

Challenges And Opportunities of Senior High School Graduates with Learning Disabilities

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ABSTRACT : This study explores the lived experiences of senior high school graduates with learning disabilities, focusing on the challenges they face after completing senior high school and the opportunities available to them during and beyond their secondary education. Using a **phenomenological research design**, the study seeks to capture the personal narratives and insights of individuals who have navigated the academic and social landscape with learning difficulties. Through in-depth interviews, the research aims to understand the barriers these graduates encounter in pursuing higher education, employment, and independent living, as well as the support systems and interventions that have facilitated their growth and transition. The findings are intended to inform educators, school leaders, and policymakers in creating more inclusive and responsive programs that address the unique needs of learners with disabilities, both within senior high school and in their post-secondary journeys.

I. INTRODUCTION

DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021. This order aims to create a more inclusive environment for all learners by ensuring that students with disabilities are included in general education classes.

The transition from high school to adulthood is a significant milestone in the lives of all young individuals. However, for those with disabilities, this journey can be particularly complex and challenging. (Lenz, 2001) This research paper aims to determine the challenges and opportunities of senior high school graduates with learning disabilities as they navigate the post-senior high landscape, shedding light on the barriers they encounter and the strategies they employ to achieve their aspirations.

The literature on this topic highlights the multifaceted nature of the transition process for individuals with disabilities. Researchers have emphasized the importance of understanding the experiences of students and their parents as they leave the structured environment of high school and venture into the next stage of their lives. (Shields, 2017) The transition to adulthood involves a broad spectrum of life issues, such as separating from the family, facing new challenges, learning decision-making and problem-solving techniques, and preparing for the pressures of adult life (Halpern, 1994).

Individuals with disabilities often face significant hurdles in their transition to adulthood. Studies have shown that for many students, high school is not a positive experience leading to a successful transition to adult life. Unemployment, financial dependence, and lack of social relationships are common outcomes faced by students with disabilities as they leave high school. (Hughes, 2001)

Research Questions

The study aimed to describe the life of a students with disabilities after senior high school, specifically it sought to answer the following questions.

1. What are challenges of the senior high graduates with learning disabilities (LD) experienced?
In terms of:
 - a. Academic and
 - b. Social aspect
2. What are the opportunities offered to senior high students with learning disabilities (LD) after senior high?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges and Opportunities of Senior High Graduates with Learning Disabilities

Challenges and opportunities of senior high graduates with learning disabilities. As SHS graduates with learning disabilities move beyond secondary education, both the challenges they face and the opportunities available to them are shaped by a range of factors, including societal perceptions, educational support systems, and individualized approaches to learning and skill development. This idea was stated by Kim Riley Founder of

Transition Academy. Riley addresses the challenges and opportunities for youth with disabilities. The information above was augmented by Swanson & Deshler, (2003). When they said that *Academic Performance and Achievement Gaps* One of the most significant academic challenges faced by students with learning disabilities is a persistent gap in achievement compared to their non-disabled peers. Research shows that students with LDs often score lower on standardized tests and have difficulty completing academic tasks on time, especially in reading, writing, and mathematics.

According to Bursuck & Poth, (2004) this gap tends to persist after high school graduation, with many individuals finding it difficult to meet the academic demands of post-secondary education. Despite this, students with LDs may show strengths in other areas, such as creativity or problem-solving, but their academic challenges are often a source of frustration and discouragement.

Challenges Faced by Students with Learning Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education: A Shift from Structured Support to Greater Independence

Meanwhile, Gerber et al., (2014). Defines features of Difficulty in Post-secondary Academic Settings The shift from SHS to higher education is marked by a transition from a structured environment to one with fewer supports and accommodations. Studies have found that students with learning disabilities often struggle in postsecondary settings where accommodations are less explicitly integrated into the academic experience, and professors may have limited understanding or awareness of LDs. Without appropriate support services or individualized education plans, students with LDs may face difficulties with note-taking, reading comprehension, writing assignments, and time management.

Challenges of Academic Rigor for Students with Learning Disabilities

As cited by Vaughn et al., (2009). Challenges with Academic Rigor: Higher education demands higher levels of academic rigor and independent learning, which can be particularly overwhelming for individuals with learning disabilities. In postsecondary settings, students are expected to be more self-directed, which can create challenges for those with LDs who need structured guidance. Many students with LDs report difficulties with self-advocacy and time management in such environments, resulting in academic underachievement.

Academic Challenges and Support Gaps for Senior High Graduates with Learning Disabilities in the Philippines

In the Philippines, students with learning disabilities (LDs) face several unique academic challenges, especially as they transition from Senior High School (SHS) to higher education or the workforce. Learning disabilities are neurological conditions that impact students' ability to process, retain, and express information, which affects academic skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and executive functions. While national policies and educational reforms have been made to accommodate learners with special needs, there remain significant gaps in support and resources for students with learning disabilities. This review of related literature focuses on the academic challenges and opportunities faced by Senior High graduates with learning disabilities in the Philippine context, specifically within the education system.

Limited Awareness and Training on Learning Disabilities: A Challenge for Educators in the Philippines

Limited Awareness and Understanding of Learning Disabilities *Lack of Training for Educators:* A major challenge for students with learning disabilities in the Philippines is the limited awareness and understanding of learning disabilities among educators. Research has shown that many teachers are not equipped with the necessary knowledge or training to identify and support students with LDs (Dizon & Esguerra, 2018). Teachers often struggle to differentiate between students who are underperforming due to lack of motivation or those who are genuinely facing cognitive difficulties. As a result, students with LDs may not receive the specialized instructional strategies they need, resulting in academic underachievement.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The phenomenological approach will be used for this study. After the researchers set aside all personal preconceived experiences, the bracketing stage. Theme clustering was done by analyzing, outlining and grouping the significant statements into themes or meaningful units. The first group of theme cluster was formulated to answer the central questions of the study: What are the challenges senior high with learning disabilities face graduations? (Textural description) The second group of themes answered the second central question: Opportunities offered to senior high graduates with learning disabilities? (Structural description).

Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies challenges and opportunities of senior high graduates with learning disabilities in terms of academic and social aspect. The essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study (Creswell, 2009). In this approach, the researcher focuses on a concept or phenomenon and seeks to understand the meaning of experiences of individuals who have experienced or "lived" the phenomenon.

Respondents

The researcher conducted the study at the National High School. It has a total population of 10 senior high graduates with learning disabilities. It is an integrated school offering SPED at senior high. The school was managed by a Secondary School Principal I.

Instruments of the Study

This study used Interview tool to determine the life of students with disabilities after senior High. Specifically, In-depth interviewing was utilized to conduct an interview since it resembles conversations, but with pre-determined response categories. In this Type of interview, a degree a systematization in questioning maybe necessary, especially in a multi-site case study or when many participants are interviewed. This way large amount of data is gathered quickly and immediate follow-up and clarifications are possible. Further in this type of interview, interviewer should have excellent listening skills, and be equally skillful at personal interaction, questioning framing and gentle probing for elaboration.

A self-constructed questionnaire was the tool for study in evaluating. The life of a student with a disability after Senior High. The instrument comprise only of one parts: Part 1. Includes the description of the experience of the student with disability after Senior High. The personal data of the respondents was optional.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers asked permission to the school authorities and to the students who are the main respondents in the study. The researchers explained to students on what is the purpose of the study and conducted interviews during those scheduled visits. The collected data were analyzed using theme clustering outlining and grouping significant statements into themes or meaningful units.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher submitted a letter to the ethics committee regarding the conduct of the study at the same time requesting for a clearance for the conduct of the survey. The investigator followed the basic ethical principles in research for the conduct of the study, since human subjects were involved as respondents.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents will fill an instrument (optional) to give them their personal data. After that, the researcher will ask questions regarding research objectives and literature. Transcripts will be analyzed using Thematic Analysis to describe the emerging patterns and relevant themes, ultimately forming study findings.

Based on the data gathered from the survey and interviews, 6 out of 10 respondents are male, and 4 are female. Among the male respondents, 4 students ages 18, with 3 diagnosed with both dyslexia and dyscalculia, and 1 student diagnosed with dyslexia. One male ages 20 diagnosed both dyslexia and dyscalculia, while the other male ages 21 is diagnosed with dyscalculia. For the females, 2 students ages 18, both diagnosed with dyslexia and dyscalculia, and 2 are ages 19 with the same disability. All of them are single, they have completed their secondary education, and graduated last school year 2023-2024.. Out of the 10 respondents, 1 is employed as a janitor at Mang Tinapay for 11 months, while the other 9 are unemployed and still seeking for a job.

This section presents the responses from respondents regarding the challenges they encountered after graduating from senior high school, focusing on both academic and social aspects. It also highlights the opportunities that have been available to them.

1. What challenges do Senior High School with learning disabilities face after graduation?

In terms of:

A. Academic and;

Theme (Academic)	Respondents
Theme 1: Struggles with Specific Subjects Most graduates reported significant challenges with Mathematics and reading comprehension, particularly in processing complex problems or remembering procedures. (G1, G2, G4, and G5). In the Philippines, students with learning disabilities (LDs) face several unique academic challenges, especially as they transition from Senior High School (SHS) to higher education or the workforce. Learning disabilities are neurological conditions that impact students' ability to process, retain, and express information, which affects academic skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and executive functions. While national policies and educational reforms have been made to accommodate learners with special needs, there remain significant gaps in support and resources for students with	G1: "Alegre io percausa ya gradua ion a senior maskin tan dipisil io man apas kunel maga lesson pati requirements ta dale el de amun maga maestro i maestra. El uno tan dipisil io na senior high deantes si pakilaya le pati intende el mga malisud palabra, amo ya abaha el dimio grado na mga otro subjects. Usada del maga numero pati man problem solving ta dale kumigo duele na cabeza percausa ta ulbida io si pakilaya el proseso amo se tan mali-mali el dimio maga answer. Pero maskin kosa problema ya pasa, ya puede lang syempre gradua percausa na ayuda del dimio mga amigo amiga pati dimio maga maestro i maestro." G2: "Masaya ako dahil ako ay nakapagtapos sa senior at ang mga magulang ay proud na proud sa akin. Ang achievement na ito ay hindi ko masasabing madali koi tong nakuha dahil sa

learning disabilities. This review of related literature focuses on the academic challenges and opportunities faced by Senior High graduates with learning disabilities in the Philippine context, specifically within the education system. Limited Awareness and Understanding of Learning Disabilities **Lack of Training for Educators:** A major challenge for students with learning disabilities in the Philippines is the limited awareness and understanding of learning disabilities among educators. Research has shown that many teachers are not equipped with the necessary knowledge or training to identify and support students with LDs (Dizon & Esguerra, 2018).

mga pagsubok na nakaharap ko lalo na subject na Mathematics. Nahihirapan ako lalo na sap ag memorize ng mga formula, sa pag solve ng mga problems, graphs at iba pa. Dahil rito, ay bumaba ang grado ko sa Math pero hindi rin sa punto na masyadong mababa. Ang plano ko sana pagkatapos ko ng senior high ay mag enroll sa college.”

(Source: Interview, December 04, 2024)

G4: “Si bien alegre io maskin bien manada maga problema ya pasa pero ya puede lang syempre gradua. Ara, na de amun casa lng io ta ayuda na dimio nana I tata ta ayuda mentras ta mira-mira io kosa maga trabaho puede io incuntra. Kere era io entra na college pero hindi kaya el de mio pamilya paga el tuition fee na college para puede io entra. Kera paman era io keda engineer maskin hindi gat io Bueno na Math, na English maskin na Filipino. Ese maga duele palabra maga comments, discrimination tali lang se pirmi pero manda io mira kunila n achene io el kapabilidad pati el determinasyon aprende para puede io alkansa el dimio goal na bida. Ara, ta buska-buska io trabaho para puede io man ipon sen para na college.”

(Source: Interview, December 05, 2024)

G5: “Bien thankful pati alegre kay maskin io student with learning disability dyscalculia, ya puede lng gat syempre gradua. Este dimio discapacidad ya dale gat kumigo dipisil tiempo del dimio senior high. Tan harta gat io aprende el na Math si pakilaya el maga steps, el patterns pati el advance advance Math ta duele el dimio cabeza. Ta uwi io el dimio maga uban classmates ta tenta kumigo kay no pede io man answer na para kunila dol pasi lang. Duele ele para kumigo uwi. Pero beuno ya lang chene io maga buen amigo i amiga ta intende pati ta ayuda kumigo si necesita io el diila ayuda. Nuay io plano ara kay kere ya io buska trabaho. Kere ya io man ipon sen para puede ya io ayuda na dimio nana i tata.”

(Source: Interview, December 06, 2024)

The responses indicates that students with learning disabilities often face significant challenges in mathematics and reading comprehension, particularly when processing complex problems or remembering procedures. For instance, a study on Filipino children with learning difficulties highlights issues in acquiring mathematics skills, noting that language barriers and limited understanding of mathematical terms can impede problem-solving abilities. (The acquisition of mathematics skills of Filipino children with learning difficulties Issues and challenges, April 2019, Maria Hazelle Riesgo Preclaro).

1. What challenges do Senior High School with learning disabilities face after graduation?

In terms of:

B. Social Aspect

Theme (Social)	Respondents
Theme 1: Discrimination and Mockery Experiences of discrimination and being mocked by peers for their disabilities were common (G5, G6, G9). This will greatly affect their academic and social well-being. These students often face stigma, exclusion, and prejudice from peers, educators, and even society at large. Such treatment can undermine their self-esteem, increase anxiety, and hinder their ability to thrive in educational environments. According to research by <i>Lindsay (2016)</i> , students with learning disabilities are more likely to experience bullying and social isolation, which can further exacerbate their challenges. Moreover, <i>Hornby (2014)</i> highlights that educators' negative attitudes toward learning disabilities can contribute to discrimination in the classroom, leading to unequal opportunities and a lack of proper support. It is essential to foster an inclusive and supportive environment where these students are recognized for their potential rather than marginalized for their	Graduate 5: “Si Sir bien alegre io maskin chene io disabiidad ya puede lang syempre gradua. Este dimio kundisyon ya harta gat io tiempo na senior high pa io. Tan dipisil aprende na Math, man memorize si pakilaya el maga steps, patterns, hasta el advance Math da duele dimio cabeza. Ese dimio maga uban classmates ta tenta kumigo na no puede io aprende i bonamente igual kunila, ta sinti duele el dimio corason. Pero Bueno ya lang chene io alli maga buen uban na ta intende el dimio sitwasyon, pati ta ayuda si nececita. Nuay pa io plano entra eskwela percause tan plano io buksa trabaho. Hindi man io ta abla na no kere io entra sadya nuay kame sen para paga el maga nececita para na college. Man ipon anay io para puede io entra sunod anyo. Pati pirmi se io ta pone na dimio cabeza na el de amun pagka pobresa, hindi se el rason para hindi io puede eskwela.” (Source: Interview, December 06, 2024)
	Graduate 5: “Bale na ruswelyo akel ya puede io gradua na senior

<p>challenges.</p>	<p>high. Dol chene ya kita espina na dimio garganta. Hasta ara ta puede syempre io acurda akel dilla maga insulato, maga malo palabra ta buta sila kumigo na tan dipisil io man apas kunel de amun maga requirements na eskwela amok el yan trouble pa gale. Ya manda lama kunamun na principal's office pero bueno ya lang ya dale kunamun warning na hindi ya daw dapat sosede kel ule. Akaba io ya gradua, Nuay na dimio cabeza man enroll na college. Dol, no kere ya io sinti kosa ya pasa kumigo na senior high. Pero chene suwerte, ya puede io saka trabaho na Mang Tinapay janitor. Maga onse semana ya io alya ta trabaha. Ese maga dia, semana ya io alya ta trabaha, ta puede io risibi maga malo palabra, reganya na dimio maga uban pero dol tan anad ya io. Ta asa ya lng io dol nuay keber kunila. Ta pensa ya lang io para na dimio pamilya este amo se el rason porke io ta trabaha.” (Source: Interview, December 06, 2024)</p> <p>Graduate 9: “Akel ya gradua ion a senior high, chene dos plano io ta puede pensa. Entra ba ion a college o buska io trabaho. Pero sayang, nuay io puede entra na college percuasa nuay kame sen pati chene io miedo baka puede io resibi igual kosa ya pasa kumigo na de antes na senior high. Chene io miedo na baka ase malo el dimio maga classmates kumigo kay hindi io igual kunila. Baka re sila kumigo si manda le kumigo el di amun maetra kay tan lisud io le embonamente. Ta pone ya lang io el dimio atensyon buska trabaho. Hindi gale pasi buska trabaho pero mas Bueno ya este kaysa man tamba na casa nuay cosa ta ase. Mentras ta espera na diila liamada, ta ayuda io na dimio nana I tata na casa. (Source: Interview, December 10, 2024)</p>
<p>Theme 2: Fear of College Life Graduates expressed hesitation about enrolling in college, citing fears of academic challenges, discrimination, and social adaptation (G2, G3, G4, and G9). The fear and anxiety students with learning disabilities (LD) feel about college life is heightened by a variety of factors. Such students might be concerned with academic success, fitting in socially and coping with the newfound autonomy expected at the college level. The self-paced learning approach and the stimulating assessments used cause anxiety in students with LD due to fear of abandonment (Davis, 2014). As Lerner (2013) argues, the unknown aspect of if and when accommodations will be available and whether students have confidence in their effectiveness can exacerbate anxiety.</p>	<p>Graduate 2: “Masayang masaya ako dahil ako ay nakapagtapos ng kolehiyo at proud na proud ang mga magulang ko sa akin. Itong achievement ay hindi madali para sa akin at marami rin akong mga challenges na nadaan at isa na dun ang asignaturang Mathematics. Since Senior High na ako, expected na na mahirap ang lesson namin sa Mathematics at nahihirapan akong magmemorize at magsolve ng math equation, etc. not to the point na nakaka-alarma na nananatili sa bahay na tumutulong sa aking Nanay sa paggawa ng mga gawaing bahay. (Source: Interview, December 04, 2024)</p> <p>Graduate 3: “Una, bien thankful io kun lord pati algere kay ya puede gat io akaba na Senior High .Malisud man, manada kosa ya pasa pero worth el dimio sakripisyo. Kere-kere gat era io keda man in uniform. Policeman. Pero este tiempo nuay io puede man enroll percausa nuay kame sakto budget pati chene io miedo tenta-tenta mi uban I maga classmate kumigo. Pero ya abla mio nana I tata na prikura sila man enroll ion a otro anyo. Prikura io na otro anyo ase io buen mi istudya para man kamit el dimio pangarap na bida.Ta dale io gracias na dimio pamilya ta suporta kumigo. (Source: Interview, December 05, 2024)</p> <p>Graduate 4: “Si mam. Alegre io maskin chene io maga problema ase akaba el dimio maga requirements, ya puede lng gat syempre io gradua.“Of course I’m very happy despite having difficulties in completing all of my requirements to able to graduate. Right now, I’ve been at home for a while, helping my parents doing household chores waiting for an opportunity to come. I want to pursue college but my family can’t afford the tuition needed for me to be enrolled. I want to be engineer someday. Even I myself is not good in Math, English or even Filipino. Discrimination will always be there. Receiving hurtful words or comments that may put me down. But still I will prove to them that I have the capability and the determination to learn in order to fulfill my goal. For now, I’m planning to find a job so that I could earn money to be able to go to college. With determination and strength nothing’s impossible.” (Source: Interview, December 05, 2024)</p>

Experiences of discrimination and mockery among students with disabilities are prevalent in the Philippines. A 2021 UNESCO report indicates that children with disabilities are two to four times more likely to be bullied at school than their non-disabled peers. (Incomplete data on bullying weakens protection of children with disabilities, February 14, 2023, Phil star) Additionally, societal stigma and misconceptions contribute to the marginalization of persons with disabilities, often leading to their exclusion from community activities and leadership roles. (Including persons with disabilities in peacebuilding in the Philippines, April 2021, Norhanie Mamasabulod Taha).

V. INSIGHTS

Homosexuality is not appropriate in the sight of God or Allah if we are going to base on the Holy Bible or Quran. In a society wherein a gay exists, there is a notion that the gays are not fully accepted in the sight of some other persons that may result to bullying, unfair treatment, work deprivation or employment status, lack of support from some parents or family members.

Yet, as we live in this world, we should show love, support, respect and accept other person no matter what race, religion, sex do we have. Acceptance should always start at home. Some CPs still do not believe that their son is gay. They have high hopes and dreams for them but things fell down upon discovering of their homosexuality. Some scold them for being gay but some just ignore the reality. Some CPs are also afraid of the consequences of their son being gay especially from being bullied and discriminated.

For this, we must always have faith in God. We may not understand all the things that happen to us but remember that everything happens for a reason. We need to trust God always. Also, we should treasure our family and friends, and all those people that we trust, for they will always be there for us. Importantly, we must always be strong in facing the adversities of life, including stress, because if we let stress defeat us, we might as well fail as a person.

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