

THE POWER OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TODAY

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As time passes, the number of persons with special needs increases. According to the World Health Organization and World Bank (2011), an estimated over a billion people, or 15% of the world's population, live with different disabilities. In the Philippines, 15 million out of 100 million Filipino children, youths and adults have disabilities, and 3.3 million of them are in school. Each of these learners with disabilities has different situations and experiences that may lead them to continue participation in the K-12 basic education. According to S B. No. 1331, although there are laws affirming the policy on inclusive education, which is the equal right to education, significant gaps remain, particularly in ensuring access to quality education for children with disabilities. A 2011 study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies revealed that female Persons with Disabilities are up to twice as likely as their male counterparts to leave primary education unfinished, largely due to financial constraints and social barriers. These individuals need a comprehensive support system to ensure their well-being, inclusion, and access to opportunities.

In today's generation, there are more cases of disabilities in the country, specifically autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Based on the Autism Society Philippines, one in 1 million Filipinos is autistic, or approximately 1.2 million Filipinos living with autism in the Philippines. Autistic has difficulties in communication, socialization and adapting to the world. This case is a lifelong developmental exceptionality that is why they must develop their communication and social skills by attending therapy sessions in private and having environmental care. The ordinary citizen cannot afford the lifetime

expenses for this case. It is an advantage that persons with special needs have a certain place in public education.

The Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children confers that out of 2.2 million of children with disabilities, only 2% has access to the right to education. The parents of these children need to be aware of educational opportunities for their children's welfare, and most of them live in rural and remote areas. There is a huge gap in the learning of children with disabilities in the country that needs a crucial response. Inclusive education is the power to combat the education crisis in children with disabilities. This resolution was organized to accept all children regardless of race, size, shape, colour, ability, or disability.

All regular schools may provide educational services to children with special needs with or without special education-trained teachers. The SPED teachers offer services in helping persons with disabilities who are enrolled in inclusive education. It is not a problem if the regular school does not have trained SPED teachers, as they must coordinate with the SPED center or SPED-trained teachers. The children with disabilities and their parents will be having courage to attend classes, either SPED or regular, because there is a certain platform for them. Bullying may be avoided because teachers have proper guidelines and directions to manage children with disabilities. Inclusive setting reduces discrimination since it helps normalize diversity and promote understanding and acceptance among all students. Inclusive education may control the increasing number of children with special needs by bringing the right to education.

Either SPED or regular school requires medical assessment from a professional and licensed neurodevelopmental or developmental paediatrician. The assessment may also be performed by the SPED center to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the children using instructional materials for proper program grade placement. The full participation of the parents or guardians is needed during and after the assessment. They must continue the activities from SPED center or school at home for constant learning.

To have improved learning outcomes, the government provides free school supplies and scholarship program to the learners. The teachers identify the children who are not in school, including the children with disabilities. They offer an inclusive environment and instructional materials. Inclusive education enhances their social skills and ensures they are not limited by isolation or exclusion. This is to support them in accessing equal education and attending school, regardless of their characters.

But according to the Senate of the Philippines press release, December 8, 2024, there is a shortage of more than 7,000 special needs education teachers in the country. There are only 5,147 SNED teachers while 323,344 learners with disabilities aged 2-17 are enrolled for the school year 2023-2024. The DepEd secretary said, "One of the challenges in implementing inclusive education is the supply of qualified teachers". Collaboration with CHED and the development of a scholarship program for in-service teachers to pursue the required master's degree in special needs education are solutions for the barrier of accessing excellent education for children with disabilities. Inclusive education offers significant opportunities and renewed hope for children with disabilities, particularly those living in remote and impoverished areas, by enabling them to access their right to quality education.

The continuous scream of persons with special needs are understanding, support and equality. The most feared is the chance of losing their parents and relatives who understand and take care of them if they were deprived of the right to learning. Inclusive education uncovers chances for change and success.

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