

The Special Education Program in Ilocos Sur: An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Learners with various exceptionalities keep increasing in number. Many come from families that cannot afford to enrol in private SpEd Centers, hence, they throng to DepEd schools with SpEd centers. This study was conducted to assess the compliance of Special Education Program of selected public elementary schools with Special Education Centers in the Division of Ilocos Sur. It was conducted during the School Year 2013 -2014 with policies and standards in terms of management and supervision, objectives, curriculum, physical facilities and equipment, linkages and networking, and special services. The respondents of the study are the school administrators and teachers. A questionnaire was used to gather data and information about the Special Education Program in the Division of Ilocos Sur. The data were treated using frequency, percentage, and mean. Results revealed that the management and supervision of the Special Education Program is very satisfactory, the objectives are highly attained; curriculum is outstanding, physical facilities and equipment are very satisfactory, linkages and networking are very satisfactory, and special services are satisfactory. Based on the findings, it was recommended that there should be better provisions for supplementary aids and services since these are barely available in the center. Likewise, there should be more linkages and networking with the LGOs, NGOs, private institutions and hospitals as service providers for children with exceptionalities who need further formal assessment. Also, a multidisciplinary team should be created in every center with the strong partnership of all stakeholders.

Keywords: Management, Objectives, Curriculum, Physical Facilities, Competence, Linkages and Special Services

INTRODUCTION

Special Education in the country traces its roots more than 90 years ago. It was first introduced in an institution where care and other special services were given to children with hearing and eyesight impairments. Through the years there has been no notable change in the needs and demands of Special Education program. It was in the year 1992 that the Philippine legislation has made a great contribution to the

development of Special Education with the creation of Republic Act No. 7277: Magna Carta for Disabled Persons.

The increase in the level of awareness of educating children with exceptionalities is universal. In other countries like the United States of America, improvement of the special educational program is a priority. Today's special education is the culmination of efforts by researchers, professionals, parents, and legislators and is guided by federal law (IDEA-Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004), Friend (2013). Their educational policy is to ensure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency. In the Philippines, before the implementation of special education program, children with disabilities were excluded from participating in any activity of the school. At present, these children have the same right to education just like everyone. It is important to ensure that a quality special education is provided to these children. However, despite government's effort to ensure quality services in special education nationwide, there are still some problems and concerns that beset the special education program and special education teachers in the country. One of these is the fast turn-over of competent SpEd teachers. Due to meager salary, SpEd teachers are enticed in favor of the better pay offered by schools abroad particularly in the United States of America, Canada, Singapore, Middle East and other developed countries. Teachers who have inadequate formal training programs are not fully equipped in handling children with exceptionalities. The limited facilities, materials and equipment remain a drawback in some schools offering SpEd program. A hearing-impaired child, for example, needs auditory device to address his/her exceptionality. But not a single SpEd center in the province acquires state of the art equipment which facilitates accurate and scientific screening procedure for early identification of children with hearing impairment.

Ilocos Sur is behind other provinces as far as Special Education (SpEd) is concerned based on the study of Artates (2003). Her finding was the SpEd classes catered to the educational needs of the children with visual impairment, hearing impairment and autism in Mindoro Elementary School and Nagsangalan Elementary School, Vigan City District, respectively under three Special Education trained teachers. At present, Special Education classes in Mindoro Elementary School are non-existent due to the resignation of the teachers who used to teach the said classes. There is no trained and competent SpEd teacher to take over the classes.

There were studies conducted to find out the proper implementation and improvements of the SpEd Program. One was the study of Onoza (2011),

which revealed four components of SpEd found to have strengths. These were adequate instructional materials, competent teachers, sufficient program funding and qualified administrators and teachers. But readiness of the parents and students/pupils, inadequate equipment, physical facility, buildings, linkage with other agencies were among the weaknesses of the SpEd programs. At present, SpEd and trained regular teachers play an important role in meeting the needs and in providing accommodative learning opportunities for children with exceptionalities.

Moreover, the objective of the study is to assess the status of special education program of schools in the Division of Ilocos Sur so as to address the needs of exceptional children. In addition, it aims to find out whether the actual practice of this program complies with the guidelines and policies stipulated by the DepEd. The Special Education Program has been given much attention by the government and most of the services of this program have been implemented. SpEd Centers in the division of Ilocos Sur have adhered, complied and designed modifications on their program specifically on SpEd curriculum, special services and physical facilities. Thus, the ultimate goal of special education is integration or mainstreaming of exceptional learners into the regular school system (Policies and Guidelines for Special Education, 1997). Further, the result of this study may enable administrators of the different SpEd centers to discover the strengths and weaknesses in order to provide innovative strategies for the improvement of its program.

The paradigm presents the components of the SpEd Program which are the core of this study. These are management and supervision, objectives, curriculum, physical facilities and equipment, teacher competence, linkages and networking, special services.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research method was used to assess the Special Education Program of the four SpEd centers in the Division of Ilocos Sur in terms of management and supervision, objectives, curriculum, physical facilities and equipment, teacher competence, linkages and networking, and special services. The investigation was also confined to the responses that were gathered through questionnaire and interview.

The research focused on the program of the four SpEd Centers in the Division of Ilocos Sur. The respondents are the school administrators and teachers. A questionnaire adapted from Canlas (2009) was used to gather data and information about the Special Education Program in the Division of Ilocos

Sur. In the questionnaire, components of the Special Education Program were indicated and marked by the administrators and teachers.

Further, the questionnaire was adapted from the study of Canlas (2009), where some of the items in the different components were modified to suit the study. The questionnaire was validated by Special Education specialists/expert. Interviews were utilized to obtain additional information.

The data were interpreted by using the five-point Likert-Scale method as the criteria which served as the bases for the interpretation of the result of the data.

In conducting the study, the researcher requested permission from DepEd School Superintendent, Supervisor, and Administrator/Principal to field and conduct survey in their division/ school; constructed and developed the survey questionnaire to gather relevant data/information especially in the assessment of the SpEd Program; developed questionnaire validation; collated the data for statistical treatment; and kept data and records with confidentiality as part of SpEd centers procedural safety concerning children with exceptionalities. Furthermore, frequency and percentage were utilized to describe the profile of the respondents; and mean to determine the status of the SpEd Program as assessed by the school administrators and teachers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations and principles were observed. The principles of privacy and confidentiality were ensured by the researcher that all the information from the respondents were not divulged to anyone.

On the principle of informed consent, adequate information were presented and explained to the respondents. Explanation of the purpose of the study, how the study took place, the possible benefits derived from the study were discussed by the researcher to the respondents before they signified their consent to actively participate in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assessment of the Special Education Program for children with exceptionalities in terms of:

On Management and Supervision

Table 1 presents the assessment of the respondents on the management and supervision of the Special Education Program.

Table 1
Assessment of the Respondents on the Management and Supervision of
SpEd Centers in Ilocos Sur

Management and Supervision	Administrators		Teachers		As A Whole	
	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR
1. Establish and maintain programs for children with exceptionalities	4.0	VO	4.67	A	4.34	A
2. Provide assistance in planning, establish and interpret the needs of programs	4.25	A	4.33	A	4.29	A
3. Develop and validate prototype instructional materials for children with exceptionalities	4.0	VO	4.17	V.O	4.09	VO
4. Consult and coordinate services with local and national and public and private agencies	3.5	VO	4.67	A	4.09	VO
5. Develop policies and guidelines	3.75	VO	4.33	A	4.04	VO
6. Prepare bulletins, guides and memoranda	4.25	A	4.5	A	4.38	A
Overall	3.96	VS	4.44	O	4.20	VS

Norm:

Mean Range	Item Descriptive Rating	Overall Descriptive Rating
4.21-5.0	Always (A)	Outstanding (O)
3.41-4.20	Very Often (VO)	Very Satisfactory (VS)
2.61-3.40	Often (O)	Satisfactory (S)
1.81-2.60	Seldom (S)	Slightly Satisfactory (SS)
1.0- 1.80	Never (N)	Unsatisfactory (U)

It can be gleaned from the table that on the overall, the management and supervision of the SpEd Program in the Division of Ilocos Sur was assessed by the respondents as “Very Satisfactory” ($m = 4.20$). This implies that the role of the administrator is pivotal in the Special Education Program. As backed up by the study of Wongthong (2002), “leadership or management style depends on the maturity of the group he is working with the use of the management style that is most appropriate,” Both administrators and teachers in SpEd are prepared for any responsibility assigned to them. The administrators effectively foster collaboration, smooth communication and coordination of services to public and private agencies. They provide assistance to SpEd teachers to meet and ensure their instructional needs and other major concerns in the SpEd centers. It is in this regard that SpEd Division shall provide supervisory and consultative services to assist regional and division offices develop and expand their program and to ensure quality and continuity of services (Article IX, Sec. 12, Policies and Guidelines for Special Education, 1997). This is to enhance the supervisory practices and skills of administrators.

Meanwhile, in the interview with a principal, she said, *“I have a lot of time supervising the teachers especially the Special Education Teachers to monitor the needs of the children in the center. I do time and resource management.”*

On Objectives

Table 2 shows the assessment of the respondents on the objectives of the Special Education Program.

Table 2
Assessment of the Respondents on the Objectives of Special Education Program

Objectives	Administrators		Teachers		As A Whole	
	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR
1. Address the needs of children with exceptionalities	3.8	HA	4.5	VHA	4.15	HA
2. Provide opportunities for children with exceptionalities to develop their own potential	4.0	HA	4.83	VHA	4.42	VHA
3. Provide relevant education to enable the children with exceptionalities interact effectively with their peers	3.25	MA	4.67	VHA	3.96	HA
4. Provide holistic intervention program for children with exceptionalities	3.25	MA	4.50	VHA	3.88	HA
5. Provide alternate program regardless of exceptionalities and severity	3.75	HA	4.50	VHA	4.13	HA
6. Reflect the goals and mission of Special Education as well as the regional and national development goals	4.0	HA	4.83	VHA	4.42	VHA
Overall	3.54	HA	4.64	VHA	4.09	HA

Norm:

Mean Range	Item and Overall Descriptive Rating
4.21-5.0	Very Highly Attainable (VHA)
3.41-4.20	Highly Attainable (HA)
2.61-3.40	Moderately Attainable (MA)
1.81-2.60	Fairly Attainable (FA)
1.0- 1.80	Unattainable (U)

The table indicates that as a whole, the respondents assessed the objectives of the SpEd Program in the Division of Ilocos Sur is “Highly Attainable” as supported by the mean rating of 4.09. This shows that the objectives of the Special Education Program for children with exceptionalities are attained by the administrators and teachers. With collaborative efforts of administrators, teachers, parents and allied professionals, the objectives of Special Education

ensure that provision is made for the education of all children with exceptionalities. It is in this purpose that the program of Special Education is based upon each individual's identified leading needs and skills. It is aimed that these children with disabilities are fully equipped and prepared to participate fully and contribute meaningfully to the society. The items under this component are assessed and attained to the high level, therefore, if the objective is attained, the program is effective.

Special Education is a part of but not apart from General Education; its educational goals are similarly embodied in the National Educational aims, (P.D. 6A 1972). Objectives have been laid out to increase the participation rate of exceptional learners. Corollary, the development and maximization of learning competencies, as well as inculcation of values to make exceptional learners useful and effective members of society is one of the aims of SpEd Program.

The finding is supported by the researcher's interview with the administrators. The researcher elicited the following comments/reactions: "Special Education objectives are not fully attained because of limited resources and lack of trained teachers to cater to individuals with special needs. But we are trying our best to cater to their needs."

In a separate interview, another teacher said, *"To my observation and assessment, some of the objectives have been fully implemented while some are still being implemented. Since we only started the program four years ago, we are still not totally aware of the different methods and strategies of catering to the needs of the children enrolled in the program, but maybe through trainings in the future we will be more updated with the strategies to enable us to meet the objectives."*

On Curriculum

Shown in Table 3 is the assessment of the respondents on the curriculum of the Special Education Program.

Table 3
Assessment of the Respondents on the SpEd Curriculum

Curriculum	Administrators		Teachers		As A Whole	
	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR
1. Curriculum allows reasonable degree of flexibility of different exceptionalities.	4.0	A	4.83	SA	4.42	SA
2. Curriculum is periodically reviewed with consideration for a child's exceptionality.	3.75	A	4.67	SA	4.21	SA
3. Curriculum prepares children with exceptionalities for the necessary skills essential for everyday life	4.25	SA	4.67	SA	4.46	SA
4. Curriculum provides appropriate evaluation instruments to assess the children with exceptionalities development and progress.	4.25	SA	4.67	SA	4.46	SA
5. Modified curriculum is applied to meet the needs of children different exceptionalities.	4.25	SA	5.0	SA	4.63	SA
6. Curriculum strengthens the vocational and training program for children with exceptionalities.	4.25	SA	5.0	SA	4.63	SA
Overall	4.13	VS	4.81	O	4.47	O

Norm:

Mean Range	Item Descriptive Rating	Overall Descriptive Rating
4.21-5.0	Strongly Agree (SA)	Outstanding (O)
3.41-4.20	Agree (A)	Very Satisfactory (VS)
2.61-3.40	Undecided (U)	Satisfactory (S)
1.81-2.60	Disagree (D)	Slightly Satisfactory (SS)
1.0- 1.80	Strongly Disagree (SA)	Unsatisfactory (U)

It is reflected in the table that, as a whole, the curriculum of the SpEd program is “Outstanding” as assessed by the respondents as evidenced by the overall mean rating of 4.47. This implies that it takes intensive academic preparation, support and other holistic intervention programs for administrators and teachers to meet the academic standards and participate meaningfully in the curriculum. Each school is responsible for determining the curriculum so that provision carefully matches individual’s needs. Curriculum aims need to be agreed and shared by all members of the school staff, administrators, parents, caregivers, other professionals and the students themselves (Camara, 2002). The result shows that curriculum is most appropriate and best in developing the children in the SpEd center to become functionally literate and useful in the society they live in despite their exceptionalities.

The administrators and teachers concur that modified curriculum is applied to meet the needs of different exceptionalities. It strengthens training programs for these children. Further, the curriculum for SpEd shall be based on

the curriculum prescribed for the regular schools by the DepEd (Sec. 1, Article V, Policies and Guidelines for Special Education, 1997).

On Physical Facilities and Equipment

Table 4 presents the assessment of the respondents on the physical facilities and equipment of the Special Education Program.

Table 4
Assessment of the Respondents on the Physical Facilities and Equipment of the SpEd Program

Physical Facilities and Equipment	Administrators		Teachers		As A Whole	
	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR
Facilities suit the needs of children with exceptionalities.	3.75	A	4.17	A	3.96	A
Facilities follow/ observe the national safety and building code.	3.5	A	3.67	A	3.59	A
Facilities are positioned strategically for maximum utilization.	3.75	A	3.67	A	3.71	A
Facilities are provided for the convenience of children with exceptionalities.	3.75	A	3.83	A	3.79	A
Equipment conform to the requirements of the program.	3.75	A	4.17	A	3.96	A
Equipment and materials are complete, and suitable for children with different exceptionalities.	3.5	A	3.83	A	3.67	A
Equipment are properly labelled.	3.5	A	4.0	A	3.75	A
Equipment and instructional materials are readily available for use by the children with exceptionalities and teachers.	3.75	A	4.0	A	3.88	A
Overall	3.66	VS	3.92	VS	3.79	VS

Norm:

Mean Range	Item Descriptive Rating	Overall Descriptive Rating
4.21-5.0	Strongly Agree (SA)	Outstanding (O)
3.41-4.20	Agree (A)	Very Satisfactory (VS)
2.61-3.40	Undecided (U)	Satisfactory (S)
1.81-2.60	Disagree (D)	Slightly Satisfactory (SS)
1.0- 1.80	Strongly Disagree (SA)	Unsatisfactory (U)

The table reveals that on the overall, physical facilities and equipment for the SpEd Program in Ilocos Sur is “Very Satisfactory” as backed up by the mean rating of 3.79. This means that physical facilities and equipment are provided to ensure safety and quality education for all children with exceptionalities. It shows that the school site is vital to the program. The location of the SpEd centers are favourable and facilities and equipment are adequate to meet the learning needs of children with exceptionalities. It contradicts the finding of Artates (2003) who stressed that the facilities and

equipment are perceived to be urgently needed but are not provided in the SpEd centers in Ilocos Sur. These facilities are very important for the SpEd centers to be effective in meeting the wide range of needs of the special children. The physical facilities and equipment are foremost priority by DepEd to address the growing population or increase of enrolment of children with exceptionalities. Likewise, a similar contradictory finding was found in the study of Vaquilar (2004). She stated that “quality education cannot be achieved by students due to lack of enough facilities. She, however, recommended that physical plant and facilities need to be improved.”

Administrators and teachers, in an interview, said “we are trying our best to provide the facilities needed by our special children in the center. We try to purchase materials and make sure it is complete.”

On Teacher Competence

Table 5 presents the assessment of the respondents on the competence of teachers in the Special Education Program.

Table 5
Assessment of the Respondents on SpEd Teacher’s Competence

Teacher Competence	Administrators		Teachers		As A Whole	
	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR
1. Uses variety of instructional materials	3.75	VO	4.50	A	4.13	VO
2. Shows mastery of the subject matter	4.25	A	4.67	A	4.46	A
3. Demonstrates effective classroom management	4.25	A	4.67	A	4.46	A
4. Encourages children with exceptionalities. to express themselves	4.25	A	4.83	A	4.54	A
5. Observes functionality and personal discipline	4.25	A	5.00	A	4.63	A
6. Respects the rights and feelings of children with exceptionalities.	4.25	A	5.00	A	4.63	A
7. Follows efficient classroom routine	4.25	A	4.67	A	4.46	A
8. Ensures classroom atmosphere conducive to teaching	4.25	A	4.83	A	4.54	A
9. Provides well-organized lessons for children with exceptionalities.	4.25	A	4.83	A	4.54	A
10. Prepares and implements IEP well for children with exceptionalities.	4.25	A	4.67	A	4.46	A
Overall	4.20	HC	4.77	VHC	4.49	VHC

Norm:

Mean Range	Item Descriptive Rating	Overall Descriptive Rating
4.21-5.0	Always (A)	Very Highly Competent (VHC)
3.41-4.20	Very Often (VO)	Highly Competent (HC)
2.61-3.40	Often (O)	Moderately Competent (MC)
1.81-2.60	Seldom (S)	Fairly Competent (FC)
1.0- 1.80	Never (N)	Incompetent (I)

The table reflects that the overall assessment of the respondents on teacher competence is ($\bar{x} = 4.49$) described as “Very Highly Competent”. This implies that SpEd teachers in the SpEd Centers are well-trained, highly motivated, dedicated, and professionally competent. Teachers have enumerable responsibilities as the society is becoming too complex and exceptional children are increasing. They play several roles to develop the potential of these children with different exceptionality.

As cited by Reddy (2004), special educators must be competent enough to perform the aforesaid duties. In addition, they must attain special expertise in the following areas to distinguish them from general educators. Expectations for Special Education Teachers may vary from school system to school system and from state to state.

The findings support the assessment of Onoza (2011) that four components of SpEd were found to have strengths. These are adequate instructional materials, competent teachers, sufficient program funding and qualified administrators and teachers.

As backed up by the findings of Li (2002), “Special Education teachers felt that they were highly skilled in the areas of knowledge/skills of assessment, diagnosis and evaluation and knowledge/skill of instructional content and practice.” Interviews with teachers of SpEd Centers A-D reveal common answers, *“we are sent to seminars, training programs and conferences. Just recently we went to national trainings in Iloilo. We are also enrolled in graduate studies to specialize in different programs of disabilities so we can cater to other difficulties of special children.”*

On Linkages and Networking

Table 6 presents the assessment of the respondents on the linkages and networking of Special Education Program

Table 6 reveals that, on the overall, the linkages and networking of Special Education Program in Ilocos Sur is “Very Satisfactory” ($\bar{x} = 3.92$). This implies that administrators create tie ups with other allied professionals and medical practitioners for the improvement of the services of Special Education. The SpEd centers linkages are the Department of Health and Department of Social Work and Department of Local Government. As to financial resources, administrators and teachers consider grants, donations and endowments while the local government units from the special education funds. Teachers, too, had formal and informal partnerships with parents and other organizations. Both share common mission and advocacy to reach out to parents with special

children and help them transform their children’s lives to become productive individuals.

Table 6
Assessment of the Respondents on the Linkages and Networking of Special Education Program

Linkages and Networking	Administrators		Teachers		As A Whole	
	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	
1. Coordinate with medical, social, vocational, and rehabilitation services	3.50	VO	4.50	A	4.00	VO
2. Tap health, welfare and other community services	3.25	O	4.50	A	3.88	VO
3. Demonstrate effective collaboration of education, medical, health care and social services	3.25	O	4.33	A	3.79	VO
4. Establish and intensify system of referral, collaboration, follow-up among various disciplines and services	3.25	O	4.83	A	4.04	VO
5. Exert effort to link with the community in providing recreational and other facilities in the community on issues and concerns about SpEd	4.0	VO	4.17	VO	4.09	VO
6. Engage in networking to update the parents and officials in the community on issues and concerns about SpEd	4.0	VO	4.67	A	4.34	A
Overall	3.50	VS	4.33	O	3.92	VS

Norm:

Mean Range	Item Descriptive Rating	Overall Descriptive Rating
4.21-5.0	Always (A)	Outstanding (O)
3.41-4.20	Very Often (VO)	Very Satisfactory (VS)
2.61-3.40	Often (O)	Satisfactory (S)
1.81-2.60	Seldom (S)	Slightly Satisfactory (SS)
1.0- 1.80	Never (N)	Unsatisfactory (U)

Artates (2003) cited that a great majority of the teachers and administrators affirmed that the SpEd centers have linkages with LGOs and NGOs in the community. This implies that government and non-government agencies and even netizens nowadays are concerned with the development of special children.

Based on the interviews with the administrators and teachers, they both mentioned and expressed, *“We were provided supplementary funding support through the Special Education Fund (SEF). We also have linkage with the Saint Louis University- Inclusive Education Foundation (SLU-IEF). They monitor our HI and VI pupils. They visit them and invite us, teachers, to go on training programs and seminars. They always come to monitor and give resources. Networking, too, is important so that parents who have an access to internet*

are updated with our activities in our SpEd center. We make sure that everything is posted.”

On Special Services

Table 7 presents the assessment of the respondents on programs and services

Table 7
Assessment of the Respondents on Special Services of Special Education Program

Special Services	Administrators		Teachers		As A Whole	
	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR	\bar{x}	DR
1. Types of placement are available in the center- Special class or self-contain class, Integration or mainstream program, Special day school, Residential school, Resource room	3.40	FA	3.28	FA	3.34	FA
2. The special services are provided in the center for children with exceptionalities: Speech therapy, Physical therapy, Occupational therapy, Health care (medical and dental), Transportation	2.29	I	2.22	I	2.26	I
3. Assistive devices and technology are provided/ utilized to enable the children with exceptionalities to function efficiently in the classroom environment	2.65	FA	3.03	FA	2.84	FA
4. Home visitation is done by the teachers to observe the children with exceptionalities in their home environment	4.0	A	3.67	A	3.84	A
5. Consultancy services are extended/ provided to assist in the school’s special educational program of children with exceptionalities: Psychologist, Audiologist, Ophthalmologist, Interpreter, Mobility instructor	1.15	VI	2.37	I	1.76	I
6. Vocational services are rendered to children with exceptionalities in preparation for employability	1.25	VI	2.0	I	1.63	VI
Overall	2.46	SS	2.76	S	2.61	S

Norm:

Mean Range	Item Descriptive Rating	Overall Descriptive Rating
4.21-5.0	Very Adequate (VA)	Outstanding (O)
3.41-4.20	Adequate (A)	Very Satisfactory (VS)
2.61-3.40	Fairly Adequate (FA)	Satisfactory (S)
1.81-2.60	Inadequate (I)	Slightly Satisfactory (SS)
1.0- 1.80	Very Inadequate (VI)	Unsatisfactory (U)

The table reflects that the special services of the SpEd Centers in the Division of Ilocos Sur is “Satisfactory” as evidenced by the overall mean of 2.61.

This implies that these programs or educational placements are only offered in the center.

For the self-contained, pupils with different types of exceptionality are enrolled in the program. These are for moderate and severe problems that must be addressed. And for mainstreamed program, these children have mild conditions who are qualified to be integrated in some regular classes but must be given additional teaching, modified and differentiated instruction and care resources

On the provisions for supplementary aids and assistive devices, children with vision impairment or blind were provided insufficient assistive devices and specialized instruction to compensate their vision problem. Children with low vision, were neither given enough larger materials nor provided concrete experiences. According to Gryta (2014), "Special education refers to a range of services that can be provided in different ways and in different settings." These can include adapted equipment, such as a special cushion that can help kids with attention or sensory_processing_issues stay seated and focused for longer periods of time. Other examples of supplementary support include assistive technology and training for staff, students and parents.

Furthermore, consultancy services like those provided by a psychologist, audiologist, ophthalmologist, and interpreter were found inadequate in the SpEd center. Parents cannot afford the services of developmental paediatrician so only few children underwent formal assessment on their conditions. However, Teachers assessed these children through informal assessment using checklist.

During the interview, the teachers declared: *"We are doing our best to place our special children in their proper placement, not categorizing them but making sure that they are ready before they are mainstreamed. If we cannot put them in the regular classes, we have the self-contained classes so we could enhance their full potentials. We are not going to isolate them. If they are ready, they can cope with the regular classes. If they cannot cope, that is the time we open a transition program. We are not closing our doors because what we offer is inclusive education. We make sure that they have access in the regular classes for socialization."*

In a separate interview, administrators and teachers expressed these sentiments: *"We need more support from service providers like medical, dental and technical or the multidisciplinary team. Our special children must be provided not only with assistive devices but also other services by medical specialists for further assessments."*

CONCLUSION

The Special Education Program in Ilocos Sur is at a high status. The program has administrators and teachers who are very much competent to manage, supervise and implement SpEd activities. The objective of the program which is to educate children with exceptionality is highly attainable. The curriculum of the SpEd is carefully prepared and designed to meet the needs of different exceptionalities. There are very adequate physical facility and equipment to implement its activities. In addition, the administrators are also capable in creating tie-ups with other allied professionals to provide SpEd services. Finally, the program also delivers adequate special services to cater for other needs of children with exceptionalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that there should be better provisions for supplementary aids and services since these are barely available in the center. Likewise, there should be more linkages and networking with the LGOs, NGOs, private institutions and hospitals as service providers for children with exceptionalities who need further formal assessment. Also, a multidisciplinary team should be created in every center with the strong partnership of all stakeholders. Furthermore, a continuous monthly advocacy program including training services of receiving teachers (regular teachers), special education teachers and administrators should be conducted to address needs and to improve programs and other alternative mode of services. In the absence of a clinical psychologist, there should be a certified guidance counselor for each special education center. Proper placement must be observed, too, and followed for effective specialized instruction. More importantly, children with different exceptionality must be handled by a specialized teacher (i.e. teacher in autism must handle children with autism only).

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