

Reforming Students' Perceptions on Inclusive Education (IE) Through DepEd Order 72 s. 2009

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Abstract

This study is an action research on changing the perceptions of students towards Inclusive Education (IE) through the DepEd Order (DO) 72 s 2009 for there is a misconception about Inclusive Education. A qualitative research design and a descriptive phenomenological research approach were used in the study. It was conducted at the Senior High School (SHS) of Davao City National High School (DCNHS). The fifteen (15) participants are officially enrolled Grade 11 students that were selected based on pre-selected criteria through purposive selective sampling. To obtain the data, there were in-depth interviews with the participants where questions were asked and their answers were recorded and transcribed. Qualitative thematic analysis was used as a technique for interpreting the data and synthesizing it into themes to facilitate understanding of the perceptions of the participants. The results of the study showed that the students perceived Inclusive Education as the merging of strands and tracks, the mixture of multiple intelligences, the end of discrimination, and a learning environment for children with or without disabilities. To address the problem of misconception about the IE system of the school, the study recommended the DepEd Order 72 s 2009: Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children as a basis for implementing the IE program. Proper orientation and dissemination of information among stakeholders should be done which includes the visions and goals, importance, benefits of the program, policies, strategies, as well as the education system reconstruction from an exclusive to an inclusive system.

Keywords: Inclusive Education (IE), Davao City National High School

1. Context and Rationale

In the context of the DepEd Order No. 72 series of 2009, Inclusive Education is the strategy organized by the Department of Education to increase the participation rate of children in the Philippines. It is urgent to address the problem of Special Education in the Philippines which has fulfilled only 2% of the targeted 2.2 million children with disabilities in the country who live without access to their right to education as a basic human right. The Department of Education guarantees that children with special needs will receive appropriate education within regular or inclusive classroom settings.

The philosophy of Inclusive Education believes that it creates a community that values diversity and includes all children regardless of who they are, what they are, and if they have an ability or disability (Hyde, Carpenter, & Conway, 2010). However, the definition of Inclusive Education is still based on an inadequate view (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014). According to Tichá et.al. (2018), the definition of Inclusive Education has changed over time because of the lack of awareness and proper orientation of what Inclusive Education is. Research conducted by Muega (2019) on 91 participants who have firsthand knowledge of and experience with inclusive schools located in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines revealed that they are not

sure whether their understanding of Inclusive Education coincides with widely accepted definitions. The study also showed that there is no significant difference among the participants' mean scores in the survey of their knowledge of Inclusive Education and involvement in Inclusive Education through one-way ANOVA. Also, in the local context, the general situation is the assessment of how they understand inclusive in Senior High School (SHS) of Davao City National High School (DCNHS) as they knew it as the merging of all strands and tracks.

The problem of misconception about Inclusive Education in the SHS needs to be addressed immediately because students tend to get discouraged from Inclusive Education without them knowing what Inclusive Education really is. Also, the teachers were not able to assess properly the implemented practice because of the lack of orientation and training. It needs an immediate solution to have awareness of the implementation of the Inclusive Education evaluation in DCNHS. Through that, the students and teachers will accept the value of Inclusive Education and will be able to implement it properly and successfully achieve its goal and purposes.

This study aims to understand the perception of the students in SHS toward Inclusive Education. By understanding their perception, the study will be able to distinguish the knowledge of the Senior High School students about inclusion. This study intends to raise awareness and make clarification that Inclusive Education is not the merging of strands and tracks but an education for all students especially those with special needs. The study also intends to help the institution to practice Inclusive Education according to its real definition starting from the appropriate training for the teachers and staff and orientation to the school.

The study is important because it will give knowledge and clarification on what Inclusive Education is. The study is also important as teachers should be aware of how effective their teaching and learning strategies are in Inclusive Education. They will understand the students' perspectives so that they will know where and how to assess their students. Also, this study is important because there is a need for proper orientation about IE not only to the students but to all stakeholders such as the school administrators, staff, teachers, and especially the parents.

Furthermore, the study can potentially contribute to the awareness of IE wherein students were misguided and misinformed by the clear concept of IE. This study can help correct the mindset of the students and teachers toward Inclusive Education. The study can also provide insights to the school administration and staff about the perceptions and knowledge of the students towards inclusive education. It can also provide insights on the proper implementation of the IE in the school base on the DepEd Order 72 s 2009. Through the potential contributions of the study, the school will be able to assess the implementation of IE and will evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented system.

2. Research Questions

1. What is their perception of Inclusive Education?
2. What comes to their mind regarding Inclusive Education?
3. How do they define Inclusive Education?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were the Grade 11 Senior School Students officially enrolled in Davao City National High School (DCNHS) SY 2019-2020. They were purposely selected based on their knowledge and ideas about the implementation of IE in the school. Tagadiad (2012) stressed further what Silverman (2000) mentioned in his work that methods used by qualitative researchers exemplify that they can grant a deeper understanding of social phenomena which little is yet known. Further, the qualitative method as mentioned by Creswell (2008) is exploring the perceptions of individuals that could be a way to obtain the significant

contributions to a knowledge-based practice of education.

3.2 *Gathering Methods*

Purpose selective sampling and in-depth interview (IDI) were used in this study, where participants were selected or sought after based on pre-selected criteria based on the research question. The data collected led to identifying common themes in people's perceptions of their experiences (Creswell, 1998). Data collection involved spending considerable time in the setting under study, immersing oneself in this setting, and collecting as much relevant information as possible. We must determine and find what data will contribute to our understanding and resolution of a given problem and collect the suitable and available data for that problem. The collection of data pattern of steps: obtaining permission to conduct the study selecting informants and cites purposefully to best understand the phenomenon, identifying data from various sources, administering and recoding data using protocols, such as observational and interview protocols, and administering the data collection in a manner sensitive to individuals and sites (Creswell, 2008; Gay, Mills and Airasian, 2006).

3.3 *Data Analysis Plan*

The technique of data analysis used in this research is thematic analysis. In this study, qualitative thematic data analysis was used to interpret the data and synthesized it to themes to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This includes working and organizing the data, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them to search for patterns, discovering what is important and what to be learned, and deciding how did this information relate to the study. It is a method of "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is described as a descriptive method that reduces the data in a flexible way that dovetails with other data analysis methods (Vaismoradi et. al, 2013).

3.4 *Proposed Innovations, Interventions, and Strategy*

Inclusive Education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity in the needs of all learners, through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities. Innovative and intervention programs should be implemented through proper orientation and dissemination of information among stakeholders about the IE program in DCNHS, which includes the visions & goals, policies, and strategies, as well as the education system reconstruction from an exclusive to an inclusive system. There should be a proper discussion on the importance of IE implementation in the school with the collaboration of the DepEd Offices. Such components to be discussed for a successful and effective IE Program in school are Child Find, Assessment, Program Options, Curriculum Modifications, and Parents' Involvement. The strategy must also be discussed properly as stated in the DO 72 s 2009 such as providing the needed training on IE to administrators, teachers, and other school staff; with regular monitoring of the implementation of the program and providing the corresponding technical assistance needed and evaluate to determine the effectiveness of the program and improve its implementation. Assessment must be included in the IE Program; it is the continuous process of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the child by the use of formal and informal tools for proper program grade placement. Parent involvement plays a vital role in preparing the children for academic, moral, and spiritual development. Parents shall involve themselves in observing children's performance, volunteering to work in the classroom as a teacher aides, and providing support to other parents. Regular schools with or without trained SPED teachers shall provide educational services to children with special needs. These schools shall access educational services from SPED Centers or SPED trained teachers.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO (2009), inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. This means that all children have

the right to a quality education that caters, to the extent possible, to their individual needs. It also means that all learners attend regular classes and are welcomed by schools in age-appropriate, and supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school (UNESCO, 2010). It was clear that the IE system must develop and design quality schools, classrooms, programs, and activities so that all learners regardless of status in life learn and participate together. The International Conference on Education in Geneva (2008) stated that “a broadened concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all, and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities”. Thus, regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and creating a welcoming, as it provides an effective education to the majority of the children's education system. This means that education systems must be willing and able to welcome students, regardless of their disability, and provide them with the supports they need, with the default always a regular class with nondisabled peers” (UNESCO, 1994).

The reconstruction of the new educational system focuses on the transformation of education systems in schools that will cater to the diversity of students' learning needs. Inclusive education is a continuous process of educational transformation, and a clear set of equity indicators, such as from UNESCO (2017) can support inclusive education implementation. IE begins with the assumption that all children have a right to be in the same educational space (Cobley, 2018). The importance of IE is defined in its positive outcomes for all children both with and without disabilities or other disadvantages. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education – EASNIE (2018), has provided ample evidence that inclusive education increases social and academic opportunities for both children with and without disabilities, as well as significantly increases the likelihood that children with disabilities enroll in higher education and have better employment and life. Successful implementation of IE occurs at the school and classroom levels (Carrington, et al., 2017; Schuelka, 2018). A clear concept of IE implementation must include the understanding of the existing structural, educational, and cultural challenges, a well-designed implementation strategy that includes a clear plan, evaluation, and school review process, providing inclusive education training, sustained support, and resources for all teachers and school leaders, and national leadership on inclusive education policy, education management information systems, and curricular-reform.

4. Results and Discussion

The section discusses the results of the conducted in-depth interviews of the respondents. The perceptions of the Grade 11 SHS students towards Inclusive Education were stated in this section. Themes were identified and synthesized accordingly to discover the perception of the students on their understanding of IE.

4.1. Merging of Strands and Tracks

Based on the data, twelve (12) out of fifteen (15) students have closer answers. Participants also mentioned that the merging of the strands and tracks, the equality, communication, and interactions among the students will be shown in one section or classroom.

Student 1: *“For me, inclusive education is where all the strands were mixed.”*

Student 2: *“By mixing the strand of a student and to have equality in every strand and also to our school.”*

Student 3: *For me, inclusive education is the way to communicate and interact with student that have different strand.*

Student 4: *“For me, it is an integrated means of education wherein students of different strands merge to comprehend diverse topic.”*

Student 6: *“Uhm, ang pagsagol sa mga strands or specializations sa isa ka classroom mao na. “(Uhm, the mixed of all strands or specializations in one classroom).*

Student 7: *"Inclusive education for me is a way that the school taught to make learning more engaging for students and different strands and to have diversity in the class in which they were successful in..."*

Student 8: *"Inclusive education for me is the.... fair treatment among students where in one classroom there are different knowledge, skills, and wisdom in merge and will be developed. Inclusive education means that we can learn in the same school with those students with disabilities."*

Student 10: *"For me, inclusive education is the way to... socialize with other strand or track."*

Student 12: *"Inclusive education for us is including all strands in a single section."*

Student 13: *"Inclusive education is where students under the academic track and non-academic tracks are merged together."*

Student 14: *"Inclusive education is a class compose of students with different SHS tracks and strands. It will give us the opportunity to help each other in a particular subject."*

Student 15: *"Inclusive education consists of different students regardless of any academic strands and tracks in one classroom setting."*

4.2. Mixture of Multiple Intelligences

Out of fifteen (15) participants, one (1) respondent defined inclusive education as a mixture of multiple intelligences.

Student 11: *"Inclusive education, according to what we discussed, is a mixture of multiple intelligences."*

4.3. End of Discrimination

Out of fifteen (15) participants, one (1) respondents defined inclusive education as the end of discrimination and fair treatment among students who were in one classroom.

Student 8: *"Inclusive education for me is the end of discrimination*

4.4. Children with or without Disabilities

Out of fifteen (15) participants, two (2) respondents defined inclusive education as a learning environment for children with or without disabilities. The Student 5 added that IE is a learning environment taught together as equals regardless with or without disabilities, and emphasizing the IE is not limited and open to all students. The Student 8 added that through IE, there is a fair treatment among students who learning in the one classroom with different knowledge, skills, and wisdom will be develop.

Student 5: *"For me, inclusive education is a learning environment where children with or without disabilities are taught together as equals. It's an education for all, dili siya limited kumbaga open siya para sa tanan students."* (..... It is an education for all, not limited which is open to all students)

Student 8: *"Inclusive education for me is the.... fair treatment among students where in one classroom there are different knowledge, skills, and wisdom in merge and will be developed. Inclusive education means that we can learn in the same school with those students with disabilities."*

Based on the results gathered, majorities responded on the perception of SHS students towards IE seems misinformed without proper orientation. Possible consequences may lead to confusion among the learners and misguided. Hence, strategies for implementing IE in the school must be discussed among stakeholders and the purpose of implementation. The DepEd Order (DO) 72 s 2009 defines Inclusive Education

embraces the philosophy of accepting all children regardless of race, size, shape, color, ability, or disability with support from school staff, students, parents, and the community. They DO clearly state that IE is for all regardless of with or without disability. However, it only focuses on addressing the problems and issues of the special needs of the learners. The DO did not state that Inclusive Education is the merging of the academic tracks in the Senior High School. Strategy in the curriculum modification can be helpful in the implementation of IE in the school where it was stated “curriculum modification of IE shall be implemented in the forms of adaptations and accommodations to foster optimum learning based on individual’s needs and potentials. Modification in classroom instructions and activities is a process that involves new ways of thinking and developing teaching-learning practices. It also involves changes in any of the steps in the teaching-learning process. Curriculum modifications shall include service delivery options like cooperative or team teaching, consulting teacher programs, and others. The provision of support services from professionals and specialists, parents, volunteers, and peers or buddies to the children with special needs is an important feature of the inclusion program.

Additionally, inclusive education means that students with disabilities and other disadvantages are taught with their peers in a mainstream classroom for a majority of the school day. When most experts speak of ‘inclusive education’, this does not include special units or special classrooms (segregation) or placing children with disabilities in mainstream settings so long as they can adjust (integration). Inclusive education begins with the assumption that all children have a right to be in the same educational space (Cobley, 2018; Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2017; Hehir, et al., 2017; Schuelka & Johnstone, 2012; UNESCO-IBE, 2016).

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education - EASNIE (2018), has provided ample evidence that inclusive education increases social and academic opportunities for both children with and without disabilities, as well as significantly increases the likelihood that children with disabilities enroll in higher education and have better employment and life outcomes (Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2017). It is far more efficient to have all children in one school and mainstream classrooms, rather than in special classes and schools (ADB, 2010). Evidence from the literature strongly suggests that inclusive teaching practices raise the achievement of all children in the classroom (EASNIE, 2018; Sailor, 2015). In that way, inclusive teaching can be synonymous with quality teaching.

Moreover, researchers note that when students are included, they have better academic outcomes than students with identified special needs in special classes (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2010). Improved social acceptance and peer relations (Caywood & Fordyce, 2006) and an increase in self-esteem (Walther-Thomas, 1997) have also been identified. Students with hearing or visual impairments, and students with multiple mental and physical disabilities, did not perform better academically when educated in special schools (Jan Pijl, Nakken & Mand, 2003). Walther-Thomas (1995) also wrote about the benefits of inclusion to students with no identified special education needs. General education students in cotaught, inclusive classes, enjoyed additional teacher attention, improved academic achievement, and increased study skill instruction. Jan Pijl, Nakken & Mand (2003) noted that non-disabled students developed a positive attitude towards their disabled peers as a result of an inclusive educational environment and that overall learning in class improved.

5. Reflection

The importance of the study in our understanding of inclusive education is that we can understand the clear concept and definition of inclusive education (IE) and the purpose of implementing the IE in our school based on the DepEd Order 72 series 2009. We have learned that IE is for all regardless of or without disability. It also means that all children have the right to be in the same educational space. It must avoid segregation and discrimination as we meet specialized educational needs since many students are not given access to the same learning experience or opportunities as other children. Separate schools, classrooms, or marginalization within the mainstream setting create differently, and often less robust educational experiences, and yet the worth of these children is measured by the same standardized test used with every other child. Children must be

permitted equality and access to education at all levels of schooling. The promotion of an inclusive school culture requires that all school personnel value diversity and view differences as assets. Through these, we will be able to understand how diversified the *classrooms are in the SHS* and how should we teachers attend to learners with a range of diverse needs. Teachers must be able to know, how inclusive education and its setting are being adopted by the school. This study will augment our understanding of how every child feels, are they safe or not safe, or treated equally by the teachers with a sense of belongingness in the classroom. Lastly, it is relevant to every educator's understanding of how it is being adapted so that we will know what training, support, resources, encouragement, and flexibility we may be able to extend to attend to all their needs.

This study is relevant because the school is embracing a new IE education system. It is a great challenge for the school, particularly for teachers in dealing with diverse students. The school must create a modified curriculum that models the unity and collaboration that will meet the diverse needs of every learner. The school must provide with or without trained SPED teachers and teach candidates to view diversity as a valuable asset and not to fear differences. To facilitate inclusive thinking and acting, we must provide access to educational services from SPED Centers or speed-trained teachers with knowledge about diversity and the pedagogy needed to embark on their practice with confidence. They have the responsibility to inform their stakeholders (students and parents) about the IE program in DCNHS, which includes the visions & goals, policies, strategies, and the DepEd Order 72 s 2009. The school may also be able to know how students are being treated and how they feel that they are being mixed regardless of race, color, ethnicity, height, weight, religion, and even disability. The school will be able to have a better-quality education and this IE system will lessen the cases in Davao City National High School of discriminatory attitudes among students. The school will be able to address the needs of the students with special needs. However, this will take some time to be perfected, but since the school started, it will surely acclimate the system correctly with

Inclusive education is a big help in terms of social transformation. Inclusive schools provide a supportive and compassionate environment that will produce better outcomes. Students can socially transform through cooperation, and collaboration, foster cultural respect, and develop a sense of belongingness. Thus, inclusive education will develop students' sense of responsibility, and friendship and the system will help them learn the opportunity to accept individual differences. Parents' involvement plays a vital role in preparing the children for academic, moral, and spiritual development. Parents shall involve themselves in observing children's performance, volunteering to work in the classroom as a teacher aides, and providing support to other parents. Meaningful inclusion cannot be realized until we change our cultural and educational expectations to value numerous forms of achievement and recognize the contributions of all members of our society. The language a society uses to address social issues is extremely meaningful in understanding how matters are viewed and addressing the issue of the misconception of IE. We have learned that there is evidence that inclusive education increases social and academic opportunities for both children with and without disabilities, as well as significantly increases the likelihood that children with disabilities enroll in higher education and have better employment and life outcomes according to Hehir, et al., (2017).

6. Recommendation

To address the problem with the IE system of the school, the implementation of the IE program should be:

- Based on the DO 72 s 2009: Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children.
- There should have proper orientation and dissemination of information among stakeholders which includes the visions & goals, importance, benefits of the program, policies, and strategies.
- There should have an education system reconstruction from an exclusive to an inclusive system. Such components stated in the DO 72 s 2009 will also clearly discuss the:

1. Child Find - Children with disabilities who live without access to a basic human right: the right to education.
 2. Assessment - It is the continuous process of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the child by the use of formal and informal tools for proper program grade placement.
 3. Program Options - Regular schools with or without trained SPED teachers shall be provided educational services to children with special needs.
 4. Curriculum Modifications - This shall be implemented in the form of adaptations and accommodations to foster optimum learning based on an individual's needs and potential. Modification in classroom instructions and activities is a process that involves new ways of thinking and developing teaching-learning practices. It also involves changes in any of the steps in the teaching-learning process. Curriculum modifications shall include service delivery options like cooperative or team teaching, consulting teacher programs, and others. The provision of support services from professionals and specialists, parents, volunteers, and peers or buddies to the children with special needs is an important feature of the inclusion program.
 5. Parents Involvement - This plays a vital role in preparing the children for academic, moral, and spiritual development. Parents shall involve themselves in observing children's performance, volunteering to work in the classroom as a teacher aides, and providing support to other parents.
- The strategy must also discuss properly such as providing the needed training on IE to administrators, teachers, and other school staff; regularly monitoring the implementation of the program and provide the corresponding technical assistance needed and conduct an evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the program and improve its implementation.
 - Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and creating a welcoming, as it provides an effective education to the majority of the children's education system. This means that education systems must be willing and able to welcome students, regardless of their disability, and provide them with the support they need, with the default always a regular class with nondisabled peers (UNESCO, 1994). The importance of Inclusive Education is defined in its positive outcomes for all children both with and without disabilities or other disadvantages.

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