

Challenges of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

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Abstract— This study determined the responsiveness of the higher educational institutions (HEI's) in the province of Sorsogon to the needs of the students with disabilities. It is a descriptive survey that aimed to determine the profile of the students with disability and the responsiveness of the colleges in terms of facilities, policies and student support services. The challenges met of the students with disabilities were also included. The respondents of the study were the 20 students with disabilities who were enrolled for AY 2017-2018 and the administrators of the 15 colleges in the province. A survey questionnaire checklist and an interview guide were utilized to gather the informations and served as the primary sources of data. The profile showed that majority of the students with disabilities their age range from 17-23 years old, most of them are male and their common physical disabilities were orthopedic condition due to birth defects and accidents, speech, visual and hearing and health impairments. The study found out the lack of facilities, policies and student support services that will cater the needs of the students with disabilities in the HEIs. Challenges met by the students were due to limitations of these provisions. Thus, it was recommended that provisions on basic facilities for mobility and accessibility be provided. Likewise, clear admission policies and guidelines may be established to give equal opportunities and provisions on support services and facilitate the documentation of the disability of the students.

Keywords— students with disabilities, facilities, policies, higher educational institutions, student support services.

I. INTRODUCTION

Right to education is an essential right. As the 1987 Philippine Constitution speaks elaborately the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels. It also emphasizes the accessibility of quality education and ensures non discrimination to all citizens of the country. Thus it connotes that all citizens including the PWDs should be educated. Education is also paramount to social development as it promotes employment opportunities, national productivity and values.

This entitlement is equally valued to all students including the person with disabilities. Spelled out in the Magna Carta for person with disabilities RA 9442 supports the Educational assistance to persons with disability, for them to pursue primary, secondary, tertiary, post tertiary, as well as vocational or technical education, In both public and private schools, through the provision of scholarships, grants, financial aids, subsidies and other incentives to qualified persons with disability, including support for books, learning materials, and uniform allowance to the extent feasible: provided, that persons with disability shall meet minimum admission requirements.

Disability as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) refers to the problems in one or more of the three domains of functioning. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) may also be

used to comprehend and quantify positive elements of functioning, such as bodily functions, activities, involvement, and environmental facilitation. In like manner as provided in RA 7277, disability means (1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more psychological, physiological or anatomical function of an individual or activities of such individual; (2) a record of such an impairment; or (3) being regarded as having such an impairment.

In 2006- 2007 the CHED reported a total number of 325 PWDs who availed scholarship program to pursue college. <https://pdfslide.net/documents/ched-guidelines-in-admission-of-pwds-090826.html>. The prevalence of persons with disabilities in higher educational institutions perceived that education is equally significant to them as a predictor of opening up chances for professional advancement and improved quality of life. Recognizing this basic right all institutions in higher learning were urged to make substantial accommodations for students with disabilities through their programs and policies.

Congruent to CHED's commitment on upholding the rights of all individuals to equal access of quality education, and the provisions as stated in RA 7277-the 1992 Magna Carta for Disabled Persons as follows:

"The State shall take into consideration the special requirements of disabled persons in the formulation of

educational policies and programs. It shall encourage learning institutions to take into account the special needs of disabled persons with respect to the use of school facilities, class schedules, physical education requirements and other pertinent consideration”

“Further, “The State shall also promote the provision by learning institutions, especially higher learning institutions, of auxiliary services that will facilitate the learning process for disabled persons”, the Commission on Higher Education issued the CHED Memorandum (CMO) No. 23, s. 2000 titled “Quality Education for Learners with Special Needs. ” The policy encourages the educational institutions in the country to admit learners with special needs and give them the opportunity to pursue college; Inclusion of SPED programs for teacher training institutions; and Facilities and equipments be modified to ensure quality education is made accessible to learner with special need.

To ensure the responsiveness of the HEIs in meeting the needs of their students with disabilities, the CHED, TESDA and NCDA collaboratively formulated the guidelines in the admission of students with disabilities in higher education and post-secondary institutions in the Philippines. The guidelines provide basic informations that can help HEIs address the needs of their students with disabilities. It has identified key areas such as admission, support services, facilities and equipment and research and development where they can provide interventions for the varying needs based from categories of the disabilities. <https://pdfslide.net/documents/ched-guidelines-in-admission-of-pwds-090826.html>.

However, despite the mechanisms and available laws that protect and ensure the inclusion and equal opportunities for higher learning and educational services many institutions are still striving to support the learning needs of the students with disabilities. The Canadian Human Rights Commission identified the lack of disability accommodation and support; lack of services and funding; ineffective dispute resolution and lack of special education and disability supports on First Nations reserves were the common education barriers for students with disabilities. It is noteworthy that these students need conducive and comfortable learning environment. Hence, modifications on provisions for facilities, services and policies should be taken into considerations to support the learning of the students. As cited by Aragon (2017), problems on compliance on the Magna Carta for Disabled persons embodied policies were one of the major concerns of the CHED. This was caused by lack of financial resources and perception of

school management to PWDs. De la Fuente (2021) emphasized a thorough planning to come up with an authentic and responsive curriculum design is highly needed to achieve success for inclusive education. The benefits of education entice the persons with disabilities to participate in the academia. Their presence is evident at all levels of education specifically in higher education. In Sorsogon Province, it shows that there are persons with disabilities enrolled in different academic institutions. They join with other students who do not have any disability and presumably treated like any other regular student. However, it cannot be denied that PWDs students, they have special needs as they considered as those people who are differently abled brought by their physical incapacity. It is observed that despite the legislative policies that protect the welfare of the differently abled students and promotion of equal opportunities for employment and education, (Sachs, 2011) claimed that many PWDS still are not able to avail this privilege only 8-14% students with disabilities were instituted in the post secondary education. This is also true in the Philippines, PIDS, (2011) revealed that around 6 percent PWDs were able to finish college degree. With this premise, the researchers were motivated to conduct the study.

II. OBJECTIVES/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study determined the responsiveness of higher educational programs to the needs of students with disabilities. Specifically, it will seek answer to the following questions:

1. Determine the profile of the students with disabilities in terms of:
 - a. Age
 - b. Sex
 - c. Disability
2. Assess the responsiveness of the educational institutions to the needs of the students with disabilities along:
 - a. Facilities
 - b. School policies
 - c. Student Support services
3. Determine the challenges met by the students with disabilities along the identified variables.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive method of research. It utilized a survey questionnaire and interview guide as the primary sources of data. The researchers used the

purposive sampling. The respondents of the study were the 20 students with disabilities enrolled for the academic year 2017-18 from fifteen HEIs in Sorsogon Province. An interview guide was devised to determine the profile and the challenges met by the students with disabilities. While the survey questionnaire was administered to the administrators of the fifteen colleges to determine the responsiveness of the college's facilities, policies and student support services towards the needs of the students with disabilities. To facilitate

the data gathering a letter request was sent to the identified schools wherein approval for schedule of administration of survey and interview were specified. In the collection of data, the interview with the students took a while for there was no available record of the identified students with disabilities. The data collected were tabulated analyzed using the frequency count. Meanwhile the responses of the participants were transcribed and coded thematically.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Profile

Table 1: Profile of the Students with Disabilities

Age	frequency
17-23	20
Sex	
Male	15
Female	5
Disability	
orthopedic condition due to accident	3
orthopedic condition birth defects	5
speech defects	4
visual disability	4
hearing impairment	3
Health impairment	1

The present study covered 14 private schools and 1 SUC in the province of Sorsogon. The study revealed that there were a total number of twenty students with disability in the HEIs in the province. Most of them are male with a total number of 15 and 5 females. The common physical disabilities of these students are orthopedic conditions due to birth defects, speech

defects, visual disability, orthopedic due to accident hearing impairment, and health impairment. It should be noted however that the disability disclosed are self identified and based from the understanding of the respondents of their physical condition. Many of the disabilities disclosed have no medical record shown.

2. Responsiveness of The Educational Institutions to The Needs of the Students with Disabilities

1.1 Facilities

Table 2.1: Facilities

FACILITIES	Available	Not Available
1. There is ramp with handrail accessible to students with disability	2	13
2. The parking space provided exclusively reserved for PWDs	2	13
3. The stairs tread is slip resistant and painted with gray value color at the edge of the steps		15
4. There is a separate washroom and toilets for PWDs	-	15
5. There is available equipment to support the learning need of student with disability	-	15
6. There is available student lounge for PWDs	15	-

Table 2.1. presents the availability of facilities for the students with disabilities. It can be seen from the table that some schools provided ramp with handrails but do not fit to the standards for use of person with

disability. Two schools have bold mark parking space exclusively for person with disability and the parking space is utilized by both employee and the students. The schools do not have separate washrooms

and toilets for PWDs. In addition, the stairs tread are not slip resistant, they are not painted with the specifications designed for student with disability needs, hence do not comply with the standards. ON the other hand, all the schools have a student lounge where students can take rest during their free time however the facility is shared by all students. It is explained that the school do not intend to provide a separate space or provide a label for the PWDs as they thought that it would create a feeling

for PWDs of being secluded. The findings show that the higher educational institutions in the province of Sorsogon lack the facilities to cater the needs of the students with disabilities. The study of Wade (2012) lend support to the findings of the study as the former revealed the difficulties faced by the students with disabilities because of lack of accessible bathrooms and the architectural barriers.

2.2 Policies

Table 2.2: Policies

POLICIES	Available	Not available
1. The institution has clear admission policies and procedures for learners with disability	1	14
2. The institution has database of the accommodated students with disabilities		15
3. The institution implements provisions of Anti Bullying act to protect the students with disability	15	-
4. The institution has provisions on flexibilities/exemptions to enable the PWDs comply the requirements.	--	15

Based from the table presented above, the study showed that the HEIs have no clear admission policies and procedures for students with disability. The schools explained that they are in the process of crafting policies that will be integrated in their existing school policies in compliance with CHED Memorandum 9, s. 2013. It was also found it that the school has no database for students with disabilities. Many schools, except for the maritime and criminology schools do not require disclosure of physical impairment. It is a voluntary action and it does not necessitate entitlement for special accommodations.

discrimination. The HEIs do not have specific provisions that exempts from school activities that may affect their mobility however, the instructors give them considerations in some activities. It was explained the consideration given is discretionary as there is no provision in the academic requirement intended for PWDs. The Maritime and the criminology schools clarified that before an applicant may be admitted the schools require that an applicant must be in physically fit condition. Both schools explained that their students must be physically fit before being enrolled because this is a basic criterion when applying for jobs in these sectors. Those students who have disabilities but still want to study at their school they recommend to enroll in other courses.

However, the school implements the anti bullying act that protect the students from bullying and

2.3 Student Support Services

Table 2.3: Student Support Services

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES	Available	Not available
1. The institution provides scholarship grants, financial aids and other incentives for students with disability	15	-
2. The school provides special priority lane for students with disabilities	15	
3. There is available guidance counselor equipped to provide guidance and counselling to students with disabilities	8	7
4. Teachers have trainings/seminars and/or oriented in dealing with students with disabilities	-	15
5. The library provides special services such as assistance and amenities for convenience	-	15

6. Students with physical disabilities are given privilege to attend their classes on the ground or 1st floor of the building	15	-
7. The institution through its student services has programs and activities designed to provide equal opportunities to student with disabilities	-	15

Findings revealed that the schools provide scholarship grants, financial aids and any other incentives for those deserving students and some students with disability passed the criteria and are recipients of the scholarship privileges. It should be noted that the grants and financial supports and scholarship grants are not exclusive for persons with disabilities. In some private schools, financial assistance was given out of benevolence to students who became handicapped due to accident. The study also revealed that school provide priority lane for students with disabilities. All schools adhere to providing of priority lane for PWDs as this is mandatory as provided under CSC Memorandum Circular No. 20, s. 2017 and RA 10754 - An Act Expanding The Benefits And Privileges Of Persons With Disability (PWD). On the other hand, the teachers do not have special trainings in dealing with disabilities. Even so, the teachers give considerations to students with disability having a hard time in complying the activities by giving them special activity that would compensate the course requirement. It can be noted also that the schools do not have provisions for library services exclusive for students with disabilities. The findings is supported by the study of Hill (1998) who revealed that needs of students with disabilities in postsecondary are not met because of lack of services offered by the school.

3. CHALLENGES MET

On the challenges met these are the common expressions of the participants:

“Kahit pilya ako, sinasabayan ko mga classmates ko palipat lipat ng room, minsan malayo ang sunod na room, nahihirapan pero tinitiiis”. Even though I'm handicapped I go with my classmates moving from one room to another room, sometimes the next room is far, it's hard but I endure.

“Wala ako naiintindihan sa lecture kasi di ko naririnig masyado, nahihiya naman ako magtanong” I don't understand anything in the lecture because I don't hear much, I'm ashamed to ask.

“Mahirap kasi minsan di ako nakakasabay sa ibang activities.” It is hard because I could hardly perform some activities .”

“Kapag intramurals wala kami ginagawa no choice kasi wala naman activity na pwede masalihan” “When intramurals we do nothing because there is no activity that can be joined”

“Nahhirapan magbayad ng tuition fee , minsan kasi wala pa pera ang parents ko”. “It's hard to pay the tuition fee, because sometimes my parents don't have money yet.

“Konti lang kaibigan ko nahihiya ako lumapit sa mga school mates ko minsan kasi baka pagtawanan o iwasan ako” ““ I have few friends, I am ashamed to approach my school mates sometimes because they might laugh at me or avoid me”

Based from the expressions above, it can be deduced that regardless of their limitations, they deal with circumstances in the same way that a physically capable student would. This is due to the absence of facilities that could aid their mobility. It was disclosed by the participants they have difficulties understanding the lectures during classes because of their impairments. It was disclosed that some teachers are not aware of their impairment. They added that some teachers rarely use audio visual devices when teaching. Same observations that have been disclosed in the Study of Kabuta (2014), she found out shortage of teaching and learning materials as well as lack of special schemes, trained staff, funds and scholarship for students with physical disabilities. He recommended that government and other stakeholders should take special considerations and actions in order to accommodate students with physical disabilities in higher learning institutions.

Some students face financial challenges in paying their tuition fees. It should be noted that although the schools provide scholarship and financial aid but not all PWD respondents are recipient of the financial privileges. It showed that they like to engage in school activities if there are activities suitable for their physical condition. The respondents stated that, despite their physical limitations, they are not dysfunctional and that, given the opportunity, they are capable of participating and doing well. It is also evident that the students with impairments have poor self-esteem as a result of their physical condition. Similar findings were found in the study of Nene (2019) where he revealed that students faced challenges in higher education and

training. Physical, social, financial, and perceptual were the common problems faced by students with impairments. The physical environment of the school, as well as the absence of assistance for students with disabilities from some academic personnel were the two most significant barriers to accessibility of the students. Amin, et. al (2021), findings also support that financial issue is one of the main challenges experienced by students with disability in higher education.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion:

Based from the findings revealed, there are students with disabilities with varying needs with regard to their physical condition. The higher educational institutions in the province of Sorsogon are lack of facilities that would improve the accessibility and mobility of students with disabilities. The schools have limited school policies that would provide equal opportunities such as clear admission policies and provisions on the course requirement that would address the needs of the students with disability. On the other hand anti discrimination and anti bullying policies are strongly implemented in all schools. Although the schools offer scholarship, counseling services, special lanes and considerations for students with disabilities, there are essential student support services that are not provided by the colleges. The students with disabilities faced challenges due to lack of facilities, equipment that could assist in their learning process, limited policy and support services provided by the school.

Recommendations

The higher educational institutions in the province of Sorsogon should provide the basic facilities for better accessibility and mobility of the student with disabilities. Equipment and applicable learning resources may be provided to support the learning needs of the students. Programs and activities may be designed that can promote better learning experience and develop or enhance their capabilities. A provision on admission policies and special guidelines may be provided to give equal opportunities to be enrolled and pursue college. The schools may facilitate the documentation of the disability of the students that may be used for possible accommodations and availment of benefits that may be provided as stated in RA 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons). An exclusive financial aid or scholarship package may also be granted to student with disability to assist him/her finish college degree.

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