

# Status of Compliance of Higher Education Institutions in Bataan to a Barrier-Free School Environment for Persons with Disability

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## Abstract

This multiple case study aimed to identify the status of compliance of selected higher education institutions (HEIs) to a barrier-free school environment for persons with disability (PWD) during academic year 2018–2019. The participants of the study included school heads, director and chairperson of the office of the student affairs, guidance officers, PWD students and alumni, and PWD teachers who were chosen using purposive sampling method. The research locales of the study were the three HEIs in the province of Bataan. Moreover, data triangulation was utilized in data gathering, which included in-depth interview, focus group discussion, document analysis and prolonged engagement. To analyze the data gathered from the procedures mentioned above, cross-case analysis was conducted. In the entirety of the data collection period, ethical principles of justice, beneficence, and respect for persons were observed. Informed consent forms were distributed to participants, especially PWD students prior to data collection. Moreover, trustworthiness of the data was observed. The following three themes emerged: inadequate PWD-friendly facilities and programs, neglect in the needs of PWDs in school planning, and emerging opportunities for inclusive school environment for PWDs. Concludingly, the HEIs under study have inadequate PWD-friendly facilities and programs. In addition, the needs of the PWDs are often neglected during school planning. In spite of these difficulties, there are emerging opportunities that HEIs may use in order to create an inclusive school environment for PWDs like accreditation. This study, which focus on the fundamental principle of inclusive education and educational needs of PWDs, is significant in the areas of educational management and psychology, guidance and counselling and social studies among others.

**Keywords:** *barrier-free environment, inclusive environment, persons with disability*

## Introduction

Educational institutions have to follow the fundamental concept of inclusive education, which is the most common approach to meeting the educational needs of all children, including persons with disabilities. Inclusion means that children with special needs attend general school courses, and they take part in classes appropriate for their ages (Idol, 2006). United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) pointed out that inclusive education is important because it is a right and is an integral component of modern society and of the principles of equal opportunity. Inclusion is one of the best ways to give people with disabilities (PWDs) the best opportunities to thrive since they have physical, social, or mental impairment which affects their activities in

life. The various problems that they endure may be the primary explanation for their anxiety and lack of a sense of belongingness. Many of them therefore tended to live apart from normal people and consequently stop from schooling. PWDs are excluded from being recognized by others due to many barriers which make them unable to play their part in the community and the world, much more actively participate in school education (Christensen, 2009). The PWDs are considered as the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups, whose impairment heightens their vulnerability to social and economic barriers such as non-PWD-friendly schools and negative attitudes by the abled members of the community (Fojas, 2012).

In 1992, the Philippines signed a new law to ensure that PWDs are given and guaranteed the rights and privileges that persons with no disabilities enjoy.

Republic Act 7277 or Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities assured that the state will make every effort to eliminate all social, political, economic, environmental and behavioral obstacles that are prejudicial to PWDs. For instance, Chapter III – Education Section 12 – Access to Quality Education of the same law suggested that the State shall ensure that PWDs must have access to quality education and adequate opportunities to learn and develop their skills. The country's report from the Department of Social Welfare, Development (DSWD) and Department of Health (DOH, 2009) revealed that there are approximately 4,124,833 PWDs in the Philippines. Around 21% are children between the ages of zero and 19. Nevertheless, only approximately 7% of these children have access to education.

In order to achieve basic, secondary, tertiary and vocational and technical education in public and private schools, PWDs must be provided with quality and inclusive education based on government policy and written legislation. In order for PWDs to avail inclusive education, the implementation of Republic Act 7277 or Magna Carta for Disabled Person should be mandatory for each school. In formulating educational policies and programs, the needs of the PWDs must be addressed by encouraging educational institutions to create PWD friendly school facilities, schedules of classes, and physical activities in the school (Chapter II– Education, Section–12 Access to Quality Education). Admittedly, a significant number of schools lack ramps, working lifts and the required resources, facilities and opportunities for PWDs since this sector is not sufficiently funded (Agbon & Mina 2017). The RA 7277, while being enforced, most schools are not committed to building an inclusive school environment for all, including PWDs.

Hence, the researchers studied the status of compliance of public higher education institutions (HEIs) to a barrier-free school environment, specifically on the student services provided by the office of the student affairs and the facilities and infrastructures related to helping the PWDs. It looked into the case of each public HEI in the province of Bataan in the implementation of an inclusive school environment and programs to cater the needs of PWDs. From these cases, insights emerging from the experiences of HEI were captured. In Bataan, 1.5% of the populations or about 10, 200 persons are PWDs from 7,700 persons in 2000 based on Census of Population and Housing (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2010). The progressive development and availability of accessible facilities help to encourage an inclusive community where

individuals of all ages and abilities can lead an active and healthy life. All people including PWDs have a sacred right to education. In order to know whether the PWDs are leading a normal school life, there is a need to know whether educational institutions are providing opportunities and creating an inclusive environment for them. A study like this—which focuses on the fundamental principle of inclusive education and educational needs of all children including those persons with disabilities—are significant in the areas of educational management and psychology, guidance and counselling, and social studies among others.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study utilized case study as the research method since this type of qualitative research emphasizes the context in determining realities of the society (Yin, 2009) and allows for an exhaustive analysis of a confined system (Merriam, 2009) like in the case of the HEIs. Since the problem on inclusive learning environment is a continuing social reality, the use of the case study method is appropriate especially when contextualizing the problem so that these social realities are drawn and, consequently, understood. Furthermore, a multiple case study design was utilized by the researcher in the attempt to investigate the experiences of each HEI in promoting a barrier-free school environment for its PWD students and personnel. As mentioned by Yin (2009), the use of multiple case study is appropriate for a study that looks into an in-depth analysis of more than one case. This research design provides for data descriptions that are rich and thick (Creswell, 2007), which explored the beliefs, attitudes, emotions and understandings of the participants in the study. Through the use of this research design, the researchers were able to replicate the research process for each HEI separately. The researchers contended that all HEIs' experiences are unique—they do share the experience of challenges in promoting a barrier-free environment for PWDs. Using multiple cases of HEIs increased both reliability and validity by providing a variety of experiences from which to draw conclusions (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). As part of the scope of the study, it focused only on the student services provided by the office of the student affairs and the facilities and infrastructures related to helping the PWDs to move freely without barrier. It did not explore the instructional aspects of inclusive education since this will be another area of study.

The participants of the study came from three HEIs

in the province of Bataan which were coded as School 1, School 2 and School 3. These academic institutions were selected due to the fact that they offer a wide range of academic programs, free to almost free tuition and, hence, accessible and affordable to almost all PWDs. The participants, on the other hand, were selected using purposive sampling following these inclusion criteria: permanent personnel of the academic institution, present or past head of offices directly involved in the affairs of the students like guidance and student affairs and head of physical plant and engineering services, and has served the position for more than two years. Excluded are those personnel who are temporary or not permanent in position or has served the position for less than two years. For students and personnel with disability, the inclusion criteria included: must have disabilities, bona fide personnel and student of the academic institution and permanent in position for personnel. For School A, the participants were seven school officials, two personnel with disability, and three students with disability. For School B, the participants were three school officials, one personnel with disability, and two students with disability. Finally, for School C, the participants were three school officials, one personnel with disability, and two students with disability.

The philosophical foundation used in this multiple case analysis was post-positivism which suggests that social reality is created and different people build it. This also provides geographical, empirical, metaphysical and phenomenological research perspectives (Fischer, 1998). Another explanation why the study used multiple cases is that a post-positivist research approach promotes methodical pluralism, as the case study is best understood by looking at various viewpoints using many lenses (Wildemuth, 1993).

Moreover, data triangulation was utilized in data gathering, which included in-depth interview, focus group discussion, document analysis, and prolonged engagement. The interview and focus group discussion guides, which were developed from the review of related literature and personal observation of the researchers, were validated by three experts in the field before it was actually used by the researchers. This was to ensure that the materials captured the essence of the cases being investigated. The researchers conducted school visits in the span of five months where participants were interviewed and inspections of the school facilities were done. During these periods, focus group discussions were done with the participants from each HEI. Furthermore, school documents pertaining to policies

on PWDs and infrastructure developments of the school were scrutinized to shed light on how the academic institutions promote a barrier-free environment for the PWDs.

To analyze the data gathered from the procedures mentioned above, cross-case analysis by Stake (2006) was conducted. This analysis examines themes, similarities, and differences across cases (Miles *et al.*, 2014). Each HEI was treated as a single case and was analyzed individually. Afterwards, a cross case analysis was performed by looking into the relevant differences and commonalities in each HEI. For analysis purposes, the data collected have been translated into digital transcripts. The researchers read each transcript to familiarize themselves with the results. NVivo 10 was used to monitor the code cycle, save memos and promote the connections between concepts and commonalities through cumulative data. Initially, NVivo coded information resulting in 15 provisional codes. These codes have been analyzed and categories have been formed by combining two or more codes. Then, a rule of inclusion for every category was written so that the meaning contained in each category may be summarized. Lastly, there was a case-by - case study, which showed five key trends from the research. Finally, a cross-case analysis was conducted, revealing three emerging themes from the analyzed data. In the data collection period, ethical principles of justice, beneficence, and respect for persons were observed. Informed consent forms were distributed to participants especially PWD students prior to data collection. Moreover, trustworthiness of the data was observed using the principles of dependability, confirmability, transferability and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Results and Discussion

### *Case 1: School A*

School A was a HEI established as a university in 2007. During the time of visit in the university, there were 208 visually impaired students, nine orthopedic handicapped students, and 18 hearing impaired students, and four personnel who have disabilities, mostly orthopedic and one is visual. University policies on promoting an inclusive learning environment for PWD students and personnel are yet to be written. For the students, the student handbook—which serves as the primary source of guidance and reference of the students regarding pertinent university policies, rules

and regulations, facilities, services, various forms, and laws relevant to the students—doesn't mention about students with special needs or persons with disabilities nor it discusses specific provisions tantamount to helping and accommodating PWDs. Although the handbook points out that one of the overarching policies of the Office of the Student Affairs (OSA) is the provision of services for students with special needs, there was no mention of the services in the handbook or in other documents requested by the researchers. The handbook reiterates in principle that the university, through its OSA, must ensure that academic accommodation is provided to students with disabilities or special needs. There must also be a program for life skills training such as conflict management, counseling and testing, and referrals whenever necessary. These principles do not constitute to any provision in the handbook, which, in reality, do not constitute to any program related to PWDs.

According to the officials of the student affairs, policies on helping the PWDs are part of the annual plan. While there is no direct program for PWDs, some of the small plans were considered under the Institutional Student Program of OSA and the Student Welfare services of the Guidance Office. These offices conduct needs assessment and counselling sessions for PWDs to improve their self-esteem so that they may feel comfortable inside the university and attain some sense of belongingness. The results of the assessment and counselling are used to design interventions that are geared towards helping the PWDs. To carry out the program for PWDs, a small amount of budget is allocated for the activities and are reflected in the annual plan of the office. To sustain this program, commitment of the OSA people must be guaranteed given the situation now that the number of enrollees is increasing every year and that may include more PWDs enrolling in the university. Furthermore, the OSA doesn't directly coordinate with the PPES with regards to the needs of the PWDs in as much as the designs of infrastructures are concerned. For student affairs, these concerns on infrastructures are solely the work and decisions of the PPES. Hence, they don't meddle given the fact that there are only around less than 20 PWDs in the university. Hence, there is no urgency to do a massive program for PWDs.

As for infrastructural development, the school building—which includes classroom, canteen, school administration building, library, parks, and student center – must be designed in a way that full access for all PWDs is ensured. As such, students and personnel

with motor and physical disabilities and other impairments need to be considered when constructing buildings and other school facilities. All Physical Plant and Engineering Services (PPES) Chairperson noted that many of the old buildings in the university do not provide safe spaces for the PWDs since the needs of these vulnerable people were not considered during the construction of the buildings. It was only in 2016 when the needs of the PWDs, as well as GAD provisions, were incorporated in the design. As such, much of the school environment at present is what it was many years ago—no provision for PWDs.

In all campuses, wheeling spaces were not provided for wheelchair users. Many parts of the school grounds have uneven and discontinuous footpath surfaces, no warning signs installed and lack guided tiles for PWDs. In one of its premiere campuses (Campus B), the spaces outside its walls adjacent to its entrance gates were blocked with a tricycle terminal and street food vendors which leave no space for PWDs to stay for some time while waiting for the traffic to subside especially in the afternoon. In Campus A, while the roads are wide, a big part of these are not cemented, which provide challenges for PWDs when passing along the streets since irregular surfaces often cause bumpy rides for PWDs in wheelchairs. Furthermore, there is no international symbol of accessibility placed in the accessible spaces and facilities within each campus. Also, there is no directional signs on the grounds and in the buildings, which may be used by PWDs in identifying the location and function of spaces and facilities which they can access. In addition, the doorways, toilets and other facilities of the school which serve as circulation routes and key destinations have no information and directional signs. Likewise, classroom have no adequate circulation space for PWDs in wheelchairs and walking aids like sticks.

What is common among campuses is the provision of ramp for PWDs in wheelchairs, which is, however, limited only in the entrance of the buildings. For instance, all libraries have ramps in entrance gate which follows the provision of the Philippine Librarianship Act of 2003 stating that all facilities for PWDs like ramps shall be provided in the school libraries. All buildings of School A has no elevator except for the Academic Building of Campus B which has a provision for elevator but nothing has been installed yet. Furthermore, there is no continuous ramp in all high-rise buildings which can be used by PWDs in wheelchair as an alternative to a lift or elevator. Hence, faculty members and students with disability have to climb up the stairs to attend their

classes. This condition may be even critical for PWDs especially during emergency situations where they have to struggle to leave the building using the stairs.

The school environment is also a challenge for blind persons or those with visual impairment since neither warning signages nor tactile warning blocks and floor guidance path for approaching potential hazard or a change in direction of the walkway that they can use. Likewise, there is no information board written in Braille and no audible signages for announcements. Majority of the doors open outwardly to the corridor which may cause hazard especially during an emergency situation. However, the number of these doors were relatively reduced ever since academic programs of the school undergo accreditation and were recommended to be modified during various visits. All buildings in each campus of the school, except the Academic Building 1 of Campus, have no restroom for PWDs. As such, PWDs have to share toilet with students that have no disabilities. The problems are shared by personnel who have disabilities since comfort rooms are either for men and women only or unisex with no features that are suitable for use by persons with ambulatory disabilities. Hence, PWDs have faced challenges in using the restrooms since these are friendly to them like lack of front bar to provide chest support and sidebars to hold on to while standing. In addition, most of the high-rise buildings of the university have handrails since these provide support PWDs who are using the stairways. However, color contrast between landing and the steps of the stairs is not evident in all campuses.

The lack of PWD friendly facilities in the campus is coupled by lack of consideration for students with disability in class scheduling and room assignments. Students with disabilities pointed out that their physical conditions are not usually considered during enrollment since the schedules for their major courses are fixed. Also, some visually impaired students stated that they have been experiencing difficulties moving around since the campus has not been designed to accommodate PWDs like them.

Meanwhile, the accreditation of the academic programs of the school accreditation warrants schools to provide facilities that will accommodate PWDs. Hence, the university is taking some small steps towards the realization of this goal. For instance, new buildings being constructed in some campuses contain ramp at the entrance floor. This is the easiest to attain with respect to the provision of a barrier-free school environment. International symbol of accessibility is

being painted also in circulation spaces.

The five categories that emerged from this Case Study 1 are summarized in Table 1. Overall, the data reflect that the school is not totally PWD friendly although there are efforts being made to ensure that the needs of students and personnel with disability are given some preferential attention. The standard facilities that will address the needs of the PWDs to accessibility and mobility are very limited in all school campuses. It means that the PWD students and personnel may have been experiencing challenges when moving around the campus. Also, there is no clear program that will identify PWDs and no clear activities that will ensure that their needs and problems are addressed and resolved.

### **Case 2: School B**

School B is a college founded in 1987. During the time of visit, the college has one teacher who has an orthopedic disability and, hence, uses a wheelchair to go around the school. There were two students who are visually impaired while one student with cerebral palsy was identified. There were three students who have orthopedic disability and one has cerebral palsy.

The school administrator who also head the student services admitted that the school is not PWD-friendly academic institution for two reasons: one, the college doesn't have facilities which are PWD friendly since it does not provide any support to PWD enrolled in their college; and two, there is no established programs to support the PWDs when they enroll in the school. The only kind of support that the school provides is counselling to boost the self-esteem of the PWDs so that they won't feel aloof or alone while in school and so they can develop a sense of belongingness while studying. Also, the school doesn't provide training to teachers on how to handle PWDs.

One steering reason the school officials are restrained from developing their programs and improving their facilities to incorporate essential aspects of inclusive education like a barrier-free school environment for PWDs is their lack of authority to decide on matters relevant to the development and improvement of the college. It is the call of the local government unit (LGU) to prepare the plan and execute it. Most of the times, school officials were not consulted and were just informed by the LGU of the plan for the school. This is one of the problems of running a local college where school officials and the school itself are at the mercy of the local government officials.

**Table 1.** Emerging Categories from School A

| Category   | Selected Participant Data Excerpts  |
|--|---|
| Lack of PWD friendly facilities                      | <p><i>“Doon sa facilities wala tayong ano e, sa PWD magiging ano lang nyan yung meron tayong rampa, other than that merong time dya na meron 2 cr para sa PWD kaya lang ng ginawa tong malaking gate natanggal sya.”</i></p> <p>(In terms of facilities, we do not have for PWDs except for the two comfort rooms for them. However, it was displaced when the big gate was constructed.)</p>                                   |
|  | <p><i>“Ahh yung ating mga building, ating mga facilities, hindi sya sumasagot sa ting mga PWDs, although kasi wala pa rin naman kasi pa tayo, kasi ang flagship program natin ay Education.”</i> (Our buildings, facilities, do not answer the needs of the PWDs since we do not have students like them. Our flagship program is education.)</p>   |
| Inadequate comprehensive PWD-focused program         | <p><i>“Kasi unang-una trabaho ito ng VPAA kasama ng mga Deans, siguro dapat rin isinasama ito in case na ahh, ahhh, mga pangangailangan laung-lalo na, ibig sabihin dapat may nakaamba ka na curriculum for them.”</i> (Because it is the job of the VPAA, including the deans. I think the needs of the PWDs must be included like for instance a curriculum.)</p>   |
|  | <p><i>“Actually, walang malinawa na policy for PWDs. Sa handbook wala...”</i> (Actually, there is no clear policy for PWDs in the handbook for students.)</p>   |
| Ad-hoc approach to the needs of the PWDs             | <p><i>“Yung kakulangan ng impormasyon, siguro sa mga kinauukulan dapat maghandaan nila para mas responsive sila para may puso.”</i> (The lack of information is, I think, should be properly planned to make them responsive with a heart.)</p>   |
|  | <p><i>“Usually, adhoc ang approach sa ganyan even before. Kapag walang PWD, walang plano. Kapag meron na, doon lang magplaplano. So hindi siya priority, hindi kasi siya isang malaking problema so far...”</i> (Usually, the approach is ad hoc even before. If there is no PWD, there is no plan. If there are, that’s the time to draw a plan. So it is not a priority, it is not a big problem so far.)</p>                 |
| Accreditation as precursor to meet the needs of PWDs | <p><i>“Ang problema ay kung paano sila magiging safe sa campus. So kapag may ganyan na, wala tayong pamamaraan kung paano sila mahelp. Kasi walang facilities to cater them. Wala tayong malinaw na programa...”</i> (The problem is how to make them safe in the campus. So if there are PWDs, we do not have the ways on how to help them because there are no facilities to cater them. We do not have a clear program.)</p> |
|  | <p><i>“Sa accreditation need na yan ay. Yes, yes pero kung merong iimproved tulad ng cr, nilalakihan na naming yung mga pinto ng cr just to give access doon sa mga kapatid na PWDs...”</i> (It is needed in the accreditation. Yes, yes. If there are to be improved like CR, we widen the door so that our PWDs will have access.)</p>  |
|  | <p><i>“Siguro nung mga nakaraan 10 o 15 yrs ago hindi sya masyado pero ngayon na meron na tinitignan na iniinclude na...”</i> (Ten to fifteen years back, these were not look into, but we are including it now.)</p>   |

| Category   | Selected Participant Data Excerpts   |
|--|--|
| Exclusion of PWD needs in infrastructure development in the past years | <p>“Luma na ang mga building sa campuses natin. Hindi naman iyan requirement dati noong tinatayo ang mga buildings. Hindi yan need so sa planning at development, it was not considered, not until now na may accreditation...” (The buildings in the campus are old. These were not the requirements when the buildings were constructed. It was not needed, hence, it was not considered in the planning and development not until now because of accreditation.)</p> <p>“Ngayon lang kasi nabrought up sa consciousness ng mga tao ang PWDs at mga needs nila. So dati, walang ganyan sa mga planning and meeting ng mga university officials...” (It is only now that the PWDs and their needs are brought to the consciousness of the people. Before, these were not included in the planning and meeting of university officials.)</p> |

Upon assessment of the school, it was revealed that the only available fixtures to help PWDs students, especially those who have orthopedic mobility, are the ramp and the railings. There is a ramp situated at the entrance gate of the school that goes all the way to the corridors and to the academic building. Hence, students in wheelchairs utilize when going the ground floor of the academic building. Also, the stairs have railings, which are used by students with orthopedic disability, to go to the second floor and back to the ground level. The staircases are wide enough to accommodate a flock of students going up and down but doesn't have a color contrast between landing and the steps of the stairs, which is very essential for PWDs. There is no elevator or ramp that can be used by PWDs in wheelchair when going up and down the building.

Although the corridors are long, pathways were not wide enough to cater the needs of PWD pedestrians. However, the parking area, which also serves as students' playground, have footpath with even and continuous surfaces but do not have warning and guided tiles for PWDs. There are no irregular surfaces in the college ground but neither the international symbol of accessibility nor directional signs to indicate clearly the location and function of accessible spaces and facilities are present. In addition, no information board in Braille and audible signages for announcements can be found in the college. In addition to, there are no tactile warning blocks and tactile floor guidance path for persons with visual impairments. Furthermore, all the 20 rooms in the college have no adequate circulation space for PWDs in wheelchairs and in walking aids like sticks. The doors of these rooms open outwardly from rooms directly into the corridor. There is also no toilet intended for PWDs.

The lack of facilities in the college that may assists PWDs to move around provided challenges to

teacher and students with disability. One teacher in a wheelchair stated that he had to crawl up the stairs to get to the second floor where his classes are scheduled. He had hard time using the comfort room since there are no grab bars in the toilet, and the area is not wide enough to accommodate persons in wheelchair like him. Students with disabilities also narrated the challenge of going up and down the stairs especially those with orthopedic disability. Those who have visual impairment are helped by their classmates when going around the college and going up and down the building.

The data reflect that the college is not PWD friendly since many features of an inclusive learning environment are observable in the college. The school officials have a very limited participation in school planning since the LGU decides on the fate of the college. School program for PWDs are lacking and most of the activities are ad hoc. Findings are summarized in Table 2.

### Case 3: School C

School C is a university branch founded in 1970. During the interview, the school caters to three students who are PWDs (autistic, visually impaired, and orthopedic disable) and employs one faculty who has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. They were identified using individual inventory form, which were given during enrollment where special needs of the students are identified. Through this process, the guidance office is informed of the condition of the students, and the information is also relayed to the faculty members so that they design their teaching methodology for these PWDs. The autistic student, who enrolled under the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration program was accompanied by his

**Table 2.** Emerging Categories from School B

| Category   | Selected Participant Data Excerpts  |
|--|---|
| Lack of PWD friendly facilities  | <p><i>“If regards to the facilities, I think wala talaga. Hindi PWD friendly ang college...”</i> (With regards to the facilities, I think there’s none. The college is not PWD-friendly.)</p> <p><i>“During my time, medyo yung unang dating doon, wala talang access, from 2004–2007 wala talang ramp ey, nagrequest ako sa admin ng ramp from entrance sana. Pero hanggang doon lang. Meron kaming estudyante si Jeck, meron syang Cerebral Palsy kaya nahihirapan sya. Meron din time na gumagapang ako sa stairs kapag aakyat ako sa second flor. Pero yun yung issue noon. Yung cr din wala din para sa PWD’s, getting off from my wheelchair...”</i> (When I first came here in 2004 to 2007, there was no access, no ramp. I requested the administration for a ramp at the entrance, but that all ends there. We had a student named Jeck who has a cerebral palsy and found it difficult. There were times that I have to crawl to the second floor. That was the issue then. The comfort rooms were not also PWD-friendly.)</p> |
| Inadequate comprehensive PWD-focused program                           | <p><i>“So far we don’t have definite policy in admission of students with disabilities, kase the LGU sees to it that everybody is accommodated....”</i> (So far we don’t have definite policy in admission of students with disabilities because the LGU sees to it that everybody is accommodated.)</p> <p><i>“Wala kami program talaga to help them. Parang ano, let the teachers magisip kung paano...”</i> (We don’t have a program to help them. It’s like, let the teachers think how.)</p>   |
| Ad-hoc approach to the needs of the PWDs                               | <p><i>“So far, wala, short term budgeting lang ang kailangan most of the time hindi nabibigyan ng budget yan. So pag may PWD, doon lang magiisip kung paano gagawin...”</i> (So far, short time budgeting is all that it needs, and these are not given budgets. So the only time we think about it is when there are PWD students enrolled.)</p> <p><i>“Di naman siguro sa budget yun ey, they were not, di nila priority or concern pa, or baka naaoverlooked nila. Dapat noong si Sir Arellano pa dapat Nakita na nila yun...”</i> (I think it is not about the budget. It’s just that it’s not their priority or concern or they might have overlooked it. They should have seen it during the time of Sir Arellano.)</p> <p><i>“Sa totoo lang, wala talaga, Sa tagal kong nagtuturo wala, kaya how much pa sa mga PWD’s. Kaya sana ayusin muna nila.”</i> (The truth is, there is nothing. I have been teaching here for long and there is nothing for the PWDs. They have to fix it.)</p>   |
| Limited participation in school planning                               | <p><i>“Wala, kasi eto nagrenovate, kami lang lahat yun. They send people...”</i> (Nothing. They just send people for the renovation.)</p> <p><i>“Sila sila kasi purely academic lang talaga kami. Sa planning ng school ay LGU yun. Hindi kami kasa-ma...”</i> (The LGU does the planning. We are purely academic here. We are excluded from the planning.)</p>   |
| Exclusion of PWD needs in infrastructure development in the past years | <p><i>“Wala naman yan dati noong gingawa yang mga building yan.”</i> (These were not there during the time the buildings were being constructed.)</p> <p><i>“Those needs of the PWDs were never considered when the building was being erected. Kaya ayan wala tlaa...”</i> (The needs of the PWDs were never considered during the construction of the building. Hence, there is nothing.)</p>   |



parents. This helped the guidance office to know the needs of the student through the narratives of the parents and the necessary assistance that can be provided to the said student. Right now, the student is being provided with a different set of learning activities, but in some situations, is mainstreamed with his classmates since he can talk fairly well and can understand directions and simple to complex instructions. For students who have orthopedic disability and visual impairment, they are being helped by their classmates when moving around the school. The student handbook of the school doesn't have any provision for the PWDs. Hence, everything is ad hoc, which goes to show that the welfare and programs for PWD comes to mind only when there are PWDs enrolled in the academic programs.

The university faces a big challenge on infrastructure development since it occupies the site of a former hospital. The school officials admitted that the actual challenge lies on their control towards the development of the area and the establishments of a barrier-free school environment for PWDs. They cannot renovate the buildings since they do not own it. Upon assessment of the school, half of the main building is condemned and is off limits to the students and personnel since these parts are dilapidated or needs further assessment to assess its safety. On the ground of the campus, wheeling spaces were not provided for wheelchair users, but the surface of the footpath is even and continuous. However, there are no installed appropriate warning and guided tiles for the PWDs. Parking areas of the school, as well as other accessible spaces and facilities, do not have placements of international symbol of accessibility. Also, the campus does not have directional signs, which may be used to indicate clearly the location and function of accessible spaces and facilities in the school.

The only observable feature of the school that addresses the needs of the PWD students is the ramp, which is place at entrance of the school all the way to the lobby of the academic building. Ramp is also observable to other buildings in the campus since it is the easiest requirement to comply with and some of the few things they can do about their buildings since major renovations are not allowed. Elevators are part of the building structure but cannot be used since it is not functioning anymore. Hence, stairs are the only means of moving between floors but are not supplemented with lifts and/or ramps. Since the school was located in an old hospital building, there are projecting nosing and open stairs, which may increase the risk of stumbling. There is no color contrast between landings and the

stair steps. Likewise, all classrooms have no adequate circulation space for PWDs in wheelchairs and in walking aids like sticks with doors opening outwardly to the corridor.

Since there is a student with visual disability, the campus is presumed to have facilities that will cater to their needs or for the needs of PWDs with the same disability in the future. However, the stairways of the buildings have no warning signages that can be used by students with visual impairment. However, walkways, halls and corridors, and other circulation spaces have clear headroom to minimize the risk of accidents. Likewise, there is no information board in Braille available in the school or even audible signages for announcements. In addition to, there is neither tactile warning blocks nor tactile floor guidance path for approaching potential hazard and danger to persons with visual impairments. However, all stairs have handrails which provide support to PWDs as they go down and up the building. Meanwhile, there are no toilets that are intended for PWDs in the school.

Since the building is on lease for the school, the administration cannot improve it. Funds to make some renovations of the area are always denied since the building is not theirs, and there is a plan for the university to transfer to a three-hectare lot, which was purchased by the university. The year of transfer is not yet determined since there is a problem on the right of way for the lot that will be used as the entrance road for the school. On its master plan, the provisions of facilities for PWDs are considered like the ramp, signages, parking areas, and toilets. These important facilities for the PWDs will be considered in the construction of the new buildings for the school. These are also being considered since the university has applied for accreditation by the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP). Six major categories emerged from the analysis and are summarized in Table 3.

### ***Cross Case Findings and Discussion***

From the analysis of each HEI, the categories are summarized in Table 4.

Once the data in each of the three case studies were combined, the resulting seven categories were refined by the researchers into three broad themes. The following three themes emerged: inadequate PWD-friendly facilities and programs, neglect in the needs of PWDs in school planning and emerging opportunities

**Table 3.** Emerging Categories from School C

| Category   | Selected Participant Data Excerpts   |
|--|--|
| Lack of PWD-friendly facilities  | <p>“Since this was a former hospital, there are no facilities to cater sa mga PWDs. Meron nga elevator kaso bawal gamitin. Tapos half ng building dito ay condemned na. So bawal galawin. Wala talaga. Hindi kami PWD friendly...” (Since this was a former hospital, there are no facilities to cater the PWDs. There are elevators, but we are forbidden to use it. Half of the building is condemned. Hence, it can’t be touched. There is nothing. We are not PWD friendly.)</p>   |
| Inadequate comprehensive PWD-focused program                           | <p>“Tinutulungan po ako classmates ko na maglakad. Masaya naman po kahit papaano pero pag wala ako kasama sa pagakyat sa second floor, nahihirap ako.” (My classmates help me to walk. It’s fun somehow, but when there are no one to help me to go to the second floor, it’s difficult.)</p> <p>“Meron naming kaming assessment. Tas pag naassess na at nalamang PWD, icounsel sila to boost their self-esteem. Hanggang doon lang yun kasi wala naman talaaga comprehensibong programa...” (We have assessment. After assessing and knowing that a student is PWD, he/she will be counselled to boost his/her self-esteem. That’s the end of it because there is no comprehensive program.)</p> <p>“Walang program ay. Meron man e sa Guidance office na yun. Sila lang gumagawa hindi kami kasama...” (We don’t have a program, ay! We have at the guidance office. They do it, and we are not part of it.)</p> |
| Ad-hoc approach to the needs of the PWDs                               | <p>“Pag walang PWD, walang plano. Magplalano lang pag meron na. Ganun lagi approach e sa school at sa ibang lugar din..” (If there is no PWD, there is no plan. That is the approach of the school and in other places, too.)</p> <p>“Parang disaster yan. Pag andyan na doon naghahanda. Hanggat wala pa, walang gingawa. Pag andyan na ang PWDs na magi inquire, doon lang nagiisip ng plano.” (It’s like a disaster. We only plan if it’s there. For as long as it’s not there, we do nothing. If there are PWDs who will inquire, that’s when the time we think of a plan.)</p>  |
| Limited infrastructure development due to lack of school ownership     | <p>“Umuupa lang kami dito e. Hindi sa amin ang lupa. So wala kaming permission para magpagtayo ng building.” (We only rent the place, we don’t own the land. So we do not have the permission to construct a building.)</p> <p>“Luma na yung hospital. Kaya di yan marerenovate kasi saying pera. Besides, hindi sa amin yun, hindi nila pag-aari lupa so hindi pwede patayuan.” (The hospital is old. Hence, it is not renovated since it will be just a waste of money. Besides, we don’t own it. It doesn’t own the land, as such no construction is allowed.)</p>  |
| Exclusion of PWD needs in infrastructure development in the past years | <p>“Dati kasi yung tinatayo building e di namn kasama sa plano ang PWDs. Ala sa plano...” (When the building was being constructed, the PWDs were not part of the plan. It was nowhere in the plan.)</p> <p>“Oo, di naman kasi nacoconsider ang PWD related features dati. Kaya nung tinayo yan, walang ganun.” (Yes, because PWD-related features were not being considered before. That is why when it was built, there is nothing about PWD.)</p>   |
| Accreditation as precursor to meet the needs of PWDs                   | <p>“Sa ngayon, nagpapaacredit na kami, kaya yang mga PWDs and GAD related indicators na yan ay dapat ng gawin.” (As of this time, we are undergoing accreditation. That is why there is a need to do the PWDs and GAD-related indicators.)</p> <p>“Since Level 2 na kami, yung pwde mainstall like signages, tactile markers, ramp, pwde na namin yang wain...” (Since we are already Level 2, we can install signages, tactile markers, ramp. We can do it now.)</p>  |

**Table 4.** Combined Categories Across Three HEIs

| No. | Name of Category   | HEIs |
|-----|--|------|
| 1   | Lack of PWD friendly facilities  | 3    |
| 2   | Inadequate comprehensive PWD-focused program                           | 3    |
| 3   | Ad-hoc approach to the needs of PWDs                                   | 3    |
| 4   | Limited infrastructure development due to lack of school ownership     | 1    |
| 5   | Limited participation in school planning                               | 1    |
| 6   | Exclusion of PWD needs in infrastructure development in the past years | 3    |
| 7   | Accreditation as precursor to meet the needs of PWDs                   | 2    |

for inclusive school environment for PWDs as depicted in Figure 1.

**Inadequate PWD-Friendly Facilities and Programs.** The study revealed that all of the public HEIs in under study have inadequate facilities and programs to support the PWDs in the school. They do not have the necessary features of a school that will allow PWDs to enjoy inclusivity in as much as support programs and PWD friendly facilities are concerned. These cases of HEIs is a microcosm of a bigger picture of many educational institutions that are not generally not friendly to PWDs (Reyes, 2015). These conditions

violate RA 7277, Chapter VI–Accessibility, Section 25–Barrier-Free Environment, which states that PWDs should attain a barrier-free environment where they can access public buildings and establishments without hindrance and where their needs in utilizing school facilities and resources, in their schedule of classes and the requirements physical education among others are considered (Chapter II–Education, Section 12–Access to Quality Education). The conditions of these public HEIs reflect the problems of many schools like lack of ramps, elevators, lift and other necessary facilities which is a result of inadequate funding or just plain inconsideration on the needs of the PWDs (Agbon & Mina, 2017). Hence, incorporating the needs of PWDs in the design, construction and continuous development of built environment like public buildings is of utmost importance (Baris & Uslu, 2009).

**Neglect in the Needs of PWDs in School Planning.** From the experiences of the HEIs, the needs of the PWDs have been neglected so many times especially during the planning of school facilities and programs. As such, most of the old buildings in the HEIs have no facilities, features, and fixtures that can be used by PWDs for easier mobility and easy life inside the school. It echoes the findings of Pandey and Pandey (2017) where it stated that many schools have no enough services and facilities to accommodate PWDs due to lack of funding to support initiatives and planning issues where the needs of the PWDs were partially if not totally ignored. However, RA 7277, Chapter VI–Accessibility, Section 25–Barrier-Free



**Figure 1.** Emerging Themes Across Three Cases of HEIs

Environment clearly suggests that PWDs must be considered in the formulation of educational policies and programs and their special needs with respect to the use of school facilities and resources, schedules of classes, requirements in physical education activities among others are take into consideration. The needs of the PWDs are equally important with the needs of the physically-able majority. For this reason, planning and designing for the majority should take into account the requirement of PWDs (Uslu, 2008). Hence, the findings imply that needs of the PWDs must be considered and incorporated when HEIs plan for both infrastructural development and student support programs. This is essential so that the school may have fixed structural facilities for PWDs and at the same time, operates on sound support program for students and personnel with disabilities.

**Emerging Opportunities for Inclusive School Environment for PWDs.** Since most of the HEIs are undergoing accreditation process, it has become an emerging opportunity for them to plan for PWD friendly facilities and programs. Accreditation areas like Support to Students and School Facilities and Laboratories call for inclusion of PWDs related programs and plans in the strategic plan of the schools. As such, accreditation is a rich avenue for HEIs to raise the bar of quality in teaching and learning (Segismundo, 2017) through creating an inclusive school environment while keeping the schools in check with the set standards like improved facilities and programs for both abled and disabled members of the educational institution. This accreditation process may provide the HEIs the opportunity to satisfy the important provisions of RA 7277 particularly in the creation of an inclusive school environment that embraces all people including the PWDs.

## Recommendations

Concludingly, the HEIs under study have inadequate PWD-friendly facilities and programs. In addition, the needs of the PWDs are often neglected during school planning. In spite of these difficulties, there are emerging opportunities that HEIs may use in order to create an inclusive school environment for PWDs like accreditation. It is recommended that since School C is transferring to a three-hectare property where new buildings and facilities will rise, they should include in the plan the needs of PWDs and ensure that in the implementation, these facilities, fixtures,

and features are built and provided. The HEI should continue to aspire for higher level of accreditations so that the needs of the PWDs are persistently address in the planning and continuous improvement of its buildings and support programs for the students. Meanwhile, since School B is constrained by the lack of authority of its school officials in the school planning, it should rally for the inclusion of school officials in crafting the plans of the academic institution. The wisdom of the school officials is needed to ensure that proper guidance and plans are put up to steer the school to a right direction of achieving an inclusive environment. It should also apply for the accreditation so that facilities, fixtures, and features and support programs for the students to address the needs of the PWDs will be given preferential attention. Through accreditation, continuous development maybe attained. Also, pertinent provisions of RA 7277 must be strictly enforced by the HEIs so that a culture of inclusivity will be nurtured and consequently, thrive in the academe. For future researchers, instruction area must be explored to understand how HEIs promote inclusive education through its academic programs.

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