

VIABILITY OF LEARNING PROGRESSIONS OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (LSENs)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the viability of learning progressions among Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) in recognized Special Education (SPED) Centers in Region V, Philippines. Specifically, it identified the special educational needs of learners, assessment instruments used to monitor progress, intervention programs and instructional strategies employed by SPED teachers, educational milestones achieved by learners, challenges encountered by teachers, and an action plan and proposed transition curriculum framework for improving SPED implementation. The study employed a descriptive mixed-methods research design involving 65 SPED teachers from the first recognized SPED Centers across 13 Schools Division Offices in Region V. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling based on predefined inclusion criteria. Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) for quantitative items and thematic analysis for open-ended qualitative responses. Findings revealed that learners with intellectual disability constituted the most commonly served group, followed by learners with autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and cerebral palsy. Observation was the most commonly used assessment method, supplemented by parent and teacher interviews, medical or health professional reports, and teacher-made assessment tools. Intervention practices varied according to learners' needs and included sign language enhancement, one-on-one instruction, behavior management, hands-on and multisensory activities, modified instruction, positive reinforcement, functional and pre-vocational skills, and transition-related interventions. Learners demonstrated progress in areas such as computer literacy, inclusion in regular education, individualized early-intervention outcomes, and employment. However, teachers reported challenges involving inadequate professional training, limited instructional materials and funding, insufficient access to medical specialists, limited parental support, and difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The study concluded that viable learning progression among LSENs depends on individualized assessment and intervention, qualified and continuously trained SPED teachers, adequate resources, multidisciplinary collaboration, and strong school-family-community partnerships. It recommends standardized and validated assessment procedures, strengthened teacher professional development, adequate funding and instructional resources, improved parent-teacher partnerships, public-private collaboration, and systematic benchmarking of effective SPED practices.

Keywords: *Learners with special educational needs, Learning progression, Special education, Assessment, Intervention, Transition program, Inclusive education*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental to the development of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, independence, and

meaningful participation in society. For learners with disabilities and other special educational needs, education must respond to individual differences and provide appropriate opportunities that maximize their capabilities. Special Education (SPED) therefore seeks to provide customized instructional programs, materials, services, assessments, and teaching strategies appropriate to the unique physical, sensory, cognitive, behavioral, communication, and developmental characteristics of learners. Philippine educational policies similarly emphasize equitable access to education, inclusion, individualized support, and transition programs that enable LSENs to develop functional, academic, vocational, and independent-living competencies.

Learning progressions are particularly important in special education because they provide a means of understanding how learners' knowledge, skills, and capabilities develop over time. Rather than simply determining whether learners meet predetermined standards, learning progressions help educators identify learners' current levels of functioning and determine appropriate instructional next steps. Effective learning progression therefore requires coherence among curriculum, instruction, assessment, individualized interventions, and learner outcomes. The study was undertaken to examine how these processes operate in SPED Centers in Region V and to determine the interventions, practices, challenges, and support systems necessary to sustain the development of LSENs.

The research specifically explored the development of LSENs' skills and capabilities, the interventions implemented by teachers and schools, teachers' pedagogical practices, educational advancement and transition, and decisions concerning inclusion, vocational preparation, and further education. Ultimately, the findings were intended to contribute to educational reforms that move from system-centered practices toward more person-centered approaches responsive to individual learner needs.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The study sought to determine the viability of learning progression among Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs). Specifically, it investigated: (1) the special educational needs and categories of learners being served in SPED Centers; (2) the assessment instruments and tools used to regularly monitor learners' progress; (3) the intervention programs provided by SPED teachers; (4) the specific instructional strategies employed to develop LSENs' skills and capabilities across functional, academic, social, and vocational domains; (5) the educational milestones and developmental achievements attained by LSENs; (6) the challenges experienced by SPED teachers in developing learners' skills and facilitating educational progression; and (7) an action plan incorporating an Outcomes-Based K–12 Transition Curriculum Framework to address identified challenges and enhance the viability of learning progressions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study was to determine the viability of learning progressions among Learners with Special Educational Needs in recognized SPED Centers in Region V. Specifically, the study aimed to: (1) identify the different categories of LSENs being served; (2) determine the assessment instruments and procedures used to monitor learner progress; (3) identify intervention programs provided by SPED teachers; (4) examine instructional strategies for developing functional, academic, communication, social, and vocational skills; (5) identify educational milestones and developmental achievements attained by LSENs; (6) determine the challenges encountered by SPED teachers in sustaining learning progression; and (7) formulate an action plan and an Outcomes-Based K–12 Transition Curriculum Framework to improve assessment, intervention, transition, professional development, partnerships, resources, and overall SPED program implementation.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive mixed-methods research design to examine the viability of learning progressions among LSENs. A semi-structured survey questionnaire containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions was utilized as the primary data gathering instrument, supplemented by interviews. Quantitative data obtained from structured items were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data derived from open-ended responses and interviews were transcribed, categorized, and analyzed through thematic analysis to identify emerging patterns, interventions, and challenges.

The participants were SPED teachers from the first recognized public elementary SPED Centers representing 13 Schools Division Offices in Region V. The study covered six provincial divisions—Albay, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Catanduanes, Masbate, and Sorsogon—and seven city divisions—Iriga City, Legazpi City, Ligao City, Masbate City, Naga City, Sorsogon City, and Tabaco City.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who met specific inclusion criteria: (a) regular-permanent tenure or an appropriate contract in the identified SPED Center, (b) at least three consecutive years of teaching experience in a DepEd-recognized SPED Center, and (c) experience handling more than three categories of LSENs. Five SPED teachers meeting these criteria were selected from each of the 13 centers, yielding a total of 65 teacher-respondents.

Data were collected through a survey questionnaire using both online and face-to-face procedures. Online platforms included video conferencing and Google Forms, while face-to-face data collection followed prevailing health and physical-distancing protocols. Appropriate permissions and informed consent were secured, and confidentiality and participants' rights were observed. The collected data were coded, grouped, thematically analyzed, and summarized using frequencies and percentages.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

The study revealed several significant findings. First, among the categories of LSENs served by the SPED Centers, learners with intellectual disability were the most frequently identified, followed by learners with autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and cerebral palsy. Other conditions included multiple disabilities, global developmental delay, Rett Syndrome/GDD, behavioral disorders, ADHD, schizophrenia, and corpus callosum-related conditions.

Second, observation emerged as the most commonly utilized assessment method, followed by interviews with parents and former teachers, reports from medical and health professionals, and teacher-made assessment tools. Other instruments included Portage and checklists, the Multi-Factored Assessment Tool, Raven's Progressive Matrices, BRIGANCE, ECCD Checklist, C-TONI, and other specialized instruments. A notable concern was that some teachers reported difficulty interpreting certain instruments, particularly BRIGANCE.

Third, intervention programs differed according to learners' disabilities and individual needs. Major interventions included Sign Language Enhancement for learners with hearing impairment; one-on-one intervention and behavior management for learners with autism; hands-on and multisensory intervention during the Early Intervention Program; modified lessons, positive reinforcement, individualized education planning, and life-skills integration for learners with intellectual disability; one-on-one and practical approaches during transition; and practical-skills training and individualized assessment for learners with visual impairment and cerebral palsy.

Fourth, teachers used disability- and learner-specific strategies such as communication and sign-language development, comprehension activities, Applied Behavior Analysis approaches, individualized early intervention, functional and pre-vocational skills, social interaction and peer-engagement activities, repetition and reinforcement, and one-on-one instruction or therapy

Fifth, significant learner milestones included computer literacy, successful inclusion in regular schools, individualized achievements documented during early intervention and progress monitoring, and employment or work opportunities for some LSENs.

Finally, SPED teachers identified major barriers to effective learning progression, including insufficient training, inadequate educational materials and technological devices, limited financial resources, lack of medical specialists for appropriate assessment, insufficient parental support and training, and the adverse social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the learning progression of LSENs is viable when educational services are individualized, appropriately assessed, adequately supported, and responsive to the specific characteristics and developmental needs of each learner. The diversity of LSENs requires differentiated assessment procedures, interventions, instructional strategies, and transition services rather than a uniform approach. Although SPED teachers employ numerous strategies that support learner development, the effectiveness and sustainability of these practices are affected by limitations in professional training, assessment expertise, instructional resources, funding, specialist support, and family involvement. The study further demonstrates that LSENs are capable of achieving meaningful educational and functional milestones, including inclusion in regular education, technological competencies, independent-living and vocational skills, and employment, when appropriate interventions and support systems are provided.

Consequently, viable learning progression should be viewed as a collaborative and continuous process involving assessment, individualized instruction, progress monitoring, intervention, transition planning, family participation, multidisciplinary support, and school-community partnerships. Strengthening these components is essential to creating an outcomes-based SPED program that promotes meaningful participation, independence, and improved quality of life for LSENs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends the establishment of a standardized and validated assessment process for identifying and determining the educational needs of LSENs before their admission to SPED programs. Assessment should not depend solely on observation or teacher-made instruments but should incorporate appropriate standardized indicators and, whenever necessary, validation and diagnosis by qualified medical or allied professionals.

SPED teachers should consequently receive continuous professional development in both assessment and intervention to strengthen their capacity to identify learners' needs and interpret assessment results accurately. SPED Centers should also establish greater consistency in selecting evidence-based intervention programs and learning packages appropriate to specific learner needs. Stronger parent-teacher partnerships, public-private partnerships, and benchmarking of effective practices should be encouraged to provide a collaborative support system for learners.

Adequate funding should be provided for conducive SPED classrooms, assistive devices, educational materials, technology, assessment resources, and transition programs. Regular round-table discussions and consultative meetings among SPED teachers, educational leaders, parents, medical and allied professionals, and community partners should be institutionalized to identify emerging challenges and develop responsive solutions.

Finally, the action plan and proposed Outcomes-Based K–12 Transition Curriculum Framework should emphasize eight focal areas to enhance learning progressions: (1) standardized assessment tools for LSENs, (2) medical specialist validation and case diagnosis, (3) adequate funding and structural resources, (4) learner-centered educational materials, (5) skills and capability development for teachers, (6) parent-teacher partnerships, (7) private-public partnerships, and (8) benchmarking of best practices

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