

Assessing the Implementation of Inclusive Education Among Children and Youth with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT The study assessed the implementation of Inclusive Education among children and youth with special needs. It investigated how well the school maintains the salient features of Inclusive Education, how well it addresses the basic concern of parents of non-disabled students, the inclusion potential benefits; and how adequately key persons carry out their roles during phases of implementation. In using the descriptive method, 2 of the 3 administrators, 13 regular teachers, 2 SPED teachers and 713 parents of disabled and non-disabled children from selected schools in Isabela were considered. Checklist, guided interview/focused group discussion, observations, weighted mean and standard deviation were utilized. Overall computed mean of salient features-2.76; potential benefits-2.97, and carrying out of key persons' roles-2.97, prove that implementation is evident. Concerns of parents of non-disabled were less

evident with overall computed mean of 2.29. Results imply provisions of appropriate materials, equipment, in-service trainings, medical data to determine impairment categories/levels of special child; and Individualized Educational Programs (IEP).

Keywords: Assessment, Children and Youth with Special Needs, Implementation, Inclusive Education

Introduction

“Special Schools alone can never achieve the goal of Education for All (EFA)” (Rocal, 2011). Participants of the 1994 Conference on Special Needs education held in Salamanca, Spain issued this statement and reaffirmed the right to education of every individual, as enshrined in the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This reaffirmation served as renewal of pledge of the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA), 2007. Hence, the Department of Education (DepEd) adopted policy of Inclusive Education as a basic service for all types of exceptional children and youth; a handbook on Inclusive Education as primary reference and guide for Special Trainings and promotion of the ideas (Inciong, et.al., 2007).

The term “inclusion”, according to Farrell (2005), is to establish understanding of concept between inclusion and integration. Mainstream school systems remain the same, but extra arrangements are made to provide for pupils with special educational needs. Farrell (2005) further cited “inclusion” as securing appropriate opportunities for learning, assessment and qualifications enabling full and effective participation of all pupils in the learning process. (Wade, 1999). Inciong, et.al (2007), describe “inclusion” 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 their

peers; arranges its special education program which involves a special education teacher as one of the faculty members. The school offers mainstream where regular and special education teachers organize and implement appropriate programs for special and regular students.

Farrel (2005) identified three aspects of inclusion: 1) Social inclusion; 2) including pupils with special educational needs already in mainstream school; and 3) balance of pupils in mainstream and special schools. As a strategy, *social inclusion* is likely to raise more standards pupil with SEN (Special Educational Needs) attains when in school than when not educated at all. Included in the second thread are pupils with (SEN) already enrolled in mainstream schools, an approach that seems to be the purpose of documents on inclusion of all those connected with the school, adults as well as children, not only pupils with SEN. It addresses three dimensions of schooling: a) *creating inclusive cultures*, b) *producing inclusive policies*, and c) *evolving inclusive practices*. (Booth, Ainscow & Black-Hawkins, 2000). The third aspect of inclusion may result in increasing proportion of pupils in mainstream schools with reference to specialist provision or a pupil referral unit. No pupils would be educated in special schools or other settings; and all pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) would be educated in mainstream schools.

A range of provision which Special Educational Needs (SEN) could be met (such as mainstream school, special school, pupil referral unit, home tuition) would not be acceptable. Better yet, to have increased support and resources in mainstream schools in proportion to the severity and complexity of SEN (e.g., Gartner & Lipsky, 1989).

Farrel (2005) presents the document, "Inclusive Schooling: Children with Special Educational Needs", Department for Education and Skills (*DfES 2001b*) provides

statutory guidance on the framework for inclusion within the Education Act 1996. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 is said to deliver a “strengthened right to mainstream education for children with special needs by amending the Education Act 1996. The law concentrates on two aspects of the document: 1) The first concerns interface of this “right” with the “right” of parents to express a preference for school for their child 2) The second is the constrained nature of right to inclusion apparent in the document.

“The act seeks to enable more children who have special education needs to be included successfully within mainstream education. This clearly signals that where parents want a mainstream education for their child everything possible should be done to provide it. Equally, where parents want a special school place their wishes should be listened to and taken into account” (London, Department for Education and Skills, 2001b).

Heubert (1994) outlines some of the major philosophical assumptions that proponents and opponents hold relative to their attitudes about inclusion. Those who favor greater inclusion consider labeling and segregation of students with disabilities as unfavorable. They do not view these students as distinctly different from others, but only have limitations in terms of abilities. They also believe that students who are disabled can be best served in mainstream classes because: teachers who have only low-ability students have lower expectations; students in segregated programs tend not to have individualized programs; most regular teachers are willing and able to teach students with disabilities; and the law supports inclusive practices. Whitbread (2014) mentioned that education is the most important function of the state and local government, a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him

for later professional training, and in helping him adjust normally to his environment. We conclude that in the field, the doctrine “separate and equal” has no place. These same arguments, originally applied to race, have been repeated on behalf of children with disabilities, many of whom continue to be educated separately from their non-disabled peers despite legislation mandating otherwise (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). In fact, as cited by Whitbread (2014), children with intellectual disabilities educated in general education settings have been found to score higher on literacy measures than those educated in segregated settings (Buckley, 2000). Student academic achievement is higher when parents are involved; the higher the level of parent involvement, the higher the level of student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002); (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

The Legal Mandate of Inclusive Education declares basic right of every Filipino child with special needs to education, habilitation, rehabilitation, support, training and employment opportunities, community participation, and independent living.

In the Philippines, the legal mandates of Inclusive Education are anchored on The world declaration on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtiem, Thailand in March, 1990, giving primacy for expanded vision and a renewed commitment to provide basic education to all children, youth and adults (Rocal, 2011). Other legal mandates where Inclusive Education is anchored include: 1) The World Conference on Special Needs held at Salamanca, Spain on June 7, 2012, recognizing necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adult with special educational needs within the regular educational system; 2) The Agenda for Action of Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. (1993-2002) declares that all children and young people have the right to education, equality, opportunities and participation in the society; 3) The Philippine Action Plan (1990-2000)

in support of EFA focused its policies and strategies to specific groups of people: rural poor, those in urban slums, cultural communities, disabled, educationally disadvantaged, and the gifted; 4) Republic Act 7277, otherwise known as Magna Carta for Disabled Person enacted in July 1991 and approved 1995, upholds full participation, total integration, protects and promotes independence and respect of persons with disabilities.

Inciong et.al., (2007) cited that the Special Education Division of the Department of Education takes charge of all programs and services in the country. It has the following functions: 1) formulates policies, plans and programs 2) develops standards of programs and services; 3) monitors and evaluates efficiency of program and services; 4) conducts in-service training programs to upgrade competencies of SPED administrators, teachers, and ancillary personnel; and 5) establishes and strengthens linkages and network.

The Philippine Normal University, a leading Teacher Education institution, strongly supports the promotion of SPED. Its Research Agenda include assessing or evaluating of implementation of SPED programs and services in the nearby public or private schools in its area of responsibility. One of these research agenda is the Assessment of the Implementation of Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Special Needs. As advocates, the researchers embarked on this task for they strongly believed that findings may help SPED School Administrators, Regular Teachers, SPED Teachers and parents strengthen their Inclusive Education Program.

The present study assessed the implementation of Inclusive Education for children with special needs. Primarily, it investigated: 1) to what extent are salient features of Inclusive Education evident and maintained; 2) to what extent does the school addresses the basic concerns of parents of non-disabled students; 3) to what extent are potential benefits

of Inclusion evident or manifested in inclusive schools; and 4) to what extent do Inclusive Education key persons carry out their roles during the phases of implementation of inclusive education: Administrator/Regular Teacher, SPED Teacher, Parents. Involved in the study are school administrators, regular teachers, SPED teachers, parents of special children and youth and non-disabled children or youth (where the special ones are mainstreamed) in selected mainstreamed public schools in the Isabela, Northern Philippines.

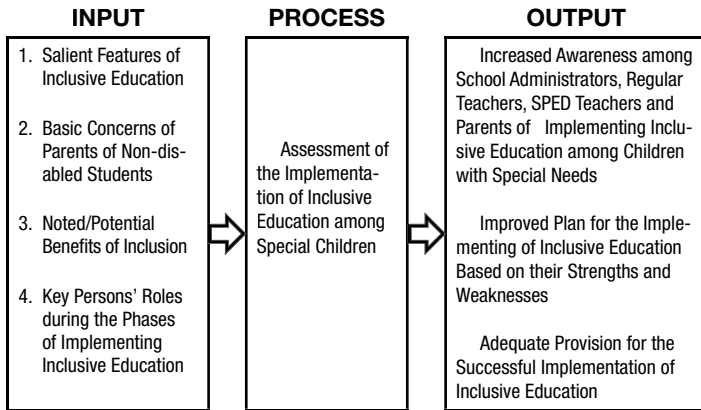


Figure 1. Research Paradigm

Methodology

Using the Descriptive method, the study involved two (2) of the three (3) school administrators, thirteen (13) randomly selected regular teachers, two (2) Special Education teachers and 26 parents of disabled children and 187 parents of non-disabled children comprising the population from selected schools in Isabela where inclusive education is fully implemented. A research instrument or checklist to assess the implementation of inclusive education in selected three (3) schools in Isabela, subjected to validation by experts in the

field of Special Education was utilized. Results were validated through guided interviews: for the principal/regular teachers/ Special Education teachers, parents of non-disabled children and parents of disabled children, focused group discussions, and class observations. Rating Scale and Weighted Mean were also used.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Extent by which Salient Features of Inclusive Education Evident and Maintained

	Adminis- trator		SPED Teacher		Regular Teacher		Parent		Total	
	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD
1. There is an implementation and maintenance of warm and accepting classroom communities that embraces diversity and honor differences.	3.33		3.17		3.08		3.15		3.15	
2. Teachers implement a multi-level, multi-modality curriculum	3.50		3.50		3.19		3.11		3.11	
3. Teachers teach interactively	2.50		3.25		2.54		2.70		2.70	
4. There is a provision of continuous support for teachers in the classroom and breaking of professional isolations.	3.75		3.00		2.46		2.35		2.36	
5. Parents are actively involved in the planning process in meaningful ways.	3.33		3.00		2.75		2.45		2.46	
Overall computed average mean=2.76										

\bar{x} = mean

QD=Qualitative Description

Computed average mean of 3.15 shows that the Administration, SPED teachers, regular teachers and parents agree that implementation and maintenance of warm and accepting classroom communities that embrace diversity and honor differences is evident to a great extent. Stated by Giangreco et al, (2004), cited by Kliewer & Kasa-Hendrickson (2014) “peer support programs can also create and extend ‘hidden safety supports’ in the schools” as one way to counteract the problem of bullying. They suggest students taught in inclusive safe learning environments become more empathetic of others (U.S. Department of Education (nos. H324D010031 & H324C040213).

Respondents claim that teaching and learning processes observed multi-level, multi-modality, child centered, interactive and participatory, as shown by the computed average mean of 3.11 and 2.70. Supported by Focus Group Discussion (FGD), parents claim frequent involvement of both children and parents in all school activities during regular programs and celebrations. Parents suggest field trips to be part of social life of special children. Business-type lessons (making *Pastillas*, *Turon*, etc.) need integration; these help special children realize the value of money and hard-work.

Computed average mean of 2.36 reveals no support for teacher teaching inclusive education from his/her colleague and usually, the inclusive education teacher is isolated. Mentioned during FGD, there was no consultation with parents as to offering or implementing of SPED classes. Besides, no medical data were submitted to support/help determine impairment categories or levels of among special children.

A positive result was found in the fifth feature of inclusive education with a computed average mean of 2.46 which is evident. It shows that parents were much involved in planning processes.

Kasa-Hendrickson and Kliewer (2014), commented collaboration which plays a key role in inclusive classrooms. Reciprocal process of collaboration fosters awareness and understanding of diversity existing within classrooms and in broader communities (U.S. Department of Education (nos. H324D010031 & H324C040213).

As a whole, implementation of inclusive education is evident, based on identified features and overall computed average mean of 2.76.

Table 2. Extent by which the School Addresses the Basic Concerns of Parents of Non-disabled Children

	Adminis- trator		SPED Teacher		Regular Teacher		Parent		Total	
	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD
1. Will Inclusion reduce the academic progress of non-disabled children?	3.00		3.50		2.35		2.35		2.35	
2. Will non-disabled children lose teacher time and attention?	3.00		2.75		2.35		2.21		2.22	
3. Will non-disabled children learn undesirable behavior from students with disabilities?	3.00		3.25		2.08		2.29		2.29	
Overall computed average mean= 2.29										

\bar{x} = mean

QD=Qualitative Description

Inclusive Education does not reduce the academic progress of non-disabled children, based on the computed average mean of 2.35 which is less evident. Presence of students with disability does not affect attention and time given to non-disabled children, as shown by the average computed mean of 2.22 which is less evident. Non-disabled children do not necessarily learn undesirable behavior from children with disabilities, as revealed by the average computed mean of 2.29 which is less evident.

Studies prove that placement in inclusive classrooms does not interfere with the academic performance of students without disabilities with respect to the amount of allocated time and engaged instructional time (York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1992; cited by Whitbread, 2014).

Table 3. Extent by which Potential Benefits are Evident/ Manifested

	Adminis- trator		SPED Teacher		Regular Teacher		Parent		Total	
	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD
1. Reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness.	3.00		3.17		3.15		2.83		2.84	
2. Growth in the social cognition.	2.63		3.50		2.77		3.03		3.03	
3. Improvement of self-concept	3.50		4.00		3.00		3.05		3.05	
4. Development of personal principles	3.00		3.50		2.81		2.94		2.94	

5. Warm and caring friendship	2.25	4.00	2.92	3.07	3.07
Overall computed average mean=2.97					

\bar{x} = mean QD=Qualitative Description

Indicated by computed average mean of 2.84, non-disabled children show accepting behavior; appreciate individuals' contribution in the group and live with them without fear of human differences with increase comfort and awareness. Computed average mean of 3.03 confirm a more tolerant and supportive behavior, positive feeling in dealing with disabled classmates and communicate effectively; feel proud having classmates with disabilities as friend or partner and it fosters a healthy and better relationship for both, as shown by computed average mean of 3.05. Sense of commitment to personal, moral and ethical principle of non-disabled children strengthened life prejudice as they continue to relate with disabled children succeeded by the average computed mean of 2.94. The average computed mean of 3.07 strongly supports warm and caring friendship as children work and play in and out of school.

Instructional strategies in inclusive classrooms, peer tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and differentiated instruction benefit all learners, hold Slavin, Madden, & Leavy, (1984), cited by Whitbread, 2014). Peer tutoring results in significant increase in spelling, social studies and other academic areas for students with and without disabilities (Maheady et al, 1988; Pomerantz et al, 1994; cited by Whitbread, 2014). Children with intellectual disabilities educated in general education settings were found to score higher on literacy measures than students educated in segregated settings (Buckley, 2000 cited by Whitbread, 2014).

Table 4. Extent by which Key Persons Carry Out their Roles during the Initial Phase of Implementation of Inclusive Education

	Adminis- trator		SPED Teacher		Regular Teacher		Parent		Total	
	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD
1. Adminis- trator	3.50		4.00		3.21		2.93		2.94	
2. Regular Teacher	2.00		3.50		3.41		2.90		2.91	
3. SPED Teacher	2.00		4.00		2.83		2.72		2.72	
4. Parents	2.50		3.00		2.85		3.01		2.94	
Overall com- puted average mean=2.87										

\bar{x} = mean QD=Qualitative Description

Administrator’s support to inclusive education is clearly positive with an average computed mean of 2.94. While regular teachers show full support to ideas, plans and activities of the SPED teachers and administrators, indicated by the average computed mean of 2.91. Computed average mean of 2.72 proves SPED teachers are working well with regular teachers and administrators. Equally, parents of both disabled and non-disabled children have strongly supported plans and activities of the teachers and administrators through their active involvement in creating a committee that directly supports the inclusive education marked by an average computed mean of 2.94. Student academic achievement is higher when parents are involved - the higher the level of parent involvement, the higher the level of student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; cited by Whitbread, 2014).

Table 5. Extent by which Key Persons Carry Out their Roles during the Transition Phase of Implementing Inclusive Education

	Adminis- trator		SPED Teacher		Regular Teacher		Parent		Total	
	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD
1. Administrator	4.00		3.88		2.67		2.76		2.76	
2. Regular Teacher	2.50		3.40		3.06		2.82		2.83	
3. SPED Teacher	2.50		3.70		2.65		2.62		2.62	
4. Parents	3.25		3.00		2.50		2.72		2.72	
Overall com- puted average mean=2.73										

\bar{x} = mean QD=Qualitative Description

The administrators do their part in organizing, observing, monitoring and facilitating the activities and programs of teachers and children with special needs, as supported by the average computed mean of 2.76. The regular teachers show positive effort in identifying prospective students for inclusion through the help of the school physician, medical personnel and guidance counselor. They constantly coordinate and consult stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its objectives, activities and programs of inclusive education, as indicated in the computed average mean of 2.83. SPED teachers have extensively provided assistance to the regular teachers, parents, and administrators in all the concerns of implementing a functional inclusive education, as shown in the average computed mean of 2.62. Comparably, parents of disabled and non-disabled children visibly work with the inclusive education personnel in monitoring and coordinating the plans, activities and achievements of their children marked by a computed mean of 2.72.

Table 6. Extent by which Key Persons Carry Out their Roles during the Inclusion Phase of Implementing Inclusive Education

	Adminis- trator		SPED Teacher		Regular Teacher		Parent		Total	
	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD
1. Adminis- trator	3.75		4.00		2.82		2.60		2.61	
2. Regular Teacher	2.50		3.50		2.87		2.56		2.57	
3. SPED Teacher	2.50		4.00		2.21		2.72		2.71	
4. Parents	2.25		3.13		2.13		3.04		3.02	
Overall computed average mean=2.73										

\bar{x} = mean

QD=Qualitative Description

The administrators continue to enrich the curriculum, instructional materials and teachers through in-service training, cooperative planning and monitoring of activities. They link with GOs and NGOs for their social, moral and financial support and provide incentives to regular students with a computed average mean of 2.61. However regular teachers show positive response to the enrolment of children with disabilities and treat them equally. They enrich the program by monitoring, modifying and updating the curriculum and instructional materials with consultations, as indicated in the computed average mean of 2.57.

Special Education (SPED) teachers do not fail either to provide assistance to both students and teachers, as they continuously monitor the program. Regular teachers are enhanced through a series of in-service trainings and consultative planning with Special Education (SPED)

teachers and experts, confirmed with a computed average mean of 2.71. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sustains these data since respondents comment that there are consultations done to solve/resolve problems/conflicts. In fact, in Whitbread, (2014) research cited by Villa, & Walther-Thomas, (1997) it shows that principals, special education directors, superintendents, teachers, parents and community members must all be involved and invested in the successful outcome of inclusive education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The salient features, noted potential benefits and the carrying out of key persons' roles are evident to a great extent. By contrast, basic concerns of parents of non-disabled are not evident, so inclusive schools need not to address them.

The following are recommended: Administrators need to secure special equipment and customized instructional materials for special children; that allocations be provided for the vocational training, self-help activities and life-long learning skills; that in-service trainings for inclusive education teachers; medical data be submitted to help teachers determine the categories/levels of impairments of the special child; and Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) for each special child be done.

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