

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: INSIGHTS AND LIVED-EXPERIENCES OF STAKEHOLDERS

Shela S. Rosales,¹ and Edgardo H. Rosales.²

College of Teacher Education, Western Mindanao State University¹
International Relations Office, Zamboanga City State Polytechnic College²
Normal Road Baliwasan, Zamboanga City,7000 Philippines¹
R.T. Lim Boulevard, Zamboanga City²
For Correspondence : shelasped@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of the study was to document the insights and lived-experiences of stakeholders on the Inclusive Education Program of Western Mindanao State University. This aimed to identify the supports and challenges, strategies, advantages and disadvantages of inclusion set in the university. The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological study that unfolds the experiences of stakeholders on Inclusive Education Program. The purposive sampling design was utilized in the study. An in-depth interview was conducted to determine the themes that evolved from the study. Observations and Focus Group Discussion were also conducted that aided in validating interview transcripts. The faculty researchers conducted the study to validate experiences and accommodations of Persons with disabilities in the University. The results of the study disclosed that Persons with Disabilities were accepted in the University without hesitation and discrimination. Privileges to access quality education through scholarship grants and other funding sources were provided to Persons with Disabilities enrolled in the Inclusive setting. Further, a holistic approach was evident among Persons with a Disability that includes recreation, religious, social and cultural development. Similarly, the regular classmates, parents and administrators as part of the stakeholders shared common themes of experiences and insights which include collaborative, sense of belongingness, communication and feedbacking wherein these helped provide learning opportunities and evident appropriate strategies for independent learning. Thus, it is recommended that the University as a government institution will continuously embrace the essence of inclusion for it gives equal educational opportunities as everyone else deserved.*

Keywords: Inclusive Education, stakeholders, persons with Disabilities, insights, lived-experiences

1. INTRODUCTION

Before CMO 23, s. 2000 and CMO 9, s. 2013 were mandated, the College of Education, Western Mindanao State University started accommodating students with special needs in S.Y. 1999-2000 in the Special Elementary Education (SEE) of the Integrated Laboratory School, specifically to address the needs of students with hearing impairment. Two years later, a Special Tertiary Education Program (STEP) was offered for students with visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disability and those with physical challenges. A year later, Special education at the secondary level was introduced for the incoming secondary students from the elementary department.

It was then called the Special Secondary School (SSS). Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities (PWD's) in this university is now on its seventeenth (17th) year through the Alternative Special Programs of Inclusion and Resource Education (ASPIRE). Inclusive Education models spearheaded the implementation of inclusive education programs that encourages institutions to include students with special needs in the regular program and learn side by side with their peers in any type of school setting. Inclusive Education proponents like [1] indicated that "the first model for inclusive education reflected the idea that students with disabilities should be included in the public education system and mainstreamed, or educated together with peers without disabilities, when possible. Lived-experiences of students with special needs, students and teachers from the regular classes, special education teachers, staff, administration and other service provider are essential in documenting the day-to-day activities on the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

in the university. On the study conducted by [2] on Qualitative Study of instructional Strategies Used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms, inclusion or inclusive education was described as educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. Although the terms regular education initiative and mainstreaming still exist, most educators and professionals use the term, inclusion. Inclusion is not a legal term and the word appears nowhere in the federal legislation governing the education of students with disabilities. Inclusion is a philosophy of service delivery for special education students.

On the other hand, [3] believed that barriers should be eradicated through carefully differentiating the task in a range of ways, building in access strategies, and using a range of strategies. Inclusive Education largely depends on the environment of Persons with Disabilities, which includes the attitude of teachers and students in the regular education programs, administrators, service providers, the accessibility features and other educational needs. The salient features of Inclusive Education is described as one that embraces the diversity of students that include implementing and maintaining warm and accepting classroom communities, multi-level & multi-modality curricula, preparing and supporting teachers in the classroom and breaking down the barrier of professional isolation, and involving parents in the planning process in meaningful ways. Further, [4] reported the current states of "Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in the Philippines" was adopted in all schools in the Philippines.

The researchers were prompted to conduct this study to document the lived-experiences of Persons with Disabilities

in Western Mindanao State University where the researchers are currently working in after sensing the need to document the lived experiences of students with special needs included in the general education program, recognize support and challenges in including students with special needs in the university, discuss strategies in including students with special needs in the university and document insights and lived-experiences of stakeholders on the inclusive education program of Western Mindanao State University.

The study aimed to describe the support provided by the university for students with special needs; the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive setting in the university in the following levels: Special Elementary Education (SEE), Special Secondary School (SSS), Special Tertiary Education Program (STEP) and Tertiary Inclusive Education (TIE); the challenges met by the students with special needs in the university and determine strategies on inclusive education programs for Persons with Disabilities or Students with Special Needs.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to document the inclusive education programs of Western Mindanao State University; identify appropriate strategies that train students with special needs in the inclusive education program; recognize support and challenges in including students with special needs in the university; describe the living-experiences of students with special needs included in the general education program; document insights and lived-experiences of stakeholders on the Inclusive Education Program of Western Mindanao State University.

The study specifically aimed to: identify the support provided by the university for students with special needs; describe the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive setting in the university in the following levels: SEE, SSS, STEP; describe the challenges met by students with special needs in the university; determine strategies on inclusive education programs for Persons with Disabilities or Students with Special Needs.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological study that unfolds the experiences of stakeholders on Inclusive Education Program of Western Mindanao State University. The purposive sampling design was utilized in selecting the respondents of the study. An in-depth interview was conducted to determine the themes that evolved from the study. Observations and Focus Group Discussion were also conducted that aided in validating interview transcripts gathered by the researchers.

2.2. PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

This study enlisted a total of sixty (60) respondents that includes vulnerable individuals such as students with hearing impairment; students with visual impairment; students with learning disabilities; students with autism; students with cerebral palsy and those who are physically challenged. Other stakeholders included teachers and students in the regular education program, staff, administrators and parents also took part as respondents of the study. Transcripts from interviews were coded to elicit themes of the study. Frequency counts were utilized until data on the insights and lived-experiences of stakeholders reached the point of saturation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Personal Impressions of Stakeholders Regarding the Integration of Special Students in Regular Classrooms in Western Mindanao State University. On personal impressions of stakeholders regarding the integration of special students in the regular classrooms in the university, the results of the data show that the stakeholders are enjoying the inclusive education program of the university, though along the way there were challenges faced by PWDs that made them competent and sociable students in the university. The result of the study affirms with the study conducted by [3] on *Teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms* reflected the idea that students with disabilities should be included in the public education system and mainstreamed, or educated together with peers without disabilities, when possible. To wit are transcripts from interviews, observations and Focus Group Discussion with the Stakeholders.

Furthermore, the personal impressions of stakeholders regarding the integration of special students in the regular classrooms in the university adhere with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Philippines Memorandum No. 23, s. 2000 and CHED Memorandum Order No. 9, s. 2013 which states the need to accommodate students with special needs in tertiary schools.

Table 2, presents transcripts of the challenging experiences faced by stakeholders in the Inclusive Education Program of Western Mindanao State University. On the part of the students with special needs, challenges included: that students felt that they do not exist in the classroom and adjustments with regards to projects and homework were not provided at times by the regular teachers, some students with special needs experienced bullying from their peers and it was not easy for students with hearing impairment to express their thoughts in essay writing activities.

Table 1. Personal Impressions of Stakeholders Regarding the Integration of Special Students in the Regular Classrooms in the University

A student with Special Need	A teacher from the Regular Program	Students from the Regular Program	Parents and other Stakeholders
"At first it was very hard because we have to communicate with our hearing friends with a natural gesture or body language and through text messages or writing in the paper"	"At times we find it hard teaching students with special needs because there are a lot of adjustments to make"	"it's fun because some of them are brighter, talented skillful than us"	"very thankful to WMSU, the only university in Region IX that offered programs for Persons with Disabilities"
"We are so happy as other students do, we felt the accommodation and care of our sighted classmates. Most of them tried to volunteer to be our guides".	"Amazed with the skills and talents of students with special needs, at times there's a need for me to make adjustments".	"Some are having problems with coping in the academic subjects because they cannot hear, (pero iyong blind na classmate namin matalino) but our classmate who is blind is intelligent, (ang deaf naman magaling mad drawing) and the deaf students can draw very well".	"Personally I am not fully convinced that my daughter can cope with the activities of the regular class, but as the days go by I was a witness that she was really improving and got a lot of hearing friends".
"At first I was ashamed and felt different, because I'm with cerebral palsy, (pero sa dami ng chicks I learned to study more para mapansin naman pero talagang pumapasa ako sa lahat ng subjects) but I felt so happy because there are a lot of beautiful girls and they inspire me a lot in my studies and I was able to get a passing mark in all the subjects.	"We saw how the students with special needs embraced the inclusive program. It boosts their morale as a student learning together with their peers in the regular program".	"(medyo makulit ang iba pero oks lang kasi natuto naman at helpful sila sa group activities)	"I'm not in favor of inclusive education (kasi parang pagod na pagod na iyong anak ko after class) because it seems that my daughter becomes very tired after class), but we realized later she enjoys learning a lot with students in the regular class, Thanks WMSU".

On the part of the teachers from the regular program the challenges experienced were: regular teachers had a hard time understanding answers from essays of students with hearing impairment, some teachers had a hard time understanding answers in braille and some regular teachers had a hard time assisting students with cerebral palsy during seizures.

On the other hand, challenges among regular students include empathizing with students with special needs on the

issue on bullying from schoolmates and there was a need for them to lift their classmates to the 2nd floor in order for the classmate to attend class situated in the second floor.

Moreover, parents articulated the challenges that they experienced were: when regular teachers do not know how to modify lessons for their children, parents felt nervous during test taking of their children with special needs and when the regular teacher was hesitant to accept students with visual impairment in laboratory classes.

Table 2. Challenging Experiences of Stakeholders in Inclusive Education Program

Student with Special Need	Teacher from the Regular Program	Students from the Regular Program	Parents and other Stakeholders
"At times few of the teachers make us feel that we do not exist, they do not give adjustments in the preparation and submission of projects, homework and assignments".	"Having a hard time understanding answers for essay test from students with hearing impairment".	"(wala naman masyado, madali naman silang kausap) not so much, they can get well along with us"	"when teachers do not know how to modify lessons for our children".
"I experienced being bullied because I'm a special student (with cerebral palsy). It was very hard to communicate with my talking classmates, not a problem now because I have my IPOD for communicating". Thanks to Rotary Club & our university president.	"Had a hard time understanding answers in braille, but later it was transcribed by the SPED teacher"	"We feel bad at times when they are being bullied by other students coming from the other section".	"when periodic exams are approaching, we feel nervous for our children in taking the test, (baka hindi makapasa) they may not be able to get a passing mark in the periodic test".

“When we are asked to write journals and we can’t express well our thoughts”.	“I felt bad when I didn’t know what to do with a student experiencing seizures”.	“If there are second floors, we have to lift our classmate to the second floor, (pero okay lang kasi masaya ang feelings pag nakakatulong) but it’s okay because I learned how to extend help and support my classmate, it feels so good”.	“When we knew that one of the laboratory class instructors was hesitant to accommodate students with visual impairment in her class, we felt bad about it to the extent that we wanted to sue her, but the University SPED Center tried to solve the issue. Our children were accommodated but the grades were not that good”. We as parents are hoping that teaches should be open-minded on how students with disabilities learn.
---	--	--	---

Table 3.Effect of Inclusion on the Stakeholders on the Inclusive Education Program

Student with Special Need	Teacher from the Regular Program	Students from the Regular Program	Parents and other Stakeholders
“We are very HAPPY and thankful, gained a lot of friends, had a lot of friends, had lot of pressures from teachers while learning, had teachers who were so good, the rest of the teachers need orientation, over all we learn side by side with our regular classmates”.	“My students with special needs served as models for good behavior”.	“We learned how to understand the weaknesses of our classmates, very HAPPY”.	"Happy, Thankful & Challenged to provide more support to WMSU. Iba talaga ang mga teachers and students as WMSU very UNDERSTANDING”.
"I became more confident. I learned how to study every day, (kahit mahirap) even its hard, (ok lang) it's ok. Glad to be one of the Dean's Lister every semester"	"It helped me become a more versatile, considerate and patient teacher	“I gained a very smart Visually Impaired Best Friend”.	“Educating my daughter with special need made her independent, Thanks to WMSU for the
“the program will help me find a job in the future”.	“I learned to make adjustments for students with special needs. It is self-fulfilling and makes me see and understand how these students cope-up with life in spite of the difficulties they are facing. It helps appreciate more the teaching profession”.	“we felt to learn side by side with students with special needs”. We the RIGHTS of the PWDs”.	“The implementation of CMO 20, s. 2000 and CMO 9, 2013 served as a model program for accommodating students with special needs in the general education program”.

The challenging experiences faced by the stakeholders negates with the salient features of inclusive education of the Department of Education on inclusive education with the following features implementing and maintaining warm and accepting classroom communities, a multi-level, & multi-modality curriculum, preparing & supporting teachers in the classroom and down barriers of professional isolation, and involving parents in the planning process in meaningful ways. The implementation of the salient features needs to be evaluated and monitored in order to improve the quality of inclusive programs that are implemented in the Department of Education.

Table 3 presents descriptive data on the effects of inclusion on the stakeholders on the Inclusive Education Program at Western Mindanao State University.

The transcript from Table 3, describes the effect of Inclusion on the Stakeholders on Inclusive Education Program. The inclusive education programs of the university provided positive effects on the stakeholders. This affirms with the results of the study of [3] on Teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms.

In many ways, assistance is provided to stakeholders when we implement special education programs. Table 4, presents findings on the assistance provided to learners with special needs in implementing inclusive education programs.

Table 4. The assistance that Stakeholders have Asked and Received in the Inclusive Education Program

Student with Special Need	Teacher from the Regular Program	Students from the Regular Program	Parents and other Stakeholders
<i>"Scholarship grants from CHED, RBI, POVEDA and Liliane Foundation were provided to us, some had free tuition fee's but needs financial support board and lodging".</i>	<i>"Some participated in the sensitivity training for teachers others had no training in accommodating learners with special needs in the general education programs".</i>	<i>"We requested a new wheelchair for our friend, Rotary Club – West gave us one".</i>	<i>"Requested for full-time sign language interpreter or note taker and the university provided us with this human resources, but some students included in the general education classrooms do not have full time interpreters/note-takers, they rely on the SPED majors during free time to assist them.</i>
<i>"Talking Computers, Closed Circuit Television, Braille, talking calculators, etc. were provided to us".</i>	<i>"Note-takers and special buddies were provided to assists us in teaching".</i>	<i>"supports special activities for students with disabilities"</i>	<i>"We did not ask anything, but one day we were surprised our children were given iPods for communication, this was through the efforts of our university president and the Rotary Club West of Zamboanga.</i>
<i>"Sign Language interpreters, note-takers, special buddies were provided".</i>	<i>"Note-takers and special buddies were provided to assists us in teaching".</i>	<i>"references, materials and other immediate materials needed were provided by the University SPED Resource Center"</i>	<i>"I think there is nothing to ask for as a parent for a child with special needs, WMSU gave it all".</i> <i>"The SPED teachers and regular teachers made wonders for our children, THANK YOU SO MUCH WMSU".</i> <i>"Catechism, guidance and counseling services and medical and dental were provided to our children by WMSU.</i>

The assistance provided included scholarships, instructional materials, assistive devices and counseling, and spiritual services to help facilitate learning among learners with special needs.

Results of Table 5, confirms that the stakeholders support the inclusive education program of the university.

Table 5. Views of the Stakeholders on How the University Support the Inclusive Education Program

Student with Special Need	Teacher from the Regular Program	Students from the Regular Program	Parents and other Stakeholders
"The university supports and implements education for all"	"Giving equal educational opportunities and access for all types of students".	"providing a university SPED Resource Center is very laudable"	"One of the best support of the university is providing inclusive education programs for Persons with Disabilities in all levels".

4. FINDINGS

The following are the main and highlighted findings of the conducted study :

First, it was revealed that personal impressions depend on individual experiences at a given period of time. Second, Inclusive Education program opens opportunities for learning as well as enhancing one's social skills. Third, the challenges that stakeholders experienced were instructional approaches and teaching strategies, parents support toward their child's academic requirements, the manner that regular teachers deal with educational adjustments in teaching students with special needs and coping strategies towards

discrimination. Fourth, the results of the study affirmed the belief of [1] which states that barriers should be eradicated through carefully differentiating the tasks in a range of ways, building in access strategies, and using a range of teaching strategies. Fifth, the effect of inclusion on stakeholders provided a venue for learning and training students with special needs to cope with the educational activities. Sixth, realization is present among regular teachers on the utilization of the appropriate strategies and assessment for students with special needs. Seventh, at first, parents were hesitant and apprehensive of inclusive education, but when interviewed it was found out that along with the

implementation of inclusive education they were thankful and appreciative of the effort extended and provided by the university. Last, the supports were provided in various levels and formd (e.g. utilization of gadgets, computers with speech synthesizers, voice recorders, braille typewriters, talking calculators, laptops, iPods, writing and drawing materials, catechism, guidance and counseling including scholarships were provided).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the yielded results of the investigation, the following are sound conclusions:

- Insights on Inclusion depend largely on the stakeholders accommodating behaviors towards Person with Disabilities.
- Human and educational resources were made readily available to students with special needs.
- The administration implemented CMO 23, s. 200 and CMO 9, s. 2013.
- Stakeholders commented that they were satisfied in the delivery of the Inclusive Education Program of the University.
- Despite the challenges encountered by the regular teachers in handling students with special needs, they eventually adopt the scheme in adjusting and modifying competencies needed for these students to learn.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the conducted study, the following recommendations are made, to wit:

- It is recommended that the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) will recognize the effort exerted by the university in the implementation of Inclusive

Education Program and consider it as a “Best Practice / Model for Inclusive Education”.

- There should be a Sensitivity Orientation for Regular Teachers and students before classes will formally start.
- Conduct of seminar workshops on teaching strategies for teachers in handling students with special needs in inclusive settings.
- The university may find ways to propose a dormitory for all types of learners particularly for students with special needs.
- Parents should continuously support their child in the academic, social, spiritual and financial aspects.

6. REFERENCES

- [1] Galzzard, J., Stokoe, J., Hughes, A., Netherwood, A., & Neve, L. (2015). *Teaching and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities in primary schools*. London: SAGE Publishing.
- [2] Peterson, K. (2011). A Qualitative Study of Instructional Strategies Used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms. Retrieved Online. December 2016 (Unpublished Dissertation), West Michigan University. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f57c/d2a81c03f63c42863d6950d4d265426fccc2.pdf>.
- [3] Bryant, D. P., Smith, D. D., & Bryant, B. R. (2008). *Teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms*. New York : Pearson Education.
- [4] Inciong, T.G. & Quijano, Y.S. (2013). Inclusion of children with disabilities: The Philippine Experience. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* , 24(2), 173-191. doi: 10.1080/02188791.2004.10600208.