Abstract - Inclusive education provides all students with the most fitting learning environments and opportunities for them to best attain their potential. However, the situation of inclusion is different in higher education institutions. This study determined teachers’ perceptions of the University of Northern Philippines (UNP) on inclusive education. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 teachers from UNP who have experienced handling students with special needs. It found out that all participants did not undergo any seminars, training or workshops on inclusive education. As a result, most of them do not have an idea about inclusive education, have mixed feelings, and lack the skills in handling inclusive education classes. Problems of bullying, infrastructure, students learning, curriculum, class size, and limited resources were also identified. Participants agreed that seminars/training must be provided and widest dissemination of inclusive higher education is needed.

Keywords: Challenges, Inclusive higher education, Inclusion Guide

INTRODUCTION
Inclusion is one of the most volatile topics in education today. An exception to this instability lies in the published literature about the perceptions of teachers towards an inclusion model for special education students. When it comes to inclusion and teacher attitudes, there exists a consensus opinion. Muega [1] cited that teachers support the concept and practice of inclusion but feel they are not being provided enough training or support in its implementation.

Under the Department of Education, students with learning and physical disabilities are enrolled in special classes in some public elementary and high schools. Persalli[2] stated that special schools provide education that is suited to special needs or disabilities. Teachers in basic education without formal training in handling special classes are not supposed to teach. However, the situation is different in a higher education institution.

Special needs students at the University of Northern Philippines were placed in normal classes with teachers who have not been into any special education training. Teachers were exposed to challenges in performing their normal duties, especially the teaching of hearing and visually impaired learners, psychosocial, emotional, intellectual, and mobility and physical impairment.

In UNP, some teachers received mixed feelings and reactions because training conducted was mainly in the training of teachers for mainstream classes. Such a situation caused teachers to feel lack the necessary knowledge, skills, facilities, equipment of handling students with special needs.

The perceptions of teachers toward inclusion can improve the teaching-learning process. Avramidis and Norwich [3] said understanding teachers’ beliefs about inclusion are important as positive attitudes towards inclusion are amongst the strongest predictors of the success of the inclusion reforms. Burke and Sutherland [4] also identified that knowledge and prior experience on students with exceptionalities are directly linked with positive attitudes by teachers towards inclusion.

There is more research-focused regarding sentiments gleaned from SPED teachers only. Limited research in the area of understanding the perceptions of tertiary teachers' prompted the researcher in the collection of reliable qualitative data to develop an understanding of the perceptions/attitudes towards the inclusion of students in regular schools in tertiary classes. To improve the preparation of teachers in handling a diverse population of students and inclusion guide are purposively aimed to be constructed based on the findings of this study.
Given that teachers provide key service in handling children with special needs, their attitude contributes to its success or failure. This study will reveal how teachers feel about inclusive education. With this, the value of this research is relevant to the teachers, this study can give them enlightenment on the importance of understanding inclusive education which can help them become more equipped and be better teachers. The information provided in the result of the study can be used for the academe, as the basis in formulating training programs, seminar-workshops and policy which can help educate the in-service teachers in the wider community on effective teaching; likewise help improve the welfare of the learners. The outcome of this study can give the concerned government and non-government agencies the insights into the realities of inclusive education. Thus, this can contribute to improving the existing programs that these agencies are already implementing about helping children and the learners in addressing their emotional and psychological needs.

The introduction of inclusive education at the University of Northern Philippines has made students with special needs be placed in normal classes with teachers who did not even receive special education training. Teachers were exposed to challenges in discharging their normal duties, especially the teaching of hearing and visually impaired learners, psychosocial, emotional, intellectual, and physical and mobility impairment. Such a situation has prompted the study of inclusive education experiences of teachers at UNP to ease some challenges faced by teachers in the delivery of their lessons and improve the quality of education for the learners.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
This study sought to find out the views of teachers on inclusive education; the problems that teachers face in inclusive education; ways to manage the difficulties in handling inclusive classes; and interventions for the improvement of inclusive education in the university.

METHODS

Research Design
A qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was used in this study. A phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that describes the meaning of a lived experience of a phenomenon for several individuals, which in this case is the experience of inclusive education. The purpose is to describe the commonalities of the experience. There are two (2) main types of phenomenologies—hermeneutical and transcendental—the latter of which is applied in this study. The transcendental phenomenology, approach focuses on the participants' given descriptions to generate an essence of the lived experience, as opposed to hermeneutical phenomenology which more strongly relies on the researcher's interpretations of what the lived experience means. According to Johnson and Christensen, qualitative research happens in a natural setting which allows the gathering of nonobvious issues and allows the researcher to arrive at rich and holistic findings that focused on teachers' experiences [5]. It gives the participants a stand to share their opinion, live experiences, challenges, and opportunities along with inclusive education. The research study used thematic analysis of data. Borg and Gall said thematic analysis is done by identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within the data [6].

Population and Sample
The population of this study include the faculty of the University of Northern Philippines who have previously handled any student with special needs for the past two years and teachers who are presently handling students with exceptionalities for the school year 2018-2019. Teachers who willingly participated in the interviews from the beginning until its completion were the samples of the study. The researcher excluded teachers who have handled inclusive classes for only a semester as well as teachers who refused to participate in the study. On the basis of these inclusion and exclusion criteria, a judgment regarding their impact on the external validity of the results was made. Making those judgments requires in-depth knowledge of the area of research, as well as of in what direction each criterion could affect the external validity of the study.

Thirty-two students in UNP were found out to have special needs which include psychosocial, mild autism, communication disorder, physical disability, hearing, and visual impairment.

A sample of 15 teachers participated in the study. The participants comprised of ten females and five males. Their ages ranged from twenty-four years to above forty. Ten teachers have Master’s Degree and five were Doctorate Degree holders. Four teachers were in the service for 4-6 years, five were in the service for 7-9 years, three were teaching for 10-12 years and three were already in the service for above 13 years.
Data Gathering Instrument

This study utilized an interview guide as instrument to gather the respondents' profile along age, sex, highest educational attainment, years in the teaching service, and related training attended on inclusive education. Specifically, it asked the participants about their perceptions on inclusive education, as well as their attitudes, sentiments, concerns/problems encountered in handling learners with exceptionalities, how they address or solve the difficulties they have experienced, and their suggestions to improve inclusive education.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher coordinated to the University Office of Student and External Affairs Institutional Student Programs Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs Services and requested the list of learners who were diagnosed with special cases. Special needs students in the university include psychosocial, mild autism, communication disorder, physical disability, hearing, and visual impairment. A visit to the teachers involved was done, and the researcher introduced himself to department Deans. The researcher sought the permission of the academic heads and the teachers. Concerned teachers were briefed about the research study. Appointments were made with the teachers and the interview duration was spelled out. The participants' freely stated their available time for the interview. The researcher ensured that consent forms were given and filled by the participants.

Before the interview, the participants were reminded that they had the choice to consent to the interview, that they could have refused to answer any question and that they only needed to answer to the extent that they were comfortable. They were given a choice to stop the interview at any time or decline the interview. Respondents have undergone a semi-structured interview, thus, the concept of saturation was employed. According to Hill [7], saturation is when similar data or comments are collected in the interviews, saturation is already reached. The collection of information is then stopped, and the analysis of data starts. The researcher collected the data through notes and audio-recording.

Data Analysis

After the participants were interviewed, qualitative data analysis was used. It is defined as working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, recording what is important and what is not and deciding on what to tell others [8].

The researcher independently codes teachers' responses by item. Then a comparison of codes was done to revise and resolve any differences. After discussion, codes with the most common responses were considered a reportable theme. The qualitative was appropriately processed, analyzed, and was presented in narrative form. The data was presented using quotations from the participants interviewed.

The following themes emerged in the findings of the interview: (1) Knowledge and Perception of Inclusive Education; (2) Barriers to Inclusive Education; (3) Managing Inclusion Problems; and (4) Needs of Teachers and Students.

The above listed are major themes under which information was presented. However, it should be noted that various sub-themes emerged out of major themes and were also highlighted.

Ethical Considerations

In the conduct of the study, the researcher was guided by the following ethical considerations.

Research Ethics: Research ethics was properly observed in the conduct of the study. Permission to gather data was sought from proper authorities. Informed consent was provided to the participants and they were assured of anonymity of their names.

Process Consent: The researcher asked permission from the participants for an interview and they can chose whether to be part of this study or not. Those who chose to participate may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. They may also refuse to answer questions they are reluctant to answer and still remain in the study. It was explained that the interview will take approximately 1 hour and the location was determined according to their preference. They were asked to answer some questions regarding inclusive education. Consent was asked for audio recording but they may decline to be taped. The researcher may provide the participants a copy of the transcripts upon request and they have the right to review and edit the tapes. Sentences that the participants asked to leave out were not used and they were erased from all relevant documents.

Conflict of Interest: The researcher is in the teaching profession and whose only interest is to contribute something in the generation of new knowledge. It was emphasized that the researcher is not doing this research for any personal intention. His
interest is only to generate knowledge on the perceptions of teachers of inclusive education.

Privacy and Confidentiality: The researcher always considered privacy and confidentiality. Before the interview, the participants were reminded that they had the choice to consent to the interview, that they could have refused to answer any question and that they only needed to answer to the extent that they were comfortable. They have a choice to stop the interview at any time or decline the interview. Strict confidentiality was used when treating the data from individual respondents and the results were presented which consist of aggregate data that will not lead to the identification of participants. Any records or documentations acquire were used only for the study. Records are put in a sealed envelope and stored in a safe box. It will be destroyed/thrown a year after the study is presented and/or published.

Recruitment: The participants were recruited as faculty of the University of Northern Philippines who have handled and/or are presently handling students with special needs. Total enumeration was initially considered and those who were very much willing to participate from the beginning until its completion served as a sample of the study.

Community Considerations: This study may help the UNP-community as the results will assist teachers to better their teaching in inclusive classrooms. The educators and administrators of the community will also be aware of it which will lead them to think of possible ways to help students build their confidence and learn better. The results of this study will be disseminated to the target beneficiaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study was aimed at highlighting the insights of teachers who have handled and presently handling students with special needs. Four general themes were recorded which include Knowledge and Perceptions on Inclusive Education, Barriers to Inclusive Education, Managing Inclusion Problems, and the Needs of Teachers and Students.

Knowledge and Perception on Inclusive Education

A better understanding of the perceptions of teachers towards inclusion can assist in improving the learning environment. Understanding teachers’ beliefs about inclusion are important as positive attitudes towards inclusion are amongst the strongest predictors of the success of the inclusion reforms. On the other hand, Norman, Caseau, and Stefanich [9] highlighted that teachers who lack the knowledge along with inclusive education often held stereotypical views. The study revealed that majority participants lack the knowledge about inclusive education and only a few have information about it.

A.1. Unfamiliarity

Most of the participants do not have first-hand information along with inclusive education. They honestly said that they are not familiar with the term and some never have heard of it. This might result in more serious problems in the future if more teachers who lack information about this would teach learners with special needs. The lack of knowledge on the part of the teacher is a challenge to inclusive education. If teachers do not know how to handle such students, no learning will take place, as they may do more harm than good. The following are quotations of the participants on the issue highlighted.

"What is that? I do not know anything about it."
"It is my first time to hear inclusive education. I am sorry."
"....not familiar with the term."

This implies that an inclusive education seminar and training is needed for teachers to gain information and receive the necessary skills to handle inclusive classes.

A.2. Inclusivity

Few teachers cited that inclusive education is about mainstreaming students with special needs into regular classes. This adheres to the definition of OECD [10] about inclusive education as a place where diversified students learn together in the same classroom using materials that cater to their specific needs. This allows all students to participate in regular classrooms regardless of disability or other characteristics. Citations from teachers are as follows:

"Those students who have impairment are fused in standard regular classes."

"Students who need physical, mental, or emotional support are mixed with regular students."

"....abnormal students are mixed in normal classes."

"It is about schools accepting children with physical and intellectual disability."
From this, teachers and other learners must also be aware of the right/appropriate term in describing the conditions of special learners.

**Barriers To Inclusive Education**

In this study, barriers for students with exceptionalities in inclusive classrooms were revealed. These barriers emanated from teachers' lack of training, bullying, problems of infrastructure, students learning, curriculum, class size, the lack of resources and other pupil-related problems. According to Burden [11], these barriers to learning are those "factors that lead in the inability of institutions to accommodate diversity."

**B.1. Lack of Training**

Most participants believed their ability to handle and teach students with special needs were affected because of their lack of training on inclusive education. They quoted that it affected their teaching particularly in giving meaningful activities to the learners. Ali, Mutsapa, and Jelas [12] stated that teachers who teach without training are like forcing them to enter areas they are not sure about or not fascinated by. Quotations from participants say:

"It was my first time to handle a student with a physical disability. Honestly, I did not know how I would sustain his interest. He would have appreciated my lessons more if I have more knowledge in dealing with his condition. I would have wanted to personalize the activities for him."

"At first, I did not know how to make my lessons meaningful to him. I wish I would have training at least."

"I tried looking for possible activities that she can personally relate to. I think she would be more productive if I was given the chance to know more about special students. But I'm still happy I tried my best to teach them all."

This suggests that the university must conduct inclusive education training and workshops for the teachers to gain the necessary skills in handling students with exceptionalities.

**B.2. Bullying**

A good number of participants noted that bullying is a growing concern in the school. They revealed that learners with disabilities found and hard to make friends making them prone to bullying and name-calling. This implies that bullying and labeling take place, and this challenge has to be addressed for students with exceptionalities to benefit in inclusive classrooms. Pearson [13] stated that students' nature of impairment may generate a greater risk of bullying.

"A learner with a disability might get bullied. It is very scary."

"There are students who would look and make fun of him, and it truly is heartbreaking."

"...regular students already get bullied so how much more for the disabled learners."

From this, the Guidance and Counselling Services must give an orientation to all students about bullying to break the growing cases of students being bullied.

**B.3. Problems Of Infrastructure**

Participants are worried about their students' ability to move from one classroom to another. They pointed out that buildings and infrastructures in the university were not planned to have students with disabilities in mind. Aniscow [14] says that the lack of access to toilets would much likely result in students with disabilities to no attend school as one of their necessities are hindered, thus, it could be one of the many factors why the student is absent in the class. Participants stated:

"There are buildings in the university have no ramps and handrails. Not all buildings have toilets suited for their condition."

"...no signage's even at the entrance of the school."

This suggests that school administrators and the head of the Planning Services must construct buildings that would cater to the needs of students with disabilities, thus ramps, comfort rooms, should be accessible and available for all.

**Student Related Problems**

The participants recorded absences from the students especially during group performances as well as their lack of participation in the class. The National Center on Educational Outcomes highlighted many factors that may contribute to higher rates of absences among students with disabilities. Among these are chronic health conditions, anxiety caused by bullying...
and harassment, inappropriate or inadequate special education and other related services. For example, a student may be absent because she is isolated from peers and excluded from enjoyable extra-curricular and after school activities. Another may be struggling academically due to a lack of accessible instructional materials. Quotes from the participant say:

"...few times she was absent especially during group activities."

"....not participative at all."

"If I had to schedule a group activity in advance, he is not around on that day."

This suggests that teachers must communicate in a non-accusatory manner with the parent, caregiver, and student to build a supportive relationship and to emphasize the importance of regular attendance. They should also identify the root causes of absenteeism and non-participation in-class activities and find the steps necessary to solve them.

B.5. Curriculum

Participants considered that the university's curriculum is rigid. They believed that this is a problem in the implementation of inclusive education in the school. They also cited that the curriculum is not as flexible as it should be. The inclusive curriculum should be flexible, sensitive and promotes the diversity of learners. Participants uttered:

"We are following a curriculum solely for regular classes. No curriculum is intended for students with disabilities."

"Our curriculum at the university was made for regular students only."

"I had a problem with the rigidity of the curriculum."

This suggests that curriculum makers in the university must take into consideration the needs of learners with exceptionalities. A flexible curriculum must be developed well enough for teachers to make necessary adjustments to respond to the student's differences.

B.6. Class Size

Few participants also had problems along with the teacher-student ratio. A big class size poses specific classroom management issues and possibly resulted in teachers to be reluctant in paying extra attention to the learners in the inclusive classroom. Ali, Mutsapa and Jelas [12] say even a brilliant teacher would struggle to provide for all especially considering that the class would be a combination of students with diverse special needs.

The participants experienced problems in identifying what their students need because of the big class size. Participants stated:

"I have more than 40 students in my class. A big number like that makes it hard for me to focus on his needs alone."

"I had a problem with paying attention to his needs because of too many students in one class."

"....attending to everyone's needs is almost impossible."

This suggests that classrooms must be conducive for learning and student-ratio must be well-planned to deliver effective teaching and gain higher student achievement.

B.7. Lack of Resources

The lack of resources was considered a problem and the participants said that the university lacks special equipment and technology to cater to the needs of learners with disabilities. Sebba and Sachdev [15] call these assistive technology devices. Assistive technology devices would increase student independence and participation. McConkey and Dorothy [16] pointed out that this concurrently provides learners to have equal access to the school environment. Participants also thought that the students receive limited resources so the university must provide ample resources for them. Participants quoted:

"I think the university lack equipment and resources for students with special needs. I hope they will also be given more attention and support."

"I wish there would be technologies to better assist them with their needs in school."

"...no enough resources."

From this, to meet student's unique needs, specialized books and materials must be provided for the learners to use and for the teachers to have references. Likewise, specialized equipment and
technology should also be present in the classrooms to cater to the needs of the identified special learners.

Managing Inclusion Problems

Teachers shared their sentiments towards handling learners with exceptionalities and they have collectively agreed that fairness, communication, and affection are possible ways to manage students' behaviors. According to Brophy[17], approval and reinforcement are possible methods to handle students' behavior. Studies emphasized that teachers need to approve students' behavior to increase positive academic attitudes and decrease inappropriate conduct.

C.1. Fairness

Most teachers agreed on giving fair and just treatment to all the learners in the class. This would create equality and would divide the wall against prejudices towards students with special needs. They also mentioned that special needs students must be made well-aware of their rights. This supports the finding of Choate [18] that communities become more open-minded when inclusive education programs are present. The introduction of one child with special needs may result in the breakdown judgments and prejudices against them. This would encourage a positive and welcoming environment for students with disabilities. The following are quotations from the participants:

"I feel like they deserve equal treatment just like others in the group"

"As a teacher, I have to be fair in my actions and also with my decisions. I do not favor one student over the other. I accept the fact that they are different and they need the same respect just like the rest of the class."

"It is better to give fair treatment to the students. Diversity of learners should be promoted."

"First of all, the learner must know his rights so that he will not feel out-of-place."

"I feel like it would be best that these students know that they are protected. There are already programs of the government that promote their rights."

This suggests that learners must be given special orientation programs about their rights and they must be positively introduced in the class or the community.

C.2. Collaboration

All of the participants said the same solution in addressing their concerns and problems. They believed collaboration and communication is the best way to understand their students' condition and to know exactly how they feel. This means that all the stakeholders must work hand-in-hand to help learners with special needs. Carter & Hughes [19] said that regular engagement in collaborative problem-solving by teachers and other professionals is a requirement in an inclusive classroom. Through collaboration, staff in the whole school can share ideas and suggest ways to better the implementation of inclusive education in the university. Quotations from the participants say:

"After finding out that he is going through something, I immediately called his attention and talked to him privately."

I let his mom come to me and we talked. I promised to do what I can to help his child. That is what teachers do."

"When I found out I would handle a student like him, I instantly talked to the whole class."

"It is good that I can freely talk to my teachers in the faculty room. We talked about his frequent absences and we experienced the same problem."

"When I saw his grades last semester, I was worried. As an adviser, I asked some of the faculty members about his condition. We were all on the same boat trying to help him."

These comments suggest that administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders must provide classroom-based interventions to ensure students' success.

C.3. Verbal Approvals

The participants expressed their support to the students in many forms. More than half of the participants showed their students that they are being loved, cared, appreciated and protected so that students' self-esteem will be uplifted. This is supported by Chalk &Bizo[20] that the use of verbal approvals creates positive results in managing students' misbehaviors, thus they get more time to focus on academic work. Participants mentioned:

"I tell it not only him but to all of my class that I care for them and I love them just the way they are."
"Telling him he’s doing great in my class whenever he does something good, makes him happy"

"Just simply being there whenever they needed someone to talk to is already enough to make them feel they are loved.

"I had to make them feel they are loved and that I care for them"

"......give simple praises and appreciation."

These comments suggest that teachers who handle learners with special needs must show concern and give simple appreciation to learners to boost their morale and manage their behaviors.

Needs of Teachers and Students
The results suggested that adequate seminars and training would enable teachers to function effectively in inclusive classrooms. This is a pre-requisite in the successful implementation of inclusive education in the university. Needs that were revealed from the interviews include seminars/workshops, dissemination and special programs.

D.1. Training, Seminars/Workshops
The participants extensively identified the need to have trained along inclusive education to better teach students with special needs. The teachers believe that knowledge should come first before the implementation of inclusive education in the university. Needs that were revealed from the interviews include seminars/workshops, dissemination and special programs.

"A brochure has to be distributed to everyone on the campus. So everybody will be aware of what inclusive education is."

"I have not read any pamphlet on inclusive education. Perhaps making one would easily inform us."

"It is about time that everyone knows what this is. So any means to make it known on the entire campus would be a great idea"

"Inclusive education must be widely-known in the university."

This suggests that a brochure, a pamphlet and any other means of information dissemination could be a great start in a university-wide campaign to promote inclusive education.

D.2. Dissemination
The participants suggested that there should be a mechanism to largely inform the faculty and the students about inclusive education so that nobody has an excuse for not supporting it. All of them shared a common idea to introduce inclusive education to teachers, students, and personnel in the university. According to Edwards [22], a dissemination plan is vital for the achievement of the sustainability of final outputs in inclusive education. Participants stated:

"The university must conduct appropriate training, seminars, and workshops on inclusive education."

In the implementation of inclusive education, this suggests that school administrators must give significant training, seminars/workshops along with inclusive education so that teachers may provide an effective and stimulating environment for all types of students.

D.3. Special Programs
A good number of participants recognized the importance of having programs and services that would uplift the self-esteem of students with exceptionalities. They believed that the university must create programs and activities to promote the students' abilities. The Council for Exceptional Children believes all children, youth, and young adults with disabilities are entitled to free and appropriate educational programs and/or services that lead to an adult life characterized by satisfying relations with others, independent living, productive engagement in the community, and participation in society at large.

"It seems appropriate that the university conducts annual program or activity where these students convene and they will be given special services and be morally uplifted."
"There have to be special programs offered for students with special needs."

"Life skills and vocational training programs should be given to the learners."

To achieve such outcomes, programs created must be based on individual educational needs. There must exist for all learners with special needs for a rich variety of early intervention, educational and vocational program options and experience. Also, students and their families must be acknowledged as members of the planning team and their recommendations on the placement and curriculum to be pursued by the students should be accepted.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study captured the teachers’ retrospective view of their experiences in handling students with special needs. The population interviewed for this study involved tertiary faculty of the University of Northern Philippines. It found out that all participants who handled inclusive classes did not undergo any seminar/training on inclusive education, thus, teacher’s encountered problems along with bullying, infrastructure, students learning, curriculum, class size, and limited resource.

The small ranges of participants may limit the universality of the insights and practices of teachers. Further research is needed with participants from basic, technical-vocational, and higher education teachers.

Further in-depth study in understanding teachers' live experiences in inclusive classrooms, identifying the stressors, resilience, and protective factors must be conducted. These findings could be helpful for the field of counseling psychology and foster a greater diversity of learners. This information could be most valuable by translating findings to provide workshops for the teachers and outreach services, counseling and support groups for students with special needs.

This study has shown the dynamics of inclusive education and the experiences of teachers in handling students with exceptionalities. This study provides a voice for the teachers and validates their experience. Further research is needed to emphasizing the strategies of teachers in inclusive education classrooms. More research should be conducted where students, parents, and administrators are included in the interviews.

Results and outputs from this research must also be widely disseminated so that inclusive education will be improved.

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