) Region IX adopted the policy of Inclusive Education and mandated all public schools to guarantee the right to education of children with disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting since 1997, majority of the schools in the city implemented Inclusive Education years later due to pressing issues on insufficient facilities and learning resources, inadequate capacity among many teachers to handle LSENs, increased demand for well-qualified special educators, negative perceptions of parents of regular students, inadequate district and administrative support and poorly prepared general and special education teachers (Conturno, 2014). Informal conversations with parents of LSENs revealed growing concern with Inclusive Education. LSENs in regular class had difficulty coping with class and soon dropped out of school. This has given rise to the question of the effectiveness of the implementation of Inclusive Education.

It was primarily for these purposes that the study sought to investigate the implementation of Inclusive Education for LSENs in the seven (7) elementary school SPED Centers in the division of Zamboanga City in a bid to further expand the vowed accessibility of Philippine Education.

RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Inclusive Education

The definition of inclusive education impinges on human rights, dignity and equalization of opportunities. Inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils by

reconsidering its curricular organization and provision. Inclusive Education's provision is anchored on the philosophy that all children and youth with special needs must receive an appropriate education and everything within the system. All kinds of children have the freedom and guarantee to get education along with other children regardless of human differences (DepEd, 1999, p. 2).

The basic principle of Inclusive Education is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any differences (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of these learners, accommodating both different learning styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, teaching strategies, change of attitude, use of resources and partnership with their communities (UNESCO, 2004e).

Inclusive education is generally thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings (Kugelmass, 2003). However, during the course of time, the concept of Inclusive Education was exhausted to encompass all marginalized and vulnerable groups. From the Incheon Declaration, agreed in the 2015 World Education Forum; and Brussels Declaration approved in the 2018 Global Education Meeting, the expanded idea of inclusion in education is providing "safe, quality education and learning throughout life particularly to those in vulnerable situations, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, the poor, migrants, refugees and displaced whether as a result of conflict or natural disaster" (UNESCO 2018, p. 2). That is Inclusive Education is not limited to educating learners with special needs.

Taken from the policy guidelines of UNESCO (2009), Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity in the needs of all children, youth, and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. Further, the aim of Inclusive Education according to Vitello and Mithaug (1998) is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability.

Furthermore, as shared by Hussain (2017) during the International Congress on Education for the 21st century, Inclusive Education is an approach to education that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. Moreover, Wade (1999) cited in Farrell (2005) stated that inclusion in education involves securing appropriate opportunities for learning, assessment and qualifications enabling full and effective participation of all pupils in the learning process.

Hence, this study is focused on Inclusive Education for learners with special educational needs. Inclusive Education for learners with special educational needs is a learning approach where children with and without disabilities are taught together, as equals (Leonard Cheshire Disability Philippines Foundation, 2010). This approach is different to more traditional approaches to the education of children with disabilities that involve segregating learners with special needs into separate schools. Inclusive education is recognized by teachers, families and policy makers to be more beneficial way of ensuring that children with and without disabilities achieve their full educational potential, and it is included in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Additionally, Inciong, et.al (2007), described Inclusive Education for learners with special educational needs as the process by which a school accepts children with special needs for enrolment in regular classes where they can learn side by side with peers; arranges its special education program which involves a Special Education teacher (SPET) as one of the faculty members. That is, inclusion of LSENs does not simply mean the placement of students with

disabilities in general education classes. This process must incorporate fundamental change in the way a school community supports and addresses the individual needs of each child.

Special Educational Needs

Special educational needs is a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (EPSEN Act, 2004, p.6). Special educational needs of an individual is shown when there is restriction in the ability to be involved and benefit from education due to a permanent physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability (National Council for Special Education, 2015). A child with learning difficulty has a hard time learning than majority of eh children of the same age. (Guernsey Law, 1970) or they may have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of the educational facilities provided for other children (Special educational needs, n.d.). In some case, a learning difficulty may not be evident from an early age; it may be noticeable when a child is at school. A learning difficulty might cause the child to have difficulties with: expressing themselves or understanding what others are saying, reading, writing or number work, or understanding information; making friends or relating to adults; organising themselves; and behaving properly in school (Special educational needs, n.d.).

On the other hand, special educational arrangements are well placed plans for learners with special educational needs (National Council for Special Education, 2015). These arrangements may come in many forms. This can be a group work or individual support that takes place inside or outside the mainstream classroom, or attendance in a specialist class or in a special school (National Council for Special Education, 2006).

The SEN Code of Practice (2004) suggests that there are four (4) different areas of needs – cognition and learning needs; social, emotional and behavioural needs; communication and interaction needs, and sensory and/or physical needs. An individual may fall into one particular need or a combination of the wide spectrum of special educational needs. Children with cognition and learning needs who have developmental delay may also have difficulty with learning in learning, thinking and understanding. On the other hand, a pupil with social, emotional and behavioural needs may exhibit challenging behaviours, may exhibit have very low self-esteem, may lack confidence, may seem withdrawn or isolated, and have immature social skills or present challenging behaviours. Conversely, children with communication and interaction needs may have difficulty in relating with others, expressing ideas or understanding what others are saying. Included too in this category are the children with autistic spectrum disorders. On the contrary, children with sensory and/or physical needs have a range of significant visual or hearing difficulties and/or with physical disabilities which impede their learning in school and their ability to take part in the curriculum.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Leonard Cheshire Disability Philippines Foundation (2010) discloses that children with disabilities achieve better results when educated in an inclusive environment. Children with disabilities can learn at their own pace, with peers at the same stage as themselves, and respond well to the higher expectations placed on them in a mainstream learning environment. Children with disability will better learn to overcome the challenges their disability can bring due to the support to participate fully in activities alongside able-bodied children. In addition, Elkins (1998) mentioned that when LSENs are combined with relatively more able students, the LSENs have the opportunity to observe higher

models of social and academic behaviour. Consequently, the LSENs more likely emulate and reach higher standards of behaviour and become independent.

Inclusive education is not just good for children with disabilities. Grenot-Scheyer Jubala, Bishop & Cootset (1996) cited in Jacob & Olisaemeka (2016), enumerated the academic and social benefits of inclusion to student with or without disabilities. These includes: increased communication and social interaction opportunities, age-appropriate models of behaviour skills, more active participation in the school community, individualized education goals and access to the rich core curriculum. Likewise, able-bodied children in class will also learn about the challenges faced by people with disabilities and make lasting friendships. Children will develop a strong sense of equality and fairness, an understanding of acceptance and diversity, and will be less likely to discriminate or bully later in life (Leonard Cheshire Disability Philippines Foundation, 2010; Vollmer & Vollmer, 2002 cited in Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016).

Objective of the Study

This study investigated the implementation of Inclusive Education for elementary school learners with special educational needs in the division of Zamboanga City in terms of curriculum, instruction, resource materials/facilities, school leadership, and school climate to develop an Inclusive Education Framework for LSENs.

METHODOLOGY

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Ateneo de Zamboanga University Research Ethics Committee (AdZU-REC). The study employed the Descriptive-qualitative research design, which is described by Under this research design, the qualitative method of collecting data such as the focus group discussion (FGD), key informant interview (KII), observation, and document analysis were utilized. Informed consent was sought from the school principals; teachers handling inclusive classes of the respondent schools; parents/guardians of the LSENs in inclusion and parents/guardians of regular students in inclusive classroom.

The study included seven (7) elementary school SPED Centers in the Zamboanga City division. The criteria for inclusion are the school must have implemented inclusive education not less than five (5) years; caters to at least three (3) disabilities and the principal has MA in Special Education or at the minimum has 18 units MA in Special Education.

The study had two (2) groups of respondents: elementary school principals and teachers handling inclusive class. Purposive sampling technique was utilized in determining the four (4) groups of respondents. Table 1 presents the summary of the sample size of the respondents that were included in the study.

Data was gathered through observation, document analysis, and in-depth interview, with principals and teachers. The observation was conducted in multiple settings in the classroom and school environment to ascertain the teaching and learning practices; school structures and systems; and interaction of parents, teachers, and students. The in-depth interview, document analysis and observation were employed to determine how Inclusive Education was implemented in the elementary school SPED centers with respect to curriculum, instruction, resource materials and facilities, school leadership and school climate; identify the types of SENs served in the selected elementary school SPED centers; and find out the challenges faced by the principals and teachers in the implementation of Inclusive Education. Moreover, document analysis was also employed to fill the gaps left by the interview. Documents related to the study included K to 12 curriculum guide, K

to 12 teachers' guide, detailed lesson plan or daily lesson log, and schools' annual improvement plan. Information from these documents provided data that complemented the data gained through interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Inclusive Education in selected elementary school SPED centers.

Six (6) major themes in the light of the implementation of Inclusive Education with respect to curriculum, instruction, resource materials and facilities, school leadership and school climate were recorded which include: understanding of Inclusive Education, curriculum, instruction, resource materials and facilities, school leadership and school climate.

1.1. Understanding of Inclusive Education

The study revealed that all the participants mentioned that Inclusive Education is including learners with special educational needs in the regular class. This understanding reflects the UNESCO (2009) notion of Inclusive Education as an approach to serving children with disabilities within the general education settings. In relation to the understanding of the research respondents about Inclusive Education, two (2) subthemes emerged, these were: Inclusive Education is a mandate and right based and educated in the general education setting.

1.1.1 *Inclusive Education is a mandate and right based.* All the key informants said that Inclusive Education is mandated by law and connotes accepting all learners not only limited to learners with special educational needs but also children in the streets; physically and mentally abused; in conflict with the law; and those who are working to receive free and quality education on equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.

The following were excerpts taken during the interview session:

Key informant 3 said that ... "For me, inclusive education is the right of the learners with special educational needs, to receive quality and appropriate education within the bound of general or regular classroom instruction."

Key Informant 5 also said ... "Inclusive education is an education program that provides the needs of all kinds of learners including learners with special needs."

These accounts suggest that the key informants' understanding of Inclusive Education seemed to be based on basic human rights and equality in the educational system. This finding was similar to the study of Braunsteiner and Lapidus (2014) and Volpe (2016) which highlighted that Inclusive Education draws heavily on existing legal documents, and right to education regardless of disabilities or differences.

1.1.2 *Educated in the general education setting with the regular students.* All the participants deemed that Inclusive Education was an educational approach whereby learners with special educational needs were placed in the general education environment and receive the same services with the regular students.

This was pertinently confirmed in the following statements:

Participant 16 stated that ... "Inclusive education refers to bringing our special children to the regular program, in which we're cutting the barrier between the regular and special. What we are aiming is to bring these children to live just like the other kids, so with the help of inclusive programs they have the opportunity to mingle with the regular ones for them to normalize their life and realized that they are not different from those with the other kids."

Participant 5 said that ... "Inclusive education is the practice of educating learners with special educational needs in a regular classroom environment. So, these learners with special educational

needs learn together with the regular children or the nondisabled learners under the direction of the regular teachers and with the support of their special or shadow teachers.”

Participant 2 also said that ... “My understanding on inclusive education is accepting

These statements imply that participants’ understanding of Inclusive Education seemed largely confined to the assignment of learners with special educational needs either full-time placement in the mainstream classrooms with their peers for academic subjects; or part-time placement for certain academic subjects or co-curricular activities based on their capacities and abilities. This finding was consistent with the study of Zabeli, Shehu and Anderson (2020) which point to physical integration of LSENs in the general education set-up.

1.2 Curriculum

A flexible curriculum makes possible the development of a more inclusive setting (Mustiya, 2010). Thus, the curriculum must be implemented in such a way that it fits the local context and that all learners including the learners with special educational needs can access it.

The data revealed that the curriculum in the inclusive classroom was modified and contextualized to accommodate the needs of the learners with special educational needs. This conformed with DO 117, s. 1987 and DO 21, s.2019 guidelines, that schools implementing Inclusive Education have to contextualize its curriculum in relation to the learners ability, socio-cultural background and modify it to meet learners’ need. In relation to curriculum, two (2) subthemes emerged. These were rigid curriculum and modified and contextualized curriculum.

1.2.1 Rigid curriculum. All the key informants answered that a contextualized and a modified curriculum was used. However, they described the K to 12 curriculum as rigid. It appeared that the national curriculum did not reduce the need for individual adjustments of the LSENs in the inclusive classroom. This was aptly stated by Key informant 2 who said that “The curriculum used by the regular pupils is also used in inclusive education. But sometimes the curriculum is not aligned with the needs of the special learners; it is rigid; it is not fitted to the LSENs, so we make some modifications and adjust the curriculum.”

This indicates that the curriculum used in the inclusive classroom lacks the comprehensiveness needed to address learners with exceptionalities. Furthermore, from the responses it can be deduced that the curriculum failed to give assurance of equality to the access of educational opportunities. For this reason, the key informants believed that curriculum modification is imperative such that the LSENs participation in the general education setting will increase. This confirms the study of Hall, Vue, Koga and Silva (2004) which underscored that curriculum modification is an essential ingredient for students with exceptionalities to access the general education environment. The same researchers also emphasized that “modifying existing general curriculum has been an effective way to create a more accessible learning environment to support all students and their teachers in various educational contexts” (p.2).

1.2.2. Modified and contextualized curriculum.

On the other hand, the majority of the participants said that the prescribed curriculum which is the K to 12 curriculum is utilized with adaptations and modifications, and contextualized to address the needs of the LSENs.

Hereunder are the excerpts of the interview of the teachers:

Participant 5 stated that... “Learners with special educational needs in inclusive education are educated using the same K-12 curriculum with some modifications to address their unique learning needs.”

Participant 18 expressed that... “There are some topics or lessons not suitable in the setting here in Zamboanga, so I change it to make it more suitable for the students.”

Participant 9 pointed out that... “We are using the K-12 curriculum for an inclusive education program and we modify it.”

Participant 2 stated that... “K-12 curriculum, same with the regular students.” She also added that... “I make sure that the activities that I will be having in class will cater the needs of all students. However, I give XXC a different activity.”

Participant 7 said that... “K-12 curriculum.” She further said that... “If there is a need to modify then I modify. The LSENs in the regular classroom must go with the group of regular students. I cannot separate their lessons from the normal kids.”

Participant 10 stated that... “We are using the prescribed DepEd curriculum K to 12.. There is no separate curriculum for the LSENs and the regular students in the inclusive classroom.” She proceeded stating that... “We only modify the activities but not the objectives. It is forbidden to modify the objectives.”

These responses imply the respondents’ awareness on the contextualization of the curriculum and teaching-learning process. This may be attributed to a good grasp of the respondents on the theories of learning which support that students learn best when experiences in the classroom have meanings and relevance in their lives. The finding that curriculum must be designed bearing in mind the immediate contexts of students’ lives agree with the Democratic or Inclusive Theory of Education of Knight (1999).

Basically, there is congruence in the conclusions of the research respondents that the implemented curriculum in the inclusive classroom did not consider the needs of the LSENs, thus several respondents articulated that curriculum modification is imperative to increase participation of LSENs in the general education setting. As Hall, Vue, Koga and Silva (2004) underscored, curriculum modification is an essential ingredient for students with exceptionalities to access the general education environment.

1.3 Instruction

The data from the interview revealed that all participants recognized that learning outcomes, teaching strategies, type of learners, and the learning needs of the learners must be considered in the delivery of the academic content. In addition, many of the research respondents also believed that tailoring the instruction is essential to meet the needs of the students including the learners with special educational needs. Seven (7) subthemes emerged from the responses, and these were: invariant instruction, instructional modifications and accommodations, collaboration and communication among principals, teachers and parents; assessment strategies, differentiation, inconsistency of teachers’ views and practices, and support services for transitioning.

1.3.1 Invariant instruction. When key informants were asked on the delivery of academic content to the LSENs in the inclusive classroom, all the key informants unanimously answered that the manner of educating the learners with special educational needs and the regular students is just the same. However, it appeared that the responses have an undertone of the key informants’ manner of ensuring the delivery and improvement of instruction.

Responses recorded during the conduct of the interview were the following:

Key informant 2 said that ... “Receiving teachers prepare the is not much preparation for whatever lesson they prepare, it is just the same.”

Key informant 1 shared that ... “Teaching strategies used to teach regular students and learners with special educational needs in the inclusive classroom is equally the same. Key informant 1 further said ... “I have an instructional supervisory plan, and I need to monitor them at least once a week.”

Key informant 4 also said that ... “Method of teaching regular students is not different from students with special education needs.” Key informant 4 further said ... “I am with my head teacher, we observe classes in terms of the inclusive classroom set up and all, and we usually divide to make our work faster.”

Key informant 5 said that ... “...whatever learning that the regular student will obtain they will also be given the same learning as that of the regular students considering that they have special educational needs.”

These accounts on the delivery of academic content of the informants indicated that the basis of instruction in the inclusive classroom for all students was the general curriculum content standards. More to that, it appeared that the central point of the school head in supervising the delivery of academic content are the regular students. This confirms the study conducted by the Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) which pointed that roles and responsibilities of the principals generally do not make specific references to the needs of the students with special needs.

1.3.2 Instructional modification and accommodation. Many of the participants adapt the delivery of the academic content by incorporating the maximum use of all remaining sensory modalities of the learners with special education needs in their teaching methods. That is to say, providing a great variety of multisensory learning activities into the teaching approach helps the learners with special educational needs access the lesson. Moreover, reducing the distractions, altering the pace of the lessons, presenting smaller amounts of work, clarifying directions, changing response modes, pictorial presentations, lowering level of difficulty, use of assistive/ adaptive technologies, increasing instructional support in the form of shadow teacher were the recurrent instructional modifications and accommodations practiced in ensuring inclusion of learners with special educational needs.

This was aptly expressed in the following statements:

Participant 4 mentioned that ... “Since I have hearing impaired learners, I incorporate visualization, powerpoint presentation and interactive teaching. Lessons should always be presented with visual aids because even if they cannot hear you, they can see however your materials.”

Participant 10 said that ... “I allow the LSENs to answer orally especially those that have trouble in writing. Like XHy, an ADHD learner. Knowing his background. I do not force him to write. As a receiving teacher, I adjust with respect to his condition. I also assign some of his classmates to assist him when he finds it difficult to do some tasks or activity.”

Participant 9 said that ... “I differentiate the activity. So, I usually differentiate the activity based on the strength of each student to ensure that I cater everyone’s needs in the classroom.”

Participant 19 said that ... “Whenever, I see that the lesson is quite difficult to achieve in one meeting, so I try to chop the lesson to smaller units.”

These responses imply that participants perceive that the learning needs of the students determines the teaching strategies. That is, instruction must accommodate the needs of the students. This is in agreement with the Social Constructivist Theory of Vygotsky (1978) and the study of Liggins (2016) which pointed out that students with special educational needs become successful in general education classrooms when the instruction received is adapted to meet their needs.

1.3.3 Collaboration and communication among principals, teachers, and parents. A pertinent topic surfaced during the questioning which the participants considered as relevant to instruction. Such conversation raised collaboration and communication among members of the school community such as teachers, principals and parents, which the participants felt particularly important in educating learners with special educational needs in the inclusive classroom.

Data from the interview revealed that very few of the teachers, parents and principals take time to inform each other the inclusion of a learners with special needs in the inclusive classroom, status of the LSENs in the inclusive classroom, problems encountered in the inclusive classroom, behavioral management strategies, and accommodation or adaptation techniques.

Hereunder are the excerpts from some of the participants:

Participant 2 said that ... “There is no collaboration. She is placed full-time in the regular class without a SPED teacher monitoring. She further said that ... “No SPED teacher is assisting me

regarding XXC learning, development, and managing her behavior. So, what I do is I ask her previous teachers regarding that matter.”

Participant 3 also said that ... “All I want is that there is someone that would follow-up on what to do with the LSENs.”

Participant 18 stated that ... “The SPED teachers did not give us any document or assessment, we also did not have a regular schedule to report to the SPED teacher, they did not even give us clear instruction. She also added that... “All they had to say was just: “look after them”, “you handle this”, “you handle him”.

The aforementioned responses on the delivery of academic content clearly reveal the lack of policy and guidelines on how to conduct collaboration and communication in school to address the inclusion of LSENs. Similar finding was established by Muega (2016) who pointed out that there was no consensus on how communication, collaboration and procedures of Inclusive Education be carried out in school.

1.3.4 Assessment strategies. Though the questioning was centered on the delivery of academic content, the researcher permitted the conversation to drift along related aspects, which the participants felt relevant to the topic. Such conversation brought forth the assessment strategies in the inclusive classroom.

Most of the participants disclosed during the interview that the test formats utilized in the inclusive classroom vary a little and students always did them individually with pencil and paper. However, major tests are administered by the SPED or resource teacher for several LSENs.

This was fittingly expressed in the following statements:

Participant 15 stated that ... “During major examinations. I give the test paper to the SpEd teacher and she administers the exam. The SpEd teacher extends the examination time since they have a hard time to write. Our shift is only until 12:00 pm so I cannot extend the time if they will take it here.”

Participant 1 said that ... “During major examinations, I give the test papers to the SPED teacher and let him take the exam there.”

Participant 4 expressed that ... “For the student with visual impairment (VI), during the major examination, I give the test paper to the resource teacher. The VI takes the exam with the resource teacher. The teacher reads the questions while the VI uses the Braillewriter to write her answer.”

The accounts on assessment strategies of the participants suggest that the educational measurement in the assessment of learning in the inclusive classroom was typically done following the accepted standards of the regular students. This is contradictory to what Knight (1999) espouses in his Inclusive Education Theory. From the point of the Inclusive Education Theory of Knight (1999), the emphasis on testing defined by standards does not contribute to creating optimum learning environment which contributes to the success of Inclusive Education. Hence, Knight (1999) promotes a variation on the measurement of learning based on the learning conditions.

1.3.5 Differentiation. Document analysis was also done to investigate the implementation of Inclusive Education in terms of instruction. Printed documents like the K to 12 Teachers’ Guide, and 3-day detailed lesson plan or the daily lesson log were analyzed to have better understanding of the instructional measures or practices in teaching inclusive class. These materials were collected from the research respondents. The teachers’ guide is a resource material that helps teachers think about important goals of the curriculum, expand their teaching methods and consider learning activities that children may do to achieve the learning competency. Whereas the lesson plan guides the teachers on what learners need to learn, how to facilitate the learning process and what assessment procedure to make.

From the analysis of the K to 12 teachers guide, and detailed lesson plan or daily lesson log, it appeared that many of the receiving teachers were accommodating and adapting the instruction to accommodate all learners specially the learners with special educational needs in the inclusive classroom to access grade-level content. Differentiated instruction was evident in the form of varied teaching strategies, and differentiated activities in the lesson plan. This implied that the receiving teachers believed that learning needs of the students determines the instructional strategies and learning activities. That is to say, instruction must accommodate the needs of students. This finding agrees with Vygotsky (1978) and Liggins (2016) that pointed out that when learners including those with special educational needs receive instruction adapted to meet their needs, they are able to be successful in general education classrooms. It also appeared that accommodation and modification of instruction depends on the learners' category of special educational needs. But among the LSENs it appeared that the deaf or hard-of-hearing students are the most left out compared to other category of LSENs when it comes to the delivery of academic content.

Moreover, breaking up testing over several days, dividing test into small sections and allowing for oral responses are some examples of assessment modification or accommodation evident in the documents reviewed.

1.3.6 Inconsistency of teachers' views and practices. Classroom observations were conducted to examine instructional processes, behaviors, and events in the inclusive classroom. Only one (1) formal classroom observation was conducted per research respondents due to the implementation of the city-wide lock down and variety of community quarantine enforced in the city brought about by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic which was confirmed to spread in Zamboanga Peninsula. To collect sufficient data, the researcher remained in the classroom for the entire lesson duration (40 minutes). A running observation was done to have an objective recording of what is happening during the classroom instruction.

It was noted that only few of the receiving teachers use instructional accommodation and modification in the inclusive classroom. There was a kind of inconsistency in the teachers' views and what is practiced. It appeared that receiving teachers' delivery of academic content was one-size-fits-all. Many of the receiving teachers went on with their class without modifying and/ or did not provide accommodations in the instructional methods to meet the needs of LSENs in the inclusive classroom. It looks as though learners with special educational needs were expected to adapt to the existing general education setting, rather than the education set-up adapting to the learners with special educational needs. The finding that learners with special educational needs must fit into the general education setting instead of the other way around also resonated in the study of UNESCO (2008).

It was eminent that only (1) one out of the seven (7) schools included in the study was spotted to utilize assistive tools or technology to access the general education set-up. It was noticed that through the use of assistive/ adaptive technology the learner with special educational needs was able to complete the tasks required which would be difficult to complete otherwise.

It was also recognized that merely one (1) out of the seven schools included in the study used co-teaching. It was noted that in a co-taught classroom, the receiving teacher and the special education teacher or shadow teacher work together to meet the needs of various students in the inclusive classroom and share the planning, presentation, evaluation and classroom management to enhance the learning environment of all learners. It appeared that the shadow teacher's role is not the deliverer of content but rather assists in the teaching-learning process and increases the participation of the LSENs in the inclusive classroom. For the instructional presentation, the receiving teacher and

the shadow are guided with the subject area curriculum guide. Both teachers maintain open communication. There seemed to be sharing in the planning, presentation, evaluation, and classroom management in the inclusive classroom between the receiving teacher and the shadow teacher or special education teacher. That is, there is a collaboration between the receiving teacher and the shadow teacher of special education teacher for all the teaching responsibilities.

1.3.7 Support services for transitioning. The data from the interview with the second group of respondents revealed that only one of the sample schools included support services to smoothen the transfer of the LSENs from a segregated SPED class to an inclusive classroom. The support services were in the form of special subjects. These special subjects appeared to assist the LSENs to succeed in their new placement. This was pertinently mentioned by Participant 6:

During free time or after the class the LSENs will go to the SPED center. We follow up their lessons and the difficulties they encounter in the regular classroom. Aside from that, we also have ascertain time and period that we pull out students that are in the inclusive classroom to teach them special subjects and these special subjects vary according to the disability.

He further added:

For example, those learners with hearing impairment or deaf or hard of hearing, they have special subjects like speech and language; rhythm and audiology. For learners who are blind, they also have special subjects which can be seen posted outside; ICT for the blind; braille instruction covering both reading and writing; and orientation and mobility.

These accounts on the delivery of academic content suggest that the transition program supports LSENs in adjusting to the general education set-up. The finding was similar to the study of Dalke and Schmitt (1987) who pointed that the transition program facilitates the students with disabilities capacity to cope with issues and activities faced during the transition period.

In sum, these responses of the research participants disclosed conflicting inferences on the delivery of academic content. Although the key informants claimed that the manner of educating and assessment of learning for the learners with special educational needs and the regular students are the same, the other research participants declared that accommodation and modification are adopted in the delivery of academic content. Although the documents reviewed appeared to promote differentiated instruction, the actual classroom observation confirmed a one-size-fits-all mode of teaching. It appeared that LSENs must adjust to fit into the general education setting, a finding that resonated in the study conducted by UNESCO (2008).

1.4 Resource Materials and Facilities

From the standpoint of Mutembei (2014) the quality and adequacy of the teaching and learning resources, assistive tools (e.g., Braillewriter, hearing air, white cane, recorder) and physical facilities determine how effectively Inclusive Education is implemented. It was assumed that inclusive education can be successful when adequate resource material, assistive tools, and appropriate physical facilities are provided to effectively support the learners with special educational needs.

In the study three (3) different methods were used in order to determine how Inclusive Education is implemented in terms of resource materials and facilities. The first method is document analysis of the schools' annual implementation plan (AIP). The second method is observation, and the third method is the conduct of the interview. Two groups of research respondents were interviewed on to the implementation of Inclusive Education in terms of resource materials and facilities.

All the research respondents admitted that resource materials and facilities are inadequate to meet the demands of the learners with special needs in the inclusive classroom. In addition, data from the interview also revealed that school facilities in the sample schools are not designed with consideration of the needs of the LSENs. The inadequacy of material resources and facilities may be

attributed to the lack of funds appropriated to the education sector by the national government. Four (4) themes raised in relation to resource materials and facilities. These were: outsource resource materials, collaboration with stakeholders, availability and adaptability of facilities and resource allocation.

1.4.1 Outsource resource materials. Data from the interview revealed that the majority of the participants in the second group of research respondents out-source and/or provide their own resource materials for instructional purposes although some instructional supplies were provided in the school. Hereunder were statements of some of the participants:

Participant 11 said that ... “The instructional materials and books are the main problem. So, I get my references from friends in different private schools. Most of the time I am the one who makes the drawing, and I prefer to have a printer, so it goes smoothly. We tend to spend our own money but at least our principal is also lending a hand in giving us what we need in terms of the materials.

Participant 1 also said that ... “I let them copy lectures because we do not have textbooks. Even I, I do not have a reference. So, I ask for Science books from my friends.”

Participant 4 mentioned that ... ““We have a brailewriter in the SPED Center, and we share resources. There are some learning resources and materials in the SPED center in Braille. However, books that are used in the general education set-up are not in braille.” She further said that ... “Usually every three months the school is providing us the needed materials and supplies for instructional purposes. The budget for each teacher is P 300.00 only.”

Participant 2 shared that ... “I download learning materials and distribute it individually to the students. This is a problem because I shoulder all the expenses in producing the materials.

These accounts of the participants suggest limited resource materials. For this reason, the research respondents make possible means to provide needed materials for instruction. This may be attributed to the research respondents’ perception of the importance of resource material in the practice of Inclusive Education.

1.4.2 Collaboration with stake holders. From the interview, it was apparent that the first group of respondents seemed to recognize the limitations of the government to provide necessary resource materials, assistive tools and facilities to meet the needs of all students. In that context, participants from the first group of respondents collaborated with stakeholders like the parents, teachers, community members, local government units, national government agencies, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, private individuals and corporations in order to address the inadequacy of resource materials and assistive tools; and unsuitability of the facilities to effectively implement Inclusive Education.

This was fittingly expressed in the following statements:

Key informant 5 said that ... “Our Mayor is really concerned with the children. We were given last time about 14 television units. There are no materials given yet to the regular students, so still it is not enough. But we have the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA), perhaps we can propose this as a project of the parents. We also have two (2) to three (3) teachers having classes in a room. Indeed, rooms are congested.”

Key informant 3 also said that ... “We have problems in the facilities, materials, and equipment like Brailier. The AFTEA donates some of the needs of the LSENs. Our local officials and stakeholders are also helping.”

Key informant 6 shared that ... “From that given funds we are able to purchase the materials that we need. But as of now we have the school MOOE, but not that much, it is not enough. But we have these benefactors and sponsors such as the International Organization for Migrants (IOM); recently the TAA Foundation who are the sponsors of orphan children; free uniforms are given and with

school supplies; the rotary Club; the SM Foundation; and the barangay for allowing the use of their service. Our books are also inadequate.”

Key informant 2 also expressed that ... “Even the materials for the regular students are not enough for the pupils, sometimes there are some resources donated by the Division Office and some agencies such as the Rotary Zamboanga and the Local Government, where the local government donated Smart television sets. We can use our school maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) to provide some materials for them, but for the Inclusive Education we do not have it. Whatever materials are available, we stick to that. Sometimes the SPED Teachers are also the one who provide materials for those LSENs in the mainstream; especially to those who are visually impaired.”

These responses of the participants on resource materials imply government’s limitations to provide necessary material resources and facilities. Hence, they find ways and means to meet the needs of all students. This may be attributed to the respondents’ belief that necessary individual devices and equipment support learners with special educational needs.

1.4.3 Availability, accessibility and adaptability of facilities. Observation on the schools’ physical facilities was conducted to determine the availability and adaptability of the facilities to the learners with special educational needs. Only one (1) school facilities observation was carried out per school by observing the availability and adaptability of the following physical facilities present on the school site: adaptive toilets, lecture rooms or classrooms, library or learning resource area, science laboratory, computer laboratory, clinic, and sports area or play area. Photographs of the facility were also taken during the observation.

From the school facilities observation, during the time of the research, it was evident that six (6) out of the seven (7) schools included in the study have toilets that were not disability friendly. The toilets were designed to be used by regular individuals. The toilets in these schools were not built to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities. Doorways of the toilets were not wide enough (minimum 80 cm or 32 inches) so that wheelchair users can easily roll in and out. Grab rails to provide support, stability and balance were absent. Space of the toilet is not spacious enough to turn and maneuver in a wheelchair (minimum of turning circle of 1.5 meters in diameter). It also appeared that the weak water supply compounded the inaccessibility of the toilets.

It was noted that the majority of the classrooms can only accommodate at most 40 students at one time. However, it appeared that classrooms were congested for the following reasons: several existing storage spaces, presence of equipment not in use and regular class size in the sample schools would mean 50 students. The classroom spaces were narrow and did not give the students an opportunity for active movement. The classrooms were equipped with blackboards. Television units were rarely found in the classrooms. Majority of the classroom buildings were accessible through stairs. Only new buildings had ramps. Elevators or disabled lifts were not existing to provide access to all floors in the building. Many of the classrooms were poorly lighted and ventilated, and with no internet connectivity. Internet connectivity was only available in the zone where the principals’ office was located. Moreover, no signages were placed in predictable places to inform those who are deaf or hard of hearing. In addition, no signages were also readable through touch.

Most of the sample schools during the time of the study have libraries with narrow spaces, extremely limited reference materials, fairly ventilated and lighted, and with no internet connectivity. No full-time librarian or resource specialist is managing the library, only a faculty member designated as librarian.

It was eminent too that only two (2) out of the seven (7) schools included in the study have a Science laboratory. The Science laboratories have limited science equipment and supplies, no washing facilities, fairly ventilated and lighted. One of the science laboratories in the sample schools was located on the second floor. It was also recognized that only three (3) out of the seven (7) schools have computer laboratory. The computer laboratories have limited installed computer units however some are not functional, with constricted spaces, no internet access, and no full-time computer laboratory in-charge. It appeared that a teacher handling Edukasyon sa Pagkatao (EsP) in the sample school was entrusted of the computer laboratory. It was noted that only four (4) out of the seven (7) schools included in the study had clinics. The clinics in the sample schools had limited equipment and supplies, fairly lighted and ventilated, and had a small area. No full-time nurse is working in the clinic. The schools' designated disaster readiness and risk reduction management coordinator stands as the nurse at the same time.

All of the schools included in the study during the time of the research had wide space for active play, running and sports activities, though none of these schools have outdoor play equipment like slide, see saw, monkey bars and the like. The play area offered fresh air, friends, fun and exercise. All of the play area surfaces were natural grass except for one which still reflected the remains of the Zamboanga Siege. The current state of the physical facilities of the schools included in the study implied an unaccommodating or not user-friendly for the learners with special educational needs. The findings revealed a lack of structural modification among the sample schools to accommodate the needs of the learners with special educational needs and this pose a physical and emotional stress on these learners, and it may affect their ability to concentrate and participate in learning and development activities. It also poses a safety risk, given the number of learners that use the stairs at the same time, and the lack of supervision on the stairs when learners change classes. Thus, designing physical facilities adapting the needs of the LSENs is imperative for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. The finding echoed the Democratic or Inclusive Theory of Education of Knight (1999) and the study of Wigfield, Eccles and Rodriguez (1998) that students achieve more if *optimum environments* for learning is established like considering the needs of the students in designing classrooms.

1.4.4 Resource allocation. For document analysis, the school's annual implementation plan (AIP) was analyzed to examine the resource allocation and plans in terms of resource materials and facilities of the schools included in the study. Only one school year implementation plan of the schools included in the study were analyzed for the reason that this was the only document approved by the school principal to be accessed by the researcher. It was evident in the annual improvement plan, that funds were allocated for purchase or procurement of resource materials and equipment; for school rehabilitation and physical maintenance services; for telephone and communication services; and for upgrading of internet service connection.

Largely, the accounts of the research participants confirmed a reconcilable inference regarding material resources and facilities. All school heads, receiving teachers, parents/ guardians of both the LSENs and regular students in the inclusive classroom conveyed limited teaching and learning materials; inadequate specialized equipment; and unaccommodating or not PWD-friendly facilities. The inadequate resource materials and unaccommodating facilities were attributed to the governments limitation to provide funds to schools implementing Inclusive Education.

1.5 School Leadership

As claimed by Waldrn, McLeskey and Redd (2011) cited in Maina (2014), strong leadership is pivotal to effective implementation of Inclusive Education. Thus, the participation of the principals

in the attainment of the goals and objectives of Inclusive Education is an indicator to bring about change and better services.

The data from the interviews appeared to be a compound of responsibilities provided by the principals. These responsibilities were: assessing teaching methods, student discipline, administer the budget, creating a healthy school environment, selection and appointment of teachers, and developing a professional community. In relation to school leadership, four (4) subthemes surfaced. These were: monitoring and evaluation, professional development, delegator, and leadership frustrations.

1.5.1 Monitoring and evaluation. From the interview, it was apparent that the principals ensured the implementation of Inclusive Education through classroom observation. However, it appeared that the conduct of classroom observation was a routine for the principals to know the teaching performance of the receiving teachers with little concern on the teachers' instructional and behavioral management strategies to accommodate diverse learners in the inclusive classroom.

The following are excerpts taken during the interview session:

Key informant 2 said that ... "but in most cases we are not focusing on teachers' performance in managing learners with special educational needs in the classroom. Actually, the methods and strategies, even evaluation were not focused towards emphasizing the learning disability, what we are actually doing is in general.

Key informant 5 also said that ... "Referring to the classroom observation for teachers (COT), it is also standardized so the only thing that we do is to simply check; so, we need to be critical in terms of what are the specific things that the teachers were not able to meet."

1.5.2 Professional Development. Professional development and /or capacity building activities for the teachers seemed to be linked with the principal's strategy to draw the commitment of the individual to handle learners with special educational needs and/or manage inclusive classrooms. This was pertinently expressed in the following statements:

Participant 9 said that ... "The principal sends prospective receiving teachers to IE seminars or trainings. This school year, his target is to send grade (one) 1 and two (2) teachers who are recommendees to be a receiving teacher. So once a teacher is sent to such seminars and or trainings, the teacher is aware that s/he is being prepared to handle LSENs in a regular class."

Participant 2 also said that ... "I will have a learner with special educational needs in my class because I was sent for a training in Pagadian."

1.5.3 Delegator. It appeared that principals delegate and trust some duties particularly on programs and activities related to inclusion, and assessment of learners with special educational needs, as necessary. This was pertinently expressed by some of the participants:

Participant 9 said that ... "Regarding inclusive education, the SPED teachers are requested to make proposals and present it to the principal. The SPED teachers likewise are entrusted to decide who will be placed in the regular classroom but with the approval of the principal."

Participant 14 mentioned that ... "The principal has assigned SPED focal person to collaborate with him in the planning and other activities for the LSENs."

These responses on school leadership of the participants indicate the lack of knowledge on inclusionary standards of the principals. This may be brought about by the lack of training in Inclusive Education, special education and special education law. Furthermore, these also imply that the school administrators characteristic to designate individuals with specialized expertise to supervise some school programs reflects as to what Giroux (1997) describes as *asymmetrical distribution of power*.

1.5.4 Leadership frustrations. Data from the interview of the teachers teaching in the Inclusive classeemed to indicate frustrations with the principals' management and supervision in implementing Inclusive Education. On the other hand, participants opinioned that effective school leadership was imperative and should be strong in this program initiative. In connection to this, participants pointed out leadership attributes that must be considered in implementing inclusive

education: good listener and flexible; provide encouragement and recognition; and monitor inclusion efforts.

Hereunder were the statements of some of the participants:

Participant 2 said that... “He likes to do things his way. He does not listen. When you open-up your situation, before you finish speaking, you will be stopped immediately. He does not accept our suggestions. She further said that ... “He should learn to listen to the struggles of the teachers because we are the ones directly involved teaching and/or dealing with the learners with special educational needs in the regular classroom.”

Participant 18 stated that ... “Talking about the involvement of the principal in the implementation of inclusive education, there is no involvement.”

Participant 19 confirmed the statement of Participant 18, sharing that ... “That is why, when I was visited by the supervisor from the division office for a class observation, she said “Why is that child in the regular class when the child is not doing anything in the class”. Even the supervisor from the division office told the principal that it is useless to put the learners with special educational needs in the regular class because the child is not ready.”

Participant 10 mentioned that ... “I hope the principal will give the receiving teachers a plus factor in the assessment and evaluation of teachers because that can draw commitment.”

These statements of the participants imply the lack of involvement and positive relationships of the principals in the implementation of Inclusive Education. This may be attributed to inadequate management training of principals especially in overseeing the day-to-day issues and critical incidents in supporting the LSENs and the teachers.

Mainly, these responses of the participants on school leadership imply a large array of leadership qualities. Positive leadership attributes and flexible management style were also encouraged from school heads to further promote inclusion. Although, the school heads coordinate and/ or arrange professional development concerning Inclusive Education and use the same to draw commitment from teachers to handle LSENs, the teachers perceive trainings or professional development activities insufficient and ineffective. Although the school head ensures delivery of instruction through classroom observation, they too generally do not make references to the needs of the students with disabilities and special needs teachers.

1.6 School Climate

A positive school climate undermines supportive practices that nurture inclusion and safeness (Coulston & Smith, 2013). That is to say, verifying the school climate in the sample schools is imperative considering that it can indicate acceptance of differences, supportive school community, and safe physical environment.

All of the participants claimed that the school included in the study have some ways to stimulate positive school climate. Among these were providing a safe environment, instituting anti-bullying efforts, incorporating values in the lessons especially the value of acceptance and open communication with parents. Five (5) themes surfaced along with the discussion on school climate. These were: bullying approaches, a lesson of love, need to belong, introducing a LSENs to the inclusive classroom and school environment.

1.6.1 Bullying approaches. Data from the interview with the majority of the respondents revealed that there was a school-wide approach to build positive relationships among all students. In addition, numerous activities or programs were implemented to counter bullying. These were: character education program, inclusion of the learners with special educational needs in all school activities, school-wide anti-bullying program, and counselling activities. Despite the fact that the informants disclosed that bullying occurred in their schools, however they expressed these were infrequent events.

The following are the statements made by some of the informants.

Key informant 3 said that ... “As a school principal I always devote time, like principal hour after the flag raising ceremony. So, I integrate the anti-bullying, the child protection for children; and I always remind our pupils not to bully our learners with special educational needs, explaining to them the importance of inclusive education, so we have no case of LSENs bullying.”

Key informant 5 mentioned that ... “We have an anti-bullying seminar which is conducted by the Special Action Force (SAF).”

These accounts imply an *inclusiveness of membership* (Knight, 1999). Knight (1999) pointed out that inclusive classrooms must be socially inclusive, where all students are welcomed as equally valued members of the school community.

1.6.2 A lesson of love. The accounts from the principals brought forth a lesson of love. A loving school family is more important than ever to achieve inclusivity. This was pertinently expressed by some of the participants:

Key informant 5 shared that ... “To have a good school climate, we should have commitment and passion. To make the learners feel safe, love should be felt by the learners, for that is the basic thing you should offer.”

Key informant 3 said that ... “We accepted the challenge and loved our LSENs.”

1.6.3 Need to belong. The interview with the majority of respondents revealed that the participants fostered positive relationships between peer groups and to create interaction among students in and outside the classroom. This suggested that participants recognized the significance of social interaction for the growth and development of the LSENs. A finding that also resonated in the study of Lewis and Doorlag (2003).

This was pertinently confirmed in the following statements:

Participant 10 said that ... “Students with disability have part in the school program, like they sing the pambansang awit, they give the doxology. So that they can feel that they are part of the school system.”

Participant 2 also said that ... “We involve them specially during school programs. We asked them to be in with the group. A teacher does the sign during the program. We also have dancers from the learners with special educational needs so that they will really feel that they belong.

Participant 1 mentioned that ... “They are not taken for granted and they are included in group activities.”

These accounts suggest that participants display a kind of behavior fitted into what Knight (1999) describes as *belongingness* as one of the facilitators of optimum learning environment that contributes to successful inclusion.

1.6.4 Introducing a LSENs to the inclusive classroom. Data from the interview with the teachers teaching in the Inclusive class revealed that participants seemed to facilitate a smooth transition for LSENs to the inclusive classroom and emphasized acceptance and respect for individual differences.

Hereunder are the statements of some of the participants:

Participant 1 mentioned that ... “From the start, I informed the class that they will be joined by a LSENs. I would let them watch special needs movies, movies about or involving individuals with special needs so that they will be aware and/or understand the condition of a child with special needs.” Participant 1 also added that ... “I oriented the pupils about inclusive education because pupils need to make some adjustments to have a good interaction.”

Participant 2 said that ... “I remind my students of empathy and equality.”

Participant 10 also said that ... “Teachers remind the students of good behavior. We always remind the students never to mention to LSENs that they are different and/or they have disability.”

Participant 5 stated that ... “I always remind the value of respect....”

1.6.5 School environment. A climate walk was carried out to capture information about the school's environment of the sample schools in relation to school climate. The areas included in the climate walk were safety, physical environment, student and staff interactions, student and student

interactions, and transitions to and from class. School programs and other events were not observed because DepEd released a guideline as a preventive measure of the novel Coronavirus (nCoV-2019). Department Memorandum 15, s. 2020 ordered the postponement of all national, regional, local and school-based activities involving learners and teachers rooted from the first set of policy directives of Task Force nCoV. Two (2) climate walks in each school were conducted which lasted from four (4) hours to over six (6) hours. A self-prepared school climate checklist was prepared for the climate walk. Although certain real time observations were recorded by the researcher.

The checklist for the climate walk were grounded on these materials: Council for Exceptional Children (2009), Performance Assessment and Evaluation Handbook (2005); Sunardi, Yusuf, Gunarhadi, Priyono and Yeager (2011) and Index of Inclusion (2002).

On safety, during the time of the research, Security guards were positioned in the school gates that monitored who comes in and goes out of the school campus. Identification card was a requirement for proper identification before entering the school premises. A number of Barangay Tanod were also stationed outside the gate first thing in the morning and dismissal time in the afternoon that provided effective traffic control and assisted the school children in crossing the streets. Only one (1) of the schools included in the study had an alarm system which features warning lights to alert deaf or hard of hearing students of an emergency evacuation. Students are not allowed to play in the areas other than the offered places.

Concerning the physical environment, during the period of the study, the school environment was clean and safe in the majority of sample schools. Railings were lessened in the school grounds to allow free movement of students. Only two (2) out of the seven (7) schools included in the study had covered walkways between buildings to protect students, school personnel and visitors from elements such as heat of the sun and rain. Majority of the schools included in the study had parking and passenger loading zones.

Only newly constructed buildings in the school were accessible with ramps. Elevators or disabled lifts were not existing to provide access to all floors in the building.

About student and staff interaction, during the duration of the research, a great teacher-student interaction was evident between regular students and school staff in contrast to learners with special educational needs interactions with receiving teachers and other school personnel. The researcher observed considerably less interaction between school staff and deaf or hard of hearing students compared to other category of learners with special educational needs. Typically, older teachers were observed to have more interactions with learners with special educational needs. Learners with special educational needs that are already in the inclusive classroom were noticed to frequently bond with their teachers in the special education program.

With regards to student-to-student interactions, at the time of the study, limited interactions were observed between regular students and students with special needs that have hostile behaviors. Notably, among the learners with special educational needs, children with ADHD blend easily with the regular students. On the other hand, students that are deaf or hard of hearing students would bond together noticeably. Student-to-student interactions most of the time is motivated by play. During the period of the climate walk, no student was noticed criticizing and/ or bullying learners with special educational needs.

Regarding transitions to and from the class, during the time of the research, no teacher or school staff was assisting the LSENs in moving from classroom to another classroom in going to the next floor of the building to attend the next subject and even going to the comfort room. This is a big challenge for those with mobility problems using a wheelchair. As a matter of fact, a parent was observed maneuvering her daughter's wheelchair from classroom to classroom. Still, the same parent was also noticed carrying her daughter on the back to attend the succeeding subject on the next floor of the building.

The data derived from the climate walk appeared that the school climate in the sample schools implied an unresponsive school climate. The findings revealed that the school climate was not far off safe, caring, participatory and receptive to learners with special educational needs. The findings also revealed that relational and connectedness between LSENs and receiving teachers and between LSENs and regular students is less evident. Having an unresponsive school climate inhibits inclusivity.

Framework for the Implementation of Inclusive Education for Elementary Learners with Special Educational Needs

In this paper, Inclusive Education appertains to an approach to educating children with disability and/or special educational needs alongside able-bodied children, through which schools integrate modifications, accommodations, and support to address the students' special learning needs. These modifications, accommodations, and support could be incorporated in the delivery of academic content, curriculum, teaching-learning resources, facilities, and school environment.

Analysis of the findings suggest the Implementation of Inclusive Education needs improvement. There were factors that impeded the implementation these were: high number of learners in the inclusive classroom, non-inclusive curriculum, inadequate material resources and facilities, lack of time, unpreparedness of the key players and education system due to inadequate training, lack of competence to provide accommodation and/or modification, limited support, improper assessment and placement of LSENs in the inclusive classroom, negative attitude towards LSENs, and poor parental involvement. Further, the lack of Inclusive Education policy added to the challenges experienced in this regard. It is necessary to ensure a properly implemented Inclusive Education program for LSENs so that these individuals can better access information and resources that will make them become useful and effective members of the society.

The development of a Framework for the Implementation of Inclusive Education for Elementary School LSENs as shown in figure 1 incorporated all the findings of the study. The framework encourages inclusive development of schools. It describes measures that build inclusive learning and teaching environments. The framework can help sustain the improvement of school towards the implementation of Inclusive Education.

The framework places the school components such as curriculum, instruction, and assessment; material resources and facilities; school leadership; and school climate as the center of the analysis. Similar school components concur with the K to 12 Framework. In other words, all these school components were considered as critical factors that contributed to the successful implementation of Inclusive Education as pointed out in the study. These were also the most prevalent school components in the inclusion of students with special educational needs as supported by Vygotsky (1978) and Knight (1999).

Figure 1

Development Framework for the Implementation of Inclusive Education for Elementary Learners with Special Educational Needs



The school leadership is at the midpoint among the school components since school principals play an important role in managing inclusive education policies and practices (Riehl, 2000; Ramirez, 2006; Dyal & Flynt, 1996). “The success or failure of these inclusive policies and practices is largely dependent on the school principal” (Dyal & Flynt, 1996, p.4). As pointed out in the study, principals that do not focus on instructional issues; deprive high-quality professional development for teachers; inhibit a positive school climate, do not demonstrate administrative support for special education, and manages alone the planning of the school’s programs and activities, impedes the implementation of Inclusive Education. As the schools today endeavor to become effectively inclusive, the roles of the principals too must evolve, since they play a critical role in the implementation of Inclusive Education.

Curriculum and instruction were also deemed imperative factors that contribute to the successful implementation of the Inclusive Education. Although the focus of the study was on the curriculum and instruction component of the school, the research participants felt that assessment of learning was a relevant component associated with curriculum and instruction. Therefore, it is also a factor that can contribute to the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. As shown in the study, the rigid curriculum implemented in the inclusive classroom failed to anticipate the learners with exceptionalities. Thus, the majority of the respondents pointed out the need of an adapted and/ or inclusive curriculum to respond to the curricular needs of the LSENs. For this purpose, instruction must also accommodate the needs of the LSENs as reflected in the findings of the study. Thus, a one-size fits-all mode of instruction practiced by the majority of the respondents in the study further contributed to the exclusion of the LSENs. For this reason, the framework demonstrates a component

of effective instruction for all learners must be included. Moreover, in relation to the assessment of learning, it was typically done following the standards of the regular class and test formats were mostly pencil and paper tests. From the point of view of the Inclusive Education Theory of Knight (1999), the emphasis on testing defined by standards does not contribute to creating optimum learning environment which contributes to the success of Inclusive education. Hence, multiple means of educational measurement were encouraged. Altogether, these points to a need for an adapted curriculum, effective instruction, and appropriate assessment approach of learning for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education.

Another school component that is considered necessary for the effective implementation of Inclusive Education were the resource materials and facilities. The study revealed that the quality and adequacy of teaching and learning materials, assistive tools (i.e. Braillewriter, hearing aid, recorder, white cane) and structurally modified facilities were imperative for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. Similar findings were echoed in the study of Wigfield, Eccles and Rodriguez (1998) and in Knights' (1999) Democratic or Inclusive Theory of Education that students achieve more if optimum environment for learning is established. Therefore, the framework contends that resource materials and facilities advance effective inclusion.

School climate is the ultimate school component that was found to be vital in the implementation of Inclusive Education. Findings of the study posits that a positive school climate fosters smooth implementation of Inclusive Education. That is to say, a safe, caring, participatory and responsive school climate powerfully affects the implementation of Inclusive Education.

More to that, the framework also puts forward that the elements – modification, collaboration, and support as underlined by Vygotsky in his Social Constructivist Theory must be reflected in the school practices to remove learning barriers and promote inclusive practices. The key to success in Inclusive education lies in appropriate modifications, collaboration, and support (Ghesquiere, Moors, Maes & Vandenbeghe, 2012). Modifications are so vital in helping LSENs access the general curriculum, participate in school and be educated along with peers without disabilities ("Support, Modifications, and Accommodations for Students", 2020). Modification needs to be individualized for students, based on their needs and their personal learning styles and interests. As Dyson and Millward (1997) underlined, the key to success in the inclusive classroom lies in having appropriate modifications in the instruction and classroom activities. The claim was similar to the findings of the study, that is, appropriate instructional modification and accommodation provides LSENs adequate access to the general education curriculum.

Similarly, the framework draws attention to identification, screening, assessment, and placement with able-bodied learners, another unique component of the developed framework in comparison to the K to 12 Framework. This component must form the basis for the appropriate placement of the LSENs. From the study conducted, the identification, screening, assessment, and placement of LSENs was a major concern in the inclusion of LSENs, because this determines the readiness of the LSENs to be included in a more challenging mainstream education classroom. Likewise, the study too underscored that a structured process and a well-defined criterion for inclusion of LSENs was deemed critical in the decision to integrate the LSENs in the regular classroom, for this will increase the opportunities of the LSENs to flourish in the general education setting. Since assessments "help educators determine whether or not a student qualifies for inclusion and, if so, the types and frequency of services that will best support a student's success" ("Special Education Guide", 2013, para. 2). Henceforth, a consistent systematic structure of assessment for LSENs' placement was considered as an essential component of the framework.

Another component of the framework that was considered as equally important in the implementation of Inclusive Education was capacity building activity and/or training. As can be gleaned from the findings, teachers' inability to modify the curriculum and provide appropriate instructional accommodations; resistance to handle LSENs; negative attitude; lack of competence to teach in the inclusive classroom; and the principals poor involvement in the implementation of IE were attributed to lack of training in Inclusive Education. However, participants seemed to believe that they can pull it off given adequate training. More so, the identification, screening, assessment and placement of the LSENs with their able-bodied peers demands training or capacity building activities on the part of the assessor and/or assessment team on child development, special education and other related disciplines. For these reasons, the component of capacity building activity /training is essential in the Development Framework for the Implementation of Inclusive Education for Elementary Learners with Special Educational Needs. The inclusion of capacity building activity/training as a component of the framework likewise agrees with the K to 12 Framework, wherein both frameworks maintain that to ensure the implementation of a DepEd program, teachers must be prepared and equipped.

Further, the framework suggests that the school's works towards a more inclusive education system must be driven by policies and guidelines; well-defined criteria for identification, screening, assessment and placement of LSENs; must be engaged with partnership with stakeholders, parental involvement, continuing professional development of school staff, and regularly monitored or assessed. On the one hand, the framework sees parental involvement as an active agent that interrelates with other relevant factors to promote Inclusive Education. As revealed in the study, the ineffective involvement of parents/ guardians of LSENs did not contribute towards helping the child adapt in the inclusive classroom and the school in cultivating inclusive culture. Likewise, the participation of the parents/ guardians (parental involvement), teachers, developmental pediatrician and/or psychologist (partnership) are deemed necessary in the identification and screening of LSENs, as well as in the assessment and placement of the LSENs in the inclusive classroom. As a result, the framework included parental involvement as a component. The framework demonstrates that parents/ guardians of the LSENs must be fully accountable in educating their children. "Parental involvement, in almost any form, produces measurable gains in student achievement" (Dixon, 1999, p. 16). In fact, there were several studies that associated parental involvement to a range of enhanced school outcomes for elementary, middle, and high school students, including varied indications of achievement. In other words, the parents' active participation and commitment to support their children delivers positive results.

As revealed in the study, the experiences of the teachers and principals, training and continuous professional development were important in improving strategies to teach LSENs and governing a school that implements inclusive education. This is in agreement with Margaritoui (2010) that the development of inclusive practices depends on the initial and continuous training of teachers and principals. Thus, another element included in the framework is continuing professional development. The framework as well compels a program implementation monitoring and assessment as a component in the implementation of Inclusive Education. Program implementation monitoring and assessment pertains to tracking the progress and evaluating the activities and services imposed in the implementation of Inclusive Education. A formal and regular monitoring and/or evaluation is emphasized in the framework for the school community to reflect on the successes and challenges of the program. This also concurs with the K to 12 Framework. That is to say, both frameworks view that assessment data are useful in planning, measuring the effectiveness of an educational approach and/ or program. Findings from the study indicate that the implementation of Inclusive Education in the elementary schools was badly monitored and assessed by authorities. Day-to-day issues and critical incidents supporting the LSENs in inclusion and receiving teachers went unmanaged. These situations led to faulty implementation of Inclusive Education. For this reason, the program

implementation monitoring, and assessment component was viewed as imperative for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. As Waters (2011) said that program implementation monitoring and assessment “allows more accurate understanding of program impact and the ultimate redirection of important resources away from an ineffective activity” (p. 92). Additionally, Metz (2007) stressed that program implementation monitoring, and assessment is a valuable measure to find out what works and what does not work in the program; improve school practices; and plan for the future.

However, as reflected in the study, a heart that embraces diversity and individual differences makes an unimaginable work to combat the exclusion of the LSENs. When one starts to take the full responsibility for educating and supporting the LSENs with love and starts not to see the LSENs as a problem, but the education system instead must change, as espoused by the Social Model of Disability then that produces a chain of reaction that will contribute to the success of implementing an Inclusive Education. In the developed framework, policies and guidelines encompasses all the components. This connotes that Inclusive Education can be effectively implemented when there are clear-cut policies and guidelines. Policies and guidelines are important because they address pertinent issues such as what constitutes actions to be taken, acceptable behavior of school staff, and measures to be adopted to create the necessary inclusive learning and teaching environment. As Sanelli (2018) pointed out that utilizing policies and guidelines during decision-making ensures that decisions made are consistent. In other words, policies and guidelines provide guidance, consistency, and clarity on how Inclusive Education be implemented.

Largely, the various components (school leadership; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; resource materials and facilities; school climate; partnership; parental involvement; program implementation and monitoring; capacity building activity; identification, screening, assessment and placement with; policies and guidelines) of the framework are interwoven and multifaceted. Their interaction plays a significant role in the implementation of Inclusive Education.

Finally, the framework illustrates that the ultimate goal of Inclusive Education which is to develop LSENs that is useful and effective member of the society will be achieved with the interplay of the policy and guidelines; identification, selection, assessment, and placement of LSENs; partnership with stakeholders; continuing professional development of school staff ; parental involvement; with the elements (collaboration, support and modification) in the school components (school leadership; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; resources and facilities and school climate) and the involvement of a program implementation monitoring and assessment. All these components ensure an effective framework for the implementation of Inclusive Education for learners with special education needs

Conclusion

The analysis of the findings revealed that elementary school SPED centers included in the study seemed to be in the first base of the implementation of Inclusive Education. Several actions were done to advance inclusion in the sample schools but in an extremely limited manner. There were several factors that hindered the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. Adequate training on Inclusive Education; sufficient resource materials and adaptable facilities; effective instructional modification and accommodation; strong principal leadership, appropriate identification, selection, assessment and placement of LSENs; effective instructional support; positive school climate and adapted curriculum are the key elements in the implementation process.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the DepEd Division office should conduct trainings for teachers and principals on Inclusive Education. It is suggested that the training for receiving teachers must realign their way of thinking about Inclusive Education; teaching strategies to respond to a wide range of learners' needs; curriculum modification, accommodation, adaptation, and contextualization; and assessment modification. On the other hand, the principals' training must focus on special education laws and managing inclusive schools.

The school division office must conduct regular monitoring and evaluation at the school level to ensure that the schools are delivering the program following the inclusive principles and adequate support systems are provided. Schools that pursue creative paths towards Inclusive Education should be rewarded by DepEd to encourage other Inclusive Education implementing schools to advocate inclusive practices in their schools and implement programs that promote inclusion.

Principals are recommended to build more external linkages and partnerships, and involve stakeholders for resource sharing and sustainability, and to support the implementation of Inclusive Education. Since only principals, receiving teachers and parents of the LSENs were part of the study, further studies should incorporate the viewpoints of the LSENs and shadow teachers, so as to add to the literature currently available. In addition, a further study on the same phenomenon could be researched in secondary schools and tertiary schools given that the current study focused on primary schools.

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