

Inclusive Education in Senior High School: Navigating Successes and Challenges of Mainstreaming Learners with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract - Mainstreaming Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENS) is a global and domestic advocacy effort to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, status, race, condition, or capacity, has equitable access to quality education. Inclusive education can be effectively implemented by taking into account a variety of aspects such as child find, assessment, program options, curriculum adjustments, and family involvement with three phases like initial, transition, and inclusion as stated in DepEd Order 72, s. 2009. The study utilized case study method among the deaf senior high learners in Manila High School, the only institution in SDO-Manila that caters them. Interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were carried out to gather vital data. The results highlighted the importance of identifying students with special needs, using personalized profiling and feedback, offering flexible learning options, modifying curriculum to create inclusive classrooms, and strengthening parental involvement. The program's performance in the initial, transition, and inclusion phases is a multi-phase process. The first phase involves institutionalization, cooperation between educators and parents, regular observation, peer acceptance, and various teaching techniques. The transition phase emphasizes harmonious relationships, ideal class inclusion, ongoing support, and significant teacher efforts. However, the study also highlights challenges in the initial, transition, and inclusion phases, such as insufficient teacher training, inadequate relationships, and low self-confidence among students.

Keywords - *Mainstreaming; Success; Drawbacks; LSENS; Inclusive Education*

Introduction

The integration of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENS) into mainstream classrooms, alongside hearing students, is a mandatory requirement in the Philippines. The Department of Education (DepEd) has incorporated inclusive schooling as a key goal, driven by the support for the Act Providing for The Rehabilitation, Self-Development and Self-Reliance of Disabled Persons and Their Integration into the Mainstream of Society and for Other Purposes (RA 7277). This act aims to ensure equal rights for individuals with disabilities, facilitating their complete engagement in society and integration into the societal mainstream.

DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, delineated five constituent elements of inclusive education: parental involvement, child mapping, assessment, program options, and curriculum modification. The effectiveness of inclusive education implementation depends on its three distinct phases: initiation, transition, and inclusion. The objective of mainstreaming is to create an educational environment that closely resembles a typical setting for students with special needs. When integrating LSENS into mainstream classrooms, it is crucial to offer them many opportunities for learning, foster active engagement and interpersonal interaction, and foster a sense of inclusion. A sense of belonging encourages learners to exert more effort, resulting in positive and advancing educational outcomes. Inclusive education encourages administrators and policymakers to scrutinize the barriers within the educational system, their origins, and potential solutions to overcome them. These obstacles typically encompass: curricula that are inadequately structured; educators who are not adequately trained to support children with varying needs; inadequate teaching resources; and buildings lacking accessibility.

Several research studies have explored inclusive education at the elementary and secondary levels. However, there has been limited research conducted on the SHS Program following the implementation of K-12 Curriculum. The researcher conducted a case study to examine the conditions, situations, experiences, and perspectives of LSENS mainstreamed into the senior high school program.

Materials and Methods

The search was conducted at Manila High School, which is located in Intramuros Manila. It is one of the eighteen (18) public institutions that provide the SHS Program at SDO-Manila. The research design included a theme analysis component and was based on a case study technique. It also included a descriptive and detailed case study of four Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENS), two interpreter teachers, three regular receiving teachers, and one school principal. These individuals underwent a selecting procedure in order to obtain reliable data and outcomes. In this study, the major research tool was an interview with an unstructured questionnaire. The goal of creating the materials was to support an interview and focus group discussion with the informants. To ensure the information's quality and trustworthiness, the analysis used triangulation. According to Patton (2022), the goal of triangulating data sources (FGD, documents, and interviews) was to verify consistency and indicate areas that require additional study into discordant findings. By categorizing the data and assessing code frequency, the researcher increased the research's credibility and revealed underlying trends. Finally, by reviewing the results to discover how patterns manifested into

important data, the researcher was better prepared to use the pattern matching approach, which added to the case study's internal validity.

Results and Discussions

The factors of success of mainstreaming LSEs in the SHS Program were determined based on the shared experiences provided by the participants offered significant information during the interview and focus group discussions. The following results were categorized into three different phases such as initial, transition, and inclusion.

Table 1. Successes of Mainstreaming LSEs in Initial Stage

Responses	Themes	Interpretation
<i>We institutionalize SPED Programs in our school specially for Deaf Students. Manila High School is the only senior high school who accepts deaf students and mainstream them in regular ICT class." P1</i>	a. Institutionalization of the SPED Program	Manila High School is integrating SPED programs into its regular school system to create an inclusive learning environment that supports academic, social, and emotional growth.
<i>"SPED program for Senior High school is already institutionalized." ST2</i>	b. Mainstreaming of SPED Learners	Mainstreaming, or inclusion, involves integrating children with special needs into regular classrooms, fostering a welcoming environment that supports their academic performance and overall development through collaborative planning.
<i>"Yes, in the inclusive education in mainstreaming the deaf, no one is left behind." RT2</i>	c. Collaboration of Teachers and Parents	Effective communication and mutual respect between educators and parents significantly enhance students' academic performance and social development.
<i>"Yes, we collaborate with the parents." ST1</i>		
<i>"Yes, 24/7 we share our expertise with the parents and learners..." ST2</i>		
<i>"Yes, the regular teacher and interpreter collaborate. They talk. They help one another to teach us." L1</i>		

Republic Act (RA) 11650 in the Philippines has institutionalized the Special Education (SPED) program, ensuring equal educational opportunities for all students with disabilities. The law mandates public and private schools to establish inclusion policies, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), to support students with impairments. Parents and professionals collaborated to create these plans. (Ajoc, 2019). Mainstreaming SPED learners into the curriculum is a crucial first step, promoting acceptance and understanding. This method strengthens peer relationships and provides children with special needs the support they need to thrive in mainstream classrooms. Successful mainstreaming of deaf learners requires effective coordination between SPED teachers and parents, ensuring a cohesive support network that addresses individual needs and challenges. This involves facilitating a smooth transition, providing resources, accommodations, and advocacy through open communication, collaboration, and shared goal setting.

Table 2. Successes of Mainstreaming LSEs in Transition Stage

Responses	Themes	Interpretation
<i>"Yes, quarterly classroom observation is done. Deaf learners can cope up naman with the help of the interpreter teacher and regular classmates." P1</i>	a. Regular Quarterly Observation	Quarterly observation of teachers is a regular assessment by school administrators to evaluate teaching practices and student interactions in inclusive classrooms. It helps identify strengths and areas for improvement, facilitating professional development and enhancing education quality.
<i>"Yes. I discussed to the regular students that deaf students are kind and they are here to study just like them so that the spirit of</i>		

acceptance will be strengthened." RT2
 "I'm thankful with my hearing classmates during group activity. They try hard to do finger spell and write to talk to me and help me in the group." L2

"...Groupings with hearing classmates is good. They help me finish tasks." L1

"I like moving activities like acting, dancing, drawing and drama." L3

"I don't like reporting coz it takes time and a lot of practice." L2

"Some of our regular teachers use videos with caption."- L4

b. Acceptance of Hearing-Impaired Learners by Regular Students

Acceptance in mainstream classrooms enhances academic and emotional well-being by promoting social integration, relationships, and respect among students. Teachers simplify activities and discuss acceptance, while inclusive teaching strategies facilitate participation and learning experiences for hearing-impaired learners together with hearing students.

c. Application of Varied Teaching Strategies

Emphasized the importance of diverse teaching strategies to cater to diverse learning preferences, enhancing engagement, understanding, and inclusivity in the learning environment, promoting collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity among learners.

Regular evaluations by school officials are crucial for monitoring the mainstreaming of deaf students in regular classes. These evaluations provide insights into the effectiveness of inclusion measures and the quality of the learning environment. Regular observations reveal how well adjustments are being implemented, how deaf students interact with their peers, and how supportive teachers are. According to a study by Ní Bhroin & Harwood (2020), fostering a positive attitude toward inclusion among regular students significantly improves the social integration and academic achievement of hearing-impaired peers. Similarly, findings from a study by Adewumi & Mos ito (2019) indicate that creating opportunities for interaction and promoting empathy and understanding among regular students contribute to the development of inclusive classroom surroundings that make all students feel appreciated and supported. Teachers engage in proactive measures to promote acceptance and inclusivity, and hearing-impaired learners' express appreciation for various instructional methods. Despite occasional challenges, overall sentiment indicates positive interactions and collaborative efforts among students of diverse abilities. Differentiated instruction, which includes visual aids, hands-on activities, group discussions, and technology-enhanced lessons, enhances student understanding, retention, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.

Table 3. Successes of Mainstreaming LSEs in Inclusion Stage

Responses	Themes	Interpretation
<p>"I have a good relationship with SPED learners. I acknowledge them in the class and introduce them" RT1 "Yes, I establish a good relationship with deaf learners. Because they are officially enrolled. I always greet them in the hallway." RT2</p>	a. Harmonious Relationship	Regular teachers show positive interactions with SPED students in mainstream classrooms, emphasizing the importance of identifying and addressing their needs, fostering communication, and showing genuine concern without prejudice.
<p>If Performance tasks, I choose hearing students. They are very helpful and kind and supportive." L1 "Classroom activities, I'm ok with hearing students, they assist me and help me get good grades." L2</p>	b. Continuous Support	Mainstream classrooms provide continuous support for inclusive education, addressing language barriers, teaching sign language, and providing resources for communication. They also educate students on deaf learners and support hearing classmates, enhancing the

<p><i>"Hearing students are supportive with group tasks except on drama or acting. I prefer deaf students, faster to finish." L3</i></p>	<p>c. Significant Effort and Sacrifices</p>	<p>academic experience and social integration of diverse learners.</p>
<p><i>I highly admire SPED teachers who always extend their time for remedial classes with deaf students. They are very hands on with them."-P1</i></p>		<p>SPED teachers provide extra time for deaf students, including remedial sessions and hands-on support, to help them catch up on challenging lessons. SPED teachers simplify lessons for deaf students, ensuring they understand and catch up with the material.</p>

A harmonious relationship in a mainstream classroom involves positive interactions, respect, and collaboration between students, instructors, and the learning community. This creates an inclusive atmosphere that promotes collaboration and a sense of belonging. Research conducted in 2020 by Mitchell & Sutherland shows that positive interactions lead to increased academic engagement, motivation, and social-emotional well-being. Supportive teacher-student connections also influence positive classroom environments, better student behavior, and increased academic achievement. Initiatives to address language barriers, provide resources on appropriate communication methods, and support deaf learners demonstrate commitment to promoting understanding and acceptance. SPED teachers provide extra support for deaf students, while regular receiving teachers simplify lessons for deaf students.

Table 4. Drawbacks of Mainstreaming LSENs in Initial Stage

Responses	Themes	Interpretation
<p><i>I network with the Division Supervisor in-charge of Special Education for linkages and support sometimes and only as needed." P1</i></p>	<p>a. Limited Linkage with DepEd SPED officials</p>	<p>The mainstreaming program's implementation may face challenges due to a lack of policy support and resources for integrating learners with special educational needs. Inconsistencies in inclusive education policies and limited collaboration between schools and DepEd officials may result in uneven support.</p>
<p><i>"Lack of training for receiving/ regular teachers is a reality." ST1</i></p>	<p>b. Inadequate Teachers' Training</p>	<p>Insufficient training in differentiated instruction, behavior management, and assistive technology can</p>
<p><i>"Lack of SPED teachers trained to expand and add more strands for deaf students." ST2</i> <i>"Mastery of SPED teachers on subject content." ST1</i></p>		<p>hinder educators' ability to meet individual learning needs of Special Education Students (LSENs), potentially undermining mainstreaming programs and fostering a welcoming learning environment.</p>

Inadequate connections between Special Education (SPED) schools' hinder collaboration and exchange of best practices among educators, a major disadvantage of the mainstreaming approach. Research by Bae and Smith (2016) emphasizes the importance of networking and knowledge exchange among SPED schools for improving inclusive education practices. School administrators lack monitoring and evaluation instruments to oversee mainstreaming of deaf students, making it difficult to track progress, identify problems, and make decisions. Parmigiani et al.'s (2020) research emphasizes the need for systematic monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education programs to ensure their efficacy and sustainability.

Table 6. Drawbacks of Mainstreaming LSENs in Inclusion Stage

Responses	Themes	Interpretation
<p><i>"The new batch of grade 12, their absences is the problem." -ST1</i> <i>"Our problem is their absenteeism." -ST2</i> <i>If someone is absent, others also influence to make absences." -RT1</i></p>	a. Absenteeism of SPED Learners	Absenteeism among students with special educational needs, including deaf learners, hinders mainstreaming opportunities and success, as they miss out on crucial instruction, social opportunities, and specialized interventions.
<p><i>"They don't believe on their own talents although they have it." ST2</i> <i>"There is a talent but lack self-confidence." ST1</i></p>	b. Lack of Self Confidence	Low self-esteem among deaf students can hinder their academic progress and social integration in mainstreaming programs, leading to reduced participation and perceived inadequacy.
<p><i>"We only have limited module for our specialized subjects." RT3</i> <i>"We lack textbooks for SPED learners." RT2</i> <i>"We need laptop to understand our lesson better."</i> <i>"I need gadgets for easy translation of difficult words or topics." L4</i></p>	c. Limited Resources	Insufficient resources hinder mainstreaming efforts for deaf learners, hinder the provision of accessible and inclusive learning materials, limiting their ability to integrate socially in traditional classroom settings.

SPED students, particularly those who are deaf, often experience missed opportunities and difficulties in social integration in regular classrooms. Anderson's (2021) research highlights the significance of regular attendance for fostering favorable learning outcomes for students with special education needs. Absence can lead to missed instructional opportunities, learning gaps, and difficulties forming relationships with peers and teachers. Chronic or persistent absences can negatively impact academic performance and well-being, with higher dropout rates and worse academic outcomes. According to research by Egalite (2019), deaf learners' educational experiences and results are significantly influenced by their level of self-confidence. Low self-esteem among deaf students can hinder their ability to study and integrate socially, as their self-confidence significantly influences their educational experiences. Limited resources, such as textbooks, modules, and gadgets, also pose a significant challenge in mainstreaming, hindering the provision of accessible and inclusive learning materials. This not only exacerbates disparities in academic achievement but also limits deaf learners' participation and engagement in the mainstream classroom, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of the mainstreaming program.

Conclusion

Republic Act (RA) 11650 in the Philippines marks a significant step towards inclusive education by institutionalizing the Special Education (SPED) program and mandating inclusive policies in schools. Mainstreaming SPED learners, including deaf students, facilitates acceptance, peer relationships, and academic support. Effective coordination between SPED teachers and parents is essential, requiring smooth transitions, appropriate resources, and regular evaluations to monitor progress and improve the learning environment.

Studies show that positive attitudes toward inclusion among regular students enhance the social and academic outcomes for hearing-impaired peers. Differentiated instruction, including visual aids and technology-enhanced lessons, improves comprehension and collaboration. Creating an inclusive atmosphere fosters positive interactions and a sense of belonging, contributing to academic engagement and well-being.

However, challenges persist, such as inconsistent policy support, inadequate resources, and insufficient teacher training. These issues hinder the effective integration of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) and the dissemination of best practices. Networking and knowledge exchange among SPED schools are crucial for improving inclusive practices, and systematic monitoring and evaluation are necessary to ensure program efficacy.

Deaf students often face social integration difficulties and missed educational opportunities due to absences, low self-confidence, and limited resources. Addressing these challenges is vital for the success of the mainstreaming program, ensuring that all students receive the support and opportunities they need to thrive in an inclusive educational environment.

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