

An Evaluation of De La Salle Lipa's Readiness to Respond to Different Special Needs: Basis of Proposed Program for Inclusion

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Abstract

As a formidable learning institution offering Bachelor of Elementary Education Major in Special Education, De La Salle Lipa envisions itself to be in the forefront of teacher-training and an institution that upholds its mission of providing holistic education for all. This study aimed to determine the level of readiness of DLSL to cater to students with special needs included in regular classrooms in terms of school plant facilities, teachers and staffs' knowledge, curriculum and services they offer and programs they have. The Department of Education's "Basic Checklist for Evaluating an Institution's Readiness for Inclusion" was adapted as part of the questionnaires given to selected respondents including teachers and staff, administrators, students and parents. Chi-square goodness of fit test was used to determine if the DLSL respondents vary significantly in their perceived level of readiness. Results indicated that there is a marked perception among the respondents confirming the institution's readiness for inclusion. Analysis drawn from the data gathered through the survey, follow-up interviews and focus group discussions were used as basis in drafting the proposed program for inclusion for students with special needs which is the main contribution of this research to the institution's mission of providing quality education for all.

Keywords: Special Education, Inclusion, Descriptive-survey, De La Salle Lipa, Philippines.

1. Introduction

Inclusive Education (IE) was formally developed in 1994 when participants from international organizations and governments convened in Spain to articulate jointly the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action. This defined IE as the “education in the mainstream of regular education regardless of race, linguistic ability, economic status, gender, age, ability, ethnicity religion and sexual orientation” (Dizon, 2011). Inclusive Education, therefore, ensures that learners with special needs are given the same chances to learn and perform to their full capability alongside their normal peers in the regular classroom.

In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested with investigating the effectiveness of inclusion in different countries worldwide. Being in full support of the development of inclusive education practices that have been evidently fostered by various countries around the world, UNESCO developed series of technical materials and publications to guide all stakeholders in the inclusion process including teachers, administrators, and parents.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education has been strongly advocating inclusion practices by formulating and implementing pertinent guidelines such as DepEd order No. 72 s 2009 entitled “Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children” for the public sector and DepEd Order No.88 s 2010 (Revised Manual of Regulations for Private Schools in Basic Education) for the private schools.

These memos provide a clear definition of inclusion or inclusive education which emphasize that a comprehensive program for children with special needs must have components such as child find, assessment, program options, curriculum modifications and parental involvement. In order to ensure that quality education is accessible, the following elements namely, curriculum, educational programs, teaching methods and services shall be given importance by learning institutions. Being part of De La Salle Lipa, an educational institution that upholds its mission of teaching minds, touching hearts and transforming lives, the researcher deemed it necessary to investigate the school’s level of preparedness to offer inclusive education program in terms of the key elements mentioned.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main focus of this study is to evaluate De La Salle Lipa’s readiness to cater to students with special needs included in the regular class. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of readiness of DLSL in terms of

- 1.1 school plant facilities
 - 1.2 teachers and staff
 - 1.3 curriculum and services
 - 1.4 programs?
2. What conditions will DLSL be ready to accommodate?
 3. What are the recommendations for DLSL to be able to comply with the requirements for a school that offers inclusion?

1.2 Significance of the Study

It is the ultimate goal of this research to contribute to the development of a formal program for inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classes of DLSL. It aims to come up with specific and reasonable guidelines in providing quality education to students with special needs, giving emphasis on the use of learning-friendly practices that will help them attain total development of their capabilities. To embrace diversity and ensure that its education programs and practices will be inclusive of all learners, DLSL shall promote maximum involvement of all stakeholders – administrators, teachers and staff, support services and parents – in the entire process of the development of the program.

1.3 Review of Related Literature

According to UNESCO (2004), inclusion is the practice of attending to the diverse needs of all learners by intensifying participation in learning, cultures and communities, and diminishing exclusion within and from education. Accepting children with special needs in a regular school is a big challenge. Regular schools must be ready enough to accommodate these children not only through their modification of the curriculum but also in areas like school plant facilities, services and programs they offer and most importantly, the readiness and capability of the teachers and staff in handling them (UNESCO Bangkok, 2009).

Kirk, Gallagher & Coleman (2015) define the term “exceptional” to include both the child with developmental incapacities and the child with gifts or talents. Children with exceptionalities are those who vary from the normal child in mental characteristics, sensory and communication abilities, behavior and emotional development, and physical characteristics.

There are different conditions in Special Education that are possible to be included in a regular school. Five of these are children with Autism, Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Learning Disability (LD), Mild Intellectual Disabilities and Other Health Impairments (OHI). Knowledge about these conditions can help teachers recognize and

effectively eliminate impediments to learning, development, and participation encountered by many children with disabilities. It is therefore important that different strategies are tried out to find theories that work for the teachers, and for the children in their classrooms.

The study conducted by Sacdalan (2012) investigated the possibilities to which inclusive education can succeed in one of the leading engineering schools in the country, Mapua Institute of Technology (MIT). Findings revealed positive understanding and attitudes among the students and teachers and presented an inclusion model that reflected teamwork and solid support as positive indicators for inclusive education to succeed.

There are numerous factors to be considered in operationalizing inclusive education practices. Yap & Adorio (2008) conducted a study of selected schools and school divisions chosen to expand and organize Special Education-Inclusive Education Program (SPED-IE) in the Third Elementary Education Program (TEEP) of the Department of Education in the Philippines with School-based Management (SBM) as its integrating framework. Results indicated that most schools measure access by the number of identified students with special needs whose participation is linked with their parents' participation in their individualized educational plan. The availability of SPED teachers and resources also affect quality. The authors suggested that training programs which actively involve regular teachers should be conducted continuously in order to equip them with necessary skills and knowledge thereby eliminating their negative attitudes towards inclusion.

1.4 Research Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model states that school, family, neighborhood and peers are among the system that is closest and has maximum interaction with the child and are great factors for the child's development. This study relates that the four areas (physical facilities, faculty and staff, curriculum and services and programs) are the immediate concerns for a child to be in an environment where learning and development is at high rate. Primary relationships are those that last a lifetime, hence it is necessary for the school to consider the learning of these children with special needs in a regular setting, with typical peers and with the most appropriate programs as possible.

2. Materials and Methods

The study made use of descriptive methods, adapting the Department of Education's "Basic Checklist for the Evaluation of an Institution's Readiness in Responding to Children with Different Educational Needs" in the survey questionnaires that were administered to selected respondents chosen through purposive sampling. Since the study focused on the school plant

facilities, teachers and staffs’ knowledge, curriculum and services they offer and programs they have, one hundred five (105) respondents were randomly chosen from all sectors of the institution distributed as follows: Forty (40) represented the administration (General Services Department, Institutional Admissions and Testing Office, Registrar’s Office and Guidance Offices of the Integrated School and the College), fifty (50) faculty members from the Integrated School and the Colleges, and fifteen (15) students.

Interviews were also conducted with selected respondents and in-depth analysis of their responses were done to further support the results of the evaluation. Focus Group Discussions were also held with selected representatives from the sectors mentioned to further validate results of the survey. Interviews with personnel from Children’s Developmental and Intervention Center, Inc. (CDIC), a private institution in Lipa City which offers Individualized Education Program for children with special needs, and benchmarking with other schools which already have an existing program for inclusion were also done to gather more inputs for the development of the proposed program for inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classes of DLSL.

3. Results and Discussions

Chi-square goodness of fit test was used to determine if the DLSL respondents vary significantly in their perceived level of readiness. Results indicate that there is a marked perception among the respondents.

Table 1. Level of Readiness of DLSL in terms of School Plant Facilities

School Plant Facilities	Frequency					χ^2	P	VI
	HE	E	SE	NE	NA			
1. Elevators are accessible to children in wheelchairs and buttons (with Braille) are reachable.	35	31	12	24	3	33.810	.000	S
2. Doors are accessible to children in wheelchairs.	30	45	18	7	5	53.238	.000	S
3. Corridors have enough space for wheelchairs to pass another and turn around	51	30	17	5	2	76.587	.000	S
4. Walkways are provided with slip-resistant materials.	21	35	40	7	2	53.048	.000	S
5. Fences are provided around the facility.	35	42	22	3	3	61.238	.000	S

6. Signs (with Braille) should be easily seen by exceptional and typical children. It should be kept simple and with contrasting colors for easy detection.	18	24	22	39	2	33.524	.000	S
7. There are separate comfort rooms for boys and girls.	82	16	3	2	2	228.190	.000	S
8. Comfort room shall permit easy passage of a wheelchair (allows to turn around).	20	32	31	19	3	26.190	.000	S
9. Spatial structure (how students are seated and teacher's position) allows exceptional and typical children to move around the classrooms.	19	42	27	14	3	40.667	.000	S
10. Colors, poster and furniture decorated do not easily distract the exceptional and typical children.	17	49	30	4	5	67.905	.000	S

Minimum expected cell frequency is 21, df=4.

Table 1 shows that in terms of school plant facilities, DLSL is able to meet the standards set by DepEd. All of the provisions were rated either evident, slightly evident or highly evident. Only the “signs (with Braille) that can be easily seen by exceptional and typical children, to be kept simple and with contrasting colors for easy detection” are not evident. This implies that the school needs to improve in this area if it intends to cater to visually impaired learners.

To ensure that the school provides accessible learning environment to all learners, with or without disabilities, the seven principles of universal design must be adhered to. These include equitable, simple and intuitive use, flexibility, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and appropriate size and space.

Table 2. Level of Readiness of DLSL in terms of Teachers and Staff

Teachers and Staff	Frequency					χ^2	<i>p</i>	VI
	HE	E	SE	NE	NA			
1. Faculty members are given their loads ahead of time and are equally distributed.	24	34	29	6	12	26.095	.000	S
2. Teachers are involved in	36	41	15	4	9	52.095	.000	S

curriculum planning and program development.									
3. Staff needs such as supplies, books, computers and other machineries are provided.	46	38	13	3	5	74.190	.000	S	
4. Fair compensation, fringe benefits, special awards and bonuses are given to teachers to boost morale and self-esteem.	17	46	28	5	9	51.905	.000	S	
5. Teachers are provided with training programs that give knowledge and capability building exercises in teaching a classroom with exceptional and typical children.	26	30	28	13	8	18.476	.000	S	
6. Teachers are provided with trainings that give awareness of methods, strategies and resources that will prepare them to instruct exceptional and typical children.	19	24	37	19	6	23.714	.000	S	
7. Teachers have basic knowledge about sign language, Braille reading and writing and different behavioral management.	6	13	28	48	10	56.571	.000	S	
8. Teachers are capable to apply knowledge, skills and attributes to accommodate exceptional and typical children.	9	26	38	24	8	30.286	.000	S	
9. Teachers are able to monitor the effectiveness of their practices and are flexible enough to adjust practices if necessary.	13	39	32	11	10	34.762	.000	S	
10. Teachers believe that exceptional children can	16	46	27	10	6	49.143	.000	S	

succeed. School personnel and staffs are committed to collaborative practice.

Minimum expected cell frequency is 21, df=4.

Similarly, table 2 shows that teachers and staff believe they are ready to handle students with special needs since they are provided with sufficient supplies, fair compensation and ample training in strategies and methods on how to accommodate exceptional and typical children. Only the “basic knowledge about sign language, Braille reading and writing and different behavioral management” is not evident. This necessitates the administration to include these aspects in developing programs for faculty and staff to empower them in handling hearing and visually impaired learners and those with behavioral problems.

In the focus group discussion, some teachers suggested the need to hire SPED specialist who could give them assistance in designing their lessons to fit the needs of CSN included in their class. They also suggested a stronger tie-up with the guidance and counseling office in the form of constant collaboration with parents and teachers to monitor the progress of CSN.

Table 3. Level of Readiness of DLSL in terms of Curriculum and Services

Curriculum and Services	Frequency					χ^2	<i>P</i>	VI
	HE	E	SE	NE	NA			
1. Provides opportunities for an interaction with the environment—that is so critical to learning.	16	46	24	12	7	44.571	.000	S
2. Multiple instructional models are available to meet the individual needs of exceptional and typical children.	13	47	28	14	3	55.333	.000	S
3. Textbooks, references, and supplementary materials are used to a great extent to reinforce learning.	28	42	21	8	5	43.981	.000	S
4. Assistive technologies and special facilities and equipment suited to the learning needs of exceptional and typical children are utilized.	22	39	23	18	3	31.524	.000	S
5. Counselors facilitate communication among teachers, parents, administrators and students to adapt the school’s environment in the best interests of each individual student.	28	42	25	7	3	48.857	.000	S
6. School psychology services which play a	18	45	31	7	4	55.714	.000	S

supportive role in the identification, assessment, planning, implementation, reporting and evaluation process described in developing an individual Education plan.								
7. Learning assistance services are school-based, non-categorical resource services designed to support classroom teachers and their students who have mild to moderate difficulties in learning and behavior.	16	38	37	10	4	46.667	.000	S
8. School health services are screening, diagnostic, treatment and health counseling services provided at the school which are provided by the school nurses and by school health centers either on-site or on the campus.	24	46	19	10	6	46.857	.000	S
9. Appropriate and varied assessment tools are used to evaluate learning outcomes and are congruent with the objectives.	21	43	23	10	8	37.048	.000	S
10. Evaluations derived from varied sources (activities, tests, homework, projects, etc) are explained to the students and parents.	23	42	25	7	8	39.333	.000	S

Minimum expected cell frequency is 21, df=4.

Table 3 conveys that the respondents perceive the school's provision on curriculum ascertains that CSN are provided a progressive curriculum appropriate for and responsive to their developmental conditions/levels, needs, capabilities, backgrounds as well as interests and anticipated destinations/future and in consideration of their educational and social contexts. During the focus group discussion, personnel from the admissions and guidance and counseling departments mentioned that the application procedures for CSN includes the initial screening form wherein the question pertaining to Medical Disclosure must be accomplished and an interview with parents regarding the condition and/or medical needs of the applicant is a necessary part of the process.

However, based on their experience most parents tend to hold back information regarding their children's condition for fear of rejection or non-admission from the school. Thus, they suggested that psychoeducational assessment (PA) be pursued by trained clinicians and diagnosticians within an educational context to determine/identify the child's development condition including his/her achievement level and also possible exceptionality/disability.

Table 4. Level of Readiness of DLSL in terms of Programs

Programs	Frequency					χ^2	<i>P</i>	VI
	HE	E	SE	NE	NA			
1. Teaching strategies are creative and multi-dimensional.	26	45	24	4	6	53.524	.000	S
2. Teaching strategies maximize the use of all remaining sense modalities.	23	47	22	5	8	52.667	.000	S
3. Teaching strategies provide active participation in the learning process.	31	48	13	4	9	63.143	.000	S
4. Teaching strategies provide experiential learning essential to developmental needs of the child.	29	45	18	4	9	51.524	.000	S
5. Teaching strategies are student-centered.	30	47	15	3	10	58.952	.000	S
6. Teaching strategies provide provision for individual differences.	27	48	17	3	10	58.381	.000	S
7. Teaching strategies and methods are clear and purposeful.	29	50	14	3	9	67.714	.000	S
8. Teachers monitor student's progress and modify plan as needed.	30	47	14	5	8	59.173	.000	S
9. A variety of appropriate settings and naturally occurring activities that are used to facilitate children's learning and development.	24	55	18	5	3	83.524	.000	S
10. Teachers provide environment that foster positive relationships including peer- peer, parent/ caregiver- child, and parent- caregiver relationships.	33	49	14	7	2	73.048	.000	S

Minimum expected cell frequency is 21, df=4.

Table 4 reveals that the respondents perceive the school to be welcoming for CSN as it provides learning tools that are available for the particular needs of each individual and adaptable curricula that ensure full participation of all children in its activities. However, during the focus group discussion, the teachers mentioned the need for an institutionalized program for inclusion of students with special needs in the regular class.

Specifically, they stressed the importance of being given guidelines on how to go about the practice of inclusive education. This includes (but not limited to) designing an instructional

program for CSN that is based on the results of a thorough psychoeducational assessment, planning the methodologies/strategies to be used in teaching the CSN either the same curricular contents intended/designed for typically-developing learners with some adaptations in instructional methodologies (accommodation) or by way of modifying or simplifying them (modification). They need to come up with instructional schemes or special learning plans/arrangements which permit structural flexibility, collaborative teaching, and resource sharing aimed at individualizing and maximizing intervention for CSN.

The teachers also mentioned their experience of having difficulty in managing behaviors of CSN and expressed the need for training in behavior modification and behavior coaching. Children with disabilities who enter the regular class tend to manifest more behavior problems, hence, it is important for the teachers to be equipped with skills on behavior-management to address specific behavior-social concerns.

2. What conditions will DLSL be ready to accommodate?

Based on the profile given by the guidance office, there are ten students (5 males and 5 females) from the Integrated School who were identified to have behavioral problems. Seven of them are at risk of having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), one has a problem on learning to write (dysgraphia) and learn phonemes (dyslexia), one has mild autism, and the other one has Cerebral Palsy. Their ages range from 5 to 14 years old, having either one or both parents working abroad and with either 1 or 2 siblings. Most of the problems they encountered in school are hyperactivity, inattention, easily getting into verbal fight, low frustration tolerance, non-compliance to rules/authority, doing work partially/haphazardly, difficulty in hand writing and in doing projects that require physical activity.

On the other hand, there are thirty-six (36) college students who were identified by the guidance office to have special needs. Four (4) have social problems or suspected schizophrenia, twelve (12) have emotional/depressive mood disorder, nine (9) have physical or medical condition (with heart problems or poor eyesight), two (2) are suspected to have autism while four (4) showed signs of ADHD, one has Cerebral Palsy while another one has learning disability and two (2) have traumas. In this distribution, eleven (11) were freshmen, eight (8) were sophomores, six (6) were juniors and eleven (11) were seniors.

Considering the identified conditions of these CSN, the school could accommodate initially students who are physically handicapped, those with mild medical conditions, or with moderate behavioral problems such as autism, ADHD, social/emotional stress.

3. What are the recommendations for DLSL to be able to comply with the requirements for a school that offers inclusion?

In order to operationalize the practice of inclusive education, De La Salle Lipa needs to embark on an institutional endeavor of careful planning and preparation before actual implementation of the program. Conceptualization and actualization of inclusive education program involves three phases – preparation phase, implementation phase, evaluation and sustenance phase.

Following DepEd Memo No. 88, DLSL needs to consider three phases. In the preparation phase, the school needs to consider the ideological foundations or bases of the design and implementation of the program. Principles and guidelines as well as goals and objectives must be set clearly and disseminated institutionally in order to involve all stakeholders in the process. Important considerations should also be done in terms of pupil accommodation. Psychoeducational assessment must be pursued to ensure that the admission of CSN is based on age notwithstanding gender, the ability/disability, and the child's background relying on the information provided by the parents. Physical structures including equipment, facilities, lighting, ventilation and seating need to be checked to see if there are physical - structure components that need to be provided/redone/modified considering the presence of CSN.

The school administration should also ensure that the staff and support persons such as administrators, teachers, and non-teaching personnel are given sufficient training for the implementation of inclusion. Likewise, parents of CSN must also be informed of their involvement and participation in the process. Lastly, careful planning on how modification in the curriculum and instruction as well as production of materials and use of technology in education will be carried and effected to determine the doable schemes for individualization within the regular class.

In the implementation phase, the administration must ensure that the planned instructional individualization schemes are operationalized by enforcing implementing guidelines and logistics in collaboration with parents and support-service givers. Moreover, the objectives of the guidelines in networking with support persons and in materials production should also be made clear to all the stakeholders.

Finally, in the evaluation and sustenance phase, the school needs to devise a continuous progression scheme (CPS) and explain in full detail how it works and why it is appropriate in

the advancement of CSN. Evaluation using criterion-reference should also be implemented considering its implications to instruction and assessment of CSN to measure their development and progress. The school should also emphasize the importance of practicing multidisciplinary team evaluation and continuous collaboration with family and community to the education of CSN in the inclusionary program as they prepare for transition options – employment, future job training or further education through schooling.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The philosophy behind inclusive education believes that children with special educational needs should also be afforded with a range of services in the regular classroom setup together with their normal peers. Results of the data gathered through the surveys done as well as the follow-up interviews and focus group discussions support the respondents' belief that DLSL has the capacity to provide these services through planned curricular and co-curricular activities such as classroom instruction, varied school programs, and involvement in clubs or organizations.

However, the school should consider the recommendations mentioned in the previous section to ensure that the inclusive education program will not be mishandled. In order to guarantee successful implementation of the inclusion program, certain adaptations/modifications (like accommodations of support persons in the classroom; the shift from highly academic to more psychosocial concerns; and, the shift from achievement tests to multi-source evaluation, including performance-based measures) should be adapted to address concerns/issues/problems relative to IE.

De La Salle Lipa has been offering Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Special Education for eight years now and since then has been producing quality graduates of the said program which is evident in their high passing rate in the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). Since full implementation of the inclusion program would entail hiring SPED teachers and experts in the field of special education, this might have significant budgetary implications in the area of personnel compensation. It is therefore recommended that the graduates of DLSL BEED major in SPED be considered in the hiring process.

Lastly, the involvement of other specialists particularly in support-services centers like speech or behavior clinics, therapy centers will be helpful to CSN. A system of collaboration with the Children's Developmental Intervention Center, Inc. (CDIC), a private institution in Lipa City which offers Individualized Education Program for children with special needs, could be established and pursued.

To this end, the researcher proposes a blueprint for the program for inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom (see appended concept paper) that is aligned with the school's vision-mission of providing holistic education for all.

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