

Inclusive Education for Socio-economically Disadvantage students in Selected Higher Education Institution in Pampanga

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Abstract—This study investigates the experiences of students with disabilities (PWD) at Don Honorio Ventura State University, focusing on the perceived benefits and challenges of inclusive education. A diverse group of six students with varying disabilities participated in semi-structured interviews designed to gather in-depth insights. The findings revealed a complex landscape of experiences. While participants appreciated the university's commitment to inclusivity, they identified critical areas for improvement, such as the need for accessible facilities, including ramps, bathrooms, and well-ventilated classrooms. Social inclusion experiences varied significantly; some students felt accepted and supported, while others faced discrimination, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. These insights underscore the necessity of incorporating PWD perspectives into the development of inclusive practices. By addressing the identified challenges, educational institutions can create a more equitable and supportive environment that fosters belonging and promotes the rights of all students to thrive together in mainstream classrooms.

Keywords— Inclusive Education, Students with Disabilities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has enacted several laws and policies to uphold the rights and welfare of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA 7277), along with its amendment, RA 9442, enshrines vital rights such as access to education, employment, and public services (Department of Social Welfare and Development, 2017). Additionally, the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) is instrumental in implementing these policies and fostering awareness about disability rights, ensuring that the needs and voices of PWDs are recognized and addressed (NCDA, 2018).

These initiatives not only aim to promote inclusivity but also to dismantle barriers that hinder the full participation of PWDs in society. Through ongoing advocacy and collaboration with various stakeholders, the Philippines continues to work toward creating an equitable environment for all citizens.

Inclusive education aims to provide all students, regardless of their abilities, the opportunity to learn together in mainstream classrooms. This approach recognizes the value of diversity and the rights of students with disabilities to receive an education in the least restrictive environment. Understanding the perspectives of students with disabilities is crucial for improving inclusive practices and fostering a supportive educational atmosphere.

Inclusion in mainstream schools offers significant benefits but also presents challenges that need to be addressed. By

listening to and incorporating the perspectives of students with disabilities, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that recognizes the value of every learner. Continuous efforts toward training, resources, and community engagement are essential to making inclusive education a reality for all students.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This qualitative research aims:

1. To capture the experiences of students with disabilities in mainstream schools.
2. To identify perceived benefits and challenges associated with inclusive education.
3. To gather suggestions for improving inclusive practices from the students' perspectives.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the commitment to inclusive education in mainstream schools, there is a significant lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the experiences of students with disabilities. This study seeks to address the following key issues:

1. What are the Experiences of Students with Disabilities:
2. Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Inclusive Education:
3. Suggestions for Improvement

Specifically, this research will answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of participants?
2. What are the Experiences in Mainstream Schools ?
3. What are the Challenges and Barriers ?
4. What are the Suggestions for Improvement ?
5. What other Additional Thoughts the participants would like to share?

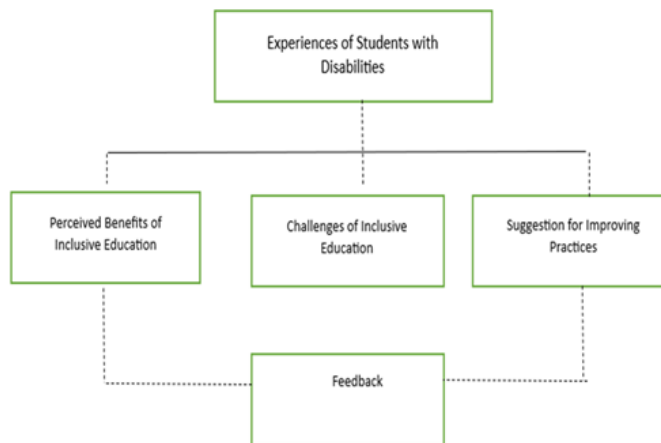
IV. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is limited to students currently enrolled at Don Honorio Ventura State University Bacolor Pampanga and Santo Tomas Campus Philippines.

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework provides a structured approach to examining the multifaceted experiences of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. By focusing on their experiences, the perceived benefits, challenges, and

suggestions for improvement, the study aims to generate insights that can inform better inclusive practices and policies.



VI. METHODOLOGY

This research paper will use a qualitative research design. Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of an individual's or group's feelings, perceptions, ideas, and behavior.

VII. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

A diverse group of students with various disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, physical disabilities, autism spectrum disorders) from multiple mainstream schools will be recruited. Purposive sampling will be used to identify the participants of the study. Purposive sampling, also known as selective, subjective, or judgment sampling, is a technique in which the researcher relies on their judgment when choosing who will participate in the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). According to Creswell & Clark (2011), purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to select participants based on criteria set by the researchers. This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. In this study, six (6) participants will be identified based on the data generated from the PWD Unit of the University

VIII. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The researchers will develop a semi-structured interview guide as the main instrument of the study. The guide will use open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the participants. The guide questions will be presented to six (6) PWD students.

IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Accessible and inclusive campus resources

The participants have highlighted their appreciation for the facilities of the University which accommodates their needs, such as convenient parking and DAP-friendly resources.

Supportive and Inclusive teaching practices. Majority of the participants have emphasized the support and consideration that they receive from their teachers. Specifically, they are given different tasks in consideration of their situation, they are given

seats that are convenient for them and, generally teachers are aware of their rights.

Infrastructure Limitations

Some participants express dissatisfaction with the classroom conditions of the University, particularly they addressed poor ventilation, which impacts their learning experience.

Conflicted feelings on Classroom inclusion

Most participants express feeling "normal" and accepted in mainstream classrooms, others experience social anxiety, discomfort, or a sense of exclusion.

Interactions and Social Comfort with Classmates

Participant shows a range of experiences, from participants feeling comfortable making friends and being supported, to others feeling like they stand out due to their disability and preferring to stay in their own space.

Educators' Gender Sensitivity

Participants highlight that gender-sensitive teachers are those who are compassionate, empathetic, and considerate of individual capabilities and limitations.

Perceived Challenges

The following themes are created to address the perceived challenges students with disabilities experience in mainstream education.

Physical Accessibility

Despite the efforts of the University to make the infrastructures accessible for everyone, it is stated that the lack of available wheelchair-accessible facilities and equipment creates frustration to some participants. It is also expressed that wider bathrooms and better classroom conditions, are lacking, highlighting a desire for more specific accommodations to effectively address their unique challenges and enhance learning experiences.

Psychological Impacts

Participants have expressed their envy among peers' physical abilities that leads to feelings of frustration and isolation. These feelings are also intensified with their experienced of being bullied and inability to address their physical challenges.

Discrimination and bullying

The participants have also shared their experiences with bullying, particularly comments on their physical appearance and being different leads to emotional distress and impacts their learning experience.

Personal Struggles on Academic Performance

Participants are also concerned whether they would continue in their education due to the limitations that they feel caused by their disabilities. Their physical conditions also hinders their classroom participation which creates impact to their academic progress.

Suggestions for improvements

In suggestion for improvements by the participants, three themes are created namely, physical accessibility improvements, education and awareness initiatives and, community support and interaction opportunities.

Physical accessibility improvements

Most participants call for increased ramps and PWD-friendly facilities to enhance mobility and accessibility. Emphasis of the need for more accommodating environment was stated repeatedly by most participants.

Education and awareness initiatives.

There is a strong desire for educational programs aimed to promote understanding, awareness and acceptance among all students to the different needs of PWDs. This program could foster the culture which is more empathetic and inclusive.

Community support and interaction opportunities.

Participants addressed the importance of creating programs or societies to encourage supportive interactions with students with disabilities. This aims to build connections and decreased feelings of isolation in a learning environment.

X. CONCLUSIONS

Students with disabilities expressed their appreciation with the efforts of the University in providing facilities to cater with their needs as well as the considerations provided by their teachers, and opportunities to build meaningful relationship with peers.

Challenges such as physical barriers, insufficient teacher training, and social exclusion from their peers, echoing earlier findings by Florendo et al. (2018). However, participants in this study also expressed a strong desire for inclusion and acceptance, emphasizing the need for enhanced infrastructure, social programs, and educator support to create a more accommodating environment for all learners.

Inclusive education, as emphasized by Ainscow (2005), is fundamental in providing diverse students the opportunity to learn together in the least restrictive environment.

The challenges experienced by the students with disabilities also impacts their psychological well-being, which call for an intervention program for their transition from secondary education to higher education to boost their intrinsic motivation (Otanés, et.al., 2023)

With the objective of improving the learning experience of students with disabilities in the mainstream educations, it is essential to address the reported concerns by improving physical accessibility, enhancing teacher training, and developing awareness programs aimed at promoting empathy and reducing stigma within the school community (Rouse & Florian, 2012).

Proactive efforts towards these areas are critical for achieving a more inclusive and supportive educational system for students with disabilities.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the experiences shared by students with disabilities, several key steps can be taken to make their time in university more positive, supportive, and empowering. These

recommendations aim to address their challenges and create a more inclusive environment where every student can thrive.

Improve Physical Accessibility:

While the university has made some progress, more work is needed to ensure that every part of the campus is truly accessible to all students. This means addressing physical barriers, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, so that students with disabilities can move around the campus without unnecessary difficulty. Regular reviews of the campus's accessibility, with direct input from students, would be a valuable way to ensure spaces meet everyone's needs.

Enhance Teacher Training:

Many students have mentioned that teachers need more training to effectively support students with disabilities. Offering ongoing workshops and training programs for faculty is essential, covering everything from understanding various disabilities to learning how to adapt lessons and use assistive technology. By giving teachers the tools and knowledge to address different learning needs, they can create classrooms that are more welcoming and supportive for everyone.

Encourage Social Inclusion and Peer Connections:

Social exclusion remains a significant issue for many students with disabilities. To address this, the university should create more opportunities for students to build relationships across different groups. Programs like peer mentorship, social clubs, and group activities can help students with disabilities form meaningful connections with their peers. Additionally, running awareness campaigns to educate the broader student body about disabilities and inclusion could go a long way in reducing stigma and fostering a more empathetic environment.

Support Transitions from High School to University:

The transition to university can be especially tough for students with disabilities. To ease this transition, the university should provide tailored support programs that focus on building self-confidence and motivation, and that help students manage the stress of adjusting to university life. Support might include peer mentorship, counseling, or workshops that teach skills like time management and self-advocacy. This kind of support can make a big difference in helping students feel more prepared and motivated to succeed.

Build a Strong Culture of Inclusion:

At the heart of these recommendations is the need to foster a university-wide culture of inclusion. This means creating an environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, feel valued and included. Everyone—from administrators to faculty, staff, and students—should embrace the idea that diversity enriches the learning experience. Universities should have clear policies that prioritize inclusion, and these policies should be reflected in everyday practices, ensuring that students with disabilities are supported in every part of their academic and social lives.

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