

Program Implementation of Special Education in Region XII: An Evaluation

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Abstract:

This study was conducted to have an in-depth evaluation of program implementation of special education (SPED) curriculum in Region XII, Philippines. It employed a descriptive research design with an aid of evaluation survey, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) as methods in gathering the data from the principals, teachers and SPED program experts. Mean was employed to describe the status of the implementation of SPED program. Document analysis, process observation and participatory rapid appraisal were also conducted to deeply investigate the facilitating factors, hindering factors and best practices of SPED-implementing schools. Clustering of ideas taken from the respondents was applied to analyze the data. Philosophy, goals and objectives; administration and supervision; parent education and community involvement; assessment process; linkages; organizational pattern; monitoring and evaluation; and school admission and organization of classes were all very well implemented. However, research and special studies were moderately implemented and school plant and facilities were poorly implemented. Overall, SPED program was well implemented and this was due to the facilitating factors such as call of duty; compliance with the DepEd orders and memorandums; support of local government units (LGUs); parents' support; and school personnel and staff. Teachers and school principals encountered some hindering factors in the implementation of SPED program such as denial; non-instructional responsibilities; budget problems; lack of school facilities, equipment and instructional resources; holding the problems of inclusive classroom and dealing with multiple disabilities; and unavailability of developmental assessment specialists. SPED centers were very proud of their best practices such as mainstreaming of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) in the inclusive classroom and community activities; implementation of child-friendly school (CFS) environment; inclusive school programs and activities; transition program for the over-age LSENs; and inter-area Paralympics.

Keywords: Program Implementation, Special Education, Evaluation

Introduction

Education for All (EFA) is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults specifically those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion (Hasan et al. 2018). It has been a global campaign designed by different nations through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and continues to be a worldwide movement led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The

commitment to EFA goals has been reiterated in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) developed by an international community.

The major component of EFA goals is inclusive education proclaiming that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs. UNICEF (2017) stressed that inclusive education means that all children, no matter who they are, can learn together in the same school. This entails to reach out all learners and to remove all barriers that could limit their participation and achievement in all school activities. Gersten et al. (2011) stressed that disability is one of the main causes of marginalization and exclusion. To respect the diverse needs, abilities, and characteristics of all children and youth, special education (SPED) program came into realization.

In support to the implementation of the Republic Act 7277 also known as “*Magna Carta for Disabled Persons*” and to provide equal educational opportunities to all children, youth and adults, public schools are mandated to institutionalize SPED program through DECS Order No. 26, s. 1997. The institutionalization aims to provide access to basic education among children with special needs, namely, the gifted or talented, the mentally retarded, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, the orthopedically handicapped, the learning disabled, the speech defectives, the autistic children and those with health problems.

SPED program is designed to ensure that learners with special educational needs (LSENs) are provided with an inclusive environment allowing them to be educated effectively without any prejudice (Rabara, 2017). In this 21st century, LSENs are expected to acquire adequate education, become God-fearing and proud Filipinos equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) to be valuable and productive citizens in their homes, places of employment and communities.

On the other hand, Abdullah (2019) stated that quantitative evaluation of a program implementation is not enough to deeply generate the new insights grounded from the concerned individuals. He added that mixed method of quantitative and qualitative assessment can deeply evaluate the status of the program implementation. Essential understanding as to the facilitating factors, hindering factors and best practices in the program implementation can be best described through qualitative method of inquiry. Abubakar (2019) stressed that facilitating factors are referred to as any causes which stimulate and encourage program implementers to provide an inclusive environment for the education of all children. He added that these facilitating factors can help the teachers and school administrators to effectively implement the program as mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd).

Although, there are many helping factors that urge the frontliners to successfully implement the program, there are encountered hindering factors that challenge them to find the best guidance and solutions to the existing problems. Luminda (2018) emphasized that there are factors that facilitate a functional outcome, but there are also factors that become barriers and are not adequately addressed. Pivik et al. (2012) noted that SPED curriculum has been implemented since 1997 with great success, but there are also areas that still encounter implementation difficulties.

Implementation of SPED program has caught the attention of many researchers. There were quantitative studies conducted to evaluate the program and it appeared that similar issues came out since only one side of the story had been unveiled. Other side of the story needs to be investigated deeply. In Region XII, SPED program has been implemented many years ago. However, there is no study conducted yet to evaluate its implementation.

Hence, this study was conducted.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the program implementation of special education (SPED) centers in Region XII for the School Year 2018 - 2019.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the status of the program implementation of special education (SPED) along with the following key result areas (KRAs):
 - 1.1 Philosophy, Goals, and Objectives;
 - 1.2 Assessment Process;
 - 1.3 School Admission and Organization of Classes;
 - 1.4 Curriculum Content, Instructional Strategies, and Materials;
 - 1.5 Organizational Patterns;
 - 1.6 School Plant and Facilities;
 - 1.7 Personnel Recruitment, Welfare and Development;
 - 1.8 Administration and Supervision;
 - 1.9 Research and Special Studies;
 - 1.10 Parent Education and Community Involvement;
 - 1.11 Monitoring and Evaluation; and
 - 1.12 Linkages
2. What are the facilitating factors that helped in the program implementation?
3. What are the hindering factors encountered by special education (SPED)?
4. What are the best practices of SPED centers in Region XII?

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design with an aid of evaluation survey, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) as methods in gathering the data. A self-survey evaluation report was conducted to the six (6) participating special education (SPED) centers. A team of SPED program experts assessed the schools based on the evaluation survey questionnaire and an in-depth assessment of SPED program was conducted to draw-out the facilitating factors, hindering factors and best practices of the program implementation.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at the six (6) recognized special education (SPED) centers in Region XII which is also known as SOCCSKSARGEN. The name of the region is an acronym which stands for the region's four (4) provinces and one of its cities: **S**outh **C**otabato, **C**otabato, **S**ultan **K**udarat, **S**arangani and **G**eneral Santos City. The region is more formally known by its older name Central Mindanao.

The six (6) recognized SPED centers in Region XII where the study was conducted are Kalawag Central School, Isulan, Sultan Kudarat; Tacurong Pilot Elementary School, Tacurong City; Koronadal Central Elementary School, Koronadal City; Polomolok Central Elementary School, Polomolok, South Cotabato; General Santos City SPED Integrated School, General Santos City; and Alabel Central Integrated SPED School.

Sources of Data

The respondents of this study were classified into three (3) types such as school heads and teachers of the six recognized special education (SPED) centers and program experts of Region XII. Self-evaluation tool was answered by the principals and teachers. Key informant interview (KII) was conducted to each principal of the six (6) recognized SPED schools in Region XII. Focus group discussion (FGD) was done to the teachers of the respondent-schools. Same survey questionnaire was distributed to the program experts to evaluate the program implementation of SPED curriculum.

Important documents were reviewed to solicit additional information needed in the discussion of results taken from the respondents. Process observation was also conducted to validate all the data taken through survey questionnaire, interviews, FGDs and document analysis.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument in this study was a validated researcher-made survey questionnaire (self-evaluation tool) based on the Policies and Guidelines (2008) and Manual of Operations for the Special Education (SPED) Program (2017) in the Philippines. It consisted of twelve (12) unified set of key result areas (KRAs) to evaluate the program implementation of SPED centers in Region XII. KRA 1 (philosophy, goals and objectives) was composed of 6 indicators; KRA 2 (assessment process) with 9 indicators; KRA 3 (school admission and organization of classes) with 12 indicators; KRA 4 (curriculum content, instructional strategies and materials) with 9 indicators; KRA 5 (organizational pattern) with 5 indicators; KRA 6 (school plant and facilities) with 2 indicators; KRA 7 (personnel recruitment, welfare and development) with 4 indicators; KRA 8 (administration and supervision) with 6 indicators; KRA 9 (research and special studies) with 2 indicators; KRA 10 (parent education and community involvement) with 4 indicators; KRA 11 (monitoring and evaluation) with 4 indicators; and KRA 12 (linkages) with 5 indicators; with a total of 68 indicators.

The secondary instruments used in this study were guide questions for the key informant interview (KII) for the principals and focus group discussion (FGD) for the teachers, process observation and perusal of documents (review of records) of the implemented programs and activities for the learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Guide questions for interview and FGD were constructed based on the research objectives and were employed to determine the facilitating factors that helped in the program implementation. They were also applied to investigate the hindering factors encountered by special education (SPED) as well as to examine the best practices of SPED centers in Region XII. Document analysis (review of records) was used to determine the approved project proposals and activities in the program implementation. Data gathered from the document analysis were used as supporting information to have a good clustering of the data taken from interviews and FGDs. Process observation was done to physically identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOTs) of the program implementation of SPED centers.

Each statement of the KRA was rated by the principals, teachers and program experts using the Five-Point Likert Scale such as 5-Very Well Implemented; 4-Well Implemented; 3-Moderately Implemented; 2-Fairly Implemented; and 1-Poorly Implemented.

Analysis of Data

The quantitative data gathered from the survey questionnaire were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted using mean to answer the first specific problem of the study. To determine the

extent of the program implementation of special education (SPED) centers, the following rating scale was utilized:

Scale	Qualitative Description	Quantitative Interpretation
4.21 – 5.00	Very Well Implemented. The required key result areas (KRAs) are observed all the time.	81 to 100% extent of effective implementation
3.41 – 4.20	Well Implemented. The required key result areas (KRAs) are observed most of the time.	61 to 80% extent of effective implementation
2.61 – 3.40	Moderately Implemented. The required key result areas (KRAs) are sometimes observed.	41 to 60% extent of effective implementation
1.81 – 2.60	Fairly Implemented. The required key result areas (KRAs) are rarely observed.	21 to 40% extent of effective implementation
1.00 – 1.80	Poorly Implemented. The required key result areas (KRAs) are not observed.	0 to 20% extent of effective implementation

Clustering of ideas was done and analyzed using some verbatim quotes from the respondents of the study. Descriptive analysis was used to discuss the data taken from the interviews, focus group discussion and process observation. Content analysis was employed to discuss data taken from the review of records of the approved projects and programs in the implementation of SPED program.

Results and Discussion

Status of the Program Implementation of Special Education in Region XII

In response to the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes the special needs of children with disabilities. Special education (SPED) is the DepEd program to educate learners in a way that it addresses their individual differences and needs. Table 1 presents the status of the implementation of special education (SPED) program in Region XII.

Table 1

Status of the Program Implementation of Special Education (SPED) in Region II

KEY RESULTS AREAS (KRAs)		SELF-EVALUATION			Evaluation of Experts	Recommendations of Experts
		Principals (n = 6)	Teachers (n = 54)	Weighted Mean (n = 60)		
1	Philosophy, Goals, and Objectives	4.56 Very Well Implemented	4.57 Very Well Implemented	4.57 Very Well Implemented	4.42 Very Well Implemented	Strength: Teachers really did their responsibilities to let LSENs develop their capabilities for brighter future. Weakness: Schools should focus on LSENs' skills development.
2	Administration and Supervision	4.33 Very Well Implemented	4.44 Very Well Implemented	4.43 Very Well Implemented	4.36 Very Well Implemented	Strength: Principals really created an atmosphere of acceptance of the SPED program. Weakness: Principals should provide adequately equipped rooms and necessary equipment and materials or an adequate place for the itinerant teachers.
3	Parent Education and Community Involvement	4.21 Very Well Implemented	4.38 Very Well Implemented	4.37 Very Well Implemented	3.92 Well Implemented	Strength: Parents were provided with information, and a process of sharing experiences continuously with other parents experiencing similar problems. Weakness: Parents should be involved in the major decision-making pertaining to the education of their children.
4	Assessment Process	4.11 Well Implemented	4.38 Very Well Implemented	4.35 Very Well Implemented	4.38 Very Well Implemented	Strength: Schools always informed the parents with the educational progress of LSENs. Weakness: Modern way of assessment should be used to assess the learning outcomes of LSENs.
5	Linkages	3.88 Well Implemented	4.34 Very Well Implemented	4.29 Very Well Implemented	3.71 Well Implemented	Strength: Linkages with government and non-government organizations were established, maintained, and expanded. Weakness: School principals should be competent enough in dealing with different types of people so that they can gain the full support of the stakeholders.
6	Organizational Pattern	4.30 Very Well Implemented	4.26 Very Well Implemented	4.27 Very Well Implemented	4.14 Well Implemented	Strength: SPED-related programs and activities were organized in a variety of settings and a continuum of alternative placements is provided Weakness: SPED teachers should be given enough opportunities to attend seminar-workshops on content and pedagogy.
7	Monitoring and	4.04	4.28	4.26	4.17	Strength: Schools recognized

	Evaluation	Well Implemented	Very Well Implemented	Very Well Implemented	Well Implemented	learners, teachers, parents and stakeholders' exemplary performance. Weakness: DepEd-Division office should conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of the SPED program and activities and technical assistance should be given to the teachers.
8	School Admission and Organization of Classes	3.96 Well Implemented	4.29 Very Well Implemented	4.26 Very Well Implemented	4.02 Well Implemented	Strength: Schools organized special classes and services for LSENs. Weakness: LSENs should be integrated in the sections whose teachers have the wide range of patience.
9	Curriculum Content, Instructional Strategies, and Materials	3.98 Well Implemented	4.13 Well Implemented	4.12 Well Implemented	4.12 Well Implemented	Strength: Teachers really exerted efforts to individualize and modify the SPED curriculum. Weakness: Teachers should be adaptive with the competitive world of digital age.
10	Personnel Recruitment, Welfare and Development	3.88 Well Implemented	4.06 Well Implemented	4.04 Well Implemented	4.09 Well Implemented	Strength: SPED teachers had all the best qualifications to handle LSENs. Weakness: Principals should be generous enough in incentives to the SPED teachers.
11	Research and Special Studies	2.47 Fairly Implemented	2.80 Moderately Implemented	2.77 Moderately Implemented	2.40 Fairly Implemented	Strength: Teachers were eager to conduct action researches. Weakness: Part of special education fund (SEF) should be religiously allocated to the educational researches of teachers.
12	School Plant and Facilities	2.48 Fairly Implemented	2.39 Fairly Implemented	2.40 Fairly Implemented	2.38 Fairly Implemented	Strength: There was a provision of specialized classroom for LSENs Weakness: School plant and facilities should be considered as the top concern of the school heads.
OVERALL MEAN		4.01 Well Implemented	4.21 Very Well Implemented	4.19 Well Implemented	4.04 Well Implemented	Strength: Philosophy, goals and objects of SPED program were very well implemented. Weakness: School plant and facilities should be improved.

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 – Very Well Implemented; 3.41 – 4.20 – Well Implemented;
 2.61 – 3.40 – Moderately Implemented; 1.81 – 2.60 – Fairly Implemented;
 1.00 – 1.80 – Poorly Implemented

As shown, program implementation of special education (SPED) was effective as manifested by the overall mean of 4.18 described as “Well Implemented”. This high extent of program implementation was supported by 8 out of 12 indicators that received a verbal rating of “Very Well Implemented”, 2 out of 12 indicators that generated a description of “Well Implemented”, 1 out of 12 indicators that garnered an interpretation of “Moderately

Implemented” and 1 out of 12 indicators that was “Fairly Implemented”. This indicates that public elementary schools enabled learners with special educational needs (LSENs) to successfully develop to their fullest potentials by effectively providing them a free appropriate inclusive education in response to the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Experts also evaluated the program implementation of SPED curriculum as “Well Implemented” and this was indicated by the mean of 4.04.

Although, SPED program in Region XII didn’t receive an outstanding assessment and it just only acquired a high extent of implementation, this study found out that LSENs were provided with accessible and quality education in the least restrictive environment which is most appropriate for them. A variety of special education services were made available for the LSENs beginning with full participation or mainstreaming them in the general education classroom until they leave the portals of schools equipped with necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (KSAVs).

In particular, mainstreaming the LSENs in the regular classrooms for at least part of the day was very well evident. Full integration and participation in community activities of LSENs were very well observed to ensure equal opportunity and access to, and excellence in education, employment and community living. All LSENs were given opportunities to learn and reach their full potential by providing them effective and appropriate learning resources. They were provided with effective learning activities to develop their maximum potentials to become self-reliant and shall be geared towards providing them with the opportunities for full and happy life. All of these were affirmed by the highest mean of 4.57 (almost perfect) described as “Very Well Implemented”. In short, philosophy, goals and objects of SPED program were very well implemented. This was confirmed by the experts when they evaluated the said key result area (KRA) as “Very Well Implemented” ($\bar{x} = 4.42$).

On the other hand, school buildings, classrooms, chairs, tables, modern ICT equipment, sports equipment, contextualized learning resources and other instructional facilities were not sufficient for the large number of enrollees as well as the increasing number of LSENs. This was manifested by the lowest mean of 2.40 described as “Fairly Implemented” only. During the process observation, it was found out that the status of school libraries was dismal since only limited books and instructional materials were evident. There was no internet connection. Ventilation and light of the libraries were not conducive for learning. Some schools had limited space for the learners to play and to perform physical activities. Only very few schools having specially designed classrooms for the LSENs. There were also schools having classrooms not so conducive for the needs of the learners with special attention. In simple words, school plant and facilities were fairly implemented. This inadequate school facilities and equipment of SPED implementers was affirmed by the experts as shown by their lowest mean of 2.38 described as “Fairly Implemented”.

Further, research and special studies concerning the implementation of SPED program were taken granted since the teachers were not capacitated with the basics of action researches. This was confirmed by the second lowest mean of 2.73 described as “Moderately Implemented” only. This further means that only very few teachers conducting researches and special studies pertaining to SPED program. It was found out during the focus group discussions that there was a poor institutionalization of culture of research in the public elementary schools. Aside from the personal budget used by the teachers to finance their action researches, there were no seminar-workshops conducted to capacitate the teachers about the research methodologies, analysis and

interpretation of data. They appealed to the school principals that special education fund (SEF) intended for the institutionalization of culture of research to improve learners' performance should be utilized in maximum level. Precisely, research and special studies for SPED program were moderately implemented. Experts also confirmed that there is a need to improve the culture of research among SPED schools and this was indicated by the second lowest mean of 2.40 interpreted as "Fairly Implemented" only.

Comparing the evaluation results of the three types of evaluators, teachers gave the highest mean of 4.21 described as "Very Well Implemented". As fronliners in the program implementation of special education, teachers were very satisfied with the services and activities they initiated to address the needs of children with disabilities. Their assessment to the implementation of SPED program was to the highest extent (outstanding). They believed that they did everything to make the implementation of SPED program very successful and in accordance with its philosophy, goals and objectives set by the Department of Education (DepEd). During the focus group discussions, teachers revealed that being chosen as SPED teachers was a great satisfaction for them. They stated that it is very challenging but fulfilling to deal with LSENs.

Although, school heads assessed the implementation of SPED program as very satisfactory, they believed that there were still many things to improve. This was affirmed by the lowest mean of 4.01 described as "Well Implemented" only compared with the teachers' rating of "Very Well Implemented". Program experts (validators) supported the school heads since the former gave the second lowest mean of 4.04 described as "Well Implemented" only. This further signifies that both school heads and experts admitted that there were many loopholes in the implementation of SPED program. However, the school heads were doing everything to assist the SPED teachers to effectively address the special needs of children with disabilities. With regards to this, SPED teachers should consider that there are other people who better see the weaknesses of the program implementation. What are best for them are not yet best for the other people particularly those program experts. This is a wake up for the SPED teachers to sustain the best practices they designed for the LSENs and look into better plans and decision-making process to achieve outstanding performance of SPED curriculum in Region XII.

Remarkably, experts really noticed that public elementary schools had limited number of buildings, classrooms and chairs for the learners. This was confirmed by the lowest mean of 2.38 on the indicator "School Plant and Facilities". This assessment of the experts was affirmed by both the school heads and teachers who gave an assessment of "Fairly Implemented" also. School heads and teachers revealed during the focus group discussion that insufficient school plant and facilities were beyond their control since it is the national government that can provide this shortage to the schools. However, they were doing everything to overcome these challenges by constructing makeshift buildings.

This finding is related to the study of Gersten, et al. (2011) when they stated that special education is an integral part of the total educational enterprise, not a separate order. They added that in school system, special education is a means of enlarging the capacity of the system to serve the educational needs of all children. Their study found out that the program implementation of special education (SPED) was to the highest extent. Although, there were lapses and challenges in the implementation, it was still revealed that special education achieved its philosophy, goals and objectives.

Consistent with this study, Dee and Jacob (2016) recommended that schools should provide administrative support and technical assistance to the teachers who handle for children

with exceptionalities. He added that goals and objectives of special education can be achieved if there is a collaborate effort of the teachers, school administrators, parents and other stakeholders. He further stressed that teacher should and school heads should create an effective line of communication between to the parents and other stakeholders to deliver quality and accessible education to the children with special needs.

Similarly, Torreña (2019) found out that there was inadequacy of school plant and facilities in the public schools in Sultan Kudarat. She suggested that DepEd – Sultan Kudarat Division should do something to fast track the provision of instructional facilities and resources so that learning opportunities of students will not be sacrificed. She further noted that teachers just only depend on the internet services for the instructional materials they need. However, she found out that very poor internet connection in the public schools was manifested. She also recommended strong internet connection should be given prior attention of the school administrators to help the teachers resolve their big problems of providing learning resources.

Miller's (2017) idea is affirmed by the above finding when they stated that special education allows the learners to enjoy the inclusive education specially designed for them and gain confidence due to the variety of learning opportunities. For the personal growth and development of the special children, it is important for all of them to receive proper, relevant and quality education. The disability cases which are the main concerns of SPED program could include emotional, mental, physical or development impairment.

This study suggests that teachers should always consult their school principals for whatever plans and decisions they would like to implement for the success of the SPED program. School heads should give their full assistance to the teachers who sacrificed a lot in the successful implementation of SPED program despite of inadequacy of physical facilities, contextualized learning resources and inadequate financial resources. SPED program in-charge from the Division and Regional Offices should always monitor the implementation of the program and provide needed assistance to sustain the outstanding implementation of SPED program in Region XII.

Experts noted that teachers really did their responsibilities to let LSENs develop their capabilities for brighter future. They really appreciated the efforts of teachers who considered LSENs as their own children by understanding their tantrums. However, they strongly recommended that schools should focus on the provision of school facilities and equipment needed in the effective delivery of SPED and inclusive curricula.

Facilitating Factors that Helped in the Program Implementation

Facilitating factors are operationally defined as any reasons and motivations which stimulate, provide or promote a friendly environment for the education of children with disabilities. Series of interviews, focus group discussions, process or participant observation and document analysis were the tools used to gather qualitative data pertaining to the facilitating factors that helped the implementation of special education (SPED) program. Findings were clustered and analyzed using some verbatim quotes from the participants. Table 2 presents the facilitating factors that helped in the implementation of special education (SPED) program.

Table 2

Facilitating Factors that Helped in the Program Implementation

Facilitating Factors that Helped in the Program Implementation	
1	Call of Duty
2	Compliance with DepEd Orders and Memorandums
3	Support of Local Government Units (LGUs)
4	Parents' Support
5	School Personnel and Staff

Based from the key informant interviews (KII) for the principals and focus group discussions (FGDs) for the teachers, (1) call of duty; (2) compliance with DepEd Orders and Memorandums; (3) support of local government units (LGUs); (4) parents' support; and (5) school personnel were the facilitating factors that helped in the program implementation.

In relation to the above findings, Abdullah (2018) stressed that call of duty, together with commitment to serve the youth, convinced the teachers to be transferred in the senior high school curriculum. He added that senior high school teachers waited for almost 6 months before they received their salary since they had been appointed as senior high school teachers. Many of them were frustrated due to the delayed salary. However, they were still very happy since they became part of the history, the first batch teachers of senior high school curriculum.

This study affirms the study of Patterson, et al. (2012) who revealed that having a clear direction, relevant, properly formulated and disseminated policies and guidelines as stipulated in the DepEd orders and memorandum can serve a guide and vehicle for effective implementation of programs and activities of the special education (SPED) curriculum.

Further, Legaste (2018) stated that basic public education is still largely the responsibility of the central government, delivered through the Department of Education (DepEd), notwithstanding the devolution of many basic services to LGUs. However, LGUs provide supplementary funding support to basic public education. They have the access to a sustainable source of financial resources that are embarked for the basic education, the Special Education Fund (SEF).

Mcevoy (2013) is supported by this study when she stressed that parental involvement and community support are considered to be facilitating factors in the implementation of SPED program. She noted that parents are the primary caregivers of the learners; they are the ones who can provide the most critical inputs as to the strengths and weaknesses of their children.

In relation to this, Clayton and Mosses (2017) recognized school administrators as curricularists. They supervise curriculum implementation and procure equipment and materials needed for effective learning. They also plan for the improvement of school facilities and physical plants. They inform teachers about the new or revised curriculum so that they understand and accept the innovation. Their role cannot be ignored.

Hindering Factors Encountered in the Implementation of SPED Program

Gathered qualitative data signify how difficult being SPED teachers and how they were able to overcome the hindering factors just to effectively implement the SPED program. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3

Hindering Factors Encountered in the Implementation of SPED Program

Hindering Factors Encountered in the Implementation of SPED Program	
1	Denial
2	Non-instructional Responsibilities
3	Budget Problems
4	Lack of School Facilities, Equipment and Instructional Resources
5	Holding the Problems of Inclusive Classroom and Dealing with Multiple Disabilities
6	Unavailability of Developmental Assessment Specialists

As shown, (1) denial; (2) non-instructional responsibilities; (3) budget problems; (4) lack of school facilities, equipment and instructional resources ; (5) holding the problems of inclusive classroom and dealing with multiple disabilities.

Bays and Crocket (2017) is supported by the above finding when they stated that anger and denial are the common reactions of parents after learning that children have learning disabilities. They added that anger is a close cousin of denial since it is based on fear. Parents’ anger and denial may come out in the form of criticism, a belief that the school system cannot serve the child adequately.

This study supports the finding of Torreña (2019) when she found out that teachers’ effectiveness and efficiency are affected by the numerous non-teaching tasks such as being coordinator of different academic clubs and organizations and being designated as supply officer and property custodian. She stressed that teachers can really concentrate on the effective delivery of lessons if not bombarded by non-instructional responsibilities. In return, effective implementation of the program will be evident.

Relative to the above finding, Palma (2018) emphasized that budget problem is one of the hindering factors that affect the implementation of the DepEd program. She stressed that school administrators managing schools with inadequate funds necessary to carry out their academic activities are expected to source out for funds, look for donors, expand the school income from school canteens, income generating projects, fundraising activities and other programs, projects and activities rather than merely depending on the school fees and government grants.

Mendel and Health (2015) are supported by the above data when they stated that a large body of research over the past century has consistently found out that school facilities impact teaching and learning in profound ways. Yet, national and local policymakers often overlook the impact facilities can play in improving outcomes for both teachers and learners. While improving facilities comes at a financial cost, the benefits of such investments often surpass the initial fiscal

costs. Policymakers, thus, should focus greater attention on the impacts of facilities and adopt a long-term cost-benefit perspective on efforts to improve school facilities.

In relation to this study, Sun (2015) emphasized that behaviors of learners with special educational needs (LSEs) inside the class include (1) hurting others such as hair pulling, hitting, and head-butting; (2) self-injury such as head banging, eye poking and hand biting; (3) destructive behaviors such as throwing objects, breaking furniture and equipment and tearing papers; (4) eating inedible objects such as pencil and ball pen caps and bedding; and (5) other undesirable behaviors such as spitting, smearing, shouting, repetitive rocking and stripping and running away.

In relation to this study, Terzi (2015) stated that developmental assessment is very important in order to identify the specific disability of a learner. He added that development assessment is an attempt to assess various aspects of the child’s functioning, including areas such as cognition, communication, behavior, social interaction, motor and sensory abilities, and adaptive abilities. He further stressed that the result of the developmental assessment serves as a basis for special education services and program modifications to be given to the learners to help them reach their maximum potential.

Best Practices of Special Education (SPED) Centers in Region XII

Schools committed to provide learners with special educational needs (LSEs) with an appropriate education definitely have best practices which they can be very proud of. Series of interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to determine the best practices in the implementation of special education (SPED) program in Region XII. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Best Practices of Special Education (SPED) Centers in Region XII

Best Practices of Special Education (SPED) Centers in Region XII	
1	Mainstreaming of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) in the Inclusive Classroom and Community Activities
2	Implementation of Child-Friendly School (CFS) Environment
3	Inclusive School Programs and Activities
4	Transition Program for Over-Age Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs)
5	Inter-Area Paralympics

Series of interviews and focus group discussions together with process observation, document analysis and participatory rapid appraisal revealed that (1) mainstreaming of learners with special educational needs (LSEs) in the inclusive classroom and community activities; (2) implementation of child-friendly school (CFS) environment; (3) inclusive school programs and activities; (4) transition program for over-age LSEs; and (5) inter-area Paralympics were the best practices of SPED centers in Region XII.

In relation to this study, Luminda (2018) stated that inclusive classroom is a term used to describe a classroom in which all learners, irrespective of their abilities or skills, are welcomed holistically. He added that LSENs being in the non-segregated classroom will better prepare them for later life. He also suggested that LSENs should be exposed into community activities so that they will feel that they are normal individuals who have the right to enjoy the benefits of those who don't have disabilities.

This study is related to the work of Abubakar (2019) and stressed that schools implementing the rights-based and child-friendly school should be reaching out all school aged children and makes sure those out-of-school youth should be encouraged to be back to school either in regular program or Alternative Learning System (ALS).

In addition, this study is in support to the notion of Abdullah (2019) when he stressed that inclusive school activities are events that make diverse students such as persons with disabilities (PWDs), indigenous people (IPs), gifted and fast learners feel valued, welcomed, integrated and included in the school environment instead of isolation.

Further, Sun (2015) mentioned that transition program is the heart of the special education (SPED) program for persons with disabilities (PWDs). He said that transition program for PWDs is the last hope to fulfill the objective of helping, guiding and empowering them to acquire vocational skills. It is a program that will give them fruitful life and help them appreciate who they are and it will provide them necessary skills to become holistically productive citizens.

In relation to this study, Bays and Crocket (2017) added that participation in physical activities of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) has a big role in their personal development. They stressed that PWDs' participation to sports activities improves their physiological and mental functional and gives rise to feelings of physical, psychological and social competence. They emphasized that physical activity minimizes signs of LSENs' hesitation and sadness, enhances their disposition, and promotes general feelings of self-worth.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were hereby drawn.

1. Special education (SPED) program in Region XII was well implemented. Philosophy, goals and objectives; administration and supervision; parent education and community involvement; assessment process; linkages; organizational patterns; monitoring and evaluation; and school admission and organization of classes were all very well implemented. However, research and special studies were moderately implemented. Further, school plant and facilities were fairly implemented.
2. Effective implementation of SPED program was due to the facilitating factors such as call of duty; compliance with the DepEd orders and memorandums; and support of local government units (LGUs).
3. Teachers and school principals encountered some hindering factors in the implementation of SPED program such as denial; non-instructional responsibilities; and budget problems.
4. SPED implementing schools were very proud of their best practices such as mainstreaming of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) in the inclusive classroom and community activities; implementation of child-friendly school (CFS) environment; and inclusive school programs and activities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, conclusions and the educational implications arising throughout the study, the following recommendations were formulated:

1. Effective implementation of special education (SPED) program in Region XII should be sustained. Moderately implemented area such as research and special studies should be improved. School plant, facilities and contextualized instructional resources specially designed for the LSENs should be provided and be given immediate attention.
2. School principals should allocate enough funds to institutionalize the culture of research and special studies pertaining to the implementation of SPED program. They should utilize the budget from special education fund (SEF) at maximum level pertaining to this educational endeavor.
3. The DepEd – Regional Office should do something to tap the national government or concerned agencies in the provision of school plant, facilities and equipment appropriate with the interests of learners with special educational needs (LSENs).
4. Developmental assessment specialists such as physical therapist (PT), occupational therapist (OT), speech-language therapist (ST), and developmental pediatrician (DP) per SPED implementing school should be provided to accurately identify the specific disability of a learner.
5. Non-instructional responsibilities of SPED and inclusive education teachers should be minimized if not eliminated to provide the maximum level of contact time with the LSENs.
6. Seminar-workshops on research methods and principles should be conducted to capacitate the teachers to conduct action researches pertaining to the SPED program implementation.
7. This descriptive research should be replicated to have in-depth evaluation of program implementation of DepEd programs particularly with regards to SPED curriculum.
8. Program implementation of special education (SPED) should be used as future reference in conducting similar study.

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