

Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Physical Education Program for Learners With Special Educational Needs in Cavite, Philippines

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The Asian Conference on Education & International Development 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

One of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations includes Quality Education which fall under SDG 4. This goal aimed for the presence and availability of education in high standards. In this connection, Quality Physical Education (QPE) as worldwide advocacy also promotes and ensures the high quality of implementation of Physical Education to produce physical literate individuals. Relatively, a global estimate of 80% of children in schools do not meet the recommendation of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. An emphasis was also given to persons with disability as the least active individuals (WHO 2021). Individuals with disability enrolled in an educational institution is also known as learners with special educational needs (LSEN). This scenario, leads this study to identify the challenges encounter in the implementation of Physical Education for learners with special educational needs that affects in providing quality physical education. This study involved an interview with ten (10) participants broken down to five (5) Special Education teachers (SPET) and five (5) School administrators from the School Division of Province of Cavite, Philippines offering program for learners with special educational needs. Responses of the participants revealed that there were challenges encountered in the implementation of Physical Education for LSEN that were similar between the SPET and school administrators such as; individual differences, budget, safe and secure facilities, and limited partnership. It was also revealed SPET encountered more challenges than of the school heads.

Keywords: Quality Physical Education, Learners With Special Needs, Special Education Teachers, Challenges Encounter

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Introduction

Physical Education is regarded as significant part of educational program that aims to promote holistic development through the performance of the properly selected physical activities. Promotion of Physical Education and other sports program is included in the law in the Philippines specifically, Article 14 section 19 of 1987 Philippine Constitution. This includes physical, mental, social, spiritual, and emotional aspect of an individual. In the international setting, UNESCO (2013) also advocates for Quality Physical Education (QPE). Policies and standards were set in order to determine the QPE. Moreover, World Health Organization determined that a great number of children in schools do not meet the recommended 60-minute moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. It was also revealed that person with disabilities were the least active (WHO 2021). Relatively, United Nations crafted 17 sustainable development goals (SDG) that is targeted to be achieved by 2030. Three of these SDG are good health and well-being, quality education, and reduced inequalities. This conducted study about the challenges encountered in the implementation of Physical Education for LSEN also targets to contribute in the attainment of the said SDG.

In the Philippines, there were 648 Special Education (SPED) centers. However, almost 84% of the Municipalities in the country do not have SPED centers. As of the school year 2021-2022 there were 126,598 enrollees of learners with special educational needs in the country (Dela Pena 2023).

Cubillo (2023) determined the Quality implementation of Physical Education program for learners with special educational needs in Cavite Province. It was identified that it is not regularly implemented. Identifying the challenges being encountered by the Special Education teacher and school administrators in the implementation of Physical Education to further determine the reason behind the status of quality implementation of the said program for LSEN in the said province.

The study also employed qualitative approach. Interview sessions were conducted among selected Special Education teachers and their school administrators. Their first-hand experiences with regard to the implementation of Physical Education for learners with special educational needs served as significant data in this study. Gathered data were transcribed and analyzed to forms themes. These data can serve as reference and basis in designing enhancement program to achieve and promote high quality Physical Education. Periodic review and monitoring are essential in every program to ensure continuous quality improvement.

Result and Discussion

Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Physical Education for LSEN

Challenges Encountered by Special Education Teachers in the Implementation of Physical Education for Learners With Special Educational Needs

Special Education teachers have first-hand experience in the implementation of Physical Education program for learners with special educational needs. Their observations and insights are valuable in determining challenges they encountered in terms of teaching Physical Education for LSEN.

Theme 1: Individual Differences of LSENs

This challenge includes the behavior, physical ability, and ability of LSEN to focus and follow instructions. SPET A mentioned that there were moments that during their “galaw ng Pilipinas” – dance activity, she had to stop the activity because there were learners that for less than 1 minute expresses their unwillingness to do the activity. SPET A had no choice but to stop the activity. It was also mentioned that they are handling not only one disability. There are times that they handle a combination of ASD, ADHD, and those with difficulty in mobility.

SPET B also expressed a similar challenge in their class. In addition, SPET C mentioned that they have this learner with autism spectrum disorder that is out of control. They have to hold him first before they can proceed to their physical activity.

Similarly, SPET D experienced the same as other SPET wherein for her the most challenging is when the learners are out of concentration and focus. When they are instructed to hold a ball, they are not following instructions since they wanted to do different things. There are also learners that has a difficulty in mobility and fragile bones, but in this case, they are afraid to try to hold the learner to assist in the movement for it might cause further injury to the learner. Similar with the other SPETs’ statement, SPET E said that how can they implement Physical Education and physical activity if the learners are out of control, having their tantrums and do not want to communicate.

Identifying individual needs and differences of every learner with special educational needs is one of the steps of the SPET to be able to design individual educational plan. Since SPET handles variety of disabilities they have to really consider all the needs, interest and abilities of the students not only for the whole term but also on a particular day. This is similar to the study by Allam and Martin (2021). The study revealed that recognizing individual differences of the learner is one of the fundamental things needed by the SPET in preparing teaching the students.

These scenarios lead the SPET opt to not to have physical activity and have other activities that the learners will have interest in. Also, due to this challenge the time supposedly allotted for physical activity or Physical Education were not maximize.

Theme 2: Non-inclusion or Non-reflection of Physical Education in the Curriculum

The curriculum serves as guide for the teachers to effectively and efficiently implement the lessons and achieve the target competencies set in the curriculum guide. With this, it is difficult to implement Physical Education for LSEN if it is not included nor reflected in the provided curriculum guide. To further discuss this challenge as seen by SPET, they are in unison that there is no specific subject for the learners that reflects Physical Education. However, physical activities are being integrated in some of the activities and lessons for LSEN but not in regular basis. SPET A mentioned that for them to be able to integrate physical activity they have to include actions while singing, they also have dancing activities.

SPET B also mentioned that they include simple movements like table tapping and puzzles, targeting the fine motors of the learners. SPET E also mentioned the integration of physical activity during their opening circle.

In addition to the integration of Physical Education, SPETs also mentioned that they have socialization every Friday. Generally, they consider this day as Physical Education Day. However, no lessons or teaching were involved. LSEN are free to do various activities available in the schools during socialization. This activity mainly targets the socialization aspect of the learners.

Department of Education Order Number 44 Series of 2021 states that the policy and guidelines for the implementation of Special Education program. The order involved the essential adaptive skills set by the department. Specifically, safe care, communication, self-direction, social skill, leisure skills, home and school living, functional academics, community use, work, and health and safety are the skills being targeted to be developed among LSEN. Visibly, Physical Education is not directly included in the said skills and competencies. In this scenario, SPET teachers usually integrate physical activity and Physical Education in some of activities.

This also somewhat conveys that SPET teacher may or may not have integration of Physical Education among LSEN, since it is not clearly stated in the policy. Physical Education is not reflected in the policy and guidelines, strong encouragement to meet the recommended physical activity of LSEN was not reflected as well.

Theme 3: Inadequacy of Facilities and Equipment Designed for LSEN to Promote Safe Spaces During Physical Activity

Availability and appropriateness of the facilities and equipment play a vital role in the quality implementation of Physical Education for LSEN. SPET A revealed that they are also facing challenges when it comes to facilities and equipment. SPET A and B said that the room they are currently utilizing is not ideal for LSEN. It was also mentioned that there must be an area for Physical Education, learning, as well as a play area for their LSEN. They also mentioned that their equipment is not yet complete. In addition, SPET C also cited that they don't have facilities or areas specially designed for LSEN wherein they can conduct their physical activities. Similar with SPET B, SPET D also cited that they do not have a balance beam. Aside from the absence of balance beam, trampoline is also needed. Having safe and appropriate was also emphasized by the SPET during the interview.

They cannot implement Physical Education for LSEN due to they also have to consider the safety of the learners when having physical activity. SPET A mentioned that although they have trampoline, they don't know where they can put it because their room is not that spacious. They are afraid that the learners' head might hit the wall. Moreover, SPET B told the researcher that their room is a mini house, small rooms were just constructed for them to utilize. However, it is not PWD friendly. SPET C said that they are conducting their physical activity inside the classroom and have to adjust the chairs inside to provide space. On the other hand, SPET D shared that they can improvise in term of equipment however, considering the safety of the learners it might be dangerous.

Concern about available facilities and equipment for Special Education program being raised by SPET respondents is the same with the findings of Allam F.C and Martin M.M (2021). The said study found out that one of the challenges being faced by SPED in the Division of Ilagan, Isabela, is that infrastructures do not cater for those with disabilities. Also, materials needed in teaching special education classes were not adequate. On the other hand, DepEd order 44 series 2021 include provisions for facilities for SPED. It is mentioned that

infrastructure for SPED must meet the standard set in the BP 344 Accessibility Law. This theme implies that due to inadequacy of facilities and equipment specifically designed for LSEN became a contributor on the factor that hinder the SPET to fully implement Physical Education for LSEN. There are also SPET who wanted to modify or improvised equipment. However, they are afraid that the safety and security of the learners will be compromised. With this they opted not to do the certain activity especially if the equipment needed was not available.

Theme 4: Limited Budget and Not Included in Prioritization of Budget Allocation

In every institution, financial aspect is one of the backbones for its various projects and programs to be achieved. Although budget is being allocated for Special Education program which is known as SPED fund, three among the five SPET being interviewed mentioned about the limited budget that leads to Physical Education for LSEN to be not included in the priority of budget allocation. SPET A, D, and E mentioned that SPED fund is available, however it is not enough to provide the needed things especially for the implementation of Physical Education for LSEN.

SPET experiencing financial constraint in teaching SPED is one of the challenges expressed by the SPET from Ilagan Isabela (Allam and Martin, 2021). School administrators are the one in charge in planning and allocating funds together with the help of the SPET. Special Education fund depends on the number of enrollees in Special Education Program in a particular school. The availability of funds is also evident. However, in terms of prioritization of fund allocation, Physical Education program is not part of it. Funds may be given to Physical Education whenever there will be excess after the utilization for other projects and programs.

Theme 5: Few Numbers of Teachers That May Help in the Promotion and Implementation of Physical Education for LSEN

During the interview, SPET mentioned that there are trends of increasing enrollment in Special Education. However, there are few teachers handling LSEN. This becomes one of the challenges in the quality implementation of Physical Education for LSEN. SPET A mentioned that she is the only one with plantilla position as SPET in their school, the other one is under the local school board. Currently, they have approximately forty (40) LSEN. The SPET under local school board is the one handling the learners she cannot accommodate anymore. SPET C and E cited that there are no teacher aide or assistant in public schools that may bring great help to the SPET in handling LSEN. SPET C also mentioned that having a teaching aide is a must in international settings.

Department of Education Order Number 44 series of 2021 clearly stated that Special Education teacher to be assigned must be vertically aligned in teaching Special Education program. Since SPET respondents observed that there is a limited number of SPET to assist in implementing Physical Education for learners with special educational needs, it became a hindrance to fully implement Physical Education program for LSEN. In the study of Allam and Martin (2021), the respondents revealed that those teachers assigned in special education in Ilagan Isabela, some of them are not specialized in special education.

Theme 6: Inadequate Trainings/ Seminars/ Workshops/ Certification Targeting Implementation and Promotion of Physical Education for LSEN

Aside from the specialization of teachers in terms of their educational background, another way of equipping themselves includes attending various seminars, trainings, workshops, and certifications here and abroad. However, the interview revealed that there is a scarcity when it comes to the attendance of SPET in various programs targeting the implementation of Physical Education for LSEN. All SPET respondents of the interview mentioned that there is no trainings or seminars conducted or attended about Physical Education for LSEN. Common topics or focus of the trainings that they attended are about the curriculum of SPED, behavior of the learners. Although the Department of Education provides trainings for SPET no topics about Physical Education are included or discussed.

SPET B got a chance to attend one training about sports for those with disabilities however, it was held 8 or 10 years ago. This made them realized that there is also a need for the conduct of trainings, seminars, workshop, and certification with regards to the implementation of Physical Education for LSEN.

One of the roles of the School Division Office is to provide CPD programs and capacity building activities for Special Education teachers (DepEd Order 44 s.2021). This theme reveals that there is limited to no trainings attended by SPET when it comes to Physical Education for LSEN. This challenge is present in connection to Physical Education is not included in the priority subjects of Special Education program nor clearly stated its promotion. On the other hand, various training courses are available but do not target the implementation and promoting of Physical Education for learners with special educational needs. Most of the trainings available are about inclusions, Filipino Sign Language, and braille, among others. If the SPET were not equip with appropriate and adequate knowledge about Physical Education for LSEN it will always be a hindrance on having Quality Physical Education for LSEN.

Theme 7: Additional Role of SPET as Sports Coaches and Trainers

As previously identified challenges, few teachers involved in handling LSEN, SPET were also being designated as sports coaches and trainers for the para-athletes of their school as well as for other extracurricular activities of the LSEN. When asked about the sports training of the LSEN athletes, SPET A, B, and E cited that they were also the one to facilitate the sports training of the LSEN athletes whenever there will be sports competitions. Aside from being sports coaches and trainers, they were also involved in the practice of the LSEN in dance competitions.

Division of Ilagan, Isabela SPET also identified additional role as sports coaches as one of their challenges in Special Education. Instructions are being affected for SPET are also assigned and designated as coaches in various events (Allam, F.F and Martin M.M 2021). In relation to the training for Physical Education for LSEN, it is also difficult to perform the task as sports coaches for LSEN if the SPET is not equip and knowledgeable about sports training. The presence of certified or accredited sports coaches for LSEN athletes will bring great help in the implementation of Physical Education for learners with special educational needs.

Theme 8: Limited Program Collaboration From Various Stakeholders in the Implementation and Promotion of Physical Education for LSEN

Collaborative effort between the educational institutions and other stakeholders brings great help in attaining each educational objective. During the interview, SPET mentioned that stakeholders provide support to the SPED program of the school. Common stakeholders involved are local government units, private individuals and other government institutions. Even though various stakeholders give support to the school, programs or projects about Physical Education for LSEN are not given emphasis. Most of the projects, programs and activities provided by the stakeholders were gift giving, feeding programs among others.

Department of Education had a strong stance in advocacy and partnership. It mentioned that building linkages, networking and partnership must be made possible by the school administrators in different levels (Dep Ed Order 44 s.2021). Types of partnership are classified as university, social service, business, non-profit organization, local municipality (Judith M.S Gross et.al 2015). Limited support from stakeholders was also mentioned in the study of Allam F.C and Martin M.M (2021). Community partnership plays an essential role in the success of implementation of Physical Education for LSEN. Active partnership can augment the needs for facilities and equipment for learners with special educational needs. It also promotes and encourages learners to be active even after school. Although it was mentioned that there were active partnerships in their institution, activities being implemented do not include the promotion and implementation of Physical Education for LSEN.

Challenges Encountered by School Administrators in the Implementation of Physical Education for Learners With Special Educational Needs

Principals or school administrators are in-charge in supervising and overseeing the overall implementation of the programs in the schools. This includes budget allocation and prioritization among others. In this section, challenges encountered in the perspective of school administrator is presented and thematized.

Theme 1: Individual Differences of Learners With Special Educational Needs

All five (5) schools administrators are encountering and observing that one of the challenges of their school in the implementation of Physical Education is the individual differences of LSEN. These differences involve the ability and behavior of each learner. School administrator A mentioned that when the student has weak muscles usually Physical Education is not implemented, only simple grasping activities. While for the LSEN with difficulty in mobility, limited physical activities is implemented.

School administrators B, C, and D answered that every LSEN are being grouped according to their ability. There are also instances where a one – on – one session is being conducted if needed. On the other hand, School head C highlighted that they do not do Physical Education for the session of hearing-impaired learners and those with physical disabilities.

They also mentioned the difference in the behavior of LSEN. This reflects on the answers of School administrators A, C, D, and E. They said that the implementation of Physical Education also depends on the mood of and interest of LSEN. There are times that during socialization there are LSEN who are not interested to attend the session. It also cited that

sometimes they cannot conduct the planned activity because the LSEN wanted different activity.

This theme is similar to the challenges encountered by the SPET teacher. This conveys that School administrators as the over all in charge of the school is aware of the challenges in terms of individual differences of the learners. One of their roles as implementers of Special Education is to promote inclusion of LSEN with mild to moderate disability in the mainstreamed classes. Also, school administrators must be aware of the data of the schools including LSEN. They must also ensure that data of LSEN is updated and correct (DepEd order 44 s.2021). Being aware of the various needs and disability of learners will help them to plan ahead in teaching LSEN.

Theme 2: Inadequacy of Facilities and Equipment Designed for LSEN to Regularly Implement Suitable Physical Activity and Promote Safe Spaces During the Conduct of the Activities

All school administrators mentioned that Physical Education and physical activity is not implemented and conducted fully and regularly, Generally, it is only integrated in some of the activities of LSEN. One of the reasons behind this scenario is the inadequate facilities and equipment specially designed for LSEN. These facilities and equipment must ensure the safety of the learners.

School administrator A expressed that they wanted to introduce and conduct bocce in their school. It is one of the required activities for LSEN as per Department of Education. However, they are not able to do this because they do not have the equipment for the said activity.

School administrator C revealed that they do not have rubber mats to ensure the safety of LSEN and also, they need sports equipment specially designed for SPED. School administrator B reiterated their challenges about having space and appropriate facilities for Physical Education and physical activity for LSEN. Although they have rooms it is not the one recommended for SPED. Moreover, School head D mentioned that they have available equipment but not considered as complete to meet needs of LSEN.

School administrators in charge, uses the school data for appropriate planning and resource allocation. Included in the planning is to ensure that physical facilities must meet and be compliant with BP 344 Accessibility Law (Dep Ed order 44 s.2021). However, there are infrastructure projects that is not allowed to be part of the budget allocation given in the schools. Providing infrastructure and other facilities and equipment is sometimes very challenging as they must go to different channels and communications. School administrators are making their full effort to provide for Special Education program.

Theme 3: Not Included in Prioritization of Budget Allocation

Special Education programs have various needs to meet and be provided. However, quality implementation of Physical Education is not part of the priority. This theme was identified based on the following answers of the school administrators during the interview. School administrators A and D mentioned that one the top priorities for the budget allocation and utilization of SPED fund is for the learners' assessment, as this cost quite expensive.

School administrators B and C provided information with regards to budget utilization. SPED fund was used to improve the classroom being used by LSEN. School administrator C specifically cited that they first planned to purchase rubber mats, however rubber mats will not be advisable at that moment because their chairs and tables were made up of steels and metals. Therefore, prior to the purchase of the rubber mats they purchased first the plastic tables and chairs.

As the budget for Special Education depends on the number of enrollees of learners with special educational needs, budget prioritization and allocation are also a challenge. School administrators is the one responsible in budget prioritization and allocation. They manage and sustain the resources of the school (DepEd order 44 s. 2021). It was mentioned that one of the priorities of SPED fund is the assessment of the learners. The assessment cost P5,000.00 for each student. Project and programs for Physical Education for learners with special educational needs will be given budget if there will be an excess after utilizing it for the top priorities. If implementation of Physical Education for LSEN will solely rely on the SPED fund it will be very difficult to provide support in achieving Quality Physical Education for LSEN.

Theme 4: Limited Program Collaboration From Various Stakeholders in the Implementation and Promotion of Physical Education for LSEN

As revealed during the interview, stakeholders of each school are very supportive to the SPED program of the institution. However, when it comes to the implementation and promotion of quality Physical Education there are limited to no programs or project in collaboration with the community and other stakeholders of the institution. All School administrators appreciated the support coming from various stakeholders. On the other hand, the support from the stake holders do not include the promotion and improvement of Physical Education for LSEN. School administrator A mentioned that the feeding program was the most common activity being sponsored by stakeholders.

School administrator B proudly cited that one of their foreign sponsors is planning to construct shelter for LSEN living in the far-flung area of the municipality. Donations were also made but not about Physical Education for LSEN, this is the same with the statement of School administrator D. For School administrator C, they are still looking for possible sponsor and partners that may help them to provide rubber mats to be used to ensure the safety of LSEN during physical activity.

Strong school leadership served as one of the factors that promote the development of strong community partnership (Judith M. S. Gross et.al 2015). School administrators are also the ones responsible in establishing and sustaining a strong partnership with the stakeholders of the schools. These include the families, government agencies, local government units, non-government organizations among others (DepEd order 44 s.2021). With the presence of strong community partnerships other challenges may be augmented as this partnership covers a wide scope and supports the implementation and promotion of Physical Education for learners with special educational needs.

Conclusion

Identified themes coincide with the gathered quantitative data from the Special Education teachers from the School Division of province of Cavite, wherein the Physical Education

program for LSEN appeared that it is being implemented but not on a regular basis (JCubillo 2023). Various challenges are present in terms of the implementation of Physical Education program for learners with special educational needs. Challenges common to both Special Education teachers and school administrators are the individual differences of the learners with special educational needs, inadequacy of facilities and equipment especially designed for LSEN to ensure their safety and security, limited available budget or non-prioritization in budget allocation, and limited partnership and collaboration with other stakeholders in terms of promoting and implementation of Physical Education for learners with special educational needs.

On the other hand, SPET acknowledge more challenges in contrast with the observation of school administrators. SPET also acknowledge the non-inclusion or reflection of Physical Education in the curriculum although physical activities are being integrated. They also observe the few numbers of SPET that can help in the promotion and implementation of Physical Education for learners with special educational needs. In addition, SPET observed the need for trainings, seminars, workshops and the likes focusing on the promotion and implementation of Physical Education for LSEN. Additional role of teachers as sports coaches and trainers for the athletes with special needs was considered to be one of the challenges being observed by the SPET. Since this study cover only one school division in the country, to comprehensively address the concern in the implementation and promotion of Physical Education program for learners with special educational needs, identifying the challenges encountered in other provinces and SPED Centers may be conducted.

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