

Exploring Inclusive Education in the Senior High School as Bridging Program to Tertiary Career Pathing

TOMASA F. QUINONES
tomasa.quinones@umak.edu.ph

Abstract — The study uncovers the awareness, readiness and the perceived roles of senior high school teachers on special education where descriptive and exploratory research using a focused-group discussion approach was employed. The data were culled from the researcher developed and validated instruments responded by 30 senior high school teachers selected following snowball technique, considering their experiences in handling special learners. The data were qualitatively and quantitatively coded, analyzed, interpreted and presented. Findings revealed that respondents are “moderately aware” of special education, its philosophy, goals and mechanisms, and “somewhat ready” in handling LSN in their respective classes. “Academic coach,” “counselor” and “motivator” were ranked highest as perceived roles in the inclusion of special learners. The study concluded that attempt to include special learners in regular classes will truly educate them as inclusion is deemed necessary for these learners to proceed to tertiary and acquire a career after. The study recommended that senior high school teachers should train themselves on special education. Thus S.H.I.E.L.D. (Senior High School Inclusive Education for Learning and Development), a capacity building program for senior high school teachers, is proposed.

Keywords — *Inclusive education, special learners, capacity-building program*

I. Introduction

Inclusive education (IE) is among the current trends in the practice of special education where the learners with special needs (LSN) attend regular classes. Here, they are supported to learn, contribute, participate and respond to demands, both curriculum and instruction. They also are given equal opportunities similar with what the regular students enjoy and experience. Including LSN in regular classes is a practice in schools today. It is a strategy to balance opportunities for both LSN and their regular classmates. This allows them to experience the same world, the same opportunities and the same difficulties. Special learners may experience more of the difficulties but with the presence of classmates who are also experiencing the same, the frustrations become less. LSNs are assured that they are not alone and that with other classmates working together on the same problem, they will develop a better attitude for the solution of their problems.

The ultimate objective of IE is for special learners to be integrated in the regular learning environment. IE supports the educational needs of special individuals where teaching and learning is tailored depending on the learner’s state. Including LSN in regular academic program is deemed

beneficial as they are given the opportunity to experience the normal school life where they can actively engage in activities that are deemed necessary to mold one's abilities. IE also allows them to enjoy the learning environment with peers who can assist and support them with academic challenges.

With the implementation of K+12 Program, most if not all students who completed the junior high school will eventually progress to the Senior High School with the expectation of getting certified after two years and be employed since the new curriculum is geared towards developing necessary skills for immediate and in demand employment. These students include special learners who have successfully met the requirements in the junior high school and are qualified to be promoted to senior high school. The problem, however, is on their integration with students who have diverse background especially those who have no exposure and knowledge of disability among peers and the teachers who will handle them.

Teachers' preparation in the senior high school is far different from the preparations of those who are in the junior high school level. This preparation, however, does not include special education or what the present practice calls it, inclusive education. Hence, placing LSN in their respective classes will bring problems. Senior high school teachers will have no problem with acceptance considering that inclusive education mandates this already. The problem lies in the delivery of instruction and the attitude of teachers on these special learners in their respective classes.

The unavailability of program, facilities, trained senior high school teachers and tailored-fit learning materials, inspired the researcher to propose an inclusive education program to help LSN on their present academic difficulties and to also serve as a bridging program toward their tertiary career pathing. The researcher's experience in HSU, having handled special learners in class, and her knowledge of special education can help identify the focus of the proposed inclusive education program which can hopefully address the concerns of LSN and eventually can help assimilate them in a genuine academic community with inclusive education program assisting them.

With the passage of Republic Act No. 10533, otherwise known as the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013", the K to 12 basic education program was formalized. From the former 10-year basic education curriculum, the K to 12 program mandates 1 year of kindergarten and 12 years of basic education, comprising of 6 years of primary education, 4 years of junior high and 2 years of senior high school. According to the Department of Education (DepEd), the rationale for RA 10533 is to address the poor quality of basic education provided by the previous curriculum as reflected in the low achievement scores of Filipino students and the Philippines' unemployment rate. The salient features of RA 10533 seek to: (a) strengthen early childhood education; (b) build proficiency through language; and (c) provide specialized upper secondary education. (Lim, 2014).

The City Government of Makati positively responds to challenges of special education and because it cares for its citizens, created various special education units in the city to address the essentials of children with special needs and their families. However, these special education units are limited to both the elementary and the secondary sector. The University of Makati, the tertiary institution established to meet the academic needs of its citizens, however, has no mandate on its charter for a provision including learners with special needs in its program.

The study is aimed to uncover the awareness, readiness and the perceived roles of senior high school faculty members on special education, findings of which will lead to a development of an inclusive education program for special learners in the senior high school. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of the Senior High School Faculty members with regards to special education?
2. What level of readiness do the Senior High School Faculty members have in handling learners with special needs in their classes?
3. What is the perceived role of the Senior High School Faculty members in the inclusion of learners with special needs?
4. What framework can elucidate the result of the findings that will lead towards inclusive education program for the Senior High School?

II. Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive and exploratory research: descriptive because it sought to determine the awareness, readiness and the perceived roles of senior high school faculty members on special education; exploratory because the researcher wanted to further gain insights on the subject and that findings helped the development of an inclusive education program for special learners in the senior high school. The study also employed the Focused-Group Discussion (FGD) approach to elicit significant information from a group of people who have direct experience and with common interest on the topic at hand. It likewise adopted the snowball sampling technique in identifying respondents from the roster of teachers from the HSU who have had experienced having learners with special needs (LSN) and difficulties in their respective classes. Snowball sampling, according to Dudovsky (2016), is where research participants recruit other participants for a test or study. It is used where potential participants are hard to find. It is called snowball sampling because (in theory) once you have the ball rolling, it picks up more “snow” along the way and becomes larger and larger. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method which consists of two steps: First, identify potential subjects in the population. Often, only one or two subjects can be found initially. Second, ask considered subjects to recommend other people (and then ask them to recommend another set) who have the same profile

identified in the study. Participants should be made aware that they do not need to provide any other names to be accepted as subject for the study. Although, they are encouraged to help the researcher identify potential subjects to be included in the study.

III. Results and Discussion

This part indicates the collected data from the 30 respondents who have had experienced in teaching learners with special needs.

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Male	7	23
Female	23	77
Total	30	100

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of respondents according to gender. Twenty-three or 77 percent are females and seven or 23 percent are males. There are more female respondents than males in the study because there are more female teachers than males teaching in the senior high school.

Table 2
Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Civil Status

CIVIL STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Single	7	23
Married	23	77
Total	30	100

Table 2 highlights the frequency distribution of respondents according to civil status. Twenty-three or 77 percent of the respondents reported to be married while seven or 23 percent indicated single status. There are more married faculty members teaching in the senior high school than are those that are single.

Table 3
Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Age

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
26-30	1	3
31-35	7	23
36-40	6	20
41-45	4	13
46-50	3	11
51 above	9	30
Total	30	100

Table 3 indicates the frequency distribution of respondents according to age. Nine or 30 percent are in the 51 years and above age bracket, followed by seven or 23 percent in the 31 – 35 age bracket and 6 or 20 percent in the 36 – 40 age brackets. The table shows that faculty members who are teaching in the senior high school are more mature with reference to age.

Table 4
Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Educational Attainment

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Bachelor's Degree	6	20
BS with MA units	1	3
Master's degree	6	20
With doctoral units	16	54
Doctoral degree	1	3
Total	30	100

Table 4 underscores the frequency distribution of respondents according to educational attainment. Sixteen or 54 percent of respondents reported to have doctoral units, followed by master’s and bachelor’s degree (both 6 or 20 percent respectively). As gleaned from the table, majority of the faculty members have advanced studies with respect to their line of discipline.

Table 5
Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Background in Special Education

BACKGROUND IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Attendance in seminar	5	17
Exposure to CWSN	12	40
Self-study/interest	4	13
Units/degree in SPED	2	7
All of the above	7	23
Total	30	100

Table 5 shows the frequency distribution of respondents according to their background in special education. Twelve or 40 percent indicated that their background in special education emanated from their exposures to children with special needs while seven or 23 percent were obtained from all cited background on the table. As indicated in the table, majority of the faculty members are familiar with LSN by virtue of their exposures and other initiatives.

Table 6
Frequency Distribution of Respondents According to Years of Experience in Teaching Senior High School

TEACHING EXPERIENCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
0- 1 year	5	17
2 -3 years	5	17
4 - and above	20	67
Total	30	100

Table 6 presents the frequency distribution of respondents according to years of experience in teaching senior high school. Twenty or 67 percent of respondents reported to be teaching 4 years and above. Majority of the faculty members began teaching the senior high school since its inception when the university partnered with the DepED and TESDA during the senior high school pioneering days.

SOP No. 1. What is the level of awareness of the Senior High School Faculty members with regards to special education?

Table 7
Respondents' Level of Awareness on Special Education

AWARENESS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION	MEAN	S.D.	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
A curriculum intended for LSN	3.47	1.04166	Somewhat Aware
A graduate and undergraduate program for teachers of LSN	3.67	0.88409	Moderately Aware
A response to UNESCO and UNICEF challenges	3.47	1.04166	Somewhat Aware
A specialized program of instruction for LSN	3.67	0.92227	Moderately Aware
Adoption of the principle of "Education for all"	4.13	0.89131	Moderately Aware
Application of SPED modalities and teaching intervention	3.73	0.94443	Moderately Aware
Aligns with the government's National Agenda	3.63	0.80872	Moderately Aware
Exclusive to LSN	3.23	1.04000	Somewhat Aware
Inclusion of LSN in regular classes	3.83	0.74664	Moderately Aware
Requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders	3.77	0.81720	Moderately Aware
Special services to address the needs of LSN	3.63	0.71840	Moderately Aware
Statutes (Laws), Directives, etc. as they apply to special education	3.57	0.93526	Somewhat Aware
Average mean	3.65	0.90347	Moderately aware

Legend: 4.50 – 5 Extremely Aware; 3.50 – 4.49 Moderately Aware; 2.50 – 3.49 Somewhat Aware; 1.5 – 2.49 Slightly Aware; and 1 – 1.49 Not at all aware.

Table 7 presents the level of awareness of the Senior High School Faculty members with regards to special education. As gleaned from the table, the overall mean performance scores (MPS) of 3.65 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.90347 indicated that respondents are moderately aware of special education, its philosophy, goals and mechanisms. The respondents particularly showed moderate awareness on the following "*adoption of the principle of "Education for All"*" (4.13 MPS and .89131 SD), "*inclusion of LSN in regular classes*" (3.83 MPS and .74664 SD), "*requires collaboration efforts from stakeholders*" (3.77 MPS and .81720 SD) and the "*application of SPED modalities and teaching intervention*" (3.73 MPS and .94443 SD). The respondents rated "*exclusive to LSN*" least as it generated 3.23 MPS and 1.0400 SD).

Findings indicate that senior high school faculty members are observed to be moderately aware on special education. Although these faculty members may have the exposure with LSN, these exposures, however, do not necessarily translate to effective teaching. Their awareness of special education may seem to be theory laden that requires solid experience and practice to genuinely respond to its nuances and challenges.

According to Dueck (as cited by Gabriel, 2015), even if teachers support the philosophy and ideology of such program, they embrace the burden of difficulties during practice and that there is a huge gap between teachers' professional judgments on teaching strategies for students with special needs and the perceptions of the public on what should really happen in schools. Garcillanosa (2011) noted that teacher's perception towards the inclusion program of children with intellectual disability manifests positive condition in the respondents' perceptions. Teachers are willing to accept the challenge of inclusion, however, the hesitation and fear of teachers to accept the responsibility can be attributed to lack of training and knowledge on this matter.

SOP No. 2. What level of readiness do the Senior High School Faculty members have in handling learners with special needs in their classes?

Table 8
Respondents' Level of Readiness in Handling Learners with Special Needs

READINESS IN HANDLING LSN	MEAN	S.D.	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
Apply SPED modalities/modification strategies in the classroom	3.03	1.09807	Somewhat Ready
Assess learning needs of LSN	3.03	1.18855	Somewhat Ready
Assist LSN in his/her academic challenges/difficulties	3.23	1.10433	Somewhat Ready
Collaborate with stakeholders (LSN, parents, teachers, non-teaching personnel, administrator, etc.)	3.00	.98261	Somewhat Ready
Consult seasoned specialists on special education	3.07	.90719	Somewhat Ready
Discuss observation of LSN with stakeholders	3.33	.95893	Somewhat Ready
Embrace the principle "education for all"	3.63	.92786	Moderately Ready
Identify disability/special condition of LSN	3.03	1.12903	Somewhat Ready
Include LSN in regular classes	3.37	1.06620	Somewhat Ready
Modify teaching strategies to assist LSN in classes	3.33	.95893	Somewhat Ready

Refer LSN to SPED specialists/academic coach to assist LSN on academic challenges/difficulties	3.27	1.08066	Somewhat Ready
Use 'differentiated instruction' to conduct lesson	3.38	.97884	Somewhat Ready
Average Mean	3.22	1.03177	Somewhat Ready

Legend: 4.50 – 5 Fully Ready; 3.50 – 4.49 Moderately Ready; 2.50 – 3.49 Somewhat Ready; 1.50 – 2.49 Slightly Ready; and 1 – 1.49 Not ready.

Table 8 illustrates the level of readiness the Senior High School Faculty members in handling LSN in their classes

Each respondent has figured out a few preparations that a teacher should do to handle learners with special needs. For one thing, a teacher should assume the possibility of having LSN in his class. The teacher's educational qualification would matter most, otherwise, he or she could educate himself through reading books, searching the net, attending seminars-workshop and trainings as well. Furthermore, he can collaborate with other sped teachers or academic coach so as for him to have holistic preparation.

Findings revealed that senior high school faculty members are somewhat ready in handling LSN in classes. The general sentiment of respondents is indicative of their reservation for such move. Although they have a very good understanding of inclusion, their experience and the likelihood of accepting them in class are another. Their readiness is associated to understanding the concept of inclusion which seemed to be more theoretical in nature; the realization of such is an exploration.

Muega & Echavia (2011) reported that teachers were willing to handle and work with professionals for the inclusion of CSN in general education classrooms, but their overall response indicates they are not prepared to take on the challenge of handling students with disorders or disabilities. Muega (2016) found considerable support from school teachers, administrators, and parents whose CSN are attending inclusive schools.

Mapsea (2006) recommended that tertiary schools and universities must possess specialist professors and instructors for instructing undergraduate students taking up courses related to special education. It also emphasized the lack of knowledge of school inspectors in the concepts and principles behind inclusive education. With this, there would be a crooked flow of policy implementation.

SOP No. 3. What is the perceived role of the Senior High School Faculty members in the inclusion of learners with special needs?

Table 9
Respondents' Perceived Roles in the Inclusion of Learners with Special Needs

PERCEIVED ROLES	FREQUENCY	RANK
Academic Coach	24	1 st
Administrator	5	10 th
Advocate Champion	9	9 th
Counselor	21	2 nd
Evaluator	13	6 th
Facilitator	18	4 th
Institutional Mediator	12	7 th
Motivator	19	3 rd
Specialist	11	8 th
Skills Developer	14	5 th

Table 9 presents respondents' perceived roles in the inclusion of LSN. As shown from the table, academic coach, counselor and motivator were ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. Being administrator was ranked last (10th).

The respondents in FGD enumerated the following perceived roles of faculty member in the inclusion of LSN: facilitator, skills developer, motivator, evaluator, friend, confidant, counselor, trainer, mediator, parent and an advocate of special education. To own these roles, respondents indicated commitment, passion, dedication and his involvement on helping and teaching LSN and manifest them by being proactive, flexible, understanding and patient.

Obviously, above cited roles a teacher in general education setting does to his/her students. However, these roles are intensified when it comes to dealing with special learners.

According to AASEP (2006), special education teacher in today's schools plays a very critical role in the proper education of exceptional students. The teacher is unique in that he/she can fit many different roles in the educational environment. However, each of these distinct roles involves a variety of responsibilities and functions. Understanding these responsibilities can only help the special educator become more familiar with the role and increase the chances for success.

Katsafanas (2006) stressed that special educators have the tasks of ensuring that students with disabilities are progressing towards the same state standards as their non-disabled peers, addressing their individualized education goals, and providing opportunities to access the general education curriculum with few precedents available to guide them in this work.

SOP No. 4. What framework can elucidate the result of the findings that will lead towards inclusive education program for the Senior High School?

From the findings of the study, a proposed inclusive education program for learners with special needs in the senior high school. The primary goal of the proposed Senior High School Inclusive Education for Learning and Development (SHIELD) is the inclusion of LSN in regular classes and the provision of academic assistance to help them complete the senior high school program and their integration toward community living.

SHIELD will prepare faculty members on their engagement with LSN as they are provided with academic assistance in completing the senior high school program. It is also proposed that a SHIELD office be established to attend to the needs of LSN while they are going through with the SHS program. The office will serve as the center where assistance is concentrated for LSN to partake, and will serve as a coordinating office that will promote the best interest of LSN in the academe and the community at large. Once established, SHIELD can be aligned to the Center of Occupational and Developmental Education of the College of Education for the LSN's entry to tertiary level, if they wish to pursue higher or technical education.

Discussion

The study is aimed to uncover the awareness, readiness and the perceived roles of senior high school faculty members on special education. This study utilized the descriptive and exploratory research using a researcher developed and validated research instruments findings of which became the basis for the development of an inclusive education program for special learners in the senior high school. The study also employed the Focused-Group Discussion (FGD) approach to elicit significant information from a group of people who have direct experience and with common interest on the topic at hand. Thirty senior high school teachers were selected through a snowball technique, considerations of which were their experiences in handling a special learner in one of their previous classes.

Researcher-made interview guideline and research instrument were developed for the purpose of the study. These were content and face validated by SPED practitioners and specialists. The study employed the following statistical tools for data analysis: frequency count, rank, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher found out that while the senior high school faculty members are moderately aware of special education and that they are somewhat ready on this challenge, they believe that attempt to include them in regular classes, will truly help educate LSN and that inclusion is deemed necessary for these learners to be able to proceed to tertiary and eventually acquire a career after. Teachers perceived that their roles to this kind of setting will be academic coach, counselor and motivator of LSN. To effectively achieve the goal of inclusion, teachers need thorough training to assuage their reservations and respond positively to specific education and other academic needs of LSN. Teachers handling LSN integrated with regular students must have knowledge and expertise on how to properly accommodate LSN in their classes. They may be exposed to such cases but exposure does not suffice effective teaching as it is a very challenging role and it demands passion and dedication.

V. Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusion that sprung from this study, the following recommendations are presented for consideration:

1. Senior high school teachers should further strengthen their understanding of special education and prepare themselves for incoming LSN in their respective classes.
2. Senior high school teachers should prepare themselves for inclusive education by attending special training on special education, particularly understanding the nature and characteristics of learners with special needs, laws, ethics and special education and inclusive education modalities. Since, the University has program for special education, they can enroll in this to further prepare them on accommodating LSN in their respective classes.
3. The faculty members should own the principle of inclusion to be effective academic coach, counselor and motivator of LSN. They need further exposure and engagement on the education of LSN.
4. It is recommended that the proposed program Senior High School Inclusive Education for Learning and Development (S.H.I.E.L.D.) accepted and infused in present senior high school program to cater to the education needs of the growing population of LSN in the academic community. That the S.H.I.E.L.D. office be composed of the Head, academic coaches, and a secretary to work hand in hand for the common benefit of LSN.
5. If and when SHIELD is considered, it is recommended that orientation be made to academic and non-academic personnel on the goal of S.H.I.E.L.D. and the principle behind such organization.ss

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