

Drop-in to special education centers in Bulacan

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ABSTRACT

The 1987 Philippine Constitution corroborated with the Magna Carta for Disabled is giving full support to the improvement of the total well-being of children with special needs (CSN). This is a proof that the government takes appropriate steps to make education accessible to all disabled persons. This study aimed to determine the extent of support the government is giving to students with special needs; in terms of admission, curriculum, teaching strategies, teacher's training, special equipment and instructional materials, pupils development activities, funding and early interventions. SWOT analysis was used to capture the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in implementation of the Special Education (SPED) Program in twelve SPED centers in Bulacan. The result of the study will provide perspective if mandates are being followed by the authority involved in the program. Thirty five SPED teachers teaching in self-contained classes in the twelve SPED centers in Bulacan were respondents of this study. Sequential explanatory design was used. This is a two phase design where the quantitative data is collected first such as the respondents' profile and their evaluation to the program; followed by qualitative data collection in SWOT format. The purpose of qualitative results is to further explain and interpret the findings from the quantitative phase. The profile of respondents was treated using frequency counts and percentage while the evaluation on the management of SPED program was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and SWOT analysis. Problems as perceived by students with exceptional needs (SEN) parents were also enumerated and analyzed. Instruments were observations, questionnaire and structured interview. An on-site visitation was made to these twelve centers. The study concluded that SPED program in Bulacan was given a moderate extent of support based on its computed mean. In spite of the support the national government is giving, instructional materials and special equipment, trainings and specialized curricula must be developed and distributed to each SPED center. Furthermore, a proposed intervention program was made. This intervention program will somehow lessen SEN and their parents' problem regarding academic achievement, social and emotional skills, medical issues and to further improve the implementation of the SPED program in Bulacan.

Keywords: Children with special needs, self-contained classes, special education program, students with exceptional needs, SWOT analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

It was estimated in the year 2013 that there were 93 million children – or 1 in 20 of those aged 14 or younger – live with a moderate or severe disability of some kind (UNICEF, 2013). They have the same rights as others—among these are the right to life and to the opportunities that flow from good health care, nutrition and education. Philippines was one of the early signatories of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(CRPD). The Philippines' commitment to CRPD is supported by national laws and local ordinances that uphold the rights of CWDs. Republic Act No. 7610 was promulgated in 1992 to protect children against all forms of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, given their unique standing in society. The Child and Youth Welfare Code also serve as a reference to reexamine laws and institutions, and promote changes to ensure that CWDs

are guaranteed the same rights as all other children. Magna Carta for Disabled Persons states in Chapter 2, Section 12 shall ensure that disabled persons (DP) are provided with access to quality education and ample opportunities to develop their skills. It is also reiterated that the national government shall allocate funds necessary for effective implementation of the special education program nationwide and mandates that all divisions were required to organize at least one three SPED centers in big school division in regular schools which will cater to the education needs of learning disabilities. Aiming to reach out to more children with special education needs, the Philippine government allocated financial subsidy for the utilization and procurement of instructional materials which will develop the special child's intellectual abilities and talents. It is very timely that the program be evaluated; to find out the current status of the program including its problems and potentials using SWOT analysis.

Research questions

1. How may the profile of the special education teachers be described?
2. How may the extent of implementation of the SPED program in Bulacan be measured in terms of:
 - 2.1. funding
 - 2.2. trainings in special education of teachers;
 - 2.3. assessment tools;
 - 2.4. curriculum;
 - 2.5. pupils development activities; and
 - 2.6. special instructional materials?
3. How may the SPED Program be evaluated by special education teachers using the Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, Opportunities (SWOT) analysis?
4. What are the problems of the students with exceptional needs (SEN) in achieving school's functional literacy as perceived by their parents?
5. What sustainable interventions maybe proposed to further improve the implementation of SPED program?

Theoretical framework

High involvement model and Principal agent theory guided the framework of this research paper. The system will not be successful without the involvement of other members of the organization. Members should create an atmosphere of acceptance of whatever responsibility is given to them inside the system. High involvement model is a set of organizational principles conceived by Edward Lawler which he defined as the alteration of the logic of the organization so that there is a less distinct

demarcation between the work that delivers the services and the work of developing strategies and plans, allocating resources, and controlling performance (Jossey and Bass, 2006). The notion of a high-performance work system (HPWS) constitutes a claim that there exists a system of work practices for core workers in an organisation that leads in some way to superior performance. The organisation is designed for more integration of people efforts. All experts are in one direction in involving themselves in organization. Collaboration, cooperation and synchronization are keys for a better organization. High involvement model seems to be relevant in this study because the success of the SPED program depends on the collaborative effort of all the members of the organization. To sustain the program, maximum supports of the administrators down to the least involved individuals are expected; for them to plan and work collaboratively with one goal. For which they are expected to move in one direction to maintain a strong SPED program not only in Bulacan but of the whole country.

Principal agent theory is highly significant in this study which insists on the direct supervision of the superior in assisting his subordinates for proper and effective implementation of the program. According to the Principal agent theory, principals such as employers, design compensation structures to get agents, such as employees to work in the principal's interest. In education, the principal-agent relationship can take multiple forms. Teachers can be considered one of the principals to be working on with the multiple sub-principals; these include parents, school staff and other education officials (Econ and Org, 1991).

Principal agent theory is relevant in this study because SPED teacher's role is crucial and its efforts geared towards the intensification of measure to ensure quality special education. They should have concerted efforts and focused on the identification of strategies in meeting the needs of the SEN. These strategies must be seen through some initiatives that are likely to meet the many challenges and ever-changing demands of the Program. This theory assumes that the interest of teachers, schools' staff and parents must be in good alignment. Teachers are motivating agents for better productivity and efficiency result. They should encourage other school's staff and parents to involve themselves in planning and decision making and in developing linkages with other NGO. This will give greater accountability to local stakeholders, direct communication between communities and SPED centers concerning students' needs and interest.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the study of Dopitova (2007), funding of special

schools differs from funding of integrated students. The funding system of individual inclusion is quite complicated. The amount of allowance for each integrated individual is stipulated to a school according to concrete needs documented by special institutions. In the case of an integrated handicapped student or students with more serious disabilities, the resources are provided quarterly. The state financial support is not high enough. It cannot cover an additional teacher or assistant, supportive equipment, or simply more teachers at schools so that classes could consist of less number of students. Similar problems emerged during the assessment of Adorio and Ingrid (2008) on how local schools address the issues on access to CSN in different schools in the Division of Abra, Aurora, Batanes, Benguet and Mountain province in Luzon. The provinces and remote areas is in need of the national government support for special education program. There were incapacitated school heads, administrators, teachers, and division supervisors for the program. Continuous training of school heads is needed to expand their knowledge in curriculum planning in inclusive education, teamwork skills, and organizational knowledge. Likewise, the training of principals must be planned in such a way that they stay in their schools for at least three years so SPED can take roots. The same result in the study of Sakyi (2017), special education for the physically impaired children in Africa is grossly underfunded and inadequately provided. Few such centres exist in the urban areas where demand exceeds supply. There are no gifted-children centres available. Most physically impaired children have no choice but to be put in the mainstream schools. There are also very few trained psychologists, diagnostic and assessment centres.

Problems in the implementation of SPED program from the previous studies can be summarized such as: inadequacy of screening assessment tools and appropriate equipment for specific exceptionality, administrators have limited background in SPED, little extent and support in the provision of sports equipment and transportation services, slow promotion of students, lack of support services and personnel, budget allocation is very insufficient; there were no substantial and regular funds for the needs of the program. They also moderately agree that there is poor coordination with local government units and collaboration among teachers and service providers. These studies put more encouragement words to the researcher to evaluate the SPED program in Bulacan to find out if the same is happening and if mandates have been carried out by the stakeholders in the actual setting of the program; to highlight possible areas for institutional action to better improve the program. SWOT analysis was used in data capturing. SWOT was a useful tool in the study of Kashiem (2015) when he used five points for each SWOT components (CyberBlue-FRC 234, 2014) to mention the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the

Arab gender gap. From the result of the SWOT analysis, three scenarios were emphasized; the Arab countries will face successfully the threats that imposed by external milieu on the one hand, and will rationalize the available opportunities for the interest of women empowerment on the other hand. SWOT therefore provides a good structuring device for sorting out ideas about the future and an institution's ability to exploit that future.

Importance of Interventions

Interventions are intended to facilitate understanding acquisition of skills and competence to help the students develop their learning interest to a more efficient, convenient and plausible teaching. Interventions enhance academic achievement, develop social and emotional skills, feeling of self-worth and motivation of SEN. Intervention programs provide a unique environment, not only to enhance academic achievement, but also for the development of social and emotional skills, feelings of self-worth, and motivation.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach that involves research-based instruction and intervention, regular monitoring of students' progress, and the subsequent use of these data overtime to make educational decisions. It is a process of systematically documenting the performance of students as evidence of the need for additional services after making changes in classroom instruction. Kirkpatrick (2013) proved the effectiveness of RTI. Advocates of the RTI in the Philippines with the support of MAPSA (2009) Commission on Early Childhood Education – Philippines, believe that this approach is preferable to determine eligibility based on a discrepancy between ability and achievement. MAPSA recommended that SPED Centers in the Philippines should adopt the RTI in response to practicality and insufficient resources in responding to the needs of SEN. According to IDEA, schools may use alternative means on how school districts should implement RTI (MCECE, 2009).

On the other hand, Reynolds (2010), McMahon (2012) and Qi and Kaiser (2003) found support for the effectiveness of early childhood intervention programs. They almost had similar suggestion that early intervention programs can be beneficial for enhancing academic and social emotional readiness and providing young children with a strong foundation for future academic success. The three studies almost agreed that without early interventions, behavioral problems will be prevalent in the preschool years and are often stable and will lead to additional problems within the classroom. Early educational support programs are the ideal environments for implementing prevention programs and helping children get off to a good start on their educational journey.

Another proof that interventions are necessary for CSN

was shown by the study of Snowling (2012) entitled Early identification and intervention for dyslexia discussed methods for early identification and review evidence that teacher assessments and ratings may be used as valid screening tools. He concluded that early identification of children at risk followed by the implementation of intervention is a realistic aim for practitioners and policy-makers.

It was followed by Moreno's (2012) study when he evaluated the effectiveness of the Second Step program with preschool age children who display problematic behaviors in the classroom. Multiple sources of information were used to evaluate the effects of the program, including teacher report, knowledge and skills interview, and behavioral observation. Second Step is widely used intervention program designed to address emotional and behavioral problems, to be taught by classroom teachers, and provides lessons in social skills training infused throughout three units: empathy, anger management and problem solving. Evidence suggests that Second Step discourage aggressive behavior among individual students. Thus, the delivery of a social skills intervention through a class wide approach provides classroom norms which include emotion management, conflict resolution, and prosocial behavior. It was anticipated in Moreno's study that students that were provided the Second Step program demonstrated an increase in knowledge of social-emotional skills from pretest to posttest.

Aside from Second Step, another intervention was tested; Perry and Dunne (2008) proved that mental health consultation program reduced the number of young children being expelled from educational settings because of behavioral problems and to promote healthy social-emotional development. He define mental health consultation as an ongoing collaborative relationship between a mental health professional and early educator to prevent, identify, treat, and reduce specific behaviors of concern and to increase the overall quality of the classroom environment. His findings showed significantly increased social skills for children who received mental health consultation, while maintaining their current childcare or school placement. According to Harris (2012), students receive critical instruction on cognitive development need community-based, out of school programming to help with physical and social/emotional development. In order to create a successful community for CSN, there needs to be a continuum of support where everyone involved has common goals. As students participate in different programs and are exposed to different adults who mentor them, they become more confident. In the study of Santiago (2014), interventions were recommended to lessen the number of students who are dropping out from their classes. The interventions were subdivided into five categories: student related intervention, teacher's intervention, school related interventions, family related and

community related intervention. Student related intervention include education, training, conditioning, exercise, stretching and awareness which focus on students' activities. School Transitional Environment intervention provides the students as well as the parents the opportunity to gain trust in school. Community related interventions are Adopt a School Project, collaborative Prevention and Violence Prevention Plan. These will provide community some activities to direct their attention into more fruitful ways. Similar approach was used in helping learning disabled in the study of Saludes and Dante (2010). He found out that most of the parent respondents in region XI in the Philippines and educators strongly agree to the treatment and intervention services for learning disabled (LD). The result manifests that the higher level of knowledge and awareness about LD, the stronger the agreement for interventions. The more the interventions, better the performance of the students.

The above studies of Snowling (2012), Moreno (2012), Perry and Dunne (2008), Santiago (2014) and Saludes and Dante (2010) are related to the current study for they proved the effectiveness of interventions like Second Step, Mental Health Consultation Program and Community related programs needed by students with behavior problems; likewise this study enumerated possible interventions in helping students attain optimum learning. The difference is that the present sighted interventions based on the findings and did not evaluate its effectiveness. The same with Santiago, the only difference is that her study dealt on minimizing the number of dropouts while the current is evaluation on SPED program.

The foregoing confirmed that problems in the management of Special Education Program in Bulacan has to be investigated and evaluated to know and understand its status and the possibility of program interventions to help the students with exceptional needs cope in elementary life.

Based on the collected literature and studies and existing theories, the evaluation of the SPED program were conceptualized by adapting the input-process-output scheme. This process traced the source of funding and its sufficiency to SEN. Related literature and studies, memoranda and circular were also analyzed. Reinforcing the process were the interview to SENs' parents and SPED teachers. After the process, the researcher posits that the expected output is the proposed intervention program for SPED.

METHODOLOGY

Sequential explanatory design by Dr. John Creswell (2013) was used. This is a two phase design where the quantitative data is collected first such as the respondents' profile and their evaluation to the program; followed by qualitative data collection in SWOT format.

The purpose of qualitative results is to further explain and interpret the findings from the quantitative phase. This design permits the researcher to explore the phenomenon in depth before generalizing the result. The first phase was the SPED teacher's profile study and their evaluation to the program. The second phase was the qualitative phase wherein various aspects of SPED program were evaluated using SWOT analysis.

Population and instrument of the study

There were only twelve existing SPED centers incorporated in the public elementary schools in Bulacan. Thirty five SPED teachers teaching in self-contained classes in these twelve SPED centers in Bulacan were respondents of this study.

Table 1 presents the list of SPED Centers and the actual number of SPED teachers per center. A locally prepared instrument was used by the researcher to seek the actual evaluation on the implementation of SPED Program in the Division of Bulacan. The questionnaire was validated by a SPED professor, SPED teacher and a research-oriented faculty member. They determined the weakness and defect of the questionnaire. Thereafter, the necessary corrections, suggestions and recommendations were incorporated to improve the questionnaire. The revised questionnaire was administered to three teachers teaching in public SPED elementary schools in Manila. After receiving all the recommendation, the researcher conducted the actual distribution and interview to teacher-respondents in Bulacan. Of the thirty five questionnaires distributed to the teachers, the researcher was able to retrieved 100%. Focus Group Discussion was also made to gather data for SWOT analysis (qualitative part); the same was used to parent respondents to gather their perceived problems in the implementation of SPED program.

The researcher used the rating scale items for teacher's evaluation on various aspects of SPED Program. A five point Likert-scale using the following descriptive ratings and range was used (Table 2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the SPED teachers

The profile of the respondents shows that there were 91% female SPED teachers compare to 9% male teachers teaching in different SPED Centers in Bulacan; forty three percent (43%) were teaching SEN for 1-5 years and the sixty seven percent (67%) were new in the program. All teachers were graduates of Bachelor in Education. They were certified teachers because they earned their credentials that gave them authority to teach (Rosas, 2005). Unfortunately, forty six percent (46%)

Table 1. Number of SPED teachers per school.

SPED school	Number of SPED teachers per school
*SC1	4
SC2	3
SC3	2
SC4	3
SC5	3
SC6	3
SC7	4
SC8	2
SC9	4
SC10	2
SC11	3
SC12	2
Total	35

*SC# = SPED Centers Number.

Table 2. Five point Likert scale.

Scale	Range	Descriptive rating
5	4.5 – 5	Very great extent
4	3.5 – 4.49	Great extent
3	2.5 – 3.49	Moderate extent
2	1.5 – 2.49	Little extent
1	1 – 1.49	No extent at all

finished general education. This means that they have wide knowledge in different subjects but no specialization at all. It is also observed that some Language, Science and Math teachers are involved in the program but they are not that ready for it. It is worthy to note that only 9% teachers were SPED related graduate and they have shared their knowledge to non-SPED teachers. The researcher declare support to the study of Piere as cited by Aguinaldo (2010) that those teachers with major aligned in the profession can teach better to those without major. Sixty percent (60%) of the teacher respondents have Master's units; and twenty percent (20%) already finished Master in Special Education. This study assumed that those SPED teachers with Master's Degree may produce better performance rating as proven true by Chang (2005) who confirmed that teachers who possess any advanced studies manifest positive traits in handling SEN. Seventy one percent (71%) of teachers participated in trainings at the division level. There were about half of the teachers attended the regional and national level training seminars and only eleven percent (11%) have attendance in the international level. Interview revealed that some teachers did not attend the national even international seminar because they were not invited to attend. The data proved that report of Ebol (2008) was true in claiming that teachers were given

trainings by DepEd in collaboration with other NGO's. However, the data also support his report that trainings were not regularly made available especially in the national and international level because of insufficient funds.

Teacher quality profile has a direct effect on student learning and is the most influential school-based factor on student achievement. Students with high-impact teachers have nearly a year's advantage over their peers in low-effect teachers' classrooms (Hattie, 2012). So therefore, SPED teachers' quality profile play an important role in supporting students' learning.

Extent of management and implementation of the SPED program in Bulacan

Funding

Budget was moderately received by the schools as shown by its mean of 3.37 in Table 3. A group of teachers evoked that they receive their budget but not in

regular basis. For the local fund, it recorded 3.49 with moderate extent of support to SPED program. The data shows that respondents were meeting halfway. Those who evaluated the local board with a very great extent of support are those schools located near or within the city; wherein municipal mayors gave their needs upon their request. Interview revealed that the local fund was not given directly to the SPED program instead it was used to support and finance other school activities like Sports and Academics where SEN activities are also included. Respondents were not informed of the allocation of SEF to support the well-being of SEN.

The above findings confirmed the claim of Special Education Act of 2010 that funds for SPED comes from the national and local government and SEN's equipment, materials and teacher's training allowance is moderately provided by the Department of Education. However, minority of teachers was not satisfied of the financial support given by the national and local government and it was confirmed by the computed average weighted mean of 3.37.

Table 3. The Extent of Implementation of SPED Program in Bulacan.

Item	Weighted mean	Descriptive rating	SD
Funding	3.37	Moderate extent	.273744
Training	3.96	Great extent	.319537
Assessment tools	2.57	Moderate extent	.814386
Curriculum	3.53	Great extent	.721443
Pupils' development activities	3.98	Great extent	.143304
Instructional materials	3.36	Moderate extent	.747727
Overall	3.4536	Moderate extent	.711242

N – 35.

Training of teachers

There is a great extent of support for teachers training as reveal by the computed mean of 3.96. Greater majority upgraded their teaching styles through seminars. Teachers cited that their training is one factor that made them feel so competent and qualified in teaching SEN. However, a little number of teachers admits they did not participate in the national seminar because they were not invited to attend for reasons unknown to them.

The finding goes with the Magna Carta for Disabled claim that government show great extent of support for the improvement of the delivery of SPED services by conducting seminars and conferences to equip teachers with knowledge, methods in teaching and preparation of instructional materials. The findings of this study do not go with Bucoy (2006) and Flameno's (2005) findings when they pointed out that teachers received a little extent of support in terms of trainings and seminars. Result revealed that many of the teachers were greatly

satisfied with the different seminars. Teachers were encouraged to attend workshops because they were greatly motivated with regards to conceptualizing, modifying and delivering SPED courses. It is assumed and concluded that previous studies and researches already reached the department and that made trainings available at present.

Assessment tools

Table 3 presents a weighted mean of 2.57 with descriptive rating of moderate extent of support to the assessment tools. It can be seen from the data that it was the lowest among the weighted means. Teachers disclosed that their main considered internal difficulty is the unavailability of diagnostic centers, instruments and standardized assessment tools for placement and promotion of students. Likewise, teachers reported that screening and assessment materials for appropriate

placement of students were considered a big problem. Since diagnostic centers were not available in the province, teachers tried to be very resourceful that they improvised instrument for admission, placement and promotion of students. The said instruments were checked and evaluated by their principal. Interview revealed that SPED Center applies the Education for All (EFA) wherein all CSN were accepted with or without medical record. Parents were advised to submit requirements in a specified deadline. Many were not able to submit due to expensive medical fees. This study found out that adequate and free medical assistance including therapy, psychometric assessment, medical examination with the government clinics, hospitals and other health facilities is insufficient to respond to all CSN who will undergo pre-assessment.

Curriculum

On the other hand, Table 3 also shows that there is a great extent of support to SPED curriculum as shown by its computed mean of 3.53. Majority evaluated that the Department of Education extended support in the formulation and providing teachers' appropriate curriculum. Interview revealed teachers modify the curriculum because of inexistence of the special curriculum per disability in their area. Some reiterated that there are curricula for visually and hearing impaired but these are not available in their centers. The findings show that there is an irregularity in the distribution of curricula to all public SPED centers. Few teachers moderately received the curriculum for the visually and hearing impaired and others did not receive any. Furthermore, the findings go with the study of Flameno (2005); he found that many SPED teachers in selected schools in Bulacan perceived that curriculum was considered their main difficulty. It was the same in the current. Accordingly, DepEd formulates and provides teachers curriculum in moderate extent but interview revealed that no curriculum was provided to them until the time of this interview. One teacher said "*Sa Manila meron at sabi bibigyan kami, but until now wala pa!*." But in the end, they are hopeful that DepEd should have the initiatives to venture into curriculum redirections and development of program models generated from the teachers, learners, parents and significant others, gathered through research-based procedure; that the special curriculum and methods shall be adapted to the needs, interests and abilities of the learner and the curricula will be distributed nationwide.

Pupils' development activities and instructional materials

It may be gleaned from the data that SEN were greatly provided athletic activities and tours, join school's

organization and academic and non-academic contest by its mean of 3.98. Respondents revealed that schools provide wide range of activities to SEN which are school related to provide students array of different interests. The findings declare support to Sec. 16 of SPED Act 2010 that the Bureau shall institute wholesome recreation and activities for the advancement of their physical, mental, social and cultural development. The table also exhibited that there is a great extent of support to SPED instructional materials base on the computed mean of 3.36. Almost all teachers produce appropriate teaching materials. Teachers with the support of the school also prepare some computer aided instructions to develop the IT knowhow of SEN; sometimes schools were given IT materials as donation of private individuals. On the other hand, DepEd provides moderate extent of support to students' textbooks and modules without cost and special equipment are provided in affordable rates. The present study also found out that special equipment like brail, computers and wheelchairs are moderately provided to SEN then later be available in the division office for distribution to either teacher or students without cost; as mandated in Sec. 7 and 19 of SPED Act of 2010.

The overall mean of 3.4536 revealed a moderate extent of support the government is giving to the SPED Program in Bulacan. The standard deviation of .71 indicates that the data are clustered closely around the mean. It means that differences among the items in the survey are small or closer to each other. The figure reiterated that the respondents have almost the same perception and evaluation of the SPED program.

Moreover, the result of the evaluation involve the special education teachers who face similar professional challenges as their general education teacher colleagues, but with the added elements of working with unique learners, mastering an understanding of legal requirements, dealing with emotionally charged parental relationships, and managing professional teaming responsibilities. Special education teachers need support and guidance from knowledgeable administrators on a daily basis, especially having the opportunity to problem solve with their SPED students in the development of curriculum and instructional materials (Miller, 2007). Lack of administrative support is a key factor in special education teacher (Green, 2011). Without well-educated administrators in special education instructional practices and legal procedures, special education teachers and its program are at risk.

Perception of SPED teachers in SPED program using the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)

Strengths of the SPED program

Considering the overall mean of 3.45, five positive points will be discussed briefly for exploratory purposes and

they are:

1. Teachers use individualized instruction according to the needs of SEN. Teachers are creative, resourceful and make use of different teaching strategies to instill maximum learning to SEN.
2. Trends and issues on SPED are discussed during the annual training given to SPED teachers. They are equipped with profound knowledge and delivered the same to students.
3. Center receives the materials and equipment annually. For materials like wheelchairs, braille machine, slate and stylus worksheets are donation of private individuals.
4. The school provides trainings for livelihood, cultural, sports and socialization activities and special students are given equal opportunities.
5. Teachers promote motor skill enhancement and speech exercises during remedial classes. Other teachers give interventions in 3R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) which parents are very much thankful for.

Weaknesses of the SPED program

The previous positive elements of the program are faced also with negative aspects that might be summarized as follows:

1. Though teachers wholeheartedly offer their time and effort in modifying curriculum, they lamented for the standardized curriculum in SPED that includes all kinds of disability.
2. Even though there's annual seminar workshop, teachers found it weak because of limited training hours and they are not provided handouts or any printed materials.
3. Materials arrive late and of low quality. Some are no longer functional when used by the teacher and students.
4. Though schools are doing its best effort in making SEN fruitful individuals, teachers found parents lack of support to SEN activities a problem in meeting their objectives. Very limited number of SEN participated in activities set for them.
5. Aside from the attendance of SEN to extracurricular activities, parents do not regularly bring their children in the intervention program scheduled by the teacher because they need to be home for household chores.

Opportunities of the SPED program

As far as the challenges of narrowing down the problems in the implementation of SPED program are concerned, five points will be mentioned in this section as follows:

1. Partnership with private SPED center and parents in the creation of special curriculum. This effort geared

towards intensification of education in collaboration with other stakeholders who could work on standardized curriculum in the future.

2. Well-trained teachers offer themselves in training receiving teachers without additional compensation. They are also enthusiastic to provide parents a weekly school-based training within the community to orient parents and other members of the community on SPED.
3. Private organizations and individuals can be encouraged to sponsor activities for SEN.
4. School can also establish strategic partnership with parents and the whole community to hold activities during summer as event of barangay for SEN.
5. To minimize problem in deficit number of teachers, the school could accept practice teachers from different colleges and universities for the implementation of the intervention program.

Threats to the SPED program

1. Teachers are willing to work on a standardized curriculum but heavy workloads can slow down the modification and creation of curriculum. A number of sections per teacher, non-teaching assignment serve as heavy burden in splitting of their time.
2. Some SPED teachers after having been trained left the service in favor of good salary offered abroad. Teachers believed that four months' salary can be earned abroad in one month time.
3. Low administrative support; not to mention narratively-teacher considers the program the least among the priorities.
4. SPED teachers emphasize that activities given by the private sector could be used by politicians in their desire for public service.
5. Teacher worries on the regular implementation of interventions. There is the possibility that parents will no longer send their children to regular class; instead they will just rely on the special remedial or tutorial class in which there is just this limited number of practice teachers allowed per center.

From the previous SWOT analysis, two scenarios might be emphasized in this regard as follows:

- SPED Program took place and considers a big help for SEN because of its individualized instruction based on their modified curriculum. Not all of SPED teachers are trained in modifying curriculum; moreover, regular annual seminars are requested to the regional office. In addition, the needs for SPED educational and manipulative materials are requested to be delivered on time because teacher has no extra allowance to improvised materials.
- Centers provide excellent and equal opportunities and interventions for all enrolled SEN; they are included in the academic and co-curricular activities and to the different

cultural, livelihood, scouting and educational tour. Support from the external community was also felt and considered opportunities that SEN and their parents should grab and be thankful for. In spite of all, parents are not participative and they have all the reasons for being so.

This study has a firm conviction that after the analysis of the SPED program, linkages with government and non-government organization maybe establish with rapport to help SEN with their concerns. Collaboration is needed to push through linkages. As stated by Resch (2014) in his paper, to sustain the gains made, the scheduling of collaboration time must be addressed. The same in the SPED program, different stakeholders need regularly scheduled time for collaboration. This could be accomplished by dedicating building staff development resources to this effort (Resch, 2014).

Furthermore, the institution from its previous failures and successes should define the general framework of the Program based from SWOT result. As compared to the statement of Hladchenko (2014) the future is regarded to be unpredictable, to make a forecast about organizational factors that will have an impact on education institution program planners in basic education should take into consideration opinions of different groups of the stakeholders in order to have a realistic picture about performance of the SPED centers and on the basis of this information to make rational decisions aimed at the development of a better SPED program nationwide.

Problems of students with exceptional needs as perceived by their parents

Table 4 shows the problems of SEN; they were summarized using frequency and ranking. The most frequent problem has been ranked first and followed by other problems and issues. The ranking shows that almost all parents are not financially able to submit their children to medical doctors like neurologist, pediatrician and other specialist because of the medical fee that these doctors are collecting from them. They were required to submit the medical requirement in a specified date. The deadline was sometimes extended to three or more months.

Parents revealed that they need time and money to complete the necessary papers. Two parents express their grievance and hardships for the completion of the requirements. Interview revealed that they had to bring their kids to pediatrician then to neurologist who will recommend SEN for occupational therapy. The therapy consists of three sessions per week; per session cost P500 - P600. Sometimes, speech and physical therapy are needed for leveling of SEN which for parent is too expensive and the saddest thing, these therapies are

available only in Manila. SEN must be brought to Manila every three or five months depending on his disability status. The result of the therapy was used to determine if SEN needs to stay for another year in self-contained class or can be included to a regular class the following year. Some parents also cited that most of the time, specialist like psychologist in the school neither within the district who will pre-assess their children are not available; even other options to lessen their admission problems.

Some parents mourn for the situation of their children that were merged in one class having different impairment. The class size is ideal and follows department order, but the number of impairment per class in some center does not follow the rule. Parents understood that this happens because of lack of teachers; and this is one thing they would like to request from the government and more financial support is another thing. Few reported that remedial classes were given to their children but not in regular basis. Other parents who are financially able hired a tutor to assist their kids in their educational needs. But most parents were not capable to do the same thing because of financial constraint. Special equipment for learning disabled, visual impaired and orthopedically handicapped, remains insufficient in some centers as perceived by few parents. Interview revealed that Braille machine, stylus paper, wheelchairs, crutches, hearing aids and other equipment were insufficient for a quite number of SEN. A little number of parent respondents perceived that when SEN were included in the regular class, receiving teachers did not convey great extent of support to them. They exclaimed that receiving teachers need more SPED training to gain understanding of the psychology of children with special needs. Five parent respondents perceived that they were not regularly informed of their child's progress. They receive the teacher's assessment late for unknown reasons. Parents revealed that they prefer personal discussion on their child's progress to find out and monitor the appropriate intervention needed by their children. However, three parent respondents of orthopedically handicapped children revealed that SEN's room was not properly located within the school compound. Sometimes, SEN came late because they can't easily reach the room. They suggested that rooms be located near the gate of the school. Likewise, two parent respondents reported that there is a little extent of support given to CSN by their community. Other members of the community were not fully aware of the program.

Proposed interventions to further improve the implementation of SPED Program in Bulacan

This study has come up with program interventions that could possibly help SEN develop their learning interest

Table 4. Problems of students with exceptional needs as perceived by their parents.

Problems of students with exceptional needs	Rank
Medical assessment is too expensive; parents cannot afford to bring their children to medical specialist prior to admission to SPED program.	1
No Occupational therapist (OT), Speech therapist (ST) even school Psychologist within the school and community who will pre-assess the CSN.	2
No assessment or testing options available aside from the medical advice of experts. This is too expensive.	3
Students with different disabilities are being merged together in one class because of lack of teachers	4
Remedial classes or tutorials after class hours are seasonal.	5
Lack of special equipment for learning disabled, visual impaired and orthopedically handicapped.	6
Some receiving (regular) teachers do not give the great extent of support to SEN	7
Parents are not regularly informed of their child's progress.	8
Rooms are not located properly within the vicinity of the school. It is far from the school gate. Cannot be easily reach by SEN.	9
Lack of public information campaign for SPED.	10

N = 20.

Table 5. Proposed intervention plan.

Objectives	Proposed interventions
1. To identify children's disabilities for proper placement.	1. School-Student Related Intervention: 1.1. Scientific Identification and Early Intervention Program 1.1.1 Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies 1.1.2 Second Step 1.2 Response to Intervention Policy (RTI)
2. To enhance the emotional and social readiness of SEN prior to elementary level.	
3. To prevent aggressive behavior of students by increasing emphatic pro-social behavior.	
4. To monitor learners progress for initiation of special services if needed.	
5. To provide SPED teachers additional information on curriculum development and teaching methodology.	1.3. Regular Quarter Seminar for Teachers with topics on Curriculum Development/ Teaching methodology.
6. To keep the SEN with classroom instruction and minimize academic work missed due to absences.	2. Home-Community Related Interventions 2.1 Home-based Instruction Program 2.2. Parent Education 2.2.1. General Assembly/Lecture Forum 2.2.2. Awareness Campaign Program 2.3 Community- based Delivery System
7. To provide parents information and awareness of their children's handicap.	
8. To involve parents in the planning of special services and rehabilitation of their children.	
9. To provide SEN in distant communities of existing SPED Program.	3. Linkages with Government and Non-Government Organizations 3.1. Directory Information Center (DIC) 3.2 Mobile Training for regular teachers 3.3 Barangay Sportsfest/ Summer Workshop for Disabled 3.4 SPED Assessment and Therapy Program
10. To provide parents a list of rehabilitation and resource centers for easy access of SEN in case of medical problems.	
11. To prepare regular teachers in handling SEN.	
12. To help SEN to be more physically active and socially able.	
13. To help parents avail of free or discounted medical assessment and therapy session for their children.	

and improve their functional literacy (Table 5). The program interventions are made based on the result of the interview both from teachers and parents, from the

related literature and studies and from teachers' focus group discussion (TFGD).

The interventions are classified into three: School-

Student Related Intervention (SSRI), Home-Community Related Intervention (HCRI); and Linkages with G.O. and N.G.O.

Early intervention support programs are the ideal environments helping SEN get on to a good start on their educational journey. Behavioral problems prevalent in the early school years are often stable and lead to additional problems within the school classroom without early intervention. If young children who have challenging behaviors do not participate in early intervention, their social development and competence is likely to be negatively affected (Blair et al., 2010). Early intervention programs can be beneficial for enhancing academic and social emotional readiness and providing young children with a strong foundation for future academic success. Interventions can vary from individualized approaches, particularly for those children who have significant needs; consultation with teachers and families to improve the overall school climate; implementation of regular curricula or typical interventions which include cooperative play, friendship skills (e.g., sharing, turn-taking, helping), understanding and expressing emotions, empathy, anger management skills, and problem solving.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. SPED Teachers received support from the government for their trainings, curriculum, instructional materials and equipment and pupils' development activities. Funds were annually given to school but late and found to be insufficient. However, SPED schools often lack the diagnostic centers, standardized assessment tools for placement, psychologist and occupational therapist. There were also gross deficiency of instructional materials and special equipment; insufficient national and international trainings and specialized curricula to some disabilities are not yet developed. This study concluded that, SPED program in Bulacan is not fully well - implemented and ready in terms of funding, curriculum, admission and assessment tools.
2. Despite of the great extent of support the government is providing to SEN, this study concluded that there are problems prior to admission; these are not educational issues but rather medical related problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering all the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are drawn:

1. The Bureau of Special Education should develop appropriate curriculum for each disability which is researched - based and tested successfully prior to its

implementation; then provide the teachers with the said curriculum and evaluate periodically. These plans shall be accompanied by a variety of low cost and indigenous instructional materials, assistance devices and special equipment.

2. Develop appropriate scientific assessment instruments to identify handicapping conditions as early as possible. These instruments shall be ready for use for free in each SPED center. Hire and assign at least two permanent psychologists, occupational and speech therapist for every district that will be available every weekday for early identification and assessment of children with special needs for proper labeling, placement and evaluation.

3. To keep the quality of the SPED Program, Basic Education Department should provide annual national seminar for Senior SPED teacher per center if funds are limited; after which an echo seminar will be held within the center. Supervisors for special education should also provide SPED teachers at least two regular annual regional training seminar; with topics in different teaching strategies and curriculum modification. Principals should request the attendance of the receiving teachers in the division level seminars for them to understand SEN better and to augment the shortage of trained teachers.

4. A similar study is recommended in a different locale and at a bigger scope so that a more accurate picture of the range of practice in SPED schools with regard to serving SEN will be drawn. Suggested topics are:

- a. SPED Admission Policy in Region III
- b. Assessment Instruments in SPED Centers
- c. Socio-Academic Competence of Special Students
- d. Training for Receiving/ Regular Teachers

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