

Public Secondary School Teachers Implementation of Inclusive Education Program Amid Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract — The study explored the public secondary school teachers' lived experiences in Kananga National High School both in Junior and Senior High department on the implementation of inclusive education program and described the status of such program implementation amid Covid-19 pandemic. A qualitative transcendental phenomenology approach and thematic analysis were utilized in the study. The research employed a one-on-one, semi structured interview having 2-3 questions with probing and follow-up questions to the targeted participants of the study. The purposive sampling method was employed to select the participants who can provide rich and relevant information to answer the objectives of the study. The result showed three emerging themes based on teachers' participants responses which include (1) mixtures of learners in the classroom, (2) teachers' management of changes of practices/ pedagogies amid pandemic (3) challenges and difficulties in the implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream classroom amid pandemic. It is imperative to hear the side of the major stakeholders such as teachers and administrators to achieved success in the implementation of inclusive education program by equipping them with proper knowledge and skills for them to provide quality education to all learners most specially to these learners with special needs and disabilities amid any circumstances. It is recommended to improve the physical environment to cater the needs of these learners with special needs and disabilities in the mainstream classroom and provide more learning materials and resources. Moreover, trainings, seminars, orientations, and workshops relative to inclusive education, expert personnel such as SPED teachers, nurses and guidance counselors deployed in a mainstream classroom for additional help to assess, evaluate and when the need arises. Furthermore, addition of shadow teachers aside from the regular teachers handling and facilitating the mainstream classroom.

Keywords — ***Inclusive Education; Education for All; Special Education; Quality Education***

I. Introduction

Education systems were interwoven in a complex organization of international and supranational agreements, curricula, legislations, plans, programs, policies, rules, and regulations, while its structures were from the macrocosm down to the microcosm level and vice versa of operations and management. With the long-time principle "Education for all", the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was further built. Also, with the pledge to leave no one behind, Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education and the Education 2030 Framework for Action emphasizes the aforementioned principle as a way to conceptualize inclusive education. Moreover, the principle on Education for All takes into account that the needs of underprivileged,

marginalized and most disadvantaged were meet and catered. Moreover, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.5 specifically necessitates the assurance of equal access to education in all levels from basic to higher education, its extension to formal and informal such as vocational training education to the destitute including persons with disabilities, indigenous people, and children in susceptible situation. Furthermore, the 1994 Salamanca Statement with its expanded concept on inclusive education, focused not only on children with special needs but to include children from all backgrounds (Sestier, 2016), thus making it more all-encompassing.

Here in the Philippines, according to Muega (2016), high quality inclusive education still poses issues and challenges for both institutions of the basic education in the cities and even in remote or rural areas where many of public schools remain ill- equipped in the implementation of high-quality inclusive education. He also asserted that having a conceptual foundation in inclusive education is one of the most neglected components in the implementation of the program. He further asserted that by recognizing inclusive education conceptual foundations, this will ensure teachers, administrators, and parents to fully comprehend and value the ground where inclusive education was developed. Moreover, his contention on adoption of inclusion policy from other countries. However, specified the adjustments to be made to fully fit and suited in accordance with the needs of Filipino learners with due consideration to culture, economic and social realities to strengthen the policies in school and classroom. Thus, making it more contextualize and indigenize in its implementation process.

On the other hand, the Department of Education addressed the issue with urgency which was overtly stated in D.O 72, s. 2009, that “a grant of instructive services will be provided to a regular teacher either with or without a training or with trained SPED teachers to cater children with special needs” (DO 72, s. 2009). This means that regular school will be equipped with the resources and services to serve children with special needs even without a trained SPED teacher available. Surely, as mandated of the Order, educational services will be given eventually to schools the access from SPED foundations or SPED trained educators. Also stated that alternative options were opted in elucidating its goal in truly addressing the urgency at hand. Stated further that, the first option to this program was “an organization handled by a trained SPED teacher where children with similar disabilities either from a mono-grade or multi-grade is self-contained in a class”. Secondly, in general education or regular class, it can either be a regular teacher, SPED trained teacher or both will supervise and address the child’s needs relative to its inclusion or placement of the child with disabilities considering learning with his/her peers. Lastly, when the child with disabilities will be separated from the general education or regular class, an option was a resource room program wherein the child report to a SPED teacher provided with small group/one-on-one instruction and/or appropriate interventions” (DO 72, s. 2009). As depicted in the second program option, these children with special needs incorporated in the mainstream classroom, attending regular classes, and taught by a regular class teacher, immerse in a large size population eventually brought catastrophe if teachers don’t have the proper training on the matter

per se. Eventually, deferring their needs and hindering their chances to develop academically and holistically.

Here in Kananga National High School Kananga, Leyte, there were identified cases of learners, medically diagnosed with special needs, and apparently seen with disabilities in physical, emotional, and mental aspect enrolled in the mainstream/ regular classroom at the height of pandemic. Moreover, regular teachers were the only one handling these types of learners with special needs and disabilities without the availability of trained Special Education teacher or experts. With the modular learning modality adopted by the school and with the prevalence of the COVID-19 virus, these teachers were facing additional challenges as to how these children with special needs and disabilities will be assessed, taught, and graded to be able to meet the required learning competencies set by DepEd to every learner in the mainstream or regular class setting.

With the mentioned phenomenon, it's imperative to address the issue on implementing inclusive education especially on learners with special needs and disabilities where regular teachers currently dealing with in the mainstream classroom vis-à-vis with pandemic. Furthermore, with this phenomenon, it's vital to explore and recognize the lived- experiences of teachers in relation to the implementation of inclusive education in their respective classrooms. Therefore, the aim of this study focuses on the lived experiences of public secondary school teachers in Kananga National High School regarding their implementation of inclusive education program and eventually provide a general description of the current status on the implementation of inclusive education program at the public secondary school amid COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this study also provides additional knowledge on the effect of the recent situation to public secondary schools' implementation of inclusivity where these type of learners with special needs and disabilities are integrated in the mainstream classroom. Thus, the study sought to explore the public secondary school teacher's lived experiences and provide general description of the status of the implementation of inclusive education program at the public secondary school amid COVID-19 pandemic specifically on teachers' perception on Inclusive Education and their management of changes in their teaching practices/ pedagogies in relation to inclusive education amid the pandemic.

Related Literature Review

In the Philippines, there were several legal frameworks which promote the right to access education of all children and where the program was anchored to. The Department of Education Order No. 72, s. 2009 was one of the legal bases that largely determined the practice of Inclusive Education in the basic education though it was an outdated directives which does not specify a stable, clear, and definite process of including children with special needs in the general education setting. However, at present, the Special Education Act (Philippine Senate Bill 3002) determine the practice of inclusion in general education schools but still under review at the Philippine Senate (Muega, 2016). According to Presidential Decree 603 (The Child and Youth Welfare Code) under Article 3 (Rights of the Child) states that "all children shall be entitled to the rights herein set forth

without distinction as to legitimacy or illegitimacy, sex, social status, religion, political antecedents and other factors”. Therefore, even at times of pandemic, people with special needs and disabilities should be acknowledged of their rights for social participation where their voices should be heard for the authorities to support them (Domingo, 2020). Moreover, Republic Act 11560 states that “all learners with disabilities, whether enrolled in public or private schools, shall be accorded services and reasonable accommodation based on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and shall have the right to avail of the appropriate support and related services”. Therefore, for these learners with disabilities and special needs to have access and support to educational platform in school despite the onset of pandemic, an assertive technology and utilization of social media platform will be useful to maximize their potentials (Domingo, 2020). Furthermore, DepEd Order No.21 series of 2019, Annex 5 provides the policy framework for the implementation of inclusive education for basic education. It laid down general guidelines on developing learning resources, learning delivery, educational assessment, learning environment, teacher professional development, school management, governance support, monitoring and evaluation (Domingo, 2020)

System’s Approach

This research was anchored on systems theory which served as background for renovating educational systems and schools to become more inclusive. The systems theory presumed that any alteration or modification in any aspect of the environment could result to changes in other parts of ecosystem which eventually could affect the lives of individuals. However, the specification of this theory was borrowed by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development which takes off on person lives, affect his development through modifications and interaction in his/her environment. Each system (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem was an avenue for interaction with his/her specie (Kinsela & Senior, 2008; hayes & Bulat, 2017 as cited by Domingo, 2020).

Human Rights- Based Approach

The right to access education, right to quality education, and respect for rights were the three principles of the human rights- based approach. These three mentioned principles should be taken into accounts to see changes in the system level. An alignment should also be done with the human rights- based approach to removed barriers that will hinder the accessibility as a right to access quality education. Moreover, with the use of child- friendly learning environments and the delivery of curriculum using child- centered teaching strategies were highlighted on the right to quality education. Lastly, a respect to cultural differences and engaging child rights delivered in education were a requirement for the principle on respect for rights (Domingo, 2020).

Whole- School Approach

This approach helped in renovating schools to have an inclusive learning environment utilizing a comprehensive school-wide reforms emphasizing on changing the whole school rather than just a subset of its population. The index developed by Ainscow and Booth with three

dimensions namely creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practices guide school in transforming more inclusivity, promulgate school development plans and evaluation processes (Domingo, 2020).

Capability Approach

This approach called for a holistic review of how an education system enhances and hinders an individual from acquiring functionality. Set by Amartya Sen, this approach further worked on the details of interrelated theses in economic welfare most specifically on the assessment of personal well-being, poverty and inequality. Moreover, this approach worked in an interrelated concepts on functionality that tackles on the roles each person may take related to the task he/she can achieve and the concept of capabilities or the practical opportunities (Domingo, 2020).

The Relational Inclusion Model

This model developed by Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016) stated that inclusive education provides equal opportunity for all children to actively participate in their own learning and the outcome of an educational system that support learners' engagement. With its five core principles: context and culture responsive practices, holistic and child-centered pedagogy, flexible educational practices based on children's functioning, increased participation in classroom and societies and relation-building educators and parent can help improves children's capabilities (Domingo, 2020).

Pyramid Approach

This is based on the pyramid-shaped framework of intervention set in Inter-Agency Standing Committee or IASC guidelines, 2007 (Mattingly, 2017). The pyramid approach comprises of social support to basic services as its base in the pyramid. Following the next level of the pyramid were the family and the community. Towards the top, was occupied by non-specialists support and at the apex where the specialist located comprises of psychologist and psychiatrists. Social basic services in the education context were supported by family and the community followed by non-specialist and specialist support. In this approach, the focus is more on the holistic broad-based preventive interventions.

Phenomenological Research Approach

Phenomenology was the philosophical study of pre-reflective (lived experiences) lifeworld or as immediately experienced by them (human). Thus, phenomenological research was the study of lived or experiential meaning and try to describe and interpret the meaning in the ways that they appear and are founded from one's understanding, phonological, intellectual, nonintellectual awareness, and by our pre-consciousness and presuppositions. Moreover, this approach explores the unique meanings of any human experience or phenomenon. By using this phenomenological design, the researcher was oriented to utilized and employed the processes of gathering data

through in-depth interview, transcribing, and systematic coding of qualitative raw data and generating themes from participants' cleaned transcripts. Thus, a thematic analysis in processing of raw set data and was done in this type of study which is necessary in interpreting, analyzing, generating conclusion and findings of the present study (Given, 2008).

II. Methodology

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was employed in this study. Phenomenology was one of the approaches in qualitative research that describe the essence or meaning of a phenomenon encountered by several individuals which in this study was the lived-experiences of public secondary school teachers in the implementation of inclusive education amid pandemic. This further utilized a transcendental type of phenomenology where it focused more on the respondents set of descriptions generated from an essence or meaning of the lived experiences in relation to implementation of inclusive education amid the pandemic. Moreover, this research employed a one-on-one interview using an audio recorder from the researcher's a mobile phone which aided for the gathering of qualitative data to answer the research questions of this study. An in-depth one-on-one, semi-structured interview was conducted to the targeted responses of the study. The research respondents were five (5) KNHS teachers and were selected through purposive sampling. Three (3) of them were from the Senior High School Department and the other two (2) were from the Junior High Department. To analyze a phenomenological raw data set, the researcher followed a systematic procedure employing Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology and thematic analysis procedures.

Procedures

The researcher sent a letter to the school principal to get the approval and schedule of the conduct of the interview. Upon getting the approval, an informed consent letter was sent to the targeted respondents and set the scheduled date, time, and venue for the actual interview by the respondents. Moreover, aside from reading of the content and signing of the informed consent form, the respondents were also instructed that their involvement were entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to without affecting in any ways their personal and professional performances. Furthermore, they were also assured that any information obtained in relation with the study were treated with utmost confidentiality and their identity will be kept anonymous all throughout the interview transcripts. An in-depth interview protocol was prepared by the researcher and developed with the advice and feedback of the researcher's classmates in the Doctorate program together with their professor. The final instrument was developed after the pilot interview with a Master Teacher in the education field in Rizal Kananga National High School Kananga, Leyte. The interview protocol included three (3) questions proceeded probe and with follow-up questions based on their responses for clarification and elaboration. Validation and triangulation of data were made after transcription were collected and transcribed where the researcher went back to the participants and show the correctness of

transcripts and confirmation of the result of the data obtained by affixing respondents' signatories. The conduct of all the interviews were done by the researcher and after each interview, transcripts were generated in verbatim. Data collection was completed over a one (1) week period or when no further themes emerged to comprehend the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

The analyses of data were based on the emerged themes from the respondent's transcripts which answered the aim and objectives of the study. The discussions on emerged themes from the teacher's experiences in the implementation of inclusive education amid pandemic includes (1) mixtures of learners in the classroom, (2) teachers management on changes in practices/pedagogies amid pandemic, (3) challenges and difficulties on the implementation of Inclusive Education program in the mainstream classroom with sub- themes.

III. Results and Discussion

Most teachers perceived inclusive education through a variety of definition. The most common reported definitions were (1) fuse inside the classroom, (2) giving equal opportunities, (3) having different learners, (4) SPED learners in the mainstream/ regular class and (5) accept everybody in class. In the aspect of managing changes on teachers' practices/ pedagogies amid pandemic, teachers expressed it in number of ways to met and catered the needs of these learners with special needs and disabilities. This was further divided into two categories according to the clusters of responses the respondents describe namely, (a) schemes for modular learning, and (b) restructuring of pedagogy. Moreover, the third emerged themes were on challenges and difficulties on the implementation of Inclusive Education program in the mainstream classroom amid pandemic. These themes were further divided into two categories namely, (a) classroom issues, and (b) support issues.

Theme 1: Perceptions of Public Secondary Teachers on Inclusive Education

Mixture of learners in the classroom

Teachers expressed their perception of inclusive education meaningful in dealing with implementation of inclusive education in their respective classrooms. Their idea on inclusive education was align in the definition of inclusive education which transforms educational system to include all children despite of race, religion, disability in the mainstream classroom (Kinsela & Senior; Liasidou, 2015 as cited by Domingo, 2020). Moreover, there perception was also aligned with The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) which emphasizes on providing equal access to education for women, underprivileged groups, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, refugees and in other vulnerable situations.

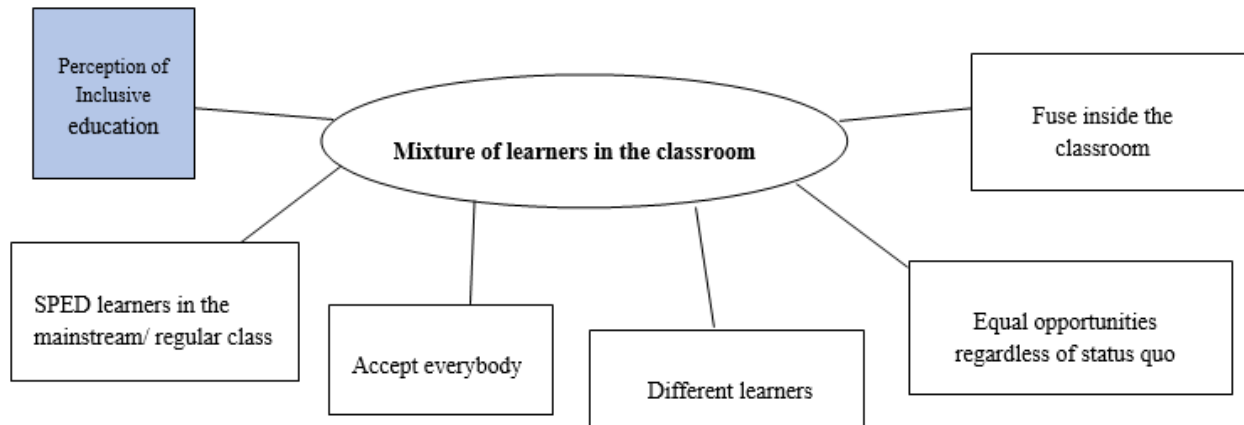


Figure 1. Thematic network for Mixture of Learners in the Classroom.

Theme 2: Teachers management of changes in practice/ pedagogies amid pandemic

Teachers expressed how they manage their classroom practice or pedagogies during pandemic in number of ways to met and catered the needs of these learners with special needs and disabilities. This was further divided into three categories according to the clusters of responses the respondents described namely, (a) schemes for modular learning, (b) classroom issues and (c) restructuring of pedagogy.

Theme 2.1 Schemes for modular learnings

Teachers used varied classroom pedagogies in managing their classrooms during pandemic in relation to inclusive education. This management of classroom was essential to met the needs of learners with special needs and disabilities in the mainstream classroom. This was included in D.O 12 s. 2020 or the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BELCP) of the department which ensures to continue learning through the K-12 curriculum adjustments, aligning of learning materials and deployment of multiple learning delivery modalities. Furthermore, this also adhere to the right-based approach to ensure access to education where quality education will be provided to all learners through flexible and distance learning strategies.

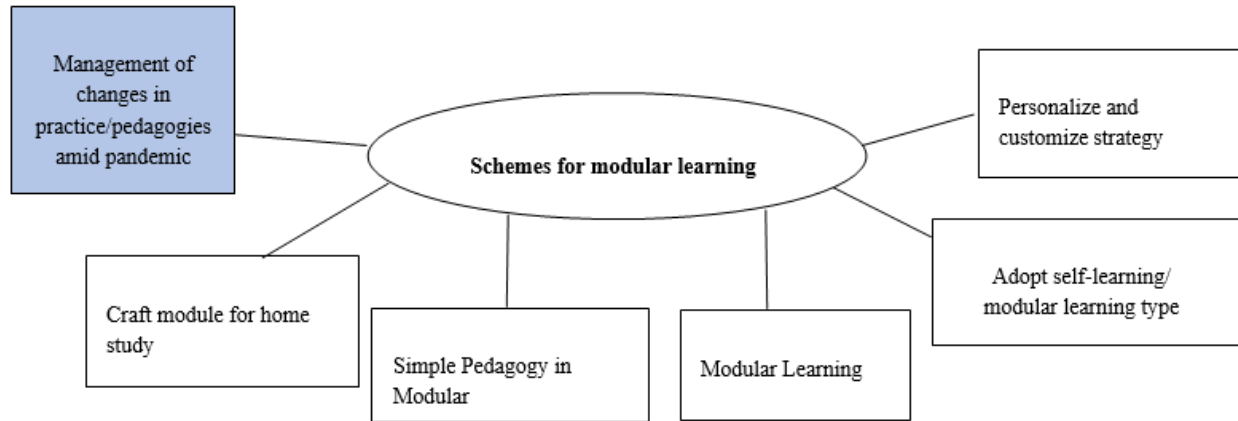


Figure 2. Thematic network for Schemes for Modular Learning.

Theme 2.1 Restructuring of Pedagogies

In the context of inclusive education, teachers applied a change of pedagogies during pandemic to cater the needs and met the standards given by the department. Guidelines on developing learning resources, delivery and assessment related to inclusive education were anchored on D.O No. 21 s. 2019, annex 5 wherein those respondents from the participants were incorporated. Therefore, changing of pedagogies to learners with special needs and disabilities were essential to give opportunity to learn and for these types of learners to fully develop their maximum potentials.

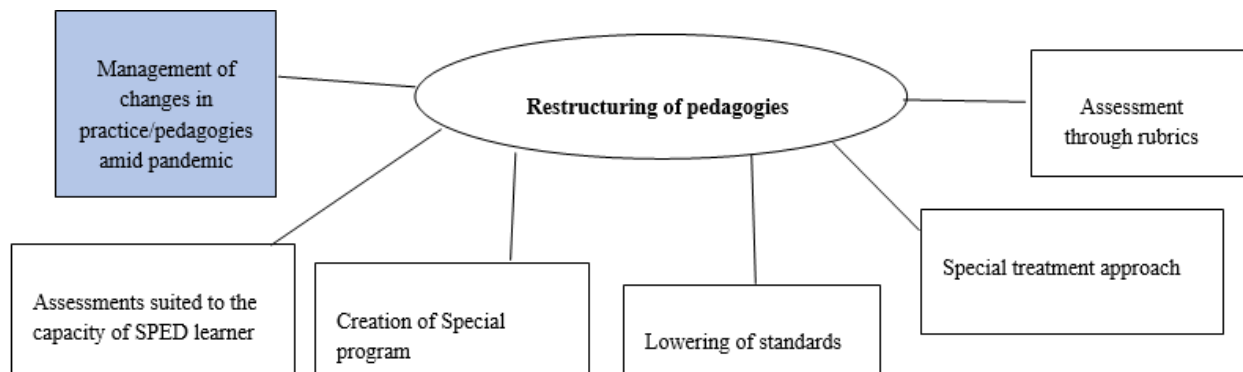


Figure 3. Thematic network for Restructuring of Pedagogies.

Theme 3: Challenges and difficulties in the implementation of Inclusive Education in the mainstream classroom amid pandemic

Incorporation of psychosocial and mental health support into school programs and curriculum served as a good intervention to counteract the challenges brought by the prevalence of pandemic in the new normal paradigm shift in education. By so doing, the mainstream/ regular teachers were able to integrate the psychosocial perspective especially in identifying students who were not developmentally ready. However, issues on its implementation impeded and posited difficulties and challenges in the mainstream classroom setting.

Theme 3.1 Classroom Issues

Teachers encountered some challenges and issues that hinder the implementation of inclusive education during pandemic in their respective classrooms. These classroom issues included based from the responses of the participants were essential to address in managing classroom pedagogies and in dealing with learners with special needs and disabilities during pandemic. Therefore, addressing the issue at hand will help in the smooth flow of implementing inclusive education program.

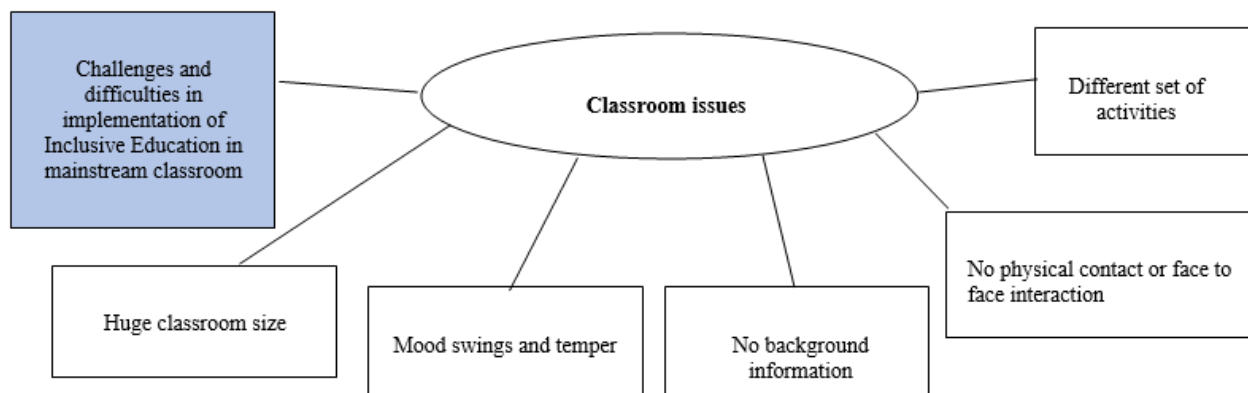


Figure 4. Thematic network for Classroom Issues.

Theme 3.2 Support issues

In this time of pandemic, support from different sectors were essential to be able to implement inclusive education successfully in school and mainstream classroom. One of the approaches to psychosocial support for learners with special needs and disabilities in relation to inclusive education was the pyramid approach which was based on the pyramid- shaped framework of intervention set in Inter-Agency Standing Committee or IASC guidelines, 2007 (Mattingly, 2017). The pyramid approach comprised of social support to basic services as its base in the pyramid. Following the next level of the pyramid were the family and the community. Towards the top, was occupied by non- specialists support and at the apex was the specialist

located comprised of psychologist and psychiatrists. Social basic services in the education context were supported by family and the community followed by non-specialist and specialist support.

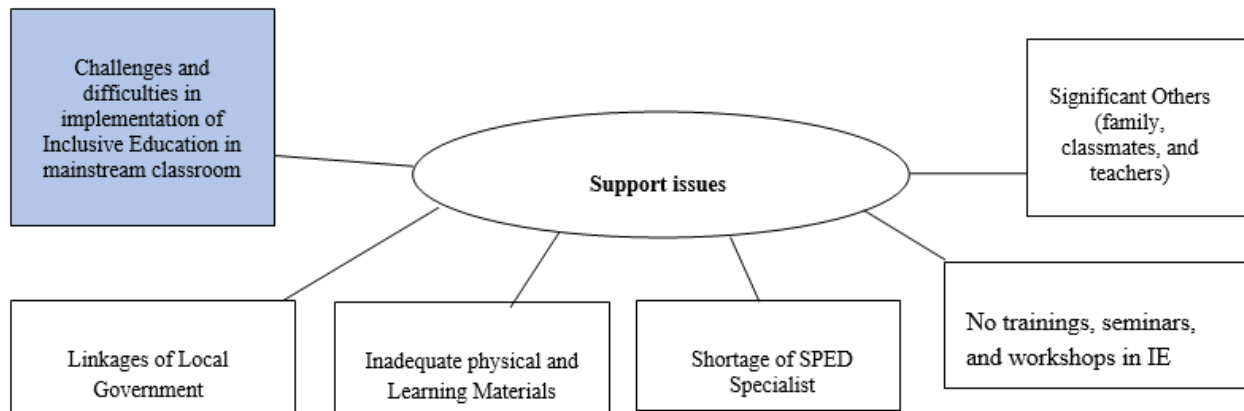


Figure 4. Thematic network for Support Issues.

Discussion

Perception of Public Secondary Teachers on Inclusive Education

According to Domingo (2020), positive perceptions towards inclusivity were important to determine success in implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, how teachers perceived and understand the meanings of inclusive education will transcend in dealing inclusive education in their classroom and can affect the totality of classroom environment. Thus, this served as one of the criteria to assess and gauge teachers in their implementation of inclusive education in their classroom.

Teachers Management of Changes in Practices/ Pedagogies amid Pandemic

Planning teacher's practice and pedagogies surely helped in the instruction, assessment of learners with special needs and disabilities in relation to inclusive education. Moreover, changing of pedagogies to suit learners with special needs and disabilities especially in the presence of any circumstances were essential to provide equal opportunity to learn and develop to their maximum potentials. These includes assessing suited to the capacity of SPED learner, creation of special program, lowering of standards, special treatment approach, and assessment through rubrics.

Challenges and Difficulties in the Implementation of Inclusive Education in the Mainstream Classroom amid Pandemic

The need for sustainable professional development relative to Inclusive Education implementation

Despite the long-time implementation of inclusive education and the continuous evolution of the program in all nations around the world, still challenges and difficulties in its success in the

contextualization of its policies and guidelines in school and classroom setting remains a problem to solve and address. Though studies on its implementation in the country revealed teachers had no defiance on the program of inclusive education (Muega, 2016; Andaya, et al., 2015 as cited by Domingo 2020), still it is imperative to put emphasis for teachers' professional development in relation to inclusive education since they were the primary mover on the success of the program especially in the basic education. Moreover, acquiring of knowledge and skill sets relative to inclusive education can be done through trainings, seminars/webinars, orientation, and workshops that will provide a high-quality inclusive education and eventually offer quality education.

Prioritization of learning resources and materials for Inclusive Education

To make implementation of inclusive education successful in school, learning resources and materials to be used should be next in priority lane to equip both teachers and learners with special needs and disabilities and further cater the interests and needs of all learners in the mainstream classroom. These may includes, manipulative/ tactile materials, printed books in braille, and sign languages, smooth pavement for going up, down, and going to their respective classrooms.

Active engagement of significant others and community linkages

Several literatures highlighted the necessities of significant others to support inclusive education in which they provided tantamount effort for its success. Such significant others include, family, classmates, teachers, and the community. In relation, one approaches that provided significant difference in inclusive education implementation was the pyramid approach. This comprises of social support to basic services as its foundation in the pyramid. In the first level were the family and the community. Towards the top, was occupied by non- specialists support such as guidance counsellors and teachers. At the apex was where the specialist located comprises of psychologist and psychiatrists. In this approach, the focus was more on the holistic broad- based preventive interventions. The teachers here will be trained, attend seminars and training workshops related on how to handle parents' cooperation during conflict and crisis, dysfunctional families, impact of poverty, stress, and traumatized children.

IV. Conclusion

On the bases of the aforementioned findings, the researcher came up with a conclusion that the implementation of the inclusive education program of the Department of Education needs more enhancement on its policies and guidelines, clearly defined goals and objectives to have a much lighter view on how to carry on inclusive education in the mainstream classrooms especially on dealing learners with special needs and abilities. Difficulties in administering the program in the mainstream classroom were due to uncleared policies and guidelines to fully grasp inclusive education from administrative personnel, inadequate physical materials and learning resources in public schools and classrooms in relation to its implementation, less priorities on trainings, seminars/workshops, orientations, and webinars of regular teachers in handling and dealing with

learners with special needs and disabilities. Also, integration and incorporation of contextual assessments, pedagogies and activities in every subject provide challenges and difficulties on its implementation.

V. Recommendations

In view of the foregoing conclusion, it was recommended to improve the physical environment of public secondary school to cater the needs of these learners with special needs and disabilities in the mainstream classroom, provide more learning materials and resources, prioritize teachers' trainings, seminars, and workshops in relative to inclusive education. Moreover, there should be expert personnel such as SPED teachers, nurses and guidance counselors deployed in the school or in the mainstream classroom for additional help to assess, evaluate and when the need arises. Furthermore, an addition of shadow teachers aside from the regular teacher teaching and facilitating the mainstream classroom.

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