Implementation of Inclusive Education Program for in Local Schools in the Division of Northern Samar

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a preliminary assessment of the implementation of inclusive education program for children with special needs in two central elementary schools in the Division of Northern Samar. Employing descriptive design, the perceptions of forty seven respondents were determined based on (1) access, (2) quality, and (3) participation. For access indicators, giving parents regular reports seems to be the top priority while failure in nationally administered tests should not be a basis for exclusion of a child in the SPED program; on quality, the respondents are competent in making IEPs whereas the division, the school heads and the community insure the sustainability of SPED programs. Conversely, assessment tools are not available in the selected schools. Parent involvement and willingness of SPED teachers to share information determine the participation indicators. The study yielded several implications for inclusion in local schools such as mechanisms for successful implementation, school leadership, curriculum innovation, teacher education/training and advocacy.

KEYWORDS: *inclusive education, programs, local schools9+6*

1. INTRODUCTION

The UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (1994) provided the framework for upholding equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional linguistic or other conditions.

At the core of the Salamanca framework is the basic human right to education situating inclusive education at the forefront of international educational concerns "to recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities" (UNESCO, 1994, Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, p. 11-12)

Meanwhile, these international initiatives have resulted in the crafting of the Special Education Act of 2004, institutionalizing inclusive education in the country and the Republic Act 7277 otherwise known as Magna Carta for Disabled Persons.

The Special Education Act of 2004 requires the establishment of at least one special education center for each school division and at least three SPED centers in big school divisions for children with special needs creating the implementing machinery thereof, providing guidelines for government financial assistance and other incentive support, and other purposes (Saludes& Dante, 2005).

According to Ainscow (2004) inclusion has been a big challenge facing educational systems throughout the world. In the Philippines, for instance, inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms has been one major issue over the years (Dapudong, 2013). Inciong (2005; 2007) cited problems that beset the SPED program implementation in the country.

UNESCO (2003) defines inclusion as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all leaners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. "The all objective leaners by of inclusive education is to support education for all, with special emphasis on removing barriers to participation and learning for girls and women, disadvantaged groups, children with disabilities and out-of-school-children; the overall goal is a school where all children are participating and treated equally" (Sandkull, 2005, p.1).

Similarly, Sebba and Ainscow (1996) also describe inclusion as the "process by which school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organization and provision. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need to exclude pupils (p. 9). In addition, inclusive education is one way to increase educational access to a number of students with various disabilities

(Mukhopadhyay, Molosiwa, &Moswela, 2009) providing these children access in regular classrooms.

In addition, Sandkull (2005) continues that inclusive education involves modifications in content, structures, processes, policies and strategies and is primarily concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in formal educational settings. As an approach, inclusive education looks into how to transform the system so it will respond to diverse learners.

Much has been said about inclusive education in urban contexts (Lontoc, 1997; Padilla, 2002; Tsang. 2004; Saludes& Dante, 2006). Also, Yap and Adorio (2008) have said about inclusive education in 9 divisions (Abra, Aurora, Batanes, Benguet. Mountain Province in Luzon, the Division of Leyte in the Visayas, and the Divisions of Cotabato and Surigao del Sur in Mindanao). What is not known is how inclusive education is implemented in the Division of Northern Samar. It is against this backdrop that the present study is pursued. This paper aims to assess the implementation of inclusive education program for children with special needs in selected schools in relation to (1) access, (2) quality, and (3) participation.

2. Methodology
Utilizing quantitative approach and descriptive design, this study employed Yap and Adorio's (2008) 39-item indicators on access, quality and participation. Purposive technique was used to draw the forty seven respondents (2 district supervisors; 2 principals; 52 regular teachers, 11 SPED teachers) from two central elementary schools in the Division of Northern Samar.

3. Results and Discussion
Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics on access indicators. It is shown that overall the access high as demonstrated by mean score of 3. 18. 1he highest indicator appears to be A3 (rank = 1) followed by A5 (rank = 2); A9 (rank= 3); A10 (rank = 4); A7 (rank= 5); Al PPS and A8 to (rank be A3 = (rank 6): A2 = A13 rank 8); A12 (rank =9) and lastly, A6 9rank = 10). It can be observed that almost all access indicators are given highest scores except for A6 similar to the findings of Adorio and Yap (2008).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on access indicators

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
A1 – The Parents of children with special needs can enroll anytime of the school year.	3.83	1.22	6.3
A2- The school announces over the radio and other media the opening of SPED classes or enrollment.	3.80	1.14	7
A3–Parents are regularly given report of their children's progress (graded or non-graded).	4.33	1.02	1
A4 –SPED students are included in all school activities.	3.75	1.26	8.5
A5 – SPED programs have specific targets for the type of disabilities for admission.	4.15	1.25	2
A6 –Students who fail in nation; and division examinations are candidates for SPED.	2.58	1.08	10
A7 – SPED teachers are accountable to parents of (students with exceptional needs) SEN.	3.85	1.21	5
A8 – SPED students may be transferred to the regular classrooms at any time when they are ready during the school year.	3.83	1.20	6.3
A9 –Students targeted for inclusion are given trial period to determine academic and social readiness.	3.95	1.06	3
A10- There is adequate resources for determining learning academic strengths of students with special needs.	3.90	1.13	4
A11 – The SPED program services students of varying age and disabilities.	3.83	1.30	6.3
A12 – The SPED program is a component of the schools' SIP/AIP and annual report card.	3.68	1.59	9
A13 – The SPED program follows the timeline targeted for the school year.	3.75	1.43	8.5
Average	3.78		

Results show that giving parents regular reports seems to be the top priority of respondents. For the selected schools, SPED programs have identified targets and clear criteria prior to admission. These specific targets are based on the needs or disabilities of students. This may seem true because A5 was perceived by the respondents to be very true. True enough, failure in nationally administered tests should not a basis for exclusion of a child in the SPED program as shown by the lowest ranked indicator A6 (rank = 10). The highest and lowest ranked access indicators A3 and A6 respectively agree with the findings of Adorio and Yap (2008) when they also found out that teachers give parents regular reports of performance and failure in national achievement test should not be the main reason for the child to be considered a SPED candidate.

Surprisingly, A12 (The SPED program is a component of the school's SIP/AIP and annual report card) is not in included as a component of school's SIP/AIP despite DepEd Order No. 72 s. 2009 to wit:

"District and school based special education and regular teachers, administrators and parents need to collaboratively develop and facilitate the most effective program for children with disabilities. This program shall be included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP)."(p. 2).

Apparently, announcement and information dissemination to public of special education programs in selected schools was not done. Moreover, enrollment of SPED students anytime of the year was perceived "untrue" probably because in selected public schools admission for SPED is part of the school's yearly regular enrollment program. Even the SPED Center of the Division of Northern Samar does accept SPED students anytime of the school year. The same can be observed to A8 (SPED students may be transferred to the regular classrooms at anytime when they are ready during the school year.); the

SPED Center and the selected schools perceived this access indicator to be "untrue."

According to Adorio and Yap (2008) quality determines how well inclusive education program is delivered in the schools. Table 2 reveals that the respondents are competent in making IEPs. Considered "true are the Q11 and Q12 (The school division insures the sustainability of SPED programs; the school head and the community insure the sustainability of SPED programs) congruent which is a good sign for these are congruent indicators of a successful inclusive education program service delivery.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on quality indicators

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Q1 - SPED students take the Division and National Achievement Tests together with the school population.	3.08	1.49	11
Q2-SPED teachers are competent in screening, identifying students with exceptional needs (SEN).	4.13	1.22	4.25
Q3 - SPED teachers have knowledge in differentiating instructional programs.	4.13	1.24	4.25
Q4-SPED instructional effectiveness is well-defined.	3.93	1.33	7
Q5- Student year end targets are well-discussed with parents.	4.13	0.97	4.25
Q6- Appropriate assessment tools are available.	3.78	1.29	9
Q7-SPED classes are regularly supervised.	4.13	1.20	4.25
Q8-The public is aware of SPED programs in the school	4.03	1.17	5.5
Q9-The resource rooms are provided with materials to improve student learning.	3.95	1.22	6
Q10-SPED teachers are competent in developing IEPs for each child.	4.23	1.10	1
Q11-The school division insures the sustainability of SPED programs.	4.20	1.04	2
Q12-The school head and the community insure the sustainability of SPED programs.	4.18	1.03	3
Q13-SPED teachers no longer carry dual assignments: regular and SPED teachers.	3.65	1.35	10
Q14-Stakeholders provide support to SPED programs.	3.83	1.17	8
Q15-SPED teachers make decisions regarding student placements.	4.03	1.07	5.5
Average	3.96		

Q2, Q3, Q5 and Q7 received mixed ratings among the respondents. Still, the respondents perceived the aforementioned quality indicators to be high. That is, the respondents are knowledgeable in differentiated instruction and competent in screening and identifying students with exceptional needs. Additionally, respondents discussed with parents the targets and outcomes, and responded regular supervision of SPED classes.

What is "not true" are Q6 and Q13 which means that assessment tools are not available in selected schools. This poses problem to the teachers in identifying the strengths and weaknesses not available of the students for proper program grade placement while on the role of teachers, the respondents have been performing dual roles, that of being a regular and SPED teacher.

Table 3 reveals the descriptive statistics on participation indicators. Apparently, parent involvement in the student's progress is rated very high with a mean score of 4.40 which is consistent with top rated indicators on access and quality. This is probably because at fits, some parents are pessimistic in sending their children to SPED program yet when they saw the progress of their children become more actively involved.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on participation indicators

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
P1 – Parents are involved in making decisions about the progress of their SPED child.	4.40	0.84	1
P2 –Other schools personnel are involved in the assessment of SEN.	3.83	1.26	6
P3 – The Local Government Unit (barangay, town mayor, etc.) are involved in referring and or identifying students with exceptional needs in the community.	3.68	1.21	8
P4 –The SPED program is separate from the regular education curriculum.	4.0	1.15	4.5
P5 – The curriculum for SPED is different from that of regular students.	4.15	1.08	2.5
P6 – It is the function of the SPED teacher to develop another teacher as understudy.	3.55	1.26	9
P7 –There is a strong collaboration between regular and SPED teachers.	4.15	1.21	2.5
P8 – SPED teachers are aware of the instructional demands in the regular classrooms.	4.05	1.20	3
P9 – There is strong collegiality between regular and SPED teachers.	3.88	1.16	5
P10 –The regular teachers are knowledge of SPED programs.	4.0	0.96	4.5
P11 – SPED students targeted for inclusion in the regular classroom are provided with transition plan.	3.80	1.26	7
Average	3.95		

The second highest indicator (P8) with a mean score of 4.15 suggest that as newly trained SPED teachers they are more willing to share information and collaborate with regular teachers to help the latter cope up with the instructional demands for better and improved outcomes. On awareness of the instructional demands of regular classrooms, the respondents rated this indicator "high" probably because for considerable number of years most of them carry the usual regular teaching loads. The present study affirms Yap and Adorio's (2008) findings on the three highest ranked indicators (P1, P7, and P8).

Interestingly, the respondents perceived P6 (It is the function of the SPED teacher to develop another teacher as understudy.) to be "untrue." This result may be attributed to the common notion among teachers that it is the Department of Education through teacher education and training that is responsible in preparing and developing another SPED teacher.

4. Conclusions
It goes without saying that successful implementation of inclusive education program heavily relies on the perceptions of administrators, regular and SPED teachers. Apparently, raising the level of awareness of school administrators, regular teachers and most importantly SPED teachers on inclusion is crucial. Observably, high ratings for the three indicators suggest encouraging perceptions thus effective inclusive education program implementation.

Unsuccessful SPED program implementation in these two elementary schools are attributed to insufficient training, advocacy, low level awareness of all stakeholders, funding, government support, and attitudes. Reporting some years ago, Inciong (2005; 2007) already identified these factors besetting SPED program implementation in the country.

True enough, legislations and policies for inclusion have not led to the attainment of the DepEd's strategy for increasing participation rate of children with special needs.

Finally, the present study has thrown light on the practices of inclusive education in two elementary schools. While this study has achieved its purpose, the researchers are aware that this is a preliminary investigation on inclusion primarily based on perceptions. Hence, it is suggested that subsequent studies use qualitative approach using alternative procedures and methods to yield several significant implications.

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