



Enhancement program for inclusive kindergarten in Southern Philippines

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Abstract

This study focused on the evaluation of how inclusive kindergarten schools implemented the inclusion of kindergarten with disabilities. It determined the level of implementation of inclusive education practices; the extent of attainment of the program; recognized best practices and challenges met by the respondents. This research employed the descriptive evaluative design and qualitative method through a focus group discussion with the principals and teachers. Results showed that the implementation of inclusive kindergarten program is generally observed to be very high; attainment of the program objectives/outcomes yielded a high level of implementation with approximately 61%-80% target indicators; best practices include dedication of teachers, appropriate school environment, in-service trainings conducted, curriculum modification and support of parents, while challenges met consisted of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education, workload of teachers, acceptance of parents, assessment and strategies in handling children with behavioral problem. Hence, the study concluded that inclusive education in Davao Region is highly implemented. It is recommended that intensive trainings and seminars on special education-related topics for both regular and SPED teachers be designed; intensify support to kindergarten teachers in terms of professional and financial needs; and child find should be conducted both by SPED teachers and regular teachers.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education nowadays is very essential definitely for diverse students who have learning needs. It is also the basis for a more unbiased society. It espouses the notion that learners irrespective of their characteristics or differences they have a right to education. Particularly, inclusive school has to encourage learners with special needs and learners without special needs to learn together. Therefore, students can acquire learning through Inclusive schools even those children with the most severe educational disabilities. (12).

In the Philippines, according to the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities or Republic Act 7277,

emphasized that persons with disabilities are guaranteed and offered suitable quality education and sufficient opportunities to enhance their skills by the State. Moreover, persons with disabilities are given access to education as provided by the State. It also stated that it is illegal for any school not to admit a person with disability because of handicap or incapacity (5).

Kindergarten special education is simply intended to meet the developmental needs of every child. Special education is not a clinic or a hospital where patients are treated nor an orphanage for the orphans (Barbetta, Norona, and Bicard, 2005). Although the General Kindergarten Program contains the

Inclusiveness of Kindergarten Education which caters the needs of the learners with special needs: the gifted, those with disabilities, and other diverse learners (5).

2. Objectives

The purpose of this study is to conduct an evaluation on how inclusive kindergartens in the division of Davao City implement the inclusion of early learners with disabilities. This study evaluates on the level of implementation on the inclusive kindergarten program. It also considers the extent of attainment of the program's objectives/outcomes. In addition, it contemplates on the best practices and challenges in the implementation of inclusive kindergarten program as experienced by the principals and teachers.

This help assesses the current status on the level of implementing inclusive education practices; evaluate the extent of attainment of the program, identify the challenges met by the respondents and best practices observed in the implementation of inclusive kindergarten education program. Finally, a proposal to enhance the implementation of inclusive kindergarten education program.

3. Statement of the Problem

This study assessed the implementation of inclusive kindergarten education. Specifically, this answers the following queries:

1. What is the level of implementation of Inclusive Kindergarten Program along the following indicators: school policies and administrative support, school environment, teacher skills, knowledge and attitudes, teacher development, students, academic content and assessment, special subject areas/curricular activities, and community?

2. What is the extent of attainment of the program's objectives/outcomes in terms of: Child Find, Assessment, Program Options, Curriculum Modification, and Parental Involvement?

3. What are the best practices and challenges experienced by the principals and teachers in the implementation of inclusive kindergarten program?

4. Method

Research Design

This research work employed the descriptive evaluative design. The program which has been running for years in the Philippines is deemed ripe for Clarificative Evaluation by John Owen, (2006). It was used to analyze and specify the theory of the program,

established the probability of program design, encourage continuity between program design and implementation and also provided the basis for program enhancement. The qualitative type was also used to determine the challenges experienced as well as best practices observed in the implementation of an inclusive kindergarten program through a focus group discussion with the principals and teachers which allowed the researcher to make follow-up queries based on the answers of respondents.

5. Sampling Design

Purposive sampling method was used to identify the involvement of respondents in the implementation of the inclusive kindergarten program. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to 60 public schools and 40 to private schools in Davao City who are implementing inclusive education. Upon retrieval, only 58 schools from the public responded while 26 schools from the private schools responded. Some schools declined to answer the questionnaires for some ethical reasons. Summing all the respondent schools both public and private, 84 schools in Davao City division were included in the conduct of evaluation.

6. Research Environment

Research locale is in the city of Davao. Specifically, public elementary schools and private schools are the target of the study. Davao City is the capital of Region XI also known as Davao Region. It is strategically located in the Southeastern part of Mindanao, Philippines. The land area is considered as one of the largest cities in the world (Davao City Map, 2007). Davao City has one division with twenty districts for the public elementary level, and 197 private elementary schools (source www.deped-davaocity.ph), all sporadically serving millions of Davaweno school children regardless of abilities and disabilities.

Interestingly, Davao City Division has one SPED school; eight SPED centers; and some Special teachers in the plantilla. In fact, a number of SPED teachers are recipients of awards both local and national award-giving organizations.

7. Research Instruments

The researcher adopted the Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments of UNESCO (2015). Specifically, the survey

questionnaire consists of the level of program evaluation of inclusive-kindergarten program in early childhood setting in terms of the following areas: “the school policies and administrative support, school environment, teacher skills, knowledge and attitudes, teacher development, students, academic content and assessment, special subject areas/extra-curricular activities, and community”.

Another tool was developed from the comprehensive inclusive program for children with special needs (DepEd Order no. 72 s. 2009) with the following components: child find, assessment, program options, curriculum modifications, and parental involvement.

A semi-structured Focus Group Discussion guide was based on UNESCO toolkit guide (2015) for the focus group discussion. Questions revolved around school policies and administrative support, school environment, teachers’ skills, knowledge and attitude, teacher development, students, academic content and assessment, special subject areas/extra-curricular activities, and community. It has eight items that is carefully crafted to elicit the most appropriate needs in the discussions part of this study.

The modified questionnaires of Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments of UNESCO (2015), tool from the comprehensive inclusive program for children with special needs (DepEd Order no. 72 s. 2009) and modified

questionnaire for focus group discussion was submitted to the panel of experts for validation to ensure its validity and reliability through a pilot testing.

Pilot Testing

To confirm its reliability, the questionnaires were pilot tested to randomly selected 30 kindergarten teachers who were not part of the respondents/or study. All items based on Cronbach’s Alpha were found to be reliable.

8. Results and Discussions

Out of the eight indicators, six of them are observed to be very high, though academic content and assessment got the highest mean which is very high while teacher development got the lowest mean which is high.

Results in table 1 indicate that, kindergarten schools in the division of Davao City generally observe a very high level of implementation in inclusive kindergarten program. Further, this shows that the school administrators, teachers, and parents strongly observing implementations of inclusive kindergarten program. Further, this shows that the school administrators, teachers, and parents strongly observing implementations of inclusive kindergarten program.

Table 1: Level of School Implementation of Inclusive Kindergarten Program

Level of School in the Implementation of Inclusive Kindergarten Program	Overall Mean	Overall Standard Deviation	Overall Descriptive Equivalent
School Policies and Administrative Support	4.26	.559	Very High
School Environment	4.20	.593	High
Teachers’ Skills, Knowledge and Attitude	4.43	.524	Very High
Teacher Development	4.08	.752	High
Students	4.41	.534	Very High
Academic Content and Assessment	4.52	.496	Very High
Special Subject Areas/Extra-curricular Activities	4.42	.636	Very High
Community	4.23	.725	Very High

Legend: “Very High- 4.21- 5:00; High- 3:41-4:20; Moderate- 2.61-3.40; Low- 1.81-2.60; Very low- 1:00-1:80” (Sullivan &Artino, 2013)

(Source: UNECO’S TOOLKIT, 2015, <http://www.unesco.org/education/Inclusive>)

The Department of Education consistently advocates inclusive education as a basic service for all

exceptional children. In the same manner, participants of the 1994 Special Needs Education session held in Salamanca, Spain reaffirmed every individual’s right

to education as enshrined in the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Because of this reaffirmation a renewal of pledge was completed. These declarations propelled the Department of Education to adopt a policy of inclusive education in 1997, although the interest to educate Filipino children with disabilities started more than a century ago in 1902 during the American Regime. Special education program in the Philippines formally started in 1907. In 1957, the Special Education Division of the Department of Education and Culture was created and it propelled the development of Special Education all over the country. The elements of Special Education programs include creating laws, training teachers, gathering census of

exceptionally-abled children and youth in schools and community, integration of children with learning needs in mainstream classes and restoration and rehabilitation of residential and special schools and provision of materials (29).

Cabajes, (2006) results study “An Assessment of Readiness of Private Preschools for Inclusive Education: Basis for Intervention” revealed that private preschools in Davao City are satisfactorily prepared for inclusion in the area of program administration, human resources, curriculum instruction, assessment, physical plant, facilities and environment, and family involvement.

Table 2: Extent of Attainment of the Program’s Objectives/Outcomes in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Extent of Attainment of the Program’s Objectives/Outcomes In the Implementation of Inclusive Education	Overall Mean	Overall Standard Deviation	Overall Descriptive Equivalent
Child find	3.47	1.030	High
Assessment	3.73	.939	High
Program Options	3.58	.916	High
Curriculum Modification	3.96	.783	High
Parental Involvement	3.98	.844	High

Legend: “Very High- 4.21- 5:00; High- 3:41-4:20; Low- 2.61-3.40; Very Low- 1.81-2.60; Not Achievable-1:00-1:80” (Sullivan &Artino, 2013)

Source:DO 72, s. 2009 from <http://deped.gov.ph/orders/do-72-s-2009>

Presented in table 2 is the summary on the extent of attainment of the program objectives/outcomes in the implementation of inclusive kindergarten program.

The extent of attainment of the program objectives/outcomes consistently yielded a high level of implementation in all indicators. This means that approximately 61%-80% target indicators of the inclusive kindergarten program were accomplished in Davao City Schools Division.

Out of the five indicators, parental involvement got the highest mean followed by curriculum modification, next is assessment, then program options and lastly is child find.

Results indicate that mostly, kindergarten schools in the division of Davao City observed a high level of attainment in the implementation in inclusive kindergarten program. Further, this shows that the school administrators, teachers, and parents strongly support inclusive kindergarten program.

This affirms with the Department of Education order that

“there is an urgency to address the participation rate of children with learning needs on inclusive education. All children as assured by the Department of Education, have the right to suitable education within the regular or inclusive setting regardless of their race, size, shape, color, ability or disability with support from school staff, students, parents and the community” (DepEd Order No. 72 s, 2009).

Best Practices and Challenges Experienced by Principals and Teachers The best practices observed by the principal and teachers as far as inclusive education implementations are the dedication of the teachers, school facilities, and in-service training.

Dedication of Teachers: Teachers have the love, the goal for the child to create something meaningful.

They learned to be patient, understanding and optimistic.

School Facilities: There are constructions of facilities appropriate for both regular students and students with special needs like ramps, audio visual room and special rooms added with strong linkages with stakeholders.

In-Service Trainings: Teachers attended a capability building skills training. They also joined seminars like “sign language” for the Hearing Impaired, literacy and numeracy music and dance, strategies in teaching children with learning difficulties. Principals echoed to the teachers the trainings and seminar attended. On the other hand, there are challenges in the implementation of the program as experienced by the principals and teachers. The issues that came out of the Focus Group Discussion centered on attitude, teacher workload, acceptance of parents and other minor complains.

Curriculum Modification

Teachers do modifications of drills and school works during remedial classes. They provide anecdotal record of the child’s behavior during class, conducted parent-teacher conference and provide an Individual Education Plan. In addition, teachers take time for a one-on-one session with the child. They tried their best to simplify and modify the lessons for the children with special needs.

Support of Parents and other Stakeholders: Parents helped clean the classroom. They hired shadow teachers for their children. The mothers are asked to be the shadow teacher. Blessed with stakeholders, who shared what they have for the special pupils. Government and non-government agencies helped and supported the program”. Parents gave toys and some materials while the local governments donated sound systems and projector.

Attitude : Educators felt that child with special needs is an illness, the disabilities are sickness. They thought disabilities are contagious. Other teachers are stonehearted and are close-minded about inclusive education. Teachers have limited knowledge about inclusive education. They complained having children with special needs in their classroom.

Workload: Teachers had to double their works because they have to follow-up the students in the regular class. A number of children with learning needs in the class are more than 2. Further, teachers have difficulty in handling different children with different

needs at a single session especially if the child really needs a lot of attention.

Acceptance of Parents : Parents' cooperation is very hard. Parents provided all their children's need but it's really hard to reach out with them because they are hands-off”. Only the nanny will take care. At home, there is no follow-up of what they did in school. There are best practices observed by the principals and teachers however, there are also challenges. Findings of the study on the level of school implementation of inclusive kindergarten program are generally observed to be very high and attainment of the program objectives/outcomes consistently yielded a high level of implementation. However, still there is a need to enrich the Inclusive Kindergarten Program. Hence, a proposed program is developed for the enhancement of Inclusive Kindergarten Program.

Proposal for the Enhancement of Inclusive Kindergarten Program

Based on the findings of this study, an intensive seminar-workshop on Inclusive Classroom for Kindergarten Teachers is designed.

Title of the Program: Strengthening Inclusive Classroom: Strategies that Work

Rationale

Kindergarten Education is now established as part of basic education and is required and obligatory for entrance to grade one. With this institutionalization, it was observed that there are children with special needs enrolled or mainstreamed/integrated in regular classrooms. Since children with special needs are in the regular classrooms, they became the additional load of the teachers. Teachers now claim that they need intensive trainings on how to handle with this kind of children. Hence, a proposed program is developed for the enhancement of Inclusive Kindergarten Program specifically on teacher development and child find.

Outcomes

i. The following are the outcomes of a training program about inclusive classes for kindergarten teachers:

ii. Thorough knowledge on inclusive education in the local, regional, national and international community, identify legal bases about inclusive education and categorize different exceptionalities;

iii. Familiarize strategies and intervention programs for children with special educational needs in an inclusive classroom;

iv. Techniques on Child Find; and

v. Expose to Special Education schools/centers.

Action Plan This has to be done on the middle of the School Year 2017-2018 and may be done every year for evaluation purposes.

Key Result Area

i. Modifies teaching strategies in an inclusive classroom.

ii. Assesses children having special educational needs in their classroom.

iii. Design intervention programs for children with special educational needs and techniques in child find.

iv. Specifically, progresses kindergarten teachers' performance during the regular work routine and in improvement in the day to-day functioning of the children who are the recipients of instructional activities.

9. Conclusion

Findings show that the level of school implementation of inclusive kindergarten program in the division of Davao City is generally observed to be very high. Out of the eight indicators, six of them which are observed to be very high are on academic content and assessment which got the highest mean; followed by teacher skills, knowledge and support; next is special subject areas/extra-curricular activities; then, students; succeeding school policies and administrative support; and the last community. Only two indicators got high level of implementation namely school environment and teacher development.

Attainment of the program objectives/ outcomes consistently yielded a high level of implementation in all indicators. This means that approximately 61%-80% target indicators of the inclusive kindergarten program were accomplished in Davao City Schools Division. Out of the five indicators, parental involvement got the highest mean followed by curriculum modification, next is assessment, then program options and the child find which got the lowest mean.

The best practices observed as far as inclusive education implementation is concerned in the Division of Davao City include dedication of teachers to teaching children with special needs, appropriate

school environment, in-service trainings conducted to teachers handling Children with Special Needs and support of parents to inclusive education programs while challenges met include attitude of teachers towards inclusive education, workload of teachers, and acceptance of parents having children with special needs.

On the extent of attainment of the program's objectives/outcomes, the best practices observed by the principal and teachers are curriculum modification and the support of the parents while assessment and strategies in handling children with behavioral problems were the challenges being met.

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn: Inclusive kindergarten program in Davao City is generally implemented in terms of "school policies and administrative support, teachers' skills knowledge and attitude, students, academic content and assessment, special subject areas/extra-curricular activities and community, school environment, and teacher development".

The extent of attainment of the program objectives/outcomes frequently yielded a high level of implementation in all indicators: "child find, assessment, program options, curriculum modification and parental involvement".

Though a number of challenges are being met by teachers and administrators, there have been best practices observed in the implementation of inclusive education and to the attainment of program as well.

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made: Compulsory survey, family mapping, campaigns, and networking for children with learning needs should be conducted not only by the SPED teachers but also by the regular teachers. Intensive trainings and seminars on SPED related topics be designed for both regular and SPED kindergarten teachers, participate in trainings, seminars-workshops, and benchmark to schools that accommodate learners with special educational needs.

Require both regular teachers and special education teachers to earn additional units and/or obtain degree program on special education in the graduate school. Intensify support to kindergarten teachers in terms of professional and financial needs to help them perform their best. National Education officials should further evaluate the curriculum of Teacher Education Institutions by adding special education subjects. Thorough pre-service trainings

must be conducted in preparation for the kindergarten teachers' actual teaching. Further research be conducted as regards enhancement of Inclusive Kindergarten Program proble.

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