

# Teachers' Perceptions on the Implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) in Public Elementary Schools in Northern Samar

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## ABSTRACT

The present study examined the perception of public elementary school teachers on the implementation of inclusive education (IE) in Northern Samar. Using a quantitative survey design, this study had one-hundred-thirty-seven respondents drawn purposively. The instrument was designed based on Yap and Adorio's study (2008) which contained thirty-nine items on three IE indicators, namely: access; quality; and participation. The study revealed that the respondents highly perceive that in an inclusive education classroom, students' parents are regularly given graded and non-graded report of their children's progress. Additionally, they also highly perceive that the SPED teachers are competent in developing IEPs for each child. Moreover, the respondent highly perceive that the parents are involved in making decisions about the progress of their SPED children. Implications for school heads and teachers include monitoring inclusive education implementation and capacity building.

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusion can be defined as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all children, youth, and adults through increasing participation in learning cultures and communities involving changes and modification in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with common vision that covers all children of appropriate age range and conviction so as to strengthen the capacity of education system to reach out to all learners and to achieve Education for All (EFA) (Quijano, 2011).

Additionally, Sandkull (2005) has this to say:

“The objective 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.”

Moreover, inclusive education offers multiple benefits to learners, their families, schools, and communities. That is, learners with varying needs when provided access in regular classrooms develop their individual strengths and gifts.

In many countries worldwide, the practice of inclusive education is adopted from the UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (2004) providing 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 (2004) 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.

Sebba, and Ainscow (1996) argue that through inclusion school attempts to respond to all learners

as individuals by reconsidering their curricular organization and provision thereby capacitating schools in accepting all learners from the local community who wish to attend thus, reducing exclusion. In effect, IE increased educational access to a number of students with various disabilities (Mukhopadhyay, Molosiwa, & Moswela, 2009) by providing these children access in regular classrooms.

Finally, Sandkull (2005) posits 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.

### ***Inclusive Education in the Philippines***

In the Philippines, the practice of inclusive education is largely determined by Department of Education Order No. 72, s. 2009, an offshoot from various national laws and guidelines such as Art. IV. Sec 2 which mandates the state to encourage non-formal, informal and indigenous learning systems as well as learning independent and out of school youth study programs and to provide adult citizens, the disabled and OSY with training on civics, vocational efficiency and other skills; PD 603 (1974) Article 3 which accounts for the rights of the child and provides for the rehabilitation, self-development and self-reliance of disabled persons and their integration into the mainstream of society; and Art 1 Sec 5 which states that the ultimate goal of SPED shall be the integration or mainstreaming of learners with special needs into the regular school system and eventually into the community. Another law that aims to effect high-quality inclusion in Philippine schools is still under review at the Philippine Senate (Special Education Act (Philippine Senate Bill 3002).

As such, inclusion had been in the mainstream education for several years now but yet, inclusion has been a big challenge facing educational systems throughout the world (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2004). In the Philippines, for instance, inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms has been one major issue over the years (Dapudong, 2013). In fact, Inciong (2003; 2005; 2007) cited problems that beset the SPED program implementation in the country.

The Philippines is particularly interesting for the following reasons: there is an increasing awareness regarding special education and a growing concern for children with exceptionalities; a long history of special education; the manifold laws and policies as offshoots of international initiatives among countries and the gloomy reality that developing nations and the rural areas get the short end of the delivery of educational services.

Currently, inclusive education practice all throughout the public school in the country is integration. In so doing, regular teachers try to help these students by fitting them into mainstream classes. This practice may have had its roots as articulated in the Policies and Guidelines for Special Education (1997) that the ultimate goal of special education shall be the integration or mainstreaming of learners with special needs into the regular school system. According to Ashman and Elkins (1998) integration is admitting children with special needs into regular classrooms where they undertake their schooling.

RA 11650 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 (Special Education Act, 2008).

In line with the Department's thrust in providing quality and inclusive basic education for all, the Department of Education (DepEd) continues to provide the necessary educational interventions for learners with certain exceptionalities through its Special Education (SPED) program which provides a holistic

approach in catering to the needs of learners with various exceptionalities. The program ensures that learners with exceptionalities will have access to quality education by giving them their individual and unique learning needs. Also, this initiative caters to learners with visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, learning disability, autism spectrum disorder, communication disorder, physical disability, emotional and behavioral disorder, multiple disabilities with visual impairment, and to those who are orthopedically handicapped, chronically ill, and gifted and talented (DepEd Order No. 72, 2009).

In 2016, DepEd reported that it has recognized a total of 648 SPED Centers and regular schools offering the program – 471 of which are catering to Elementary students and 177 are catering to High School students. It has also recorded around 250,000 enrollees with certain exceptionalities at the elementary level and around 100,000 at the high school level in School Year (SY) 2015-2016.

Many studies have been conducted on inclusive education in urban contexts (Lontoc, 1997; Padilla, 2002; Tsang, 2004; Saludes & Dante, 2006). Although Yap and Adorio (2008) studied on 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), there is a dearth in studies on how inclusive education is implemented in the rural elementary schools, particularly in the Division of Northern Samar. Yap and Adorio (2008) writes: “unfortunately in many countries including the Philippines, students from rural areas usually get the short end of delivery of educational services” (p. 53.). It is in this context that this study was conducted.

### ***Inclusive Education in Northern Samar***

Upon enrolment students with special needs are not given assessment for readiness. Also, specific period for transition is not given. Although a handful teachers hold a degree in Special Education or at least some teachers have SPED trainings, most teachers in the area are not trained to handle inclusive education classes. Because of this, teachers would usually serve dual roles inside their IE classrooms whether they are trained or not. Aside from the establishment of SPED centers and provision of materials and funds, it was observed that the Division has no specific IE program that will ensure its sustainability, nor has campaigned for support from stakeholders, including the parents association, or the local government.

### **Significance of the Study**

At present, the entire Philippine education system is lacking in the knowledge and resources required for high-quality inclusion. This study presents an evidence-based picture of how IE is perceived to be practiced in Northern Samar, Philippines, to give stakeholders in IE an idea of how inclusion is conceptualized and practiced in the rural areas. Since this study identifies important concepts of the implementation of IE in Northern Samar as indicated by the teachers’ perception, stakeholders will be enlightened as to where to begin and which specific practices to promote and make available if they wish to facilitate the development of a just and durable IE in the rural areas. General education teachers will likewise benefit from this study in that this research suggests procedures that may be considered in the implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines. Findings from this study can also be used to inform lawmakers regarding the institutionalization of inclusionary procedures in schools throughout the country.

### **Research Problem**

This study is concerned with the perception of public elementary school teachers in Northern Samar on the implementation of inclusive education. Specifically, the following question was answered:

- How do teachers from the two (2) Central Elementary Schools and the Division SPED Center perceive inclusive education implementation in their schools in terms of (1) access, (2) quality, and

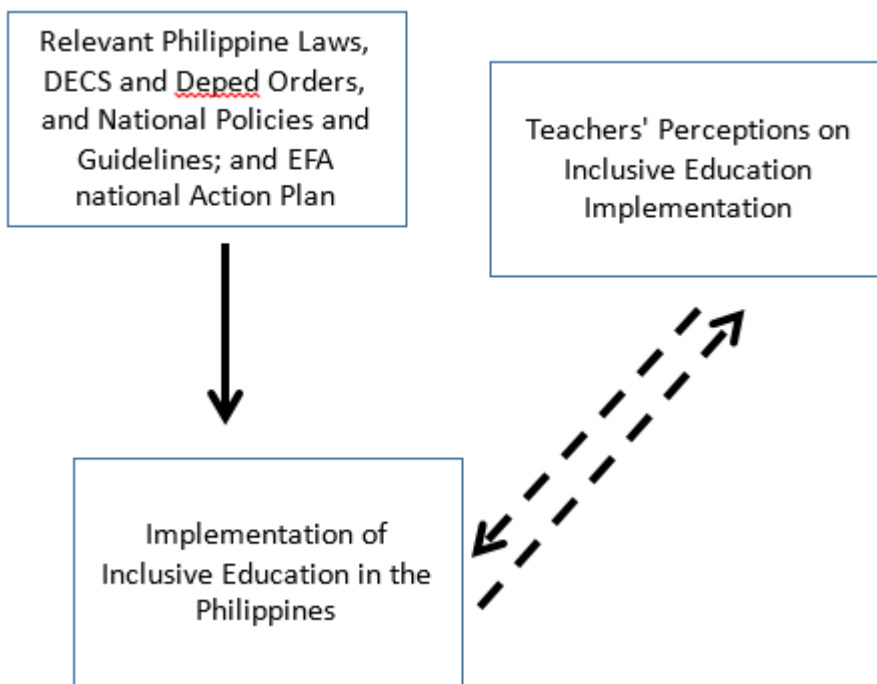
(3) participation?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The development of inclusive education in the Philippines is a spin-off of multiple national legislations, public policies, and department orders. Being so, the success in the implementation of inclusive education is interlinked with the consequences of the enforcement of these legislative efforts and policies.

Set out to guide the institutionalization of and eventual implementation in the Philippine schools system, these imperative laws were crafted to support the mandate of the 1987 Philippine constitution. The Education Acts of 1982 and 2004, the Republic Act 7277 and Republic Act 9155 provide for multi-sectoral thrusts in the implementation of inclusive education. Thus, the creation and formulation of initiatives in support to these mandates would warrant the attainment of the goals of inclusive education program in the country. The numerous department orders are the strategies of the DECS/DepEd to promote the issues and interests of the laws enacted concerning inclusive education. On the one hand, they also create contexts for practices in accordance with international standards set for quality implementation of inclusion. In effect, these policies, initiatives, and strategies, which served as the bases for the implementation of inclusive education in the country, ensure the establishment of appropriate actions and bodies for inclusive education. Moreover, it is the actual implementation and the teachers' perception on its implementation which will be the focus of the study. Figure 1 below shows the conceptual framework of this study.

**Figure 1** *The Teachers' perceptions on the implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines*



## METHODOLOGY

This study employed the quantitative research approach using survey as a design. The survey was used to collect data and describe systematically the perception of teachers on the implementation of IE. Description was used to analyze facts and characteristics of a given population which, according to Kraemer (1991) is useful in describing quantitatively specific aspects of a given population.

Conducted towards the end of the school year 2017-2018, the one-hundred-thirty-seven mainstream teachers

were purposively drawn from three public central elementary schools in the second district of Northern Samar based on two criteria, namely: (1) a regular-permanent teacher for at least five years; and (2) has been in the station school for at least three years. The instrument with thirty-nine items on access, quality, and participation was designed by the researcher based on the indicators identified by Yap and Adorio (2008) in a pilot study on inclusive education implementation in the Philippines. All items in the instrument rest on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 5 (*very true*), 4 (*sometimes true*), 3 (*somewhat untrue*), 2 (*not true*), and 1 (*no idea*). Survey contents are practice items on inclusive education.

. The mean scores were analyzed to measure the most and least perceived practices/items in the indicators.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As results of educational reforms, students with special needs are currently being educated in inclusive settings to a greater degree than ever before. However, many teachers throughout the country report that they feel unprepared to work effectively with these students. Because teacher effectiveness is strongly linked to student outcomes, these perceptions of inadequacy are clearly affecting the actual implementation of the inclusive education program. Improved teacher preparation is a necessity, thus, it is essential to determine how much the teachers know and understand the program and its processes. Hence, this study on teachers' perceptions that will help in the improvement of the program's implementation.

**Table 1** Teachers' Perception on Access to IE

Indicator	Mean
A1 – The Parents of children with special needs can enroll anytime of the school year.	3.83
A2 – The school announces over the radio and other media the opening of SPED classes or enrollment.	3.80
A3 – Parents are regularly given report of their children's progress (graded or non-graded).	4.33
A4 – SPED students are included in all school activities.	3.75
A5 – SPED programs have specific targets for the type of disabilities for admission.	4.15
A6 – Students who fail in national and division examinations are candidates for SPED.	2.58
A7 – SPED teachers are accountable to parents of (students with exceptional needs) SEN.	3.85
A8 – SPED students may be transferred to the regular classrooms at anytime when they are ready during the school year.	3.83
A9 – Students targeted for inclusion are given trial period to determine academic and social readiness.	3.95
A10 – There is adequate resources for determining learning academic strengths of students with special needs.	3.90
A11 – The SPED program services students of varying age and disabilities.	3.83
A12 – The SPED program is a component of the school's SIP/AIP and annual report card.	3.68
A13 – The SPED program follows the timeline targeted for the school year.	3.75
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.78</b>

Table 1 shows 15 indicators that will help determine teachers' perception on access to inclusive education. A3 indicator ranked first among all the 15 access indicators showing that the teacher respondents highly perceive that in an inclusive education classroom, students' parents are regularly given graded and non-graded report of their children's progress with the mean of 4.33. It is closely followed by A5 which indicates that the respondents perceive that their SPED programs have specific targets for the type of disabilities for admission with the mean of 4.15; and A9 which indicates teachers' perception that students



targeted for inclusion are given trial period to determine academic and social readiness with the mean of 3.95.

According to Quijano (2011), mainstreaming in the Philippine IE context refer to the inclusion of special needs children in complete regular instruction and the provision of all special services inside the classroom. As such, the practice being observed in Northern Samar schools where CSN are included in all school activities, are tested like a regular student, and their progress is reported to their parents with graded reports, are all appropriate. On the other hand, public schools in the locale admit students with any type of disability and that specific needs are not identified, hence, it does not support teachers' perception that specific types of special needs are given more focus. Lastly, the teachers' perception that students targeted for inclusion are provided with trial and transition period is in line with Quijano's (2011) statement that IE can be involves programs like headstart, intervention and transition programs.

The three indicators that are least perceived by the respondents are A13 which indicate that the SPED program follows the timeline targeted for the school year (M=3.75); A4 which indicate that SPED students are included in all school activities (M=3.75); and A6 which indicate that students who fail in national and division examinations are candidates for SPED (M=2.58).

In the least perceived items, the teachers are correct by indicating that there is no timeline targeted for the SPED program or that the national and division examinations are the bases for determining candidates for SPED. However, because of mainstreaming, it is expected that all students, regardless of their special need, must be included in all school activities.

**Table 2 Teachers' Perceptions on Quality of IE**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Q1 – SPED students take the Division and National Achievement Tests together with the school population.	3.08
Q2 – SPED teachers are competent in screening, identifying students with exceptional needs (SEN).	4.13
Q3 – SPED teachers have knowledge in differentiating instructional programs.	4.13
Q4 – SPED instructional effectiveness is well-defined.	3.93
Q5 – Student year end targets are well-discussed with parents.	4.13
Q6 – Appropriate assessment tools are available.	3.78
Q7 – SPED classes are regularly supervised.	4.13
Q8 – The public is aware of SPED programs in the school.	4.03
Q9 – The resource rooms are provided with materials to improve student learning.	3.95
Q10 – SPED teachers are competent in developing IEPs for each child.	4.23
Q11 – The school division insures the sustainability of SPED programs.	4.20
Q12 – The school head and the community insure the sustainability of SPED programs.	4.18
Q13 – SPED teachers no longer carry dual assignments: as regular and SPED teachers.	3.65
Q14 – Stakeholders provide support to SPED programs.	3.83
Q15 – SPED teachers make decisions regarding student placements.	4.03
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.96</b>

Table 2 shows the teachers' perceptions on the quality of inclusive education implementation. Of the 15 quality indicators, Q10 ranked first indicating that the respondents highly perceive that the SPED teachers are competent in developing IEPs for each child (M=4.23). It is followed by Q11 which indicates that the

respondents perceive that the school division insures the sustainability of SPED programs (M=4.20); and Q12 which indicates that the respondents perceive that the school head and the community insure the sustainability of SPED programs (M=4.18).

According to Quijano (2011) three programs were developed to sustain IE in the Philippine classrooms. These are headstart, intervention and transition programs. SPED teachers are appropriately trained, however, with only a handful of SPED teachers in a school, provision of special services to all their students with different needs, may not be fulfilled all the time.

The three quality indicators which were ranked to be the least perceived by the respondents are: Q14 which indicates that stakeholders provide support to SPED programs (M=3.83); Q6 which indicates that appropriate tools are available (M=3.78); and Q13 which indicates that SPED teachers no longer carry dual assignments (M=3.65).

Although IE implementation programs encourage stakeholders' participation and advocacy and appropriate assessment (Quijano, 2011), the responses indicate that the respondents do not observe this support, nor are they aware that the students are assessed. This means that if teachers are not supported IE implementation in the Division of Northern Samar may not be successful because according to Haskell (2000) teachers are integral component in the implementation of inclusive education. Moreover, if teachers are to become effective inclusive practitioners and understand and meet the needs of all learners, then they must be educated appropriately to undertake this new role (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011; Graziano, 2008).

**Table 3 Teachers' Perception on Stakeholder Participation in IE**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Mean</b>
P1 – Parents are involved in making decisions about the progress of their SPED child.	4.40
P2 – Other school personnel are involved in the assessment of SEN.	3.83
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
P4 – The SPED program is separate from the regular education curriculum.	4.0
P5 – The curriculum for SPED is different from that of regular students.	4.15
P6 – It is the function of the SPED teacher to develop another teacher as understudy.	3.55
P7 – There is a strong collaboration between regular and SPED teacher.	4.15
P8 – SPED teachers are aware of the instructional demands in the regular classrooms.	4.05
P9 – There is strong collegiality between regular and SPED teachers.	3.88
P10 – The regular teachers are knowledgeable of SPED programs.	4.0
P11 – SPED students targeted for inclusion in the regular classroom are provided with transition plan.	3.80
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.95</b>

Table 3 shows the teachers' perception on the participation of stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive education. Of the 11 stakeholder participation indicators, the most perceived by the respondents is P1 which indicates that the parents are involved in making decisions about the progress of their SPED child (M=4.40). It is followed by P5 which indicates that the curriculum for SPED is different from that of regular students (M=4.15); and P7 which indicates that there is a strong collaboration between regular and SPED teachers (M=5.15).

As the laws that created IE framework indicate, implementers should encourage parental involvement and

collaboration among and between teachers and administrators (Muega, 2016). On the other hand, in mainstreaming, all students, regardless of their special condition, will be taught using the same curriculum, however, they will be given specialized services and instruction as necessary.

The respondents also ranked the following indicators as the least perceived: P11 which indicates that SPED students targeted for inclusion in the regular classroom are provided with transition plan ( $M=3.80$ ); P3 which indicates that the Local Government Unit (barangay, town mayor, etc.) are involved in referring and or identifying students with exceptional needs in the community ( $M=3.68$ ); and P6 which indicates that It is the function of the SPED teacher to develop another teacher as understudy ( $M=3.55$ ).

Although transition programs are supposed to be in place, the respondent's answer indicates that transitioning is not evident in their schools. Moreover, these teachers do not also seem to perceive the participation of their LGU in IE advocacy, as well as the practice of mentoring.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that the respondents highly perceive that in an inclusive education classroom, students' parents are regularly given graded and non-graded report of their children's progress. Additionally, they also highly perceive that the SPED teachers are competent in developing IEPs for each child. Moreover, the respondent highly perceive that the parents are involved in making decisions about the progress of their SPED children.

Constraints in inclusion could be summarized into two: human and physical or environmental factors. The greatest human factor in inclusion is at the heart of education – the teachers. It can be concluded that teachers' attitudes, beliefs toward inclusion influence their practice. These beliefs can later on translate into the practice of more effective IE implementation (Al-Zyoudi, 2006).

Finally, the indicators in the three areas that were least perceived by the teachers may not be present, or not observable in the schools hence, DepEd must monitor the implementation of the implementation of IE to ensure that quality access and participation will be achieved. Likewise, the capacity of school heads, administrators, and teachers on the implementation of IE should be enhanced. Training of school heads and teachers is needed to expand their knowledge in inclusive education, teamwork skills, and organizational knowledge, so that implementation will be built on solid foundation. Moreover, initiatives and resourcefulness among school heads and teachers not only to promote IE, but also to gain support continuously from the stakeholders, should be rewarded and recognized.

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