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**Department of Education**  
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CITY SCHOOLS DIVISION OF BIÑAN CITY

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**“LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS”**



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**ABSTRACT**

Early 2022, the previous administration signed Republic Act 11650 into law. This provision takes into consideration the well-being of learners with disabilities while fulfilling the mandate of the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons which states that persons with disability must be given equal rights to education as their non-disabled peers. RA 11650 stipulates the construction of one learning center specifically intended for learners with special needs in every municipality and city in the Philippines. This learning center shall be equipped with learning and health facilities and service providers shall also assist with the clients' transition to tertiary level or even work. This includes the establishment of at least one (1) learning center per municipality and city catering to learners with disabilities with regards to their education, over-all health management, and shift to college, vocational school, or work.

In connection to this, the researcher wanted to explore the real-life experience of learners with disabilities in public inclusive classrooms in Timbao Elementary School for school year 2023-2024. The research involved observation of (1) learner with disability and interview of his classroom adviser and subject teacher. Through transcendental phenomenology, the research employed techniques such as imaginative variation, bracketing, intuitive integration, and phenomenological reduction. The research data included the researcher's field notes and transcription of the one-on-one interview.

Analysis of the observations and interview showed that the implementation of inclusive education is in the early stages. Basic provisions such as classroom, chairs with desks, and 75" TV were present. However, learning materials suited or focused on the disabilities of the learners were lacking (i.e. maps, pictures, posters, fidgets). In-depth and frequent trainings on inclusive education and specific disabilities may be needed by the faculty to confidently handle inclusive classrooms.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive Education, Learners with Disabilities, Elementary Education, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning*

## INTRODUCTION

The beginnings of the establishment of education for disabled persons was full of persecution and isolation. According to Winzer (1993), before the 1600s, special needs people were once considered detestable and suspected to be related to witchcraft or dark magic. They could not voice out their opinions and the government did not take care of their needs. They were treated worse than animals. On top of that, they were constant victims of violence and discrimination.

During these times, persons with disability cannot even seek to be educated as even the most basic of rights were taken away from them. Their lives were pitiful as they were viewed as disgusting abominations.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, things started to look up. Key figures in the society focused on the exploration of the suitable instruction of deaf people. Through Pedro Ponce de Leon's development of *oralism*, counterpart to sign language, Jacob Rodrigue P  reire was able to innovate education through its utilization. After the success of educating the deaf, proceeding initiatives were undertaken for the blind. This eventually led to the invention of the Braille system by Louis Braille in the mid-eighteenth century (Rotatori, et.al, 2011).

However, it may be worthy to note that early efforts on educating the disabled were focused on sense-related disabilities. The field of education would not see progress on the instruction of the psychosocially disabled for the next 200 years.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, hunters discovered an uncivilized little boy in the forests of Aveyron, France. Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, one of the leading medical practitioners of his time, took it upon himself to accomplish the great endeavor of educating the boy he named Victor and documenting his progress in a book he titled 'Savage of Aveyron'. His teaching style focused on constant communication, understanding the needs of the boy, and anchoring the lessons to the

learner's needs. Itard was able to successfully teach vowels, d, and l, proper arrangement of the letters, as well as the French word for milk (lait). But, at least for Itard, these were the only distinguishable milestones of his work relating to Victor. Other experts, on the other hand, believed that he had greater success on improving the savage's conduct (Groff, 1932).

Although, the earliest recorded law enabling the education of the special needs children was established in China in the mid-1900s. Special education law in China was put in place to institutionalize the handicapped people's right to learn. A yearly budget was allocated exclusively to building and maintenance of schools for special needs children (Agrawal, et.al, 2019).

In the Philippines, the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons or Republic Act 7277 was legalized in the year 1992. This act aims to give the special needs persons equal opportunities as their non-disabled peers. This includes anti-discrimination in the society and, by effect, rights to education.

On March 11, 2022, then President Rodrigo Duterte signed into law a mandate for provision of inclusive education to special needs learners known as Republic Act 11650. This includes the establishment of at least one (1) learning center per municipality and city catering to learners with disabilities with regards to their education, over-all health management, and shift to college, vocational school, or work.

In the locale of the study, various memorandums were released by Department of Education Division of Bi  an, namely (1) Division Memorandum No. 162, s. 2021 which equipped teachers with storytelling and video editing skills, (2) Division Memorandum No. 201, s. 2021 which focused on familiarizing teachers on how inclusive education works, and (3) Division Memorandum No. 212, s. 2021 aimed to educate Grade 4 and Grade 10 teachers on the technicalities of the special education curriculum. These are all efforts in order to bring quality and accessible education

to learners with disabilities as mandated by the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons.

These are necessary steps to improve the learning conditions of special needs learners in the Philippines. Allam and Martin (2021) conducted research emphasizing on the views of the teachers of Ilagan City regarding the obstacles and timely concerns in special education. Results yielded were the learners' motivation, lack of instructors with major in special education, proper and adequate capacity building among the primary service providers (teachers), diversification of instruction to better serve learners' individuality, and parents' involvement in the learning process.

Aside from face to face classroom instruction challenges, it is also worth to note how COVID-19 has affected the education of learners with disabilities. Ambiong of Global Impact (2020) discussed some problems encountered by special needs learners in Northern Luzon. Apparently, copyrights became a hindrance to reproduction of copies of learning materials, especially those modified for SPED learners. In addition, due to the distance learning set-up, teachers are unaware of learning disabilities their pupils or students may have unless notified. Due to this, alteration of learning material or learning mode to better suit learners with blindness or deafness, for example, were not satisfactorily met.

The country also witnessed a decline in the enrollment of special needs learners during the COVID-19 struggle. Unicef (2020) conducted a survey of almost 40,000 disabled respondents across the Philippines and 52% said that they were not participating in school. In addition, according to the Department of Education, as cited by inquirer.net (2022), only 126,598 special needs learners were enrolled in the year 2021-2022 which is only less than half of the 360,879 enrollees of 2019-2020.

With all of these memorandums in place, this study aimed to know the experiences of learners with special needs. The results of this study may provide information necessary for the improvement of implementation of inclusive education.

## METHODOLOGY

The research is a transcendental phenomenological qualitative study in nature which means there were no statistics involved. Data collection procedures involved observation of the learner in his classroom as well as interview of his subject teacher who happened to be his classroom adviser as well. Interview guide questions with 15 open-ended questions were utilized for the one-on-one interview. The transcription of the recorded interview as well as the observation field notes were analyzed to come up with the results of the study.

The procedure for data collection were summarized below:

**Phase I. Preparation Stage.** Literature review was conducted. Materials such as the 15-item open-ended interview guide questions as well as the validation tool were handed out. Data gathering procedures were relayed to the necessary authorities. Participants were selected and parental consent was secured.

**Phase II. Data Gathering Stage.** Classroom observations were conducted to focus on the LWD's interaction with his peers and teacher. The observations were carefully noted through field notes. A 40-minute one-on-one interview with the teacher was conducted and recorded.

**Phase III. Data Analysis Stage.** The researcher carefully transcribed the recording. The recording was translated to English and unnecessary and repeated words were removed (i.e. uhm, well, ah, okay). The data extracted from the transcription was compared to the field notes.

**Phase IV. Summary and Interpretation Stage.** The data gathered from the transcription and the field notes were summarized and interpreted.

**Phase V. Reporting.** The research paper was finalized for printing.

## RESULTS

The research aimed to discover how inclusive education was implemented. Other information such as the strategy employed by

the learner and the teacher to compromise to the classroom set up as well as their needs were also highlighted.

Question 1. What are the learning characteristics of the special needs learner?

- The learner has a short attention span. He is almost always present in class, but he appears to be distracted most of the time. As attested by the teacher during the interview and as observed, he may stare at his classmates, play with his water bottle or ruler, or go to sleep.
- He is a non-reader. He cannot read phonemes or three-letter words. He struggles with memorization that is why drills do not have much positive effect on him. He can write but it is more of “copying” the lines he sees rather than actual writing. He cannot construct simple sentences in English.
- But, in other subjects like Filipino and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, the learner can keep up with his peers in discussions and other speaking tasks.

Question 2. What are the challenges encountered by the learner?

- For learning struggles, he has difficulty in memorization. He may get confused with words or switch things up. He may name a picture in Tagalog but not in English. He has troubles catching up with the learning pace of his peers. Aside from this, he also has problems with keeping his focus in class.
- In addition, he comes from a low-income household. This causes a whole set of challenges for the learner. First and foremost, he was not able to get proper medical attention such as diagnosis, therapy, and medication. Second, his family was not able to provide learning materials he needs to support his learning.

Question 3. What are the coping strategies used by the learner?

- The learner has good relationships with his classmates. This was also mentioned by the teacher-participant during the interview. Since the teacher introduced and explained the learner’s situation to his peers well, there were less obstruction in the way and the children were able to form friendship faster. Whenever he gets tired or cannot keep up with the lessons, he resorts to looking at what is happening around him or fiddling with his things.

Question 4. What are the techniques employed by the teacher to accommodate the learner’s special needs?

- Generally, during discussions and activities, the learner is given the same tasks as everyone else. However, when the teacher observes that he is bored, not listening, or not doing the task assigned, she would employ differentiated learning. The learner will be given a separate task, usually a writing task, which the teacher knows that he will be able to perform. At times, she also assigns other learners to help with remediation through a strategy called peer tutoring.

Question 5. How equipped are the school and teachers with regards to inclusive education?

- The classroom is equipped with a 75” TV which the teacher uses to flash PowerPoint Presentations or show videos. The teacher has letter flash cards bought with her own money which is used by the learners she assigned for peer tutoring. The teacher was aware that funding or other provisions from the national government may be available however, a certain number of enrollees, quota, is needed in order to qualify for this.



## DISCUSSION

The publication of the Republic Act 116450 inevitably changed the face of special education in the Philippines. Not only was the curriculum and instruction improved but also the ethical and cultural factor of the conduct of special education.

However, the onset of the face-to-face lessons proved to be a massive challenge to the teachers. Not only was the inclusive education strategy a challenge to apply in the first place, but also other factors such as the learning gap caused by the COVID-19 existed.

Constant innovation is necessary to improve the quality of education and as of now, inclusive education appears to be the best way to go. The Department of Education has made the right decision to adapt to IE.

Inclusive education does not only address the intellectual progress of the children but also their social progress. By providing an opportunity for exposure for the two groups, disabled and non-disabled population, critical issues in the society such as discrimination may be greatly lessened. Of course, this relatively new concept in special education comes with its own set of challenges and difficulties.

Institutions, as a whole, must be made conducive to learners with disabilities in order to ensure the maximum possible benefits of inclusive education. Learning materials that are responsive to virtually all disabilities must be present in preparation for anticipated enrollment of diverse disabled learners. This means that fidgets, braille, and other technologies must be made available. The logistics of the school should also be adjusted to better serve the learners with disabilities. Textured pavements, labels with braille, and ramps are just few of logistic changes that may be made to better welcome the learners with disabilities.

At the same time, the teachers must have enough knowledge of inclusive education, special education, and different disabilities to properly manage inclusive

classrooms. In-depth and repetitive trainings should be considered not only for the teachers but also for the school staff and administrators as they will all likely interact and have an impact on the lives of the learners with disabilities enrolled in the school.

Successful implementation of inclusive education may encourage enrollment of learners with disabilities. Through the success of implementation of inclusive education in both elementary and secondary levels, a bigger population of learners with disabilities may transition to undergraduate studies and turn out to be responsible strongholds of the society.

Learners with disabilities are just like regular learners. It is just that teaching them may require patience and a slightly different approach, but they can be capable of being independent. Inclusive education may provide this opportunity for them.

It is up to the educational institution to make learning accessible and effective for learners with disabilities. With capacity-building and trial and errors, learners with special needs may be able to flourish and contribute to nation-building.

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The researcher relinquishes rights to this study to the department. May the results and recommendations of this research be considered for the improvement of the implementation of inclusive education in the division.

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