

Establishing a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School: A Feasibility Study

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ABSTRACT

This feasibility study explores the possibility of establishing a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School in General Santos City. The school has seen a steady increase in learners showing signs of special educational needs, and both teachers and parents have expressed concern about the lack of tailored support. The study aimed to understand how the school can better serve these learners by examining its current resources, the level of readiness among teachers, and the overall support from the community. To do this, the research team conducted surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with learners, parents, teachers, and school leaders. The study also looked into various aspects such as program planning, implementation requirements, costs, and potential risks making sure the proposal aligns with DepEd's goals for inclusive education.

The findings show that while the school currently lacks trained SNED teachers and some necessary tools and materials, there is strong willingness among the staff and parents to support such a program. Some challenges were identified like financial limitations and the stigma sometimes associated with special needs but the study also offers practical solutions, including partnerships, training programs, and community education. The results suggest that launching a SNED program is both achievable and meaningful. It would give children with special needs the right support to thrive, while also creating a more inclusive, compassionate, and responsive learning environment for everyone in the school community.

Keywords: Special Needs Education (SNED), inclusive education, feasibility study, learners with exceptionalities, Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a pivotal component of global educational reforms, aiming to provide equitable learning opportunities for all learners, including those with special needs. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has underscored this commitment through various policies and guidelines. Notably, the Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program (DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021) emphasizes the need for inclusive education practices across all educational institutions. Despite these efforts, the effective implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs remains a significant challenge due to various system and infrastructural barriers.

Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School, located in Barangay Lagao, General Santos City, serves a diverse learner population. However, like many educational institutions in the region, it faces challenges in providing specialized instruction and interventions for children with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and speech or mobility impairments. The absence of a structured SNED program may lead to these children struggling with academic progress, social inclusion, and emotional well-being. Moreover, teachers often lack the necessary training and resources to effectively address the unique needs of these learners, resulting in inadequate support and integration within the classroom setting.

A systematic literature review by Pulo et al. (2024) highlights several challenges in implementing Special

Education (SPED) curricula in the Philippines, including inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, curriculum inflexibility, social stigma, and infrastructural barriers. These challenges are particularly pronounced in public schools, where resources are often limited. The study emphasizes the need for policy enhancements, resource allocation, teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and stakeholder involvement to improve SPED implementation in the country.

In the context of General Santos City, the implementation of inclusive education faces additional hurdles. Beltran et al. (2024) identify barriers such as inadequate resources, limited parental involvement, and insufficient teacher training as significant impediments to fostering inclusivity in elementary schools. These challenges underscore the necessity for a comprehensive feasibility study to assess the viability of establishing an SNED program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School.

The proposed feasibility study aims to evaluate the school's readiness to adopt a SNED program by examining existing infrastructure, assessing teacher competencies, and identifying potential challenges. It will also explore the perceptions and support of key stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and learners, to ensure the successful implementation of the program. By conducting this study, the school administration will be equipped with data-driven insights to guide decision-making processes in establishing an inclusive education framework. The findings will serve as a basis for formulating policies, developing training programs for teachers, and acquiring necessary resources to ensure that children with special needs receive quality education tailored to their individual learning requirements.

Implementing a SNED program aligns with the global advocacy for Education for All (EFA) and the mandates of the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines. However, the success of such programs largely depends on addressing the systemic issues identified in previous studies. For instance, enhancing teacher education programs to include comprehensive SPED training and providing continuous professional development opportunities are crucial steps in preparing educators to meet the unique needs of SPED learners. Additionally, fostering collaboration between teachers and parents is essential in identifying and addressing learners' needs effectively.

Infrastructural barriers also pose significant challenges to the implementation of inclusive education. Many schools lack the necessary facilities and resources to accommodate learners with special needs, which hampers their ability to provide an inclusive learning environment. Addressing these infrastructural deficits requires concerted efforts from both governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure that schools are equipped with the necessary tools and resources.

Social stigma and cultural attitudes towards disability further complicate the implementation of SNED programs. There is a pressing need for increased awareness and education among parents, educators, and the community about the importance and benefits of inclusive education. Changing societal attitudes towards disability and special education through awareness campaigns and education is necessary for fostering an inclusive environment.

Economic constraints also play a significant role in hindering the effective implementation of SNED programs. Many families of children with special needs face financial difficulties, limiting their access to necessary educational resources and support services. Providing financial assistance to families in need and implementing outreach programs to educate and involve parents in their children's education are essential steps in addressing these economic barriers.

In conclusion, establishing a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School is a critical step towards providing equitable and quality education to all learners, regardless of their abilities. This feasibility study will provide the necessary insights and recommendations to address the existing challenges and pave the way for a more inclusive educational environment. By investing in inclusive education, the school not only complies with legislative mandates but also fosters an environment of acceptance, understanding, and equal opportunities, empowering children with special needs to become productive members of society.

Legal Bases

The establishment of a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School is anchored on various legal frameworks, policies, and international agreements that promote inclusive education and the rights of children with disabilities. The following are the key legal bases that support the feasibility and establishment of the program:

International Legal Bases

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopted in 2006 and ratified by the Philippines, affirms the country's commitment to ensuring equal access to quality education for persons with disabilities. Article 24 of the convention mandates inclusive education systems at all levels and the provision of necessary accommodations to support the learning needs of children with disabilities.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) reinforces the principle that every child has a right to education and that learners with special needs should, whenever possible, be included in the regular school system. It encourages governments to adopt inclusive education policies and ensure that adequate resources are provided to support special education programs. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4 – Quality Education seeks to guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities. This global goal specifically includes children with disabilities, aiming to eliminate disparities and barriers in access to education.

National Legal Bases

The legal framework supporting inclusive education in the Philippines is grounded in several key provisions and policies. Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels. Section 2, paragraph 1 of the same article mandates the state to establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education that is relevant to the needs of the people, including individuals with special needs.

Republic Act No. 7277, also known as the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (1992), ensures that children with disabilities have access to education in environments that promote their full development. It also provides reasonable accommodation in schools, teacher training, and special education services. Similarly, Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (K to 12 Law), mandates an inclusive, learner-centered curriculum that addresses diverse learning needs, including those of children with disabilities. It requires the application of appropriate educational interventions for learners with special needs.

Republic Act No. 9155, known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, grants local schools' greater authority to implement programs that respond to their learners' specific needs, including special education programs. Meanwhile, DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 promotes inclusive education as a national strategy for increasing the participation rate of children with special needs, directing both public and private schools to adopt inclusive practices. Lastly, DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 emphasizes the importance of inclusive education and differentiated instruction under the K to 12 Basic Education Program to serve diverse learners, including those with disabilities.

Local and Institutional Policies

Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School's Commitment to Inclusive Education, as mandated in Republic Act No. 11650, institutes the policy of inclusion in all public and private early and basic education schools. These schools are mandated to ensure that all learners with disabilities have equitable access to quality education, such that no learner shall be denied admission on the basis of disability. RA No. 11650 (Inclusive Education Act for Learners with Disabilities) (2022) Establishes inclusive learning resource centers in every school division to support special needs education. Strengthens teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and accessibility of learning materials for students with disabilities.

JCCSES supports the establishment of an SNED program as part of its strategic plan for learners'

development.

Significance of the Study

The establishment of Special Needs Education (SNED) at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School marks a significant step towards inclusivity and providing equitable learning opportunities for all learners. This initiative holds profound implications for various stakeholders, fostering a more supportive and enriching educational environment.

The School

The Establishment of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School enhances inclusivity by creating a learning environment that welcomes and accommodates learners with diverse needs, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance for all learners. By offering tailored support and resources, the school improves the overall quality of education, ensuring that each learner receives appropriate instruction and interventions to help them reach their full potential. Additionally, the presence of SNED programs contributes to a more positive and supportive school climate, where teachers, staff, and students become more aware of and responsive to the needs of others, encouraging empathy, understanding, and collaboration across the school community.

The Educational Leaders

Educational leaders play a vital role in advancing inclusive education through their commitment to implementing Special Needs Education (SNED) programs. By promoting SNED, the school demonstrates leadership in inclusivity, setting a positive example for other institutions within the community and the Department of Education (DepEd). These leaders are responsible for developing and enforcing effective policies, which include allocating resources, training teachers, and integrating SNED into the overall curriculum. Additionally, they must advocate for the program by securing funding, providing appropriate infrastructure, and ensuring the availability of qualified personnel to deliver quality education to learners with special needs.

The Teachers

Teachers play a central role in the successful implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs by engaging in specialized training and continuous professional development to effectively address the diverse learning needs of learners. SNED requires a shift toward inclusive teaching practices and pedagogical approaches that accommodate all learners. It also fosters collaboration among teachers, specialists, and parents, with educators working closely with special education professionals and therapists to design and implement individualized education plans (IEPs). Moreover, SNED empowers teachers to adapt and innovate their strategies, creating a more dynamic, responsive, and engaging classroom environment that benefits every learner.

The Learners

Special Needs Education (SNED) programs are significant for learners as they provide access to quality education tailored to individual needs, ensuring that students with special needs can fully participate in the learning process and reach their academic potential. These programs offer personalized learning experiences that align with each learner's strengths and challenges, allowing them to progress at their own pace while effectively developing essential skills. Additionally, inclusive SNED environments promote social and emotional growth by encouraging interaction, relationship-building, and a sense of belonging within the school community for all learners.

The Parents

The establishment of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs holds significant value for parents by empowering them to take an active role in their child's education through participation in the development of

individualized education plans (IEPs) and close collaboration with school staff. These programs also offer access to vital support and resources, including information about their child's condition, educational pathways, and available community services, helping parents manage the challenges of raising a child with special needs. Moreover, SNED programs provide peace of mind, assuring parents that their child is receiving appropriate support and opportunities for growth, enabling them to focus on their child's overall development and well-being.

The Community and Other Stakeholders

The establishment of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs is significant for the community and other stakeholders as it increases awareness and promotes greater acceptance of individuals with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive society. These programs encourage collaboration between schools, community organizations, and various stakeholders, building a strong support network for learners with special needs and their families. Additionally, SNED contributes to broader social change by empowering individuals with disabilities and advancing their rights, ultimately promoting equality, inclusion, and shared responsibility within the community.

The DepEd

The Department of Education (DepEd) plays a central role in the success of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs through the development and implementation of national policies and guidelines that promote inclusive education. DepEd is responsible for providing schools with the necessary funding, teacher training, and institutional support to ensure effective program delivery across the country. It also monitors and evaluates the impact of SNED initiatives by collecting data, assessing program outcomes, and making informed adjustments to address the evolving needs of learners with special needs. Additionally, DepEd serves as an advocate for inclusive education by ensuring that sufficient resources such as trained personnel, assistive devices, and learning materials are allocated to support the full implementation and sustainability of SNED programs nationwide.

The Researchers

The study provides valuable insights into the learning needs and challenges of learners with special needs, contributing to the development of more effective teaching strategies and inclusive practices. Research efforts support the evaluation and refinement of SNED models and provide evidence-based recommendations that can inform policy, improve educational systems, and promote equity and access for all learners.

Project Objectives

This feasibility study aims to evaluate the practicality and sustainability of the establishment of the Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School by assessing key areas that influence its implementation. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Market Study: Educational Needs and Market Analysis

- Identify the existing demand for a Special Needs Education (SNED) program within the community.
- Analyze the current educational landscape and determine gaps in special education services.
- Assess stakeholder perceptions, potential learner enrollees, and community support for the program.

2. Technical Study: Strategic Planning and Sustainability

- Develop a structured implementation plan, including curriculum design, faculty training, and learning materials.
- Determine the necessary infrastructure, facilities, and resources required for the program.

- Establish strategies to ensure long-term sustainability and continuous improvement of the SNED program.

3. Management Study: Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

- Identify potential risks associated with the implementation of the SNED program, including administrative, operational, and legal challenges.
- Propose mitigation strategies to address risks such as funding constraints, teacher preparedness, and policy compliance.

4. Financial Study: Financial Projections and Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Estimate the costs involved in establishing and maintaining the SNED program, including salaries, facilities, and instructional materials.
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine the program's financial viability and potential return on investment.
- Explore funding sources, including government subsidies, private sponsorships, and grant opportunities.

5. Socio-Economic Study

- Evaluate the social impact of the SNED program on learners, families, and the wider community.
- Assess the economic benefits of inclusive education, such as improved learning outcomes and future employment opportunities for learners with special needs.
- Analyze how the program contributes to the development of an inclusive and equitable education system.

6. Decision to Implement the SNED Program

- Provide a comprehensive recommendation based on the study's findings regarding the feasibility of establishing the SNED program.
- Outline the necessary steps for the program's successful launch, including policy development, capacity-building initiatives, and stakeholder engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methods used to gather and analyze data for the study on the feasibility of establishing a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School. It describes the overall research design, the participants involved, the data collection tools and procedures, and how the data were analyzed. The chapter also explains the ethical considerations observed throughout the study to ensure accuracy, reliability, and respect for the rights of all participants.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure for this study followed a mixed-method design to comprehensively analyze the feasibility of establishing a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School. A systematic approach was followed to ensure reliability and accuracy.

First, the researchers sought approval from the school administrator and relevant authorities to conduct the study. To ensure that the study captured relevant insights, a purposive sampling technique was employed to

select key participants, including parents, teachers, and the school administrators. Learners with SNED manifestations were excluded from the survey, interview, and focus group discussion (FGD). Instead, the study focused on the perspectives of parents, teachers, and the school administrators regarding the implementation of the SNED program.

Data collection was conducted through three primary methods: survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The survey questionnaire was administered to parents and teachers to assess their awareness, perceptions, and expectations regarding the SNED program. Surveys were conducted using paper-based questionnaires to ensure accessibility. To complement survey data, semi-structured interviews were held with the school administrators to gain deeper insights into the existing challenges, resource availability, and readiness for SNED implementation. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Additionally, FGDs were organized with parents and teachers, consisting of 10 participants per session, to facilitate in-depth discussions on their concerns, expectations, and recommendations for the program. Standardized discussion guides were used for consistency, and all sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for qualitative analysis.

According to Creswell and Poth (2020) principles, ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, including obtaining informed consent and maintaining anonymity. Informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participants were having the right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics for the quantitative survey data, while thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and insights from interviews and FGDs. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative findings, this study presented data-driven findings and recommendations that may contribute to the successful establishment of the Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School (JCCSES), a public elementary school under the General Santos City Division, GSC North District, located in Barangay Lagao, General Santos City, Philippines. The school serves a diverse population of learners from various socio-economic backgrounds following the Revised K to 12 Curriculum, as mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd), and has a strong commitment to providing inclusive and quality education. Over the years, the school has observed a rising number of learners exhibiting special needs manifestations in the mainstream classes, highlighting the need for a structured Special Needs Education (SNED) Program to support these learners effectively.

Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School is one of the largest elementary schools in the district, catering to approximately 2,503 learners, with a faculty of 74 teachers, and a strong parental involvement from its 2,232 parents. The school is recognized for its academic excellence, extracurricular engagement, and commitment to inclusive education, making it an ideal setting for the feasibility study on establishing SNED. However, despite its dedication to providing holistic learning experiences, the school currently lacks a formalized Special Needs Education (SNED) Program, leaving many learners with special needs at a disadvantage in traditional classroom settings.

Respondents and Informants

To gather relevant and comprehensive data, this study involved a diverse group of respondents and informants, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the feasibility of implementing a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School. The selection of participants followed a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview and focus group discussion) data collection methods. A purposive sampling technique was used to select key participants.

For the survey questionnaire, the following groups were included: all 29 parents of learners with manifestation of SNED for SY 2024-2025, and all 74 teachers from the faculty. The survey assessed their awareness, perceptions, and readiness regarding the establishment of an SNED program. Surveys were conducted through paper-based questionnaires to ensure accessibility.

For the qualitative data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted to the school administrators to gain in-depth insights into the school's readiness, resource availability, and challenges in establishing SNED. The interview allowed for a more detailed exploration of the program's feasibility, including strategies for successful implementation and addressing potential barriers. This comprehensive approach, supported by Etikan and Babatope (2021), ensured the inclusion of relevant and varied perspectives in evaluating the program's viability.

Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized, consisting of 10 parents, and 10 teachers to explore their experiences, concerns, and recommendations. The FGD sessions followed a standard discussion guide, and the responses were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis.

By engaging a well-represented sample of the school community, this study aims to provide data-driven recommendations that will support the successful establishment of the Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Market Study: Educational Needs and Market Analysis

Market Analysis

The study revealed a need for establishing a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School (JCCSES) due to the prevalence of learners with special needs, as shown by the data from the Learner Information System, results of the survey conducted, and responses from the Focus Group discussion backed up by related studies.

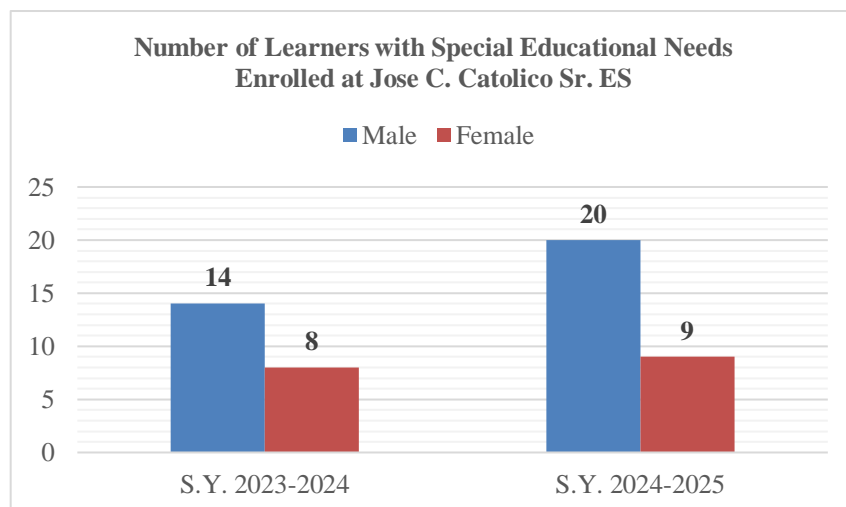


Figure 1 Comparative Analysis of Enrollment of Learners with Special Needs at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School

Figure 1 reflects the total number of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) enrolled at JCCSES has increased from 22 in the School Year 2023-2024 to 29 in the S.Y. 2024-2025, indicating a growing number and recognition of the need for support for these pupils.

In terms of sex distribution, male learners with special educational needs increased from 14 to 20, while female learners increased from 8 to 9. This suggests a significant rise in male LSENs, which requires exploration of the specific needs or challenges faced by these male learners compared to their female counterparts and provision of targeted interventions to ensure both sexes receive adequate support.

Specifically, the LIS noted 29 LSENs for the S.Y. 2024-2025. The breakdown of the specific difficulties of these learners is indicated in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Learners with Medical Diagnosis and without Medical Diagnosis but with Manifestation of Disabilities based on the International Classification of Functioning (ICF)

With Manifestation	Kinder		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Difficulty in Seeing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Difficulty in Hearing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Difficulty in Basic Learning and Applying Knowledge	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	1	4	2
Difficulty in Remembering, Concentrating, Paying Attention, and Understanding	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	3	0	4	1	0	0	9	3
Difficulty in Applying Adaptive Skills	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Difficulty in Displaying Interpersonal Behavior	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	0
Difficulty in Mobility (Walking, Climbing, and Grasping)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Difficulty in Communicating	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	2
With Diagnosis from Licensed Medical Specialists																
Autism Spectrum Disorder	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Speech/Language Disorder	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	2	0	0	1	4	2	4	0	5	0	6	3	1	1	22	7

Table 1 shows that the most common manifestation among learners is Difficulty in Remembering, Concentrating, Paying Attention, and Understanding, with a total of 12 recorded cases spanning Grades 2 to 6. This result suggests a significant need for programs that focus on cognitive development, attention support, and differentiated instruction techniques. Following closely is Difficulty in Basic Learning and Applying Knowledge, with 6 identified learners, indicating the importance of tailored academic interventions to support fundamental literacy and numeracy skills. Difficulty in Displaying Interpersonal Behavior was also notably present among 5 learners, which highlights the need for social skills training and emotional-behavioral support programs. In addition, Difficulty in Communicating was identified in 4 learners, signaling the need for language and communication development initiatives, including the potential need for speech therapy services within the school.

It is important to note that no cases of Difficulty in Seeing, Hearing, Applying Adaptive Skills, or Mobility Issues were reported in the current learner population, suggesting that physical impairments are not the predominant special needs concerns at this time.

Moreover, based on additional reports from the school, two male learners have been formally diagnosed by licensed medical specialists:

- One learner has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a condition that affects communication, behavior, and social interaction.
- Another learner has been diagnosed with a Speech/Language Disorder, impacting his ability to effectively communicate and express himself.

The presence of these formally diagnosed cases further strengthens the evidence of the school's urgent need for a structured SNED program. These learners require not only specialized teaching strategies but also individualized education plans (IEPs) that can address their unique developmental and academic needs, in alignment with DepEd's policies for inclusive education (DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021).

The manifestations noted are distributed across multiple grade levels, with a higher concentration in Grades 2 to 5, suggesting that early intervention strategies must be prioritized to enhance learner development before they advance to the higher levels.

The upward trend in the number of learners with special educational needs, as reflected in Figure 1, is supported by the survey results conducted among the teachers of JCCSES.

The data indicates that a significant majority of teachers (53 out of 74) have experienced handling learners with special needs, either frequently (8 teachers) or occasionally (45 teachers). This exposes the prevalence of

learners with special needs enrolled at JCCSES. Moreover, it suggests a foundational understanding of the challenges and dynamics of teaching these learners.

Table 2 Teacher Experience with Special Needs Learners

Experience Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes, Frequently	8	10.8
Yes, Occasionally	45	60.8
No, but I am willing to learn	9	12.8
No, and I feel unprepared	12	16.2
Total	74	100

Table 2 numerical data was substantiated by the statements given by the teacher participants during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). One participant, Teacher 9, shared that she annually experiences handling learners with special needs and that the number is increasing.

"Yearly. Yearly! Yearly, pero mas naglala, pero mas lala karon. Yearly or every school year na, ah. So like for example, ang kambal, grade, ano naman sila grade 2 na karon? So two years ago. Then last year may naa pod karon niya year, mas lala. Nagadaghan sila. Next school year incoming, nag -a -warning na sila." [FGD 3, T9, L 31-35]

The prevalence observed by the participant above is parallel to the findings of the study of Judilla et al. (2023) stating that the number of children having educational needs is increasing in the Philippines; thus, the Department of Education is rigidly campaigning for Special Education Programs and Inclusive Education, as well as its widespread implementation.

Additionally, the teacher-interviewees described the behavior of the learners with special needs that they encountered in their regular classes.

"So yung mga learners na nangangailangan ng mas special na attention. Kumbaga hindi kagaya sa mga normal na mga student. Like for example, na mga... Halimbawa, yung nahirapan silang mag-communicate, sa speech nila, speech delay, may mga ganyan or sa hearing..." [FGD 1, T1, L 1-4]

"Ano siya? Mutan-aw rai nig pangutana nimo wala gapaminaw sa mastrasa. Tapos May sariling mundo. Pero may eye contact siya, ma Wala. Kay kasagaran mong good sign is wala yung eye contact. Lalo na ang mga autism. May naka under sa autism spectrum." [FGD 2, T3, L 8-11]

"Unparticipative." [FGD 2, T4, L 12]

"Destructive siya maam. Ah, oo na. Usually nang bitaw no? They need attention. O kapag nagkakaroon sila ng tantrum. Bigla magsigaw." [FGD 2, T5, L 13-14]

"Wala ta makabalo, kung unsa iyahang gusto. masuko siya, gipukpok niya sarili niya. Naay siyay pencil case na bakal. Bigla lang magsigaw. Naa siya pencil case na bakal. Sakiton niya iyang sarili. Personal ako." [FGD 2, T6, L 15-17]

"May naay bata nga destructive. May naay bata nga may sariling mundo. So hindi sila mag-participate sa imuha. May sarili siya..." [FGD 2, T8, L 26-27]

Meanwhile, there are 9 teacher-respondents (14.5%) who don't have any experience in handling learners with

special needs but expressed willingness to learn based on the survey. This quantitative result is in corollary to the statement of a teacher during the FGD, implying openness and willingness to learn more about Special Needs Education through training to improve their skills in this area.

"Mas nindot man gud ang nay gyud miy training para sa anu nga bata." [FGD 6, T1, L 62]

The willingness of 9 teachers to learn indicates potential for professional development opportunities, suggesting that targeted training could enhance their capabilities in this area.

However, the survey also revealed that there are 12 teachers who don't have experience handling learners with special needs and feel unprepared to do such. This highlights a significant gap in confidence and readiness, which could impact the effectiveness of the SNED Program.

In terms of parental perceptions about the program, it was found that parents are positive and supportive. They shared:

"Yes. Yes. Yes. Maganda ang programa. Makakatulong talaga siya para inclusive education. It's good. Basta sa kaayo sa bata ug nanay." [FGD 3, P5, L 47-48]

"Makatabang gyud ang SNED program para sa mga bata. Support ko ana." [FGD 3, P6, L 51]

Educational Needs

This section examines the adequacy of facilities, instructional materials, teacher readiness, and other factors to deliver a specialized curriculum.

In terms of teacher readiness, the study found that majority of the teachers of Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School feel confident in handling learners with special educational needs, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Confidence in Teaching Special Needs Learners

Confidence Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Confident	8	10.8
Somewhat Confident	45	60.8
Neutral	9	12.2
Not Confident at all	12	16.2
Total	74	100

Table 3 reflects confidence level among teachers shows a predominance of "Somewhat Confident" responses (45 teachers), with 8 respondents rating themselves very confident in handling LSENs, which is a positive sign for the potential implementation of the SNED Program. However, the presence of 12 teachers who are "Not Confident at all" raises concerns about their ability to effectively teach special needs learners. This disparity suggests a critical need for targeted training programs to enhance teachers' skills and confidence, ensuring they are adequately prepared to meet the diverse needs of their learners.

Despite the confidence, the JCCSES teachers experienced challenges in dealing with LSENs. Table 4 below shows these challenges.

Table 4 Challenges Experienced by the JCCSES Teachers in Handling LSENs

Identified Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of training in special education	35	47.3
Limited access to learning materials	29	39.2
Increased workload and responsibilities	28	37.8
Difficulty in managing diverse needs	45	60.8
Others (lack of specialized teachers and doctors, parental involvement and communication, assessment)	12	16.2
Total	74	100

Table 4 presents the challenges faced by teachers at the JCCSES in managing LSENs. A total of 74 teachers participated in the survey, and the results indicate several significant challenges.

The most frequently reported challenge was "Difficulty in managing diverse needs," with 45 teachers (60.8%) indicating this as a concern. This suggests that a substantial majority of teachers feel overwhelmed by the varying requirements of LSENs, which may impact their ability to provide effective instruction.

Following this, "Lack of training in special education" was reported by 35 teachers (47.3%), highlighting a critical gap in professional development that could enhance teachers' competencies in addressing the needs of LSENs.

Additionally, "Limited access to learning materials" was noted by 29 teachers (39.2%), indicating that resource availability is a significant barrier to effective teaching.

The challenge of "Increased workload and responsibilities" was reported by 28 teachers (37.8%), suggesting that the demands placed on teachers may hinder their capacity to focus on the specific needs of LSENs.

Generally, the data underscore the pressing challenges faced by JCCSES teachers in supporting LSENs, particularly in the areas of training, resource availability, and workload management. This study aligns with Beltran et al.'s (2024) findings, highlighting the significant barriers to fostering inclusivity in elementary schools in General Santos City. Moreover, Forlin and Chambers (2011) emphasize the importance of professional development in inclusive education for increased teacher confidence and effectiveness in integrating special needs students into mainstream classrooms. Studies by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Loreman et al. (2007) highlight the significant role of teacher attitudes in the success of inclusive education programs.

In congruence with the results of the survey, the excerpts of the statements of the teachers, school heads, and parents during the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) echoed the lack of training and resources. They succinctly narrated:

"...Dapat ang teacher ma train pod..." [FGD 7, P4, L 174-175]

"Mas nindot man gud ang nay gyud miy training para sa anu nga bata." [FGD 6, T1, L 62]

"Specifically, special training for SNED." [FGD 6, T3, L 66]

"...Need of kanang classroom. Classroom..." [FGD 7, T3, L 71]

"This (specialized classroom) must be coupled with teaching aids such as visual aids, technology, and varied

manipulatives that will allow them to understand concepts, remember information, and learn through exploration.” [KII2, SH1, L 19-22]

“...Materials to be used. Materials. Na dapat tugunan para maipatupad ang programa niya. Manipulative [FGD 7, T8, L 74-75]

“From the admin and SDO: provision of materials and enough funding...” [KII5, SH1, L 46]

“Learning funding and addressing financial constraints. Needs real budget to create a detailed budget outlining cost for maintaining current funding of grants, outlining cost for resources and other related charitable organizations. Collaborating with organizations...” [KII5, SH2, L 26-28]

“Budget...” [FGD 7, T7, L 84]

“Financial. Financial...” [FGD 2, P3, L 27]

“...Mga challenges. Classroom. Budget. Teachers...” [FGD 10, T6, L 126- 127]

Pulo, Sharma, and Florian's studies highlight the challenges in implementing Special Education curricula in the Philippines, including inadequate funding, teacher training, and infrastructural barriers. They emphasize the need for continuous professional development, access to appropriate learning materials, and institutional support for successful inclusive education.

To address the lack of professional development opportunities among the JCCSES teachers vis-à-vis SNED, the JCCSES SNED Focal Person shared during the interview that she could tap resource persons for the needed teacher training. She explained:

“...Marami na ako yung resource person na mag seminar sa ato, ah. Mag -seminar o mag -training. Kasi hindi man kita tanan mahimong sped teacher. Pero ma-aware lang ba. Ana lang ito. For awareness [FGD 7, T7, L 87-89]

Lastly, the "others" category in Table 4 represents challenges that are not explicitly listed in the main identified challenges in the survey questionnaire but are still significant in the context of handling LSENs. The teacher-respondents specifically named these challenges as a lack of specialized teachers and doctors, a lack of parental involvement and communication, and a lack of assessment. With a frequency of 12 and a percentage of 16.2%, this category, while smaller compared to others, still highlights important areas that require attention. It suggests that these challenges, though less frequently mentioned, are relevant and impactful for teachers in their roles.

The three listed challenges in the survey were also mentioned by the interviewees during the FGD and KII. This can be gleaned from their responses below:

“Sped teacher talaga...” [FGD 7, T3, L 71]

“From the parents: lack of understanding, denial, lack of cooperation and collaboration, misconceptions...” [KII5, SH1, L 44-45]

“...No designated service to check, and the parent is not aware of the special needs of their child...” [KII2, SH2, L 7-8]

“Information drive conduct parental orientation ipatawag sila. Or meeting, parents meeting, patawag sila. Pero usually ba yan in denial ang mga parents? Denial. Symposium nalang pwede po? Symposium, pwede po. Ay, parang wala, natin sila gi -sulti ang ibang nanay ng bata. Pero, kanang, pero kung ang proper authority lang ang, ano, sa iya, ha? Kita wala man tay karapatan. Wala. Pero dapat ang doktor na gyud ang magsulti sa ilaha. Hindi, kasi ang atin, diba, kay parang gusto natin ipa-check muna ang bata...” [FGD 8, T3, L 90-96]

“...Dapat ma -assess yung bata. Para ano din siya. Dapat yun. Functional ged siya dapat. Kaya kung istorya -istorya lang niya, walang silbi...” [FGD 8, T1, L 109-111]

“Dapat pala dito sa division, pwede mag-assess ba? Kay mahal baya magpa-assess.” [FGD 8, T3, L 97-98]

“Dapat diba merong doktor dyan sa division? Dapat naa pod ng, ano ba tawag dyan siya, sa commission? For personality development? Oo, dapat meron sila. Sa barangay ba? Wala. Wala. Pag i -refer natin, i -check sana nila. I -test nila. Kay sila man god. Kung sila ang maghatag sa parent, mag-feedback, at least reliable. Mutuo sila. If kita man gud - Doctor diay ka, Ma’am? Dili maka-judgement ba. 7,000 baya mahal sa gawas. Kaya may ibang parent, ayaw i-pacheck. Sa teacher na lang.” [FGD 8, T4, L 99-105]

“...But sa akoo, kailangan nako siya ipa-assess. Pero paano siya magpa-assess ang inyuhang financial? Para lang ulit ubusin sa kailangan. Kasi kailangan na magkaroon na ulit. Um, assessment is very expensive. Lahi ang assessment sa PD...” [FGD 2, P3, L 34-38]

This lack of assessment voiced by the participants reflects the findings of the study of Hendrawati et al. (2023) which reveals that students who attend public or inclusive schools experience obstacles, and one of which is the lack of initial assessments that really must be considered by schools that are already able to accept these inclusive learners.

By and large, it was found that Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School had educational needs for the SNED Program to be feasible. Technically, the school lacks teacher professional development opportunities (training on SNED), infrastructure (classroom), instructional materials (manipulative materials), financial resources (budget), professionals specialized in SNED (Sped teachers and doctors), parental involvement, and assessment (diagnostic assessment of LSENs). Recognizing and addressing these areas are essential for the success of the proposed SNED Program.

Technical Study: Strategic Planning and Sustainability

This section presents a strategic implementation plan based on the identified educational gaps for the SNED Program. Further, it establishes strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability and continuous improvement of the SNED program with emphasis on the following key areas:

1. Teacher Professional Development Opportunities

The key informants (school heads) during the Key Informant Interview (KII) and the teachers and parents during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) expressed the educational gaps in terms of teachers' capacity building and how this area can be addressed. This is evident in their verbatim accounts as follows:

“Build capability and train educators/ teachers with regular professional development.” [KII5, SH2, L 33]

“Our teachers are not yet prepared to handle learners with special needs since special education is not yet included in the list of topics for LAC sessions and the school is not yet included for the slots for division training for the said topic. Teachers in our school need specialized workshops on disabilities, socio-emotional learning (SEL) training, classroom management strategies, and collaborative learning communities. This will help them better prepare to support learners with intellectual and speech delays and psychosocial disabilities and challenges. As a school head, I can support teachers by designing and providing professional development training, mentorship, and collaboration on resource allocation and building a supportive school environment.” [KII3, SH1, L 23-32]

“...Dapat ang teacher ma train pod...” [FGD 7, P4, L 174-175]

“Mas nindot man gud ang nay gyud miy training para sa anu nga bata.” [FGD 6, T1, L 62]

“Specifically, special training for SNED.” [FGD 6, T3, L 66]

Guskey 2002 emphasizes the pivotal role of professional development in teachers, highlighting its ongoing, embedded, and aligned approach to improve teaching quality and student outcomes in inclusive education contexts.

Research shows that teachers who receive specialized training on special education and inclusive pedagogies are better prepared to accommodate students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The necessity of such training is supported by Sharma et al. (2013), who found that teachers' attitudes and competencies towards inclusive education significantly improve after undergoing specific professional development programs.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education's Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions are designed to support school-based continuing professional development. However, as the key informants noted, topics on Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are often not prioritized or integrated into these sessions. This suggests a gap between policy intentions and practical implementation, which is also documented in studies such as Bernardo & Mendoza (2019), who highlighted the uneven access to capacity-building opportunities among teachers in remote or underserved schools.

Additionally, socio-emotional learning (SEL) and classroom management strategies are crucial areas where teachers require support, especially when dealing with learners who have intellectual, speech, and psychosocial challenges. As cited by Jennings & Greenberg (2009), teachers trained in SEL are more likely to create emotionally supportive classrooms, which are essential for all learners, especially those with additional needs.

Finally, Vescio, Ross, & Adams' research highlights the importance of professional development programs in KIIs and FGDs, emphasizing the need for systematic, inclusive, and sustained teacher professional development to improve teaching practices and student achievement.

2. Infrastructure Development

Another vital component for the feasibility of the SNED Program at JCCSES is infrastructure development, specifically the provision of specialized classrooms, ramps, and hallways. This is reflected in the research participants' statements below. They narrated:

"To fully implement the SNED program, specialized classrooms that are designed to meet the specific needs of learners with different disabilities are a must..." [KII2, SH1, L 18-19]

"Creating facilities in our school: 1. the physical accessibility, 2. wheelchair access, 3. wide ramps, and hallways..." [KII2, SH2, L 9-10]

"...Need of kanang classroom. Classroom..." (Need that kind of classroom. Classroom.) [FGD 7, T3, L 71]

"...*Mga challenges*. Classroom..." [FGD 10, T6, L 126]

Infrastructure development is a fundamental requirement in the effective implementation of inclusive education, particularly Special Needs Education (SNED). Adequate, accessible, and disability-responsive school infrastructure enables learners with disabilities to participate fully and equally in educational activities. According to UNESCO (2020), inclusive physical environments—such as classrooms, restrooms, ramps, and hallways—are not only supportive of learners with disabilities but also benefit the entire school community by promoting safety, comfort, and equity.

The World Bank (2019) and JCCSES have highlighted the urgent need for accessible infrastructure in the Philippines, particularly in under-resourced schools, as highlighted by DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009. The World Bank emphasizes the importance of such infrastructure for learners with disabilities, as it directly impacts attendance, learning performance, and psychosocial wellbeing. From Bernardo & Garcia (2021) who revealed that many public schools in the Philippines lack wheelchair-accessible restrooms, wide doors, ramps, and properly equipped SPED classrooms. Furthermore, Save the Children (2020) stresses that the absence of accessible infrastructure directly affects attendance, learning performance, and psychosocial wellbeing of

learners with disabilities.

Chakraborti-Ghosh et al.'s (2021) study highlights the importance of Universal Design principles in enhancing school infrastructure, highlighting the need for investment in inclusive education policies.

Moreover, the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 includes goals for upgrading public infrastructure, including education facilities, to meet accessibility standards under the Accessibility Law (Batas Pambansa Blg. 344). However, localized implementation still heavily depends on coordination between school leaders, LGUs, and the Department of Education, as echoed by the school heads in your study.

Thus, without sufficient investment in infrastructure development—specialized classrooms, wheelchair-accessible ramps, wide hallways, and sensory-friendly environments—the SNED program cannot be feasibly or effectively implemented, as validated by both local and global literature.

3. Provision of Instructional Materials

The participants also underscored the need for instructional materials for LSENs, although a key informant (school head) shared that JCCSES had already procured manipulatives and toys from the SNED funds. She explained:

“Currently, the school purchased manipulatives and toys from the SNED funds downloaded to school. These will be used by learners who exhibit manifestations of delays and disability.” [KII2, SH1, L 15-17]

“This (specialized classroom) must be coupled with teaching aids such as visual aids, technology, and varied manipulatives that will allow them to understand concepts, remember information, and learn through exploration.” [KII2, SH1, L 19-22]

Instructional materials are vital tools in facilitating learning among Learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (LSENs). These materials, which include manipulatives, visual aids, tactile resources, and assistive technology, play a critical role in making learning accessible, engaging, and meaningful for students with diverse abilities. According to UNESCO (2020), quality instructional materials tailored to learners’ needs are integral to inclusive education and must be culturally relevant, age-appropriate, and adapted to different types of disabilities.

The Department of Education (DepEd, 2022) emphasizes in its Inclusive Education Framework that learners with disabilities must be provided with learning resources that support their individualized educational needs. This includes low- to high-tech materials such as braille books, picture cards, sensory toys, talking devices, and manipulatives to aid learning and promote multisensory engagement. The use of manipulatives and play-based tools is particularly effective for learners exhibiting cognitive and developmental delays, as these materials enhance conceptual understanding through hands-on exploration (Bautista & Rabacal, 2021).

A study by Ally & Gardiner (2021) Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is crucial in creating instructional materials that cater to different learning styles, ensuring students can access, process, and demonstrate their learning through interactive visuals, adaptive software, and tactile objects.

Furthermore, Save the Children (2020) found that the availability of instructional materials significantly affects the classroom participation and academic performance of learners with disabilities. Schools that invested in diverse and adaptive learning materials showed marked improvement in student engagement and retention, particularly when the materials were matched to students’ individualized education plans (IEPs).

The research participants’ observation—that the presence of specialized classrooms must be coupled with appropriate teaching materials—aligns with the findings of Grosche & Volpe (2022), who state that the effectiveness of inclusive education environments depends not only on teacher capacity and infrastructure but also on the adequacy of instructional resources that allow learners to experience differentiated and meaningful instruction.

In conclusion, the provision of varied and adaptive instructional materials is indispensable for the successful implementation of the SNED program. These materials bridge learning gaps and foster inclusive practices that honor the unique learning profiles of LSENs.

4. Funding Mechanisms

Lack of budget is one of the challenges that arise from the survey and interviews conducted with the participants, despite the availability of the SNED fund. This can be achieved through various funding strategies. An informant hoped to receive enough funding from the administration and the Schools Division Office of General Santos City, while another one emphasized collaboration with organizations and the establishment of school-based enterprises or income-generating projects for financial support. They said:

“From the admin and SDO: provision of materials and enough funding...” [KII5, SH1, L 46]

“Learning funding and addressing financial constraints. Needs real budget to create a detailed budget outlining cost for maintaining current funding of grants, outlining cost for resources and other related charitable organizations. Collaborating with organizations...” [KII5, SH2, L 26-28]

“Need assessment for prioritization of projects from the SNED fund, inclusion of projects in the AIP, look for potential donors and stakeholders.” [KII5, SH1, L 48-49]

“Secure capital funding sources to budget, establish partnerships. Have a generating income and establish school-based enterprises.” [KII5, SH2, L 31-32]

Adequate and sustained funding is crucial for the successful implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs. Financial resources affect the availability of trained personnel, specialized infrastructure, instructional materials, and learner support services. According to UNESCO (2021), underfunding is one of the most significant barriers to inclusive education globally. Even when inclusive education policies are in place, a lack of sufficient financing prevents full implementation.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) provides SNED funds for public schools, but research indicates that the allocation and utilization of these funds are often limited or delayed, which hinders program effectiveness (Malaluan & Go, 2021). This aligns with your participants' statements that although funds are available, they are insufficient or not well-aligned with actual needs.

According to Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2020), inclusive education financing in Southeast Asia must be strengthened through multi-stakeholder collaboration, public-private partnerships, and income-generating projects at the school level. One promising strategy is the establishment of school-based enterprises (SBEs), which not only raise funds but also provide practical skills training for learners. These enterprises can serve as sustainable support mechanisms for school programs, including those focused on learners with special needs.

World Bank (2019) emphasizes the importance of diversified funding strategies, including:

- Leveraging local government units (LGUs) and community-based donations.
- Applying for grants from NGOs and international development organizations.
- Establishing partnerships with the private sector for technical and material assistance.

Balitaan & Gonzales' study suggests that schools incorporating SNED-related initiatives into their Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) can secure and prioritize budget allocations from both internal and external sources. They recommend integrating SNED needs into the School Improvement Plan, seeking local stakeholders, and implementing strategic financial planning for inclusive education.

5. Community and Institutional Partnerships

The participants recognized the role that partnership with the parents, local government, and other stakeholders plays in the successful implementation of the SNED Program. They remarked:

“Cooperation. Cooperation.” [FGD5, P1, L 97]

“Cooperation. Sacrifice. Unity. Support. *Asa gikan? Sa parents. Sa principal. Sa department. Sa government.*” [FGD 7, P6, L 202-203]

“*Attention. Attention sang ginikanan. Yes. Attention sa what? Support sang parents, community...*” [FGD 2, P3, L 27-28]

“The success of the program depends on the collaborative effort involving parents, community, local government, and varied stakeholders... The parents should actively participate, especially in giving home-based support. Community can collaborate through awareness, resource support, and strengthening of advocacy.” [KII4, SH1, L 37-40]

“The parents need to be involved in the process and have a program in the school.” [KII1, SH2, L 5-6]

“*Dapat diba merong doktor dyan sa division? Dapat naa pod ng, ano ba tawag dyan siya, sa commission? For personality development? Oo, dapat meron sila. Sa barangay ba? Wala. Wala. Pag i-refer natin, i-check sana nila. I-test nila. Kay sila man god. Kung sila ang maghatag sa parent, mag-feedback, at least reliable. Mutuo sila. If kita man gud - Doctor diay ka, Ma'am? Dili maka-judgement ba. 7,000 baya mahal sa gawas. Kaya may ibang parent, ayaw i-pacheck. Sa teacher na lang.*” [FGD 8, T4, L 99-105]

“Encourage. Encourage. And also, maging fair. *I-encourage ang uban nga, nga, parents na mag-share pod, mag-accept. Dako ang inyong actually, dako ang inyong part. Dako inyong part sa, sa atoang community. Kay kung makita nila ang ilang anak na may development, ma-happy man sila.*” [FGD 5, P2, L 98-102]

The successful implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs is deeply rooted in the collaborative efforts of parents, educators, local government units (LGUs), healthcare professionals, and community stakeholders. This collective approach ensures that learners with special educational needs and disabilities (LSENs) receive holistic support both within and beyond the classroom.

Parental Engagement and Home-School Collaboration

Parental involvement is a cornerstone of effective SNED. Parents contribute invaluable insights into their children's unique needs, facilitating the development of tailored educational strategies. Active participation in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, consistent communication with educators, and reinforcement of learning at home are pivotal roles parents play. Such engagement not only enhances academic outcomes but also fosters a supportive learning environment that extends beyond school premises.

Community Involvement and Support Networks

Communities play a vital role in nurturing inclusive education. Local organizations, religious institutions, and support groups offer resources, awareness campaigns, and inclusive activities that promote acceptance and understanding of LSENs. For instance, community-led initiatives like sensory-friendly events and inclusive sports programs provide LSENs with opportunities for social interaction and skill development.

Institutional Collaborations and Capacity Building

Partnerships between educational institutions and organizations specializing in special education enhance the quality and reach of SNED programs. Collaborations with universities, healthcare providers, and non-governmental organizations facilitate access to specialized training for educators, development of inclusive curricula, and provision of necessary services for LSENs. Such alliances ensure that schools are equipped with

the expertise and resources required to address diverse learning needs effectively.

Policy Frameworks and Government Initiatives

Government policies and directives underscore the importance of community and institutional partnerships in advancing inclusive education. Programs aimed at establishing Inclusive Learning Resource Centers (ILRCs) and conducting advocacy campaigns highlight the state's commitment to fostering collaborative environments conducive to SNED. These initiatives encourage schools to engage with various stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive support system for LSENs.

Challenges and the Path Forward

Despite the recognized importance of partnerships, challenges such as limited resources, lack of awareness, and cultural stigmas persist. Addressing these issues requires sustained efforts in community education, policy reinforcement, and the cultivation of inclusive mindsets. Empowering parents and communities through training and awareness programs can bridge gaps and promote a more inclusive society.

6. Assessment

Assessment of LSENs proves to be an essential element that contributes to the success of the SNED Program as perceived by the participants. Delving deeper, they desired that the SDO of General Santos City would have a professional or a doctor who is capable of diagnosing whether a learner has a special educational need or not. They uttered:

“...Dapat ma -assess yung bata. Para ano din siya. Dapat yun. Functional ged siya dapat. Kaya kung istorya -istorya lang niya, walang silbi...” [FGD 8, T1, L 109-111]

“Dapat pala dito sa division, pwede mag-assess ba? Kay mahal baya magpa-assess.” [FGD 8, T3, L 97-98]

“...But sa akua, kailangan nako siya ipa-assess. Pero paano siya magpa-assess ang inyuhang financial? Para lang ulit ubusin sa kailangan. Kasi kailangan na magkaroon na ulit. Um, assessment is very expensive. Lahi ang assessment sa PD...” [FGD 2, P3, L 34-38]

“The training received helped guide for the assessment of some flagged learners in the LIS.” [KII2, SH1, L 13-14]

“Strategies include effective planning in which need assessment, development of long-term funding sources are significant.” [KII5, SH1, L 50-51]

Considering all the inputs of the participants of this study, the strategic plan in the succeeding page was crafted and contextualized to the needs of JCSSES. Adoption of the said plan is necessary to ensure success of the SNED Program as what an interviewed school head emphasized:

“We must adopt a strategic, inclusive, and sustainable approach to develop a clear policy and framework.” [KII 5, SH2, L 41-42]

Accurate and timely assessment of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) is pivotal for the effective implementation of Special Needs Education (SNED) programs. Assessments inform individualized educational planning, appropriate placement, and the provision of necessary support services.

DepEd's Initiatives on Assessment Tools

The Department of Education (DepEd) has recognized the importance of standardized assessment tools for LSENs. In 2018, DepEd introduced the Multi-Factored Assessment Tool (MFAT) through DepEd Order No. 29, s. 2018, designed to assist teachers in identifying learners with special needs and planning appropriate interventions.

Further, in 2024, DepEd issued SDM No. 281, s. 2024, announcing the administration of Special Needs Assessment Tools for Learners with Disabilities (LWDs). This initiative aims to standardize the assessment process across schools and ensure that learners receive the support they need based on accurate evaluations.

Challenges in Accessing Professional Assessments

Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, particularly in accessing professional assessments. Many schools lack the resources to employ specialists capable of conducting comprehensive evaluations. Consequently, parents often bear the financial burden of seeking private assessments, which can be prohibitively expensive. A study highlighted that the cost of raising a child with a disability in the Philippines is estimated to be 40% to 80% higher than that of a child without disabilities, underscoring the financial strain on families.

Importance of Functional Assessments

Functional assessments are crucial in determining a learner's strengths, needs, and the appropriate educational interventions. These assessments go beyond academic performance, evaluating social, emotional, and behavioral aspects to provide a holistic understanding of the learner. Such comprehensive evaluations are essential for developing effective Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and ensuring that learners receive tailored support.

Management Study: Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

This feasibility study identified several key risks that could challenge the successful implementation of the SNED Program at JCCSES. These risks included misidentification due to improper assessment, parental denial, teachers' reluctance, peer stigma, and financial constraints. However, targeted mitigation strategies and the school's existing partnerships demonstrated potential for overcoming these barriers.

Misidentification Due to Improper Assessment. One major concern was the improper diagnosis of the learners, as voiced by a school head during the KII. She explained that learners may be wrongly categorized as having special needs or may be overlooked entirely when they do require support, which stems from the lack of professionals who are qualified to accurately assess and diagnose special needs as well as the lack of training for teachers who can properly recognize manifestations of learners with special educational needs. These can be implied from her suggestions below:

“Seek medical support for a comprehensive assessment and avoid misidentification of learners because there’s a danger of them being wrongly categorized.” [KII2, SH2, L. 12-13]

“...Educators should be equipped with skills, knowledge, and resources to identify manifestations to avoid improper diagnosis of the learner to be put under the SNED Program.” [KII5, SH2, L 37-39]

Hendrawati et al.(2023) study emphasizes the importance of teachers possessing proper assessment skills for effective teaching and learning activities. This assessment helps identify students' initial capabilities, including academic skills and motor skills, and serves as a foundation for tailoring curriculum and implementing effective teaching strategies.

Parental Denial. Another theme that emerged during the interview with the participants of this study is parental denial. This is a risk that was foreseen in the implementation of the SNED Program at JCCSES. The statements of the teachers, parents, and schools verified this:

“*Although as a teacher siya nakapansin ato that time na ano na siya, pero hindi ako nag-agree...*” [FGD 6, P2, L 32-33]

“From the parents: lack of understanding, denial, lack of cooperation and collaboration, misconceptions...” [KII5, SH1, L 44-45]

“*Information drive conduct parental orientation ipatawag sila. Or meeting, parents meeting, patawag sila.*”

Pero usually ba yan in denial ang mga parents? Denial. Symposium nalang pwede po? Symposium, pwede po. Ay, parang wala, natin sila gi -sulti ang ibang nanay ng bata. Pero, kanang, pero kung ang proper authority lang ang, ano, sa iya, ha? Kita wala man tay karapatan. Wala. Pero dapat ang doktor na gyud ang magsulti sa ilaha. Hindi, kasi ang atin, diba, kay parang gusto natin ipa-check muna ang bata...” [FGD 8, T3, L 90-96]

“Na-observe kulang ano ang observation sa ilaha? Sa behavior, ano siya, o ano? Insulting lang ang parent. Ma-open up ka sa ilaha kung pa-unsa po siya sa ilahang balay.” [FGD 8, T6, L 106-108]

“Sa mga bata ha, nga need, nga iba ang need nila. Wag ka naman mag-expect nga yung anak mo siya... Diagnose naman si Ken ko, nga mental hypertension. Wag na mag-expect na mag-abot sa panahon, mag-engineer siya, mag-research siya. Kasi talagang sa Grade 6 na siya, 13 years old na siya, hindi siya kabalo mag-ayos. Wala talaga yun na ang bata may problema. Hindi na mag-engineer, hindi na mag-work. Daghan kasi, daghan functional. Daghan mga, daghan mga autism na sobrang functional, taas. Mas taas ang ilahang... Pero may bata na extreme pod ang pagkabogo...” [FGD 6, P2, L 147-154]

The qualitative finding of this study is attested by that of Johnson (2024), who discovered that some parents choose to distance themselves from the school and interactions with the teachers because of denial. They struggle to accept their child’s special needs diagnosis.

Teachers’ Reluctance. Teachers’ resistance to change is seen as a hindrance to the successful implementation and sustainability of the SNED Program. Both quantitative and qualitative results have revealed this kind of risk.

Table 5. Willingness to Undergo SNED Training

Willingness to Train	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes, I am very interested	37	50.0
Maybe, if it fits my schedule	29	39.2
No, I am not interested	8	10.8
Total	74	100

Table 5 shows that the willingness of teachers to undergo SNED training is encouraging, with 37 expressing strong interest in participating in professional development relevant to SNED. This indicates a readiness to improve their skills and adapt to the needs of special needs learners; however, there are respondents who have expressed indecisiveness (n=29) and disinterest (n=8) in being trained for the SNED Program. This implies additional motivation or support to the teachers for them to engage with the training opportunities. Concerns about challenging classroom management and additional responsibilities for diverse learners can deter teachers from embracing SNED.

Verbatim accounts of the participants (a teacher, a parent, and a principal) support this finding on teachers’ reluctance. They commented:

“From the teachers: resistance to change...” [KII5, SH1, L 42]

“Willingness. No, pwede no. If you are given the opportunity... If you are given... Yes na lang, hindi man ka ganahan. Napupwersa ka.” [FGD 11, T1, L 130-131]

“Dapat mga teacher makasabot giingnan ko nga e transfer imong anak kay dili na nako kaya ni. Unta dili lng sila ana.” [FGD 6, P2, L 112-113]

Data from this study supports the study of Catubig et al. (2024), which confirms that elementary school

teachers find it challenging to address the needs of learners with behavioral difficulties, thus their reluctance.

Peer Stigma. A foreseen risk in the SNED implementation, particularly during mainstreaming, is peer stigma. This is proven by the sentiments given by a teacher and a parent. They remarked:

“Di sila pwede indiscriminate. Tudluan ang ubang bata nga i-accept sila...” [FGD 2, P4, L 44]

“Kana gong parihan sa ALIVE. I-pull out sila. Then, dapat din sila i -mainstream. Turuan ang mga bata sa regular class na i-respect sila, intindihin sila para di ma-bully.” [FGD 7, T3, L 72-73]

The lack of inclusivity in classrooms and intended programs exacerbates the struggle for both learners and teachers, leading to stigma (Catubig et al., 2024). This can be countered by teaching the learners in regular classes the concepts of diversity, inclusivity, and respect.

Financial Constraints. To sustain the implementation of any program, financial resource is vital. It is the lifeline, and this is what is emphasized by the participants of the study in keeping the SNED Program at JCCSES. One of them worries that the implementation will be affected due to a lack of budget; nonetheless, a school head recommended the development of long-term funding sources to keep the program functional.

“Basin hantud talk lang ang implementation kay walay budget.” [FGD 10, T6, L 124]

“Funding brings what’s needed to support and sustain programs.” [KII 5, SH2, L 45]

“Strategies include effective planning in which needs assessment, development of long-term funding sources are significant.” [KII5, SH1, L 50-51]

Such a financial dilemma is supported by the systematic literature review of Espeño et al. (2024), which stated that despite legislative efforts, various obstacles, including inadequate funding, prevent the effective implementation of special education curriculum in the Philippines.

Financial Study: Financial Projections and Cost- Benefit Analysis

The financial study analyzed the feasibility of implementing the SNED Program at JCCSES by assessing the required budget, identifying potential funding sources, and conducting a cost-benefit analysis. As a public school, the institution benefits from a substantial Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) allocation, Special Education Fund (SEF), and Special Needs Education (SNED) Fund.

Detailed Budget for the Program

The financial requirements of the program were broken down into key areas, with emphasis on maximizing the use of existing resources and funding opportunities. The anticipated budget is detailed in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Proposed Budget Allocation Matrix for Establishment and Costs of the SNED Program at JCCSES

Cost Category	Initial Establishment Cost	Estimated Cost	Funding Source
Learning Resources/Materials	Teaching tools and educational materials	1,000,000	School MOOE/Donation from Stakeholders
Teacher Development Programs	Workshops and training sessions for educators	300,000	School MOOE/Donation from Stakeholders
Operational Costs (Maintenance)	Ongoing maintenance expenses	200,000	School MOOE/Donation from Stakeholders

Diagnostic Assessment	Assessment tools and resources	500,000	School MOOE/Donation from Stakeholders
SNED Classroom	Infrastructure and resources for SNED	800,000	School MOOE/Donation from Stakeholders

Table 6 reflects that the learning resources category has the highest budget allocation due to the necessity for comprehensive and appropriate educational materials that can effectively cater to diverse learning needs of students with special needs. Investing in quality learning resources is essential for fostering an inclusive and effective educational environment.

Next, a substantial budget is dedicated to establishing classroom infrastructure specifically designed to support the SNED program. The costs involve creating an accessible, adaptive learning space that meets the varying needs of students, ensuring they receive a conducive learning experience.

Significant funds are also allocated for assessment tools to evaluate the unique needs of students within the SNED program. Such budget also includes the professional fees of experts specialized in diagnosing learners, whether LSEN or not. Proper diagnostics are critical for tailoring educational approaches and interventions to maximize student success.

Further, teacher training is essential but comparatively less costly than tangible learning materials and infrastructure. However, it still receives a significant budget to ensure educators are equipped with the skills necessary for effective teaching in a special needs context.

Lastly, the category for operational costs receives the smallest allocation, reflecting the anticipated ongoing maintenance expenses. While important, these costs are treated as secondary to establishing the primary educational and developmental resources necessary for the program's success.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

The Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School (JCCSES) is designed to meet the educational requirements of learners with special needs. With increasing enrollment and a growing demand for specialized support, the program aims to provide tailored educational experiences that enhance learning for all students.

Cost Analysis. The establishment of the SNED Program involves several initial costs, amounting to a total of 2,800,000. Key elements of the cost analysis include:

Learning Resources and Materials: 1,000,000 is allocated for essential educational tools and materials that cater to a variety of learning needs.

Teacher Development Programs: 300,000 is set aside for workshops and training sessions designed to enhance educators' skills in special education.

Operational Costs (Maintenance): An estimated 200,000 will cover ongoing maintenance expenses for resources and facilities dedicated to the SNED Program.

Diagnostic Assessment: 500,000 is required for assessment tools aimed at evaluating learners' specialized needs effectively.

SNED Classroom Infrastructure: A budget of 800,000 has been allocated for constructing and equipping classrooms to foster an inclusive learning environment.

Benefit Analysis. The implementation of the SNED Program offers significant benefits that justify the initial investment:

1. Educational Enhancement

The provision of specialized materials and the training of teachers will result in tailored learning experiences for learners with special educational needs (LSENs), thereby enhancing their academic performance. Moreover, increased teacher confidence through professional development initiatives will empower educators to manage diverse classrooms more effectively.

2. Social Inclusion

Integrating LSENs into mainstream classrooms fosters acceptance among peers, reducing stigma and promoting social cohesion within the school community.

3. Long-term Impact

The program aims to yield sustainable outcomes by improving educational achievements for LSENs, enhancing their access to higher education and employment opportunities. A well-executed SNED program generates community benefits, creating an inclusive culture that positively impacts all stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, and local organizations.

Overall, it is important to weigh the benefits against the costs. While the initial investment of 2,800,000 represents a substantial commitment, the long-term benefits of enhanced educational access and social integration for LSENs significantly outweigh the immediate financial outlay.

To ensure the sustainability of the SNED Program, continuous efforts in funding, community engagement, and partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government entities will be essential. It is recommended to initiate the SNED Program at JCCSES, accompanied by a strategic implementation plan that addresses potential risks and allows for ongoing evaluation and adaptation to effectively meet the diverse needs of LSENs. This proactive approach ensures not only the program's success but also the flourishing of an inclusive educational environment for all students.

V. Socio-Economic Study: Ethical and Socio-Cultural Considerations

To ensure that the program aligns with the mission and vision of the Department of Education, as well as the community values that positively influence the socio-economic environment, this feasibility study emphasizes the importance of considering ethical and socio-cultural factors.

Ethical Considerations

To promote inclusivity and equity, it is vital that the SNED program is accessible to all students with special needs, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. This can be achieved by avoiding any forms of stigmatization and by fostering an inclusive environment where every student is valued. Such inclusivity and equity are implied by the participants during the interview when they said:

"Di sila pwede indiscriminate. Tudluan ang ubang bata nga i-accept sila..." [FGD 2, P4, L 44]

"Kana gong parihaan sa ALIVE. I-pull out sila. Then, dapat din sila i-mainstream. Turuan ang mga bata sa regular class na i-respect sila, intindihin sila para di ma-bully." [FGD 7, T3, L 72-73]

Respect for autonomy is another crucial ethical consideration. Parents and guardians should be actively involved in decision-making processes regarding their children's educational needs. Concerning this, a school head shared:

"Role of parents should know their child's needs, recognize the academic barriers, and promote individualization plans and support." [KII4, SH2, L 21-22]

Furthermore, maintaining confidentiality and privacy concerning the individual circumstances of learners is

essential to build trust within the community.

Integrity in implementation is also paramount, requiring a commitment to transparent practices in both the development and management of the SNED program. Regular evaluations and feedback mechanisms must be established to ensure that ethical standards are consistently upheld.

“Collaboration with various stakeholders and establishment of communication and coordination among stakeholders will also help.” [KII 5, SH1, L 52-53]

Socio-Cultural Considerations

Within the Philippine setting, particularly in culturally and religiously diverse General Santos City, where the school is situated, cultural and religious sensitivity play a key role. It is essential to understand and integrate local values and beliefs surrounding disability and education. This is evident in the statement of one of the interviewees during the FGD, who believes that having special needs among learners is a spiritual illness that can be cured through prayer. She said:

“Ang spiritual ampuan nalang mga mga learners with special needs. May special needs, hindi sila maayo. Usahay spiritual siya. Pareho sa may sakit, nga kung tambalan, maayo.” [FGD 11, T4, L 135-136]

In certain cultures, having a child with special needs is considered a source of shame. Consequently, educators may struggle to effectively provide services for students whose families hold differing beliefs (Johnson, 2024).

Taking these things into account, engaging with community leaders will help ensure that cultural and religious practices are respected and reflected in the SNED program.

Community engagement is equally important; raising awareness about special needs education within local communities will foster support for the initiative. In fact, a school head elucidated:

“The introduction of the program can elicit a range of responses. There would be positive responses if parents and the community have the awareness and understanding, but there could also be potential concerns due to lack of understanding, fear of change, and misconceptions.” [KII 4, SH1, L 33-36]

Involving parents and community members in workshops and training sessions can also build a supportive network.

“Communication strategies and training for parents are needed so they can understand and support the program. ...” [KII 3, SH2, L 17-18]

Additionally, the program must consider potential changes in social dynamics, addressing concerns related to social integration and the relationships among students, teachers, and families due to the introduction of the SNED program.

In summary, the socio-economic study emphasizes the necessity of integrating ethical and socio-cultural considerations into the Special Needs Education (SNED) program to align with both educational goals and community values. Ethically, inclusivity and respect for autonomy are pivotal, ensuring accessibility for all students, involving parents in decision-making, maintaining confidentiality, and committing to transparent practices. Socio-culturally, sensitivity to local beliefs about disabilities is crucial, as these can shape community responses and acceptance of the program. Engaging with community leaders and raising awareness can help mitigate misconceptions and foster support, ensuring that the SNED program is responsive to both social dynamics and the diverse perspectives within the community.

On the Decision to Implement the Special Needs Education Program

The decision to implement the proposed Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School (JCCSES) is grounded in comprehensive data from market studies, technical studies, risk

assessments, financial projections, and ethical socio-cultural considerations.

Based on the findings of the feasibility study, it is highly recommended to move forward with the implementation of the SNED Program at JCCSES. The findings strongly indicate that implementing the SNED Program at JCCSES is both necessary and beneficial. The upward trend in enrollment of learners with special needs and the willingness of teachers to engage in professional development provide a solid foundation for the program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This feasibility study aimed to evaluate the potential implementation of the Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School. Based on the quantitative and qualitative data gathered, the following conclusions were drawn:

On the Market Study: Educational Needs and Market Analysis

Based on the data, it is evident that the establishment of a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program is both timely and necessary. The increasing enrollment of learners with special needs, coupled with a significant number of teachers expressing a desire for professional development in this area, indicates a critical demand for tailored educational support.

Additionally, the positive reception from parents underscores the community's commitment to inclusivity; however, there are critical educational gaps—including teacher professional development opportunities (training on SNED), infrastructure (classroom), instructional materials (manipulative materials), financial resources (budget), professionals specialized in SNED (Sped teachers and doctors), parental involvement, and assessment (diagnostic assessment of LSENs)—which must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of the SNED Program.

On the Technical Study: Strategic Planning and Sustainability

This feasibility study revealed the necessity for comprehensive and targeted approaches to address the educational gaps identified by key stakeholders. By prioritizing teacher professional development, enhancing infrastructure, securing instructional materials, establishing robust funding mechanisms, fostering community and institutional partnerships, and implementing effective assessment strategies, the school can create a supportive environment for learners with special educational needs. The collaborative efforts of educators, parents, and community members, alongside consistent feedback mechanisms, will not only contribute to the immediate success of the program but also ensure its sustainability and long-term impact on the educational landscape.

On the Management Study: Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

The risk assessment conducted for the SNED Program at JCCSES exposes critical challenges that could hinder its successful implementation, including misidentification, parental denial, teacher reluctance, peer stigma, and financial constraints. The insights gathered from the survey and interviews underscore the urgency for a strategic approach to address these risks. Specifically, the proposed mitigation strategies—such as enhancing teacher training, fostering parental engagement, promoting inclusivity among peers, and securing stable funding—demonstrate the potential to create a supportive environment for learners requiring special educational needs.

On the Financial Study: Financial Projections and Cost-Benefit Analysis

Financial analysis confirmed the program's feasibility, with funding sources available through the school's Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE), Special Education Fund (SEF), Special Needs Education (SNED) Fund, and external partnerships. While initial investments in learning resources, teacher

development, ongoing maintenance, diagnostic assessments, and classroom infrastructure are required, these costs are justified by the program's long-term benefits, including enhanced educational outcomes for learners with special needs, increased social inclusion, and long-term positive impacts on access to further education and employment opportunities.

Socio-Economic Study: Ethical and Socio-Cultural Considerations in Educational Projects

Integrating ethical and socio-cultural considerations into the Special Needs Education (SNED) program is essential for its successful implementation and acceptance within the community. Emphasizing inclusivity and respect for autonomy ensures that all students have equitable access to education, with active parental involvement and transparent practices fostering trust. Additionally, acknowledging local beliefs and cultural sensitivities regarding disabilities allows for more nuanced responses from the community, enhancing support for the program. By engaging with community leaders and providing educational workshops, misconceptions can be addressed, promoting a more understanding environment. Ultimately, these comprehensive considerations not only align the SNED program with educational goals but also strengthen community ties, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, are valued and supported.

Overall, the findings indicate that the proposed SNED program is a feasible, sustainable, and impactful initiative that aligns with the school's objectives and community aspirations. Its implementation promises commitment to inclusivity and excellence in education, paving the way for all learners to thrive.

Recommendations

In light of the conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

On the Market Study: Educational Needs and Market Analysis

It is recommended that the school prioritize the establishment of the SNED Program to address the clear rise in learners with special needs and the strong demand for inclusive education support. This includes providing targeted teacher training on inclusive practices, enhancing parental engagement, and identifying learners through early and accurate assessments. Resources should be allocated to fill current gaps in infrastructure, instructional materials, and professional support services. Ongoing data gathering through surveys and focus group discussions is also advised to ensure the program adapts to the evolving educational needs of the community.

On the Technical Study: Strategic Planning and Sustainability

To ensure the long-term success of the SNED Program, a strategic implementation plan should be adopted. This includes structured timelines for teacher training, infrastructure development, material acquisition, and diagnostic services. Establishing partnerships with local universities, NGOs, and government agencies is essential for sustainable resource and knowledge sharing. Collaborating with local health professionals for expert assessments will further ensure accurate identification. A monitoring and evaluation system should also be put in place to track progress, gather feedback, and continuously refine implementation strategies for lasting program sustainability. Through these measures, the program seeks to create a supportive, resource-rich environment for LSENs, promoting their educational success.

On the Management Study: Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

To effectively manage identified risks such as misidentification, parental denial, teacher reluctance, peer stigma, and funding shortages, a multifaceted approach is recommended. This includes regular teacher training in assessment and inclusive practices, organized workshops and counseling for parents, mentorship programs for teachers new to SNED, and school-wide initiatives to foster peer empathy and inclusion. To ensure resilience, school leadership must also establish a financial contingency plan and pursue external support from LGUs and NGOs.

On the Financial Study: Financial Projections and Cost-Benefit Analysis

A robust financial plan should be developed to ensure the viability of the SNED Program. This involves maximizing current allocations from MOOE, SEF, and SNED Funds, while actively seeking additional funding through DepEd grants, local government support, and partnerships with NGOs. The initial investment, although significant, is justified by the program's long-term educational and social benefits. Regular financial monitoring, budget performance tracking, and transparent reporting are crucial for sustaining the program and gaining stakeholder trust.

Socio-Economic Study: Ethical and Socio-Cultural Considerations in Educational Projects

It is highly recommended that the program be meticulously developed with a strong focus on ethical inclusivity and socio-cultural sensitivity to ensure it resonates with the diverse values within General Santos City. This includes respecting cultural beliefs, involving parents in decision-making, maintaining confidentiality, and fostering inclusive values across the school community. Collaborating with local leaders, organizing community education sessions, and promoting respectful dialogue about disabilities will help counter stigma and promote widespread community support for the program. Establishing transparent practices and regular feedback mechanisms will also uphold ethical standards, thereby building trust within the community.

The findings of this feasibility study highlight a clear and urgent need to establish a Special Needs Education (SNED) Program at Jose C. Catolico Sr. Elementary School. The consistent increase in learners with special needs, the strong support from parents and teachers, and the school's commitment to inclusive education present both a challenge and an opportunity. Teachers express a willingness to adapt but require specialized training and resources. Administrators recognize the importance of inclusive programming but face limitations in infrastructure, funding, and access to professionals trained in special education.

Given these realities, the following policy directions are recommended to guide both school and DepEd leadership:

Institutionalize School-Based SNED Programs

Encourage the formal integration of SNED into public elementary schools with identified LSENs through localized planning, policy support, and budget allocation.

Capacity Building for Teachers and Staff

Provide regular and targeted professional development in inclusive education, assessment strategies, and classroom adaptation techniques.

Strengthen Intersectoral Collaboration

Foster partnerships between schools, LGUs, medical professionals, and civil society organizations to support identification, referral, and intervention for LSENs.

Improve Infrastructure and Resource Access

Ensure that SNED-enabling infrastructure such as resource rooms, therapy spaces, and assistive technologies are accessible and well-funded.

Mandate Data-Driven and Responsive Programming

Require schools to maintain updated records on learners with special needs and use evidence-based practices to inform curriculum adjustments and interventions.

By adopting these recommendations, both school-level administrators and DepEd policymakers can take

strategic steps toward building an inclusive, equitable, and responsive education system that upholds the rights and potential of every Filipino learner.

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