

Implementing inclusive education in the Philippines: College teacher experiences with deaf students

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Inclusive education aims to mainstream students with special needs in a flexible learning environment for acquiring quality education that optimises their potential for holistic development. This goal depends upon teachers who can attain inclusivity in the educational system by shaping positive values, providing knowledge, and developing the skills of exceptional students to cope with life's challenges. Adopting this perspective, this study documents the experiences of forty-three college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes, in one higher education institution in the Philippines. The descriptive phenomenological approach of Colaizzi's coding and categorising of the participants' responses, obtained from in-depth, individual face-to-face and online interviews elucidates four themes that illuminate the experiences of participants. These themes are conveyed as *challenging* for harnessing their *creative/innovative* minds to develop teaching tools for effective quality education, *opportunity* to shape a brighter future of deaf students, and undertake *inspiring* teaching. The highlighted themes are attributes that can pave the way for more effective inclusive education in tertiary institutions in the Philippines.

Introduction

The paradigm shift to an inclusive educational system where students with special needs are mainstreamed into a regular learning environment with normal students has been for many decades a goal for inclusive education advocates. A global framework for inclusive education was advocated in a world conference on special needs education in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 (Ainscow, 2016) and has been a feature for UNESCO since its calls for *Education for all* (EFA) in Jontiem, Thailand (1990), Amman, Jordan (1996), Dakar, Senegal (2000), Geneva, Switzerland (2008), and Incheon, South Korea (2015). UNESCO as a prime mover for inclusive education has underscored that teachers' readiness, knowledge delivery, and teaching practices are core elements in an inclusive educational platform (UNESCO, 2015).

Worldwide, the World Health Organization pointed out that 15% of the population has a disability, and 5% (466 million) are deaf (WHO, 2018). According to the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (2010), deafness is a hearing loss above 90 decibels which causes the inability of the deaf to hear sounds and articulate words. Students who are deaf typically communicate through sign language with the assistance of an interpreter but occasionally they are effective at lip reading and interpreting non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures (Parent Information Network, 2008).

To provide equal rights and opportunities on accessible, meaningful, quality, inclusive education for students with special needs, specifically for the deaf, many countries have

enacted laws and policies such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD, 2008), which encouraged stakeholders to take appropriate actions responsive to inclusive education for exceptional students. Notably, when the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA, 1975) was legislated in 1975, deaf students in inclusive classrooms become prevalent (Meynert, 2014). The phenomenon was evident in European countries where about 50% attended mainstream schools. It escalates in the case of the USA (80%) and Canada (90%) respectively. Due to this rapid uptake, the World Federation of the Deaf has stressed that full inclusivity should be ensured in order to attain an ideal learning environment catering for the needs of exceptional students in mainstream educational system (WFD, 2018).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that comprises the Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam crafted certain international standards in support and to promote the goal of inclusive education as to the finest practices in providing quality education to students with special needs in the Asia Pacific region (SEAMEO, 2015). However, despite the global investment and crusade the goal of inclusive education remains distant (UNESCO, 2017; Jelas & Ali, 2014). To have a deeper understanding of the underlying factors on this global phenomenon a number of investigative studies are available. For example, in Greece on the exclusion of Roma children with special needs (Parthenis & Fragoulis, 2016); in Iraq on the prevalence and nature of students with special needs (Alborz, Slee & Miles, 2013); in Canada the over-representation of minority students in special education (Addo, 2011); and in New Zealand the vulnerability of students with special needs (Gabel & Connor, 2009). However, there are limited works that cite inclusive education in the Asia Pacific region (Alborz et al., 2013).

Filipinos have high regard for education as they believe this is valuable for uplifting them from poverty, having a prosperous life, and achieving breakthroughs for the country's economic progress and industrial development. This valuing of education is inscribed in the country's fundamental law, the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Republic of the Philippines, 1987) in which Article XIV, Section 1 states "The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all", which includes the rights of persons with disabilities or students with special needs, specifically the deaf. Through this mission of the government, the Republic Act (Republic Act 7277, 1991) known as the *Magna Carta for disabled persons* was enacted, which proliferated into distinct regulated laws and policies to ensure rehabilitation, self-development, and self-reliance of disabled individuals or students with special needs (Ebol, 2000). Moreover, the latter enlightened the conceptualisation of *special education* (SPED), later shifted to *inclusive education* in the country's educational system.

The SPED program has found its place since the start of its implementation in the late 1990s. Its goal was strengthened by Department of Education (DepEd) Orders which drive education specialists to enact SPED programs in public schools across the country, particularly the DepEd Orders 38 of 2015 [*Guidelines on the utilization of SPED funds*] (DepEd Order 38, 2015), 6 of 2006 [*Ordered secondary schools to offer SPED program*] (DepEd

Order 6, 2006), and 11 of 2000 [*Mandated each Division to have at least one SPED centers to cater students with special needs*] (DepEd Order 11, 2000). The SPED program has become an imperative for responding to the growing number of students with special needs who lack access to quality inclusive education (EFA, 2010). The commitment of the Philippines to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2008) pushed the government through the Department of Education (DepEd) to shift the current educational system of special education (SPED) into an *inclusive education* system where its main objective is to mainstream students with special needs in the regular classroom to learn side by side with normal students.

The paradigm shift to inclusive education challenges the higher education institutions in the Philippines. Thus, to become responsive in the implementation of inclusive education, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) circulated CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) 23 of 2000 [*Quality education for learners with special needs*] (CHED, 2000; 2017) which urged higher education institutions to:

1. Admit students with special needs.
2. Include SPED programs for teacher training institutions.
3. Provide/modified accessible facilities and equipment for students with special needs.

The landscape for inclusive education does not only challenge academic institutions, it demands more from teachers as the forefront in an inclusive educational system. This context inspired the author to document the experiences of college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes, through a qualitative study. Notably, there are limited studies and works of literature on inclusive education specifically on college teachers' experiences in higher education institutions in the Philippines. From a global perspective, research has focused mainly on the implementation of inclusive education in the elementary and secondary school sectors, typically using quantitative research methods. The present study provides a clearer picture on the status of inclusive education in the Philippines using a relatively large number of participants (N=43) to better understand tertiary sector perspectives. Moreover, the present study is the first to document the experiences of unspecialised special education (SPED) college teachers, the majority of whom are not teachers by profession, with deaf students in inclusive classes. Thus, findings will shed light on inclusive education that can contribute to the international literature.

Research question

This study explored the experiences of college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes as they encountered the implementation of inclusive education in the Philippines. It establishes empirical evidence to acquire an in-depth understanding of these experiences, seeking specifically to answer the research question:

Determine and describe the experiences of college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes as they journeyed in the Philippines implementation of inclusive education.

Method

The study used a qualitative research design, descriptive phenomenology, which allows the exploration of the experiences lived and told by individuals through the essence of certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Through this perspective, the facets of occurrences exhibited by the participants and shared through experiences were determined and described (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). The phenomenological design was deemed to be most suitable for the study as it sought to investigate the experiences of college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes. Specifically, the participants' narratives were taken into account to be part of the analysis of which their respective stories are imprinted.

Selection of site, inclusion criteria and participants

The study was conducted in one selected higher education institution in the Philippines. As a government-run academic institution, it adheres to laws promulgated by the Philippine government to cater for diverse learners regardless of sexual orientation, political beliefs, culture, religion, ethnicity, race, and disabilities. This mandate challenges the institution and teachers to admit deaf students, with currently four mainstreamed in Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM), two in Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management (BSHRM), and one (1) in Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT).

Table 1: Profile of the participants (N=43)

Category	Participants	Specialisation/ subject taught	f	%
Teacher education by profession (n=16)	P1, P2	Science	2	12.5
	P3, P4	Mathematics	2	12.5
	P5, P6, P7	English	3	18.8
	P8, P9, P10, P11, P12	Social science	5	31.3
	P13, P14, P15	Physical education	3	18.8
	P16	Filipino	1	6.3
Not teacher education by profession (n=22)	P17, P18, P19, P20, P21, P22, P23, P24, P25, P26, P27, P28	Hotel and restaurant management	12	54.5
	P29, P30, P31, P32, P33	Business administration	5	22.7
	P34, P35, P36, P37, P38	Information technology	5	22.7
Studied teacher education (with units) (n=5)	P39	BSc Information Technology	1	20.0
	P40	Bachelor of Computer Science	1	20.0
	P41	B. Hotel & Restaurant Management	1	20.0
	P42	B. Business Administration	1	20.0
	P43	BSc Biology	1	20.0

Purposive sampling was used to find qualified participants/teachers, according to the following inclusion criteria:

1. Experienced in teaching deaf students in inclusive classes as the Philippines implements the inclusive education policies.

2. Teaching either specialist or general education subjects in the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020.
3. College teachers in the selected higher education institution in the Philippines.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the institution's Research and Development Office through an In-House Research Review. The author sought ethical approval and permission from the participants prior to the conduct of the study, explaining the purpose, procedures, and possible utilisation of their recorded interviews. Participants signed a consent form to manifest their voluntary participation and utilisation of their recorded interviews. They were coded as P1 to P43 to conceal their identities.

Research instrument

The study utilised a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview with five open-ended items validated by three experts on qualitative analysis and research instrumentation. Refinements to the researcher developed questionnaires were made to capture the participants' experiences with deaf students in inclusive classes. The interview guide was:

1. Do you have experience in teaching deaf students before? If yes,
 - a. Name of the school?
 - b. Private or public?
 - c. Years of teaching?
2. What are your experiences in teaching your present deaf students?
3. How do you teach deaf students?
4. What strategy/strategies do you apply in teaching deaf students?
5. Do you consider teaching deaf students a challenge or an opportunity? Why or why not?

Data collection

The institution's school/academic year calendar is divided into two semesters, the first from August to December and the second from January to May. The author met the participants and explained the nature of the study then scheduled an interview at their most convenient time as they had teaching scheduled every day. Data collection started in January of 2020 after the end of the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020, with twenty-four participants who were teaching at the main campus where the author is located. The duration of individual face-to-face interviews was approximately 10-15 minutes. In the interview, facial expressions, gestures, annotations, emphases, pauses, and silences of the interviewees was documented in the researcher's field notes. Probing questions were asked to clarify ambiguous responses. To avoid biases, the author based the interview upon a standard interview guide, and not upon his knowledge, as suggested by Yin (2011). However, due to crowded teaching schedules, the geographical location of other campuses where other participants were teaching, and the anticipated cancellation of classes in mid-February 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, nineteen of the participants

was interviewed online by answering the interview guide questions. Data from the participants' responses were then encoded, transcribed and analysed. There were no translations of the responses as all participants used English in their interviews.

Data analysis

The collected data were transcribed immediately after each interview and randomly checked to ensure the quality of the transcription. Data were subjected to phenomenological analysis using Colaizzi's (1978) data explication process to have in-depth, objective description, and analysis to elucidate the participants' experiences in teaching deaf students in an inclusive class. The author went through the following rigorous steps in analysing the transcripts; (1) familiarisation; (2) identifying significant statements; (3) formulating meanings; (4) clustering themes; (5) developing an exhaustive description; (6) producing the fundamental structure; and (7) seeking verification of the fundamental structure. Participants' responses in the audio recorded face-to-face individual interviews were repeatedly listened to, while written responses which were sent online were read several times to internalise their unique experiences. Thus, significant statements related to the phenomenon were extracted out of the transcripts. The meanings or categories for each statement were formulated. These formulated meanings were clustered into sub-themes and themes. Then, the findings or the implied essential meanings conveyed by the participants were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon.

The constructs transferability, conformability, dependability and credibility established the rigour of the study (Tobin & Begley, 2004). *Transferability* was manifested as the participants richly described their experiences in teaching deaf students, which then enabled clusters of meaning and grouping as to the essential themes conveyed. A check-recheck strategy established *conformability* of the findings transcribed during the interviews. Thus, to ensure quality (*dependability*), results were subjected to an audit trail by a qualitative expert in the locality, who confirmed the results (themes) of the study. The researcher presented the transcripts to the participants for verification of data for its truthfulness and accuracy, to attain holistic *credibility*.

Findings and discussion

Four essential themes emerged from the analysis of narratives. These elucidated themes illuminate the experiences of college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes as they journeyed in the Philippines implementation of inclusive education.

Table 2: Themes generated from the analysis of narratives

Theme	Illustrative quotation	Participants making similar comments	Sub-themes
Challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching deaf students is difficult since it is my first time to handle these type of students. 	P1 – P43*	Unskilled in sign language.

	• Deaf students are difficult to deal with because I am incapable to understand their sign language.	P4, P7, P9, P12, P28, P31, P33	Impedes teacher's effective delivery of a lesson and communicating with deaf students.
	• It is challenging to communicate the lesson to deaf students because I am not skilled in sign language.	P1 – P43*	
	• It's hard to convince deaf students to perform classroom activities in physical education because I do not know how to communicate through sign language.	P13, P14, P15	
	• Teaching deaf students is challenging because I am not a Special Education (SPED) teacher and I don't know how to cater their special needs/attention.	P1 – P43*	Unspecialised in special education/ Majority are not teachers by profession.
	• It is very difficult to teach deaf students because by profession I am not a teacher education graduate.	P17 – P43	
	• I need to exert efforts preparing instructional materials intended for deaf students given that I am not a teacher by profession.	P1, P6, P10, P18, P20, P27, P33, P41	Status of teachers makes teaching deaf students difficult.
	• It is hard to include deaf students in class discussions because I do not know how to translate the lesson in their way of communication.	P5, P11, P17, P23, P29, P35, P38, P41	
Creative/innovation	• I wrote either in a piece of paper flashcard or on the board if I have something to discuss and explain to my deaf students so that they can follow the lesson.	P3, P4, P12, P15, P18, P22, P27, P33, P35, P37, P39, P41	Designed unique instructional materials intended for deaf students to cater for their individual learning needs.
	• During oral quiz or test I provided an exclusive teacher made test for my deaf students.	P2, P5, P8, P19, P23, P26	
	• Oftentimes I used <i>Messenger App</i> to communicate my deaf students when they shared insights about the lesson.	P3, P6, P9, P11, P12, P16, P23	
	• I provided hand-outs (notes) for my deaf students to study.	P1, P5, P8, P11, P18, P27, P35	
	• I allowed my deaf students to re-choreograph the physical exercises so that they would feel that they are also normal using claps and taps of chairs or tables as beats of the dance steps.	P2, P7, P9, P13, P14, P15, P20, P34, P37, P40, P41	
	• For my deaf students to understand the concepts in our lesson I always prepared <i>PowerPoint</i> or even video presentations.	P3, P9, P11, P23, P25, P27, P28, P33, P34 – P38, P40, P42, P43	Develop new teaching strategies and methodologies suitable for the learning styles of deaf
	• Since I do not have the skills in sign language, I maximised the peers of my deaf students who can understand and do sign language and interpreted what they	P9, P11, P13, P16, P18, P21, P25, P26, P29, P33, P40	

	wanted to ask or clarify the class discussion.		students.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I joined my deaf students with the normal students in classroom activities so that they would feel the self-belongingness during classroom activities, output making, group dynamics, workshops, and reflection writing. 	P12, P23, 25, P28, P33, P37, P38, P39, P40, P1, P42, P43	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since some of my deaf students can lip read, I always reiterated my discussion through verbal language. 	P1, P3, P7, P10, P12, P13, P14, P15, P19, P24, P33, P40	
Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An opportunity that explored and developed my creativity and flexibility in teaching deaf students. 	P1 – P16, P19, P20, P22, P23, P28, P34, P38	Upgrade teaching styles in order to provide quality and meaningful learning experiences.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an opportunity for me that I gained first-hand teaching experiences of deaf students. 	P1 – P43*	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity, because teaching deaf students motivated me to exert more effort and time to be patient and understanding. 	P17 – P38	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a teacher I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to help my deaf students achieve a brighter future. 	P2, P4, P9, P11, P13, P15, P18, P21, P33	Learn new knowledge and skills, especially to address diversity of learners in an inclusive learning environment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An opportunity that inspired me towards teaching and became part of building my deaf students' future. 	P1 – P43*	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching deaf students provided me the opportunity to widen and hone my knowledge and skills in different strategies in teaching them. 	P6, P8, P10, P12, P23, P29, P32, P42	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An opportunity for me which pushed me to learn the basics of sign language which I used in the classroom to communicate my deaf students and learn different strategies in providing meaningful learning activities to my deaf students. 	P1, P3, P5, P7, P10, P13, P16, P17, P21, P22, P28, P30, P32, P33, P38, P41	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An opportunity that enhanced my skills and teaching styles in addressing the learning needs of my deaf students. 	P7, P9, P11, P14, P16, P18, P19, P20, P21, P24, P35, P38, P40, P41	
Inspiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching deaf students for me was so meaningful and inspiring. 	P1 – P43*	Fulfilment in their role as teacher since they shaped and mould the future of these deaf students. Deaf students'
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I boosted the confidence of my deaf students since they felt hesitant in performing activities because they thought that their classmates will laugh at them. 	P3, P7, P9, P11, P17, P32, P37, P40	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I considered it inspiring by always 	P1 – P43*	

considering the welfare of my deaf students and taught them the quality learning they deserved.		passion to learn make teachers inspired to do their role.
• Inspiring knowing that I became part of reaching my deaf students' dreams.	P1 – P43*	
• I have the passion and compassion in reaching out and teaching my deaf students.	P1 – P43*	
• My deaf students' eagerness and determination to learn inspired me to teach every day.	P3, P8, P11, P18, P22, P26, P28, P32, P41	
• Teaching my deaf students was inspiring because they always pay attention to my discussion even they have hearing difficulty.	P1 – P43*	
• My heart and mind were enlightened of my deaf students' desire to learn despite being physically challenged which makes me inspired as their teacher.	P1 – P43*	
• Despite being deaf they still managed to adjust and adapt to the normal students and their peers.	P3, P5, P8, P10, P13, P15, P18, P21, P23, P28, P31, P40	
• Teaching deaf students was inspiring since their classmates and peers tried to learn the basic sign language in order to interact and communicate with deaf students.	P1, P11, P22, P26, P29, P31, P34, P36, P39, P41	

Note: P1 – P43* means that responses by the other 42 participants were generally similar to Participant 1's interview response.

In reference to Figure 1, the pyramid surrounded by a bar in circular motion depicts how themes have been generated, to convey how colourful and meaningful the experiences of college teachers were with deaf students in inclusive classes. Remarkably, the themes revealed that the experiences of the participants in teaching deaf students are *challenging*, and to become adept in delivering effective quality education, they tended to become *creative/innovative* in their styles, approaches, techniques, and strategies in teaching students with special needs. Moreover, an *opportunity* was created for participants to learn and gain first-hand teaching-learning experiences that developed their skills in teaching exceptional students, thereby leading to the core of the participants' experiences as *inspiring*.

Teachers have a key role in the attainment of successful and sustainable inclusive education by providing quality education to students with special needs in an adaptable learning environment (UNESCO, 2017), an environment where deaf students can interact with normal students through sign language as their mode of communication. Through sign language, they express their emotions, minds, and actions. It implies how important sign language is in the teaching-learning process for it maintains positive engagement between deaf students and the teacher in the classroom.

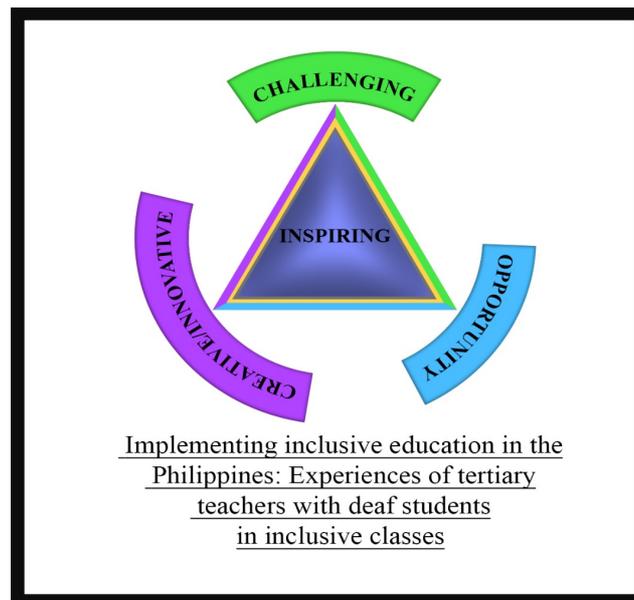


Figure 1: The central themes emerged from the analysis of clusters of meaning

Challenging expresses a common pitfall encountered in teaching deaf students in inclusive classes, because the participants were unskilled in sign language, as vividly conveyed in a number of interviews. Being unskilled in sign language indicated a difficulty with understanding their deaf students through their own used language. The author believes that this impedes the participants' effective delivery of lessons and communicating with deaf students. Teachers should be competent enough in sign language to provide meaningful learning experiences to deaf students in an inclusive learning environment (Ainscow, 2016). Hence, teachers should consider learning the basics of sign language for it is essential in communicating with deaf students, and modifying teaching methods to better suit for their learning needs. The author infers that the majority of participants, who are not teachers by profession, struggle to attain effective lesson delivery for students with special needs in an inclusive education system. Engelbrecht, Green and Naicker (1999) supported this inference that inclusive education demands an additional effort from general education teachers because they are not used to teaching students with special needs.

This challenging role for participants can stimulate them to become *creative/innovative*, to attain delivery of meaningful learning experiences to deaf students. Some developed instructional materials that cater for deaf students' learning needs. Its effectiveness was expressed by some participants in terms of deaf students' more active engagement in classroom discussions, perhaps with assistance from normal students who know sign language basics can serve as interpreters.

This technique employed by the participants is congruent with findings by Foster and Cue (2009) that the best way to teach deaf students is to integrate coaching, either from the

teacher or from normal students. However, Salazar-Clemina (2006) emphasised that teachers should be cautious and skillful when using the sign language as a medium or mode of communication in teaching, as hand gestures may create misconceptions for deaf students. Participants write on paper what they wanted to express to deaf students and to clarify ambiguous topics in lessons. Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven (2008) supported these findings that written words have a positive impact on deaf students. Similarly, some participants in the present research developed interactive video presentations, as they believed that deaf students have visual learning preferences.

To widen the range of teaching techniques and methods to capture deaf students' interest, Mpofu and Chimenga (2013) suggested other strategies, such as tapping of shoulders, waving, and walking around while teaching. If teachers have the knowledge and skills required for different styles in teaching students with special needs, they can become more flexible and dynamic teachers in an inclusive education system. Thus, to attain successful, sustainable inclusive education, academic institutions should ensure that learning is enriched with effective teaching practices and learning materials for students with special needs.

However, Luckner, Slike and Johnson (2012) pointed out that general education teachers who teach students with special needs in an inclusive classroom find themselves stressed and that this may be due to insufficient knowledge and lack of experience. Interestingly, it does not accord with findings from the present study, in which participants asserted that their experiences in teaching students with special needs like deafness is not a burden nor stressful; rather they considered it inspiring and fulfilling for their profession.

Participants' experiences in inclusive classes created an *opportunity* for them to advance and become more adept in their teaching styles. Participants revealed becoming more motivated to learn the basics of sign language, for communicating with their deaf students. Since the majority of the participants were not teachers by profession, they looked at their experiences of teaching deaf students as an opportunity to address the learning needs of deaf students through initiatives which were adaptable and flexible also for normal students.

In some classroom activities, the participants grouped deaf students with normal students, as a strategy for deaf students to feel a "self-belongingness". Berndsen and Luckner (2012) underpinned this providing of opportunities for deaf students to feel that they had become part of the hearing or normal academic community. Other participants allowed deaf students to sit in a front row as they believed that some could lip-read what others were conveying in class discussions. Also, it was underscored in this study that participants maximised the unique features of Facebook's *Messenger* app for their communication with deaf students during classes, so that deaf students could participate and express their thoughts and ideas on the topic being discussed. Visual presentations through different technological platforms can provide information and enhance students' critical thinking by students with special needs as they became more active participants in teaching and learning (Schultz et al., 2013).

Notwithstanding the challenges that the participants were facing in the new expectations for inclusive education, they remained optimistic as they conveyed that their experiences were *inspiring*, which was confidently shared by all of the participants. Teachers' positive experiences in implementing inclusive education into actual practice have been proven as effective influences upon teachers' perspectives of holistic inclusivity (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011). The participants vividly expressed that they are inspired to teach deaf students and firmly believed that they should ensure quality education for deaf students. On that note, they exerted effort by conducting remedial classes for deaf students to keep up with lessons. Poon, Ng, Wong and Kaur (2016) affirmed that positive attitudes of teachers has an impact on their commitment to providing inclusive learning. Thus, academic institutions should equip teachers with training attuned to inclusive education (Kurniawati et al., 2012), which can improve their confidence and competence in teaching students with special needs (Grimes, et al., 2011). Furthermore, Pham (2008) suggested that teachers collaborate with other educators with first-hand experiences in teaching deaf students, to ascertain best practices in teaching these students through peer-mentoring.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study investigated the experiences of college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes. The themes derived from the transcriptions and analyses of narratives by the participants shed light on teachers' personal experiences and actual teaching practices in a higher education institution in the Philippines. Their experiences were *challenging* yet they adopted a positive perspective towards meaningful teaching and learning experiences. They explored and showcased *creative/innovative* actions as they developed strategies for delivering quality education for inclusive classes. Notwithstanding their challenging role in attaining inclusivity and mainstreaming students with special needs in a regular learning environment together with the normal students/peers, teachers perceived an *opportunity* for professional development that motivated them to continue their role in shaping deaf students for a brighter future. That makes teachers' teaching experiences *inspiring*.

However, despite the progress towards full inclusivity in higher education institutions, there should be further modifications and interventions in the Philippines' educational system, concerning the insufficient number of qualified and well-trained special education (SPED) teachers, and the limited teaching and learning resources to facilitate effective, efficient, and quality inclusive education in the country. The special education (SPED) policy in the Philippines was enacted in 1997, specifically mandating that Filipino Sign Language (FSL) be used in education for deaf students. However, institutions such as the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) have not demonstrated a substantial effort concerning teacher training that includes first-hand experience, production of instructional teaching and learning materials, research on the present status of inclusive education in the country and the use of FSL in teaching deaf students. These are attributes of the core vision of inclusive education in mainstreaming students with special needs, including deaf learners, in the regular classroom to learn side-by-side with

normal students. Thorough planning to come up with an authentic and responsive curriculum design is highly needed to achieve success for inclusive education. Thus, the author recommends these salient points:

1. School administrators may consider as a hiring criterion for teaching positions in the non-board degree programs, that those who are not teachers by profession should study units or complete professional teacher education subjects from a teacher education institution of their choice, to develop their skills in different pedagogies and methods in teaching.
2. Teachers by profession who have not specialised in special education (SPED) should undertake training in sign language, ideally Filipino Sign Language (FSL) as mandated by Republic Act 11106, and American Sign Language (ASL) for its practical advantage since it is an international sign language for the deaf. Through this initiative, teachers can communicate more effectively with deaf students.
3. Academic institution could consider having a focal person on inclusive education, who will lead actions on the concerns and welfare of students with special needs. Moreover, the focal person could develop specific policies and guidelines as to RA 11106 on the use of Filipino Sign Language (FSL) as the medium of instruction in teaching, to ensure inclusivity in academic communities.
4. Education specialists may review the basic/elementary, secondary/high-school, and tertiary/college curriculum and revise to better incorporate international standards and principles of inclusive education. Specifically, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) may consider offering special education (SPED) as a mandatory or elective subject both in the undergraduate and graduate teacher education degree programs, to help these become more sensitive towards students with special needs.
5. The Philippine government through its educational agencies such as DepEd, CHED, and TESDA may allocate funds for research to widen the horizon of empirical evidence on the current status of inclusive education in the Philippines.
6. The CHED may create an accessible database to profile students with special needs among higher education institutions for academic and research purposes. The latter may also provide scholarship for students who wish to pursue special education (SPED) degree courses in prestigious SPED institutions in the country or abroad, to increase the number of specialised SPED teachers.
7. The government may strengthen the implementation of inclusive education in the country by providing support to educational agencies through allocating larger budgets for operation, programs, and projects. Specifically, the provision of sustainable tuition and other financial support to students with special needs, to help them finish their college education. Similarly, it may devise instruments that can measure the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the of inclusive education program.

Limitations

This study focused mainly on the experiences of college teachers with deaf students in inclusive classes and does not explore any other context. The captured experiences of participants derived from seven deaf students – a small number as it was the first year of admission of deaf students to the institution – limiting the richness of the experiences obtained from the participants.

Further research

Future directions may delve into a comparative analysis of teachers who are specialised and unspecialised as to their perception of inclusive education. On the quantitative aspect of research, researchers may dwell on the readiness of the academic institutions and teachers in mainstreaming students with special needs in the regular classroom. Moreover, future researchers may consider conducting an investigative study on the future cohorts of deaf students in inclusive classes. Furthermore, the present study can be replicated among other institutions in the country or elsewhere to further contribute to the research literature in inclusive education.

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