

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION HEADSTART PROGRAM OF ISABELA, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the status of Headstart Program in Isabela, Philippines. Specifically, it assessed the following; (1) Headstart Program organization; (2) screening of gifted and talented preschoolers; (3) qualifying gifted preschoolers based on prescribed indicators; (4) Headstart teachers' level of competencies; (5) implementation of preferred curriculum; (6) evidence of preferred Headstart teaching and learning strategies; (7) programs and services; (8) evaluating progress of gifted and talented preschoolers; and (9) support systems of Headstart program. Descriptive survey method was used through data collection such as interviews and documentation. Instruments comprised checklists, interview questions, recordings and documents. Participants were school administrators, teachers and parents of Headstart preschoolers in five public schools with Headstart Program in Isabela, Philippines. Frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, and rating scale with descriptive interpretations were utilized. Findings show that the level of implementation of each of the nine aspects of Headstart Program in Isabela was "very evident". Results imply affirmation of participants on the program operation. In conclusion, there is a smooth flow of execution and program goals are attained. However, implementation Headstart Program aspects still need improvement. Same investigation is recommended to be conducted with other group of learners of Gifted Education in the country.

Keywords: Headstart Program, Philippines Headstart, gifted and talented preschoolers, gifted learners

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) lays the foundation for continuing development of children in terms of knowledge skills and attitude (Inciong, Quijano, Capulong, Gregorio & Ginez, 2007). ECE plays an important and dynamic role in the formation of learners. In this context, early education of gifted and talented children must be given attention and support. In the Philippines, Special Education (SPED) meets the needs of an exceptional child or a group of outstanding children through educational plans and instruments which could develop individual's capacity and potentiality to the highest level. There is a wide range of exceptionality covered by SPED. However, in developing programs for gifted, many controversies and questions are raised and one of these is, 'who is the gifted child?' or what does giftedness really means? The knowledge about giftedness to everybody helps a lot in dealing and guiding the gifted children. According to Howard Gardner, all human beings possess multiple intelligence in at least eight areas of intelligence, each related to a specific area of the brain. Gardner believes that intelligence is the capacity to solve problems and create things

(Armstrong, 2020). The National Association for Gifted Children (2019b) conforms to Gardner's definition that gifted children are those who have at least above average intellectual ability and who demonstrate superior achievement in any of the following areas: verbal linguistic, logical mathematical intelligence, bodily kinesthetic, musicality and leadership ability (TEACH Make a Difference, 2019).

Giftedness is the focus of the study. This pertains to possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities (called aptitudes or gifted) in at least one ability domain to a degree that places a child among 10% of his or her age peers (Gagne, 2008). Giftedness is the foundation upon which an educational program for gifted children is built. The specific abilities included in the definition determine the kinds of criteria that are used to identify children for a program and corresponding types of educational services that are provided for them. Therefore, the selection of giftedness and talents as part of the definition, is very important for educators to distinguish children designated as gifted and to deliver them fitting educational support. Gifted preschool children need differentiated education program or service that must be beyond those provided by regular schools. The Department of Education Order No. 99 series of 2009 asserts that Standards for the Organization and Operation of Preschoolers (SOOP) should be implemented properly in screening and identification of prospective Headstart preschoolers (Department of Education, 2009).

Philippine Headstart Program refers to the facet of Special Education (SPED) that is especially designed for the education of gifted and talented kindergarten pupils. It is a preparatory program for 4- 5 years old children who demonstrate high aptitudes beyond their age of maturity period. The main goal of the Headstart Program is to ensure that all 4 to 5 years old gifted and talented children are given the essential assistance to achieve the highest measure of success that matches with their abilities. It is one of the highly recommended educational packages that advocate, monitor and evaluate the early education of gifted and talented young children. To attain excellence in Philippine educational system, Department of Education Order No. 99's. 2009 postulates the standards of organizing Headstart classes for gifted and talented preschoolers. The program seeks to provide appropriate educational services; competent Headstart teacher; appropriate curriculum; differentiated instruction; clear guidelines on the organization of Headstart classes; screening and identification procedures; support of parents and other stakeholders; and evaluation of gifted and talented preschoolers (Department of Education, 2009).

Philippine Headstart Program generally aimed to: (1) offer services for advancement of basic skills and enhancement of multiple intelligence at a pace and depth suited to the capabilities of gifted and talented preschoolers; (2) provide an environment that encourages and challenges gifted preschoolers in the development of creativity, originality, fluency, flexibility and elaboration in their thought processes; and (3) provide opportunities for gifted and talented preschoolers to explore and develop their unique abilities (Department of Education, 2009).

The three general aims of the Headstart Program geared towards the quest for quality and relevance of the education package and services for the gifted and talented pre-schoolers. The attainment of Headstart Program goals lies on the proper management of the nine (9) areas of program namely: (1) Headstart Program organization; (2) screening of gifted and talented preschoolers; (3) qualifying gifted preschoolers based on prescribed indicators; (4) Headstart teachers' level of competencies; (5) implementation of preferred curriculum; (6) evidence of preferred Headstart teaching and learning strategies; (7) programs and services; (8) evaluating progress of gifted and talented preschoolers; and (9) support systems. These program areas are

instituted to ensure that all gifted and talented preschoolers are accorded with the essential support to achieve highest measure of attainment which corresponds with capacities, intelligence and interests of the gifted and talented preschooler (Department of Education, 2009).

Philippine Headstart Program provides appropriate educational service, train teachers, administrators and supervisors on the early identification of gifted and talented preschoolers. It addresses the educational, aesthetic, and social needs of these learners and will ascertain how learning challenges bring out the best in each one of them. Likewise, the program may help Headstart teachers and parents on how to meet the peculiar needs of gifted and talented children (Department of Education, 2009).

Headstart Program Handbook asserts that identifying gifted and talented preschoolers is a complex process. The task becomes easier when it is viewed as a search for unusual human potential. In addition, assessment activities are part of screening process to determine if a child's general level of performance and/or behaviour falls above average or normal range. As mentioned in the Headstart Program Handbook, preschoolers who are gifted and talented tend to developed earlier than their less gifted peers in physical, mental, creative and social skills. Gifted and talented youngsters are capable of high performance and can demonstrate potential ability in any of these six areas: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative and productive thinking, leadership ability, ability in the visual or performing arts, and psychomotor ability (Inciong et al., 2007).

In addition, Headstart Program handbook also stipulated other classifications of gifted such as (1) underachieving gifted, (2) the disadvantage gifted, and (3) the handicapped gifted. Underachieving gifted shows an outstanding functioning on a degree of intelligence but does not perform well as anticipated. The disadvantaged gifted is a child who comes from marginalized family or group of the community. The gifted indigent child manifests characteristics of being highly creative, imaginative in thinking, quick in learning, responds well to media, independent, able to solve problems by indigenous practices, etc. While the handicapped gifted demonstrate extraordinary talents and giftedness despite physical deficiencies and other impairments. Hence, they should receive methodical and/or systematic differentiated instruction and services through their school experience, especially during their first informal school based education. Instruction should adapt to the unique learning styles of gifted and talented learners in the educational system. Different kinds of approaches are necessary in educating them and valuing their achievements. No matter what method is used, recognition and appraisals must inevitably focus on performance and/or accomplishment of the gifted child (Department of Education, 2009).

There are several accounts about issues and problems on the administration of gifted education. Teachers confront some difficulties while employing strategies among gifted students. These include (1) congested classes, (2) excessive workload, (3) inadequate logistics in obtaining materials and learning tools, and (4) inadequate knowledge and lack of in-service trainings (Sahin & Levent, 2015).

Other concerns of Headstart Program is on the appropriateness of normalized test. In some cases, national systematized tests may not fittingly appraise programs with such multiplicity, and that approaches of gifted program assessment requires more consideration. Advance and diverse abilities are hard to measure than basic skills. Programs for the gifted are highly individualized to cater the requirements of every learner; goals are multifarious; and

adjustments in programs often lead to difficulty in assessment. Oklahoma public school districts claimed that uniform instruments fail to stipulate an exact account of how gifted learners' needs are met by means of educational services. Analysis from the viewpoints of stakeholders, offered authorities to confirm more consideration to administrative influences such as budget allocation, curriculum enhancement, circumscribing all-inclusive necessities of giftedness. It was also underscored that arrangement for social and emotional aspects was inadequate, while more efforts are exerted in meeting academic demands of gifted students (Rains, 2015).

Some gifted and talented learners failed to develop work habits and enthusiasm. Hence, resulting to self-esteem issues and underachievement. Gifted students seemed as if they are fine on their own, but some are observed to become wearied and disobedient; dislike repetitive classroom activities; dissatisfied; troublesome; turn out to be non-compliant; and withdraw—either mentally or physically (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2013).

The Philippine Headstart Program have been established and implemented in the 4 divisions in province of Isabela. However, an assessment on its effectiveness was only within school levels and is restricted. The strengths and shortcomings of the Headstart Program need to be uncovered. Problems must be addressed and concerns should be tackled by service providers. Through investigation of the status of the nine areas of the program, stakeholders may become aware on the level achievement and/or insufficiencies of program operation. Hence, this study was contemplated to assess practices in establishing the Headstart Program of Department of Education in Isabela, Philippines. The findings of this investigation may encourage educators of Headstart Program to conduct self-check while accomplishing their tasks of identifying gifted and talented pre-schooler, thus, provide appropriate actions and innovations when need arises. Results can likewise provide direction to address some teaching-learning concerns that may occur during the process; and help in decision-making for the provision of appropriate programs and support services.

Research Paradigm

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the investigation, which employed the Input-Process-Output model. The input of the study includes the guidelines in the organization of Headstart Program; screening, procedure and identification of gifted and talented preschoolers; qualification of the gifted and talented preschoolers; Headstart teacher competence; curriculum; preferred teaching/learning strategies; program and services; bases for assessing gifted, talented preschoolers' progress; and support of parents and other stakeholders.

The processes involved the assessment of Headstart Program through checklist, survey questionnaire, and document analysis. The output describes the status of operation of the Headstart Program based from the assessment administrators, Headstart teachers and parents of gifted and talented preschoolers. The areas that were assessed include the following: (1) organization of the Headstart Program; (2) identification of gifted and talented preschooler; (3) qualifying of gifted and talented preschoolers; (4) teaching competence level of teachers; (5) curriculum implementation; (6) employment of desired teaching/learning strategies; (7) programs and services; (8) assessing the progress of the gifted and talented preschooler; and (9) level of support of parents and other stakeholders.

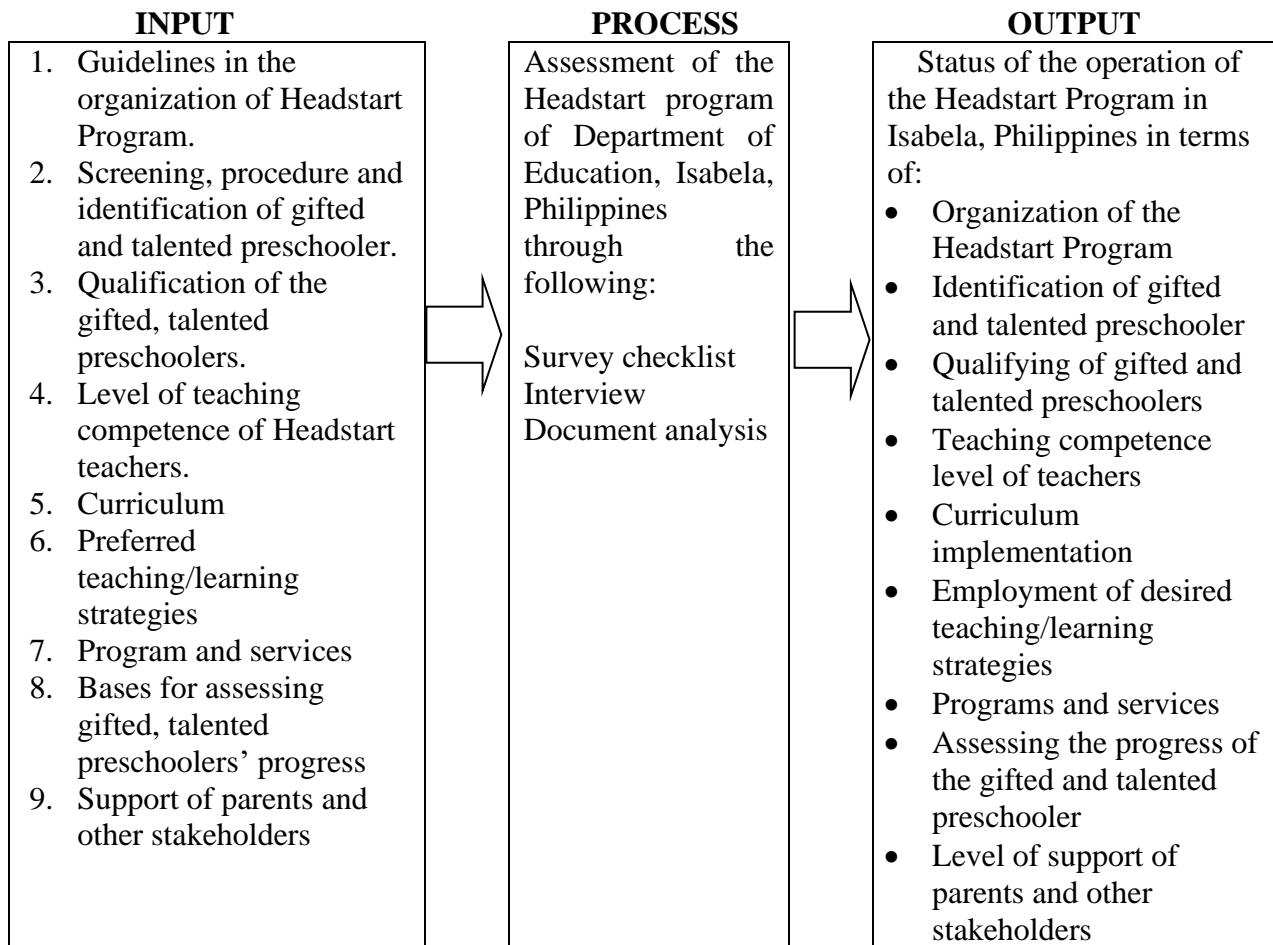


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This is a quantitative study, which utilized a descriptive method. According to Calderon & Gonzales (2004), descriptive research involves explanation, recording, analysis and interpretation of present disposition and process of phenomena. Investigation focuses on the prevailing conditions or how a person, group or thing behaves or functions in the present. The nature of the research is a survey design (Creswell, 2013) that provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population.

The participants were purposively selected. The criteria for the selection of participants were based on the aim of the investigation. The goal of the study was to assess the management of Headstart program, thus, only the administrators, teachers of Headstart and parents of preschool pupils under the program were selected as participants. Therefore, research setting only covered public elementary schools with recognized SPED Centres that manages Headstart programs in Isabela, Philippines. Participants involved were 5 principals, 5 Headstart teachers and 125 parents of gifted and talented preschool pupils who are randomly selected. In the selection of parent-participants, 20% of the population of every school was considered. Parents,

being directly involved with the program implementation, their perceptions on the efficacy or inefficiency of a program area best contributed to the needed data for the research.

Instruments were checklists that contained items to reflect respondents' levels of perceptions regarding various areas of Headstart Program and interview questions to validate the data that were gathered. Data collection procedures include validation of research instruments by experts. Prior to the gathering of information, permissions were sought from each of the 4 Division Offices of Isabela, and lists of schools with recognised SPED Centre that offers Headstart Programs were likewise requested. Data were obtained through distribution and retrieval of checklists from the participants. In the process, the participants were requested to assess the operation of the various areas of the Headstart Program of their school by putting a check mark under the option that corresponds to their rating for every item in the checklist. Results were validated through interviews.

Statistical tools comprised frequency, percentage, weighted mean and rating scale. The following tabularised rating scale was used in determining the level on how the participant assesses the Headstart Program of Isabela, Philippines.

The responses on the checklist were scored on a four-point ranking system adopted from Likert's Method of Summated Rating. Rensis Likert in 1932 was especially interested in simplifying the procedures for constructing attitude scales and in using intensity-scaled responses for each item. He crafted this method clearly to prevent scrupulous and time-consuming practises for scaling (Krabbe, 2017). In this study, the system was modified to a continuum ranging from "Very great Extent/ very evident", "Great extent/ Evident", "Moderate extent/ Less evident", and "Little extent/ Not evident".

Table 1
Rating Scale

Option	Intervals	Interpretation
4	3.00-3.49	Very Great Extent/ very evident
3	2.50-3.49	Great Extent/ Evident
2	1.50-2.49	Moderate Extent/ Less Evident
1	1.00-1.49	Little Extent/ Not Evident

Data analysis was based on the rating scale equivalent to the perception levels and descriptive interpretation provided for each checklist item.

RESULTS

The results refer to the Special Education Headstart Program of Isabela, Philippines. Findings are reported according to perception level of participants on the nine program areas namely: (1) organization of Headstart program; (2) screening of gifted and talented preschoolers; (3) qualifying of gifted and talented preschoolers according to prescribed indicators; (4) competencies of Headstart teachers; (5) implementation of preferred curriculum; (6) evidence of preferred Headstart teaching and learning strategies; (7) programs and services ; (8) evaluating progress of gifted and talented preschoolers; and (9) support system for Headstart program.

Organization of the Headstart Program for Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Table 2 assembles the extent of implementation of Headstart Program in terms of its organization based on the perceptions of participants. Findings show that participants distinguished the organization of the program as “very great extent” connoted by an overall mean of 3.5239. In details, they documented a mean of 3.5919 for the selection of preschool teachers descriptively interpreted as “very great extent. A verified mean of 3.4596 for the selection of preschoolers for Headstart Program indicated a “very great extent” carryover of set guidelines. The three primary stakeholders also recorded a mean of 3.5202 for the organization of preschool classes for the Headstart program, and was described as “very great extent”.

Table 2

Organization of Headstart Program for the Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Selection of preschool teachers for Headstart Program	3.5919	.68368	Very great extent/Very evident
Selection of preschoolers for Headstart Program	3.4596	.80059	Very great extent/Very evident
Organization of pre-school classes for the Headstart Program	3.5202	.57659	Very great extent/Very evident
Overall	3.5239	.54413	Very great extent/Very evident

Screening of Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Table 3 exposes the extent of implementing the standards of Headstart Program for screening of gifted and talented preschoolers based on observations of participants. An overall weighted mean of 3.1796 was noted, which is described as “great extent”. Individual indicator was recorded as “great extent” as to its management during the process. These were presented with their respective weighted means as follows: assessment team (\bar{X} =3.1176); submission of an application form (\bar{X} =3.2096); conduct of an informal assessment (\bar{X} =3.2819); undergo formal assessment (\bar{X} =3.1152); consolidation of assessment results (\bar{X} =3.3051); rules are strictly followed for informal assessment (\bar{X} =3.2397); grading system (\bar{X} =3.1397); acceleration of exceptional children through an informal assessment (\bar{X} =3.1446); class size (\bar{X} =3.2279), and orientation of parents and/or guardians of the informal assessment (\bar{X} =3.2034).

Table 3

Screening of Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Assessment team	3.1176	.83052	Great extent/Evident
Submission of an application form	3.2096	1.04448	Great extent/Evident
Conduct of an informal assessment	3.2819	.83826	Great extent/Evident
Undergo formal assessment	3.1152	.77127	Great extent/Evident
Consolidation of assessment results	3.3051	.75073	Great extent/Evident

Rules are strictly followed for the informal assessment	3.2397	.71542	Great extent/Evident
Grading system	3.1397	.84576	Great extent/Evident
Acceleration of exceptional children through an informal assessment	3.1446	.96242	Great extent/Evident
Class size	3.2279	.81392	Great extent/evident
Orientation of parents/guardians of the informal assessment	3.2034	.80959	Great extent/evident
Overall	3.1796	.72674	Great extent/evident

Extent of Qualifying the Gifted and Talented Preschoolers Based on Prescribed Indicators

Table 4 summarizes the perceptions of participants in relation to implementation of prescribed indicators of qualifying gifted and talented children. Participants perceived this aspect of Headstart Program as “great extent” with an overall mean of 3.2904.

Table 4

Qualifying Gifted and Talented Preschoolers Based on Prescribed Indicators

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Qualifying the gifted and talented preschoolers based on prescribed indicators	3.2904	.66543	Great extent/Evident
Overall	3.2904	.66543	Great extent/Evident

Level of Competencies of Teachers of Headstart Program

Displayed on Table 5 are the perceptions of participants on the competencies of a Headstart teacher as nurturer, observer, planner, facilitator, evaluator and communicator. As a whole, these competencies were rated with an overall mean of 2.8264, considered as “evident”.

In particular, respondents regarded every competency as “evident”. The following are the individual mean given to each competency of the Headstart teacher: as a nurturer with a mean of 3.3952; as an observer with a mean of 3.4449; as a planner with a mean of 3.4326; as a facilitator with a mean of 3.429; as an evaluator with a mean of 3.3431; and as a communicator with a mean of 3.3713.

Table 5

Level of Competencies of Headstart Program Teachers

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Nurturer	3.3952	.63869	Great extent/Evident
Observer	3.4449	.56739	Great extent/Evident
Planner	3.4326	.60430	Great extent/Evident
Facilitator	3.4294	.62374	Great extent/Evident
Evaluator	3.3431	.70849	Great extent/Evident
Communicator	3.3713	.70971	Great extent/Evident

Overall	2.8264	.58984	Great extent/Evident
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Implementation of Preferred Curriculum for Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Table 6 illustrates the observation of participants on curriculum preference for gifted and talented preschoolers of the Department of Education of Isabela, Philippines. An overall mean of 3.3184 was noted, which is referred to as “evident”. Participants gauged each of the curriculum preferences as follows: Interest-based curriculum with a mean of 3.3305, regarded as “evident”; Thematic-based with a mean of 3.3435, reflected as “evident”; and Situational approach with a mean of 3.2813, also described as “evident”.

Table 6

Implementation of Preferred Curriculum for Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Interest-based curriculum	3.3305	.68511	Great extent/Evident
Thematic-based	3.3435	.65586	Great extent/Evident
Situational approach	3.2813	.70214	Great extent/Evident
Overall	3.3184	1.24906	Great extent/Evident

Evidence of Preferred Headstart Teaching and Learning Strategies

Based from Table 7, the participants perceived an overall mean of 3.3052 corresponds as “evident” for the suggested Headstart teaching and learning strategies. Each of the Headstart teaching and learning strategies garnered distinct ratings as follows: cooperative learning with a mean of 3.2952, considered as “evident”; brainstorming with a mean of 3.3015, pronounced as “evident”; simulation with a mean of 3.2475, designated as “evident”; discussion with a mean of 3.2672, depicted as “evident”; semantic webbing with a mean of 3.3676, being illustrated as “evident”; storytelling with a mean of 3.4730, explained as “evident”; games with a mean of 3.2733, communicated as “evident”; teaching reading strategies with a mean of 3.1664, described as “less evident” and teaching writing with a mean of 3.3554, expressed as “evident”.

Table 7

Evidence of Preferred Headstart Teaching and Learning Strategies

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Cooperative learning	3.3750	.68748	Great extent/Evident
Brainstorming	3.3015	.74024	Great extent/Evident
Simulation	3.2475	.70856	Great extent/Evident
Discussion	3.2672	.72444	Great extent/Evident
Semantic webbing	3.3676	.67833	Great extent/Evident
Story telling	3.4730	.63707	Great extent/Evident
Games	3.2733	.71425	Great extent/Evident
Teaching reading strategies	3.1664	.86443	Great extent/Evident
Teaching writing	3.3554	.75817	Great extent/Evident
Overall	3.3052	.61851	Great extent/Evident

Programs and Services for Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Table 8 shows the assessment of participants on the evidence level of employing suitable programs and services for gifted and talented preschoolers. This is summed up with an overall mean of 3.2384, which is measured as “evident”.

In details, the markers for this area were gauged as follows: acceleration with a mean of 3.1433 assumed as “evident”; enrichment with a mean of 3.3105, held as “evident”; mentorship with a mean of 3.1094, contemplated as “evident”; ability grouping with a mean of 3.2181, which is appraised as “evident”; Inclusive Education with a mean of 3.3186, which is regarded as “evident”; integrated core curriculum with a mean of 3.3100, recommended as “evident”; learning center with a mean of 3.2353, described as “evident”; flex grouping with a mean of 3.2819, indicated as “evident”; and small group instruction with a mean of 3.2586, which is implied as “evident”.

Table 8

Programs and Services for Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Acceleration	3.1433	.90063	Great extent/Evident
Enrichment	3.3105	.65604	Great extent/Evident
Mentorship	3.1094	.93100	Great extent/Evident
Ability grouping	3.2181	.81688	Great extent/Evident
Inclusive Education	3.3186	.71131	Great extent/Evident
Integrated core curriculum	3.3100	.70402	Great extent/Evident
Learning center	3.2353	.74050	Great extent/Evident
Flex grouping	3.2819	.73016	Great extent/Evident
Small group instruction	3.2586	.68518	Great extent/Evident
Overall	3.2384	.71441	Great extent/Evident

Evaluating the Progress of Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Table 9 discloses the observation of the participants concerning the extent of evaluation of progress of gifted and talented preschool children. As exposed, employment of this area was estimated to a “great extent” with an overall mean of 3.3220. In evaluating the performance progress of learners, participants observed the use of checklist and portfolio as “great extent”, signified by their means of 3.3725 and 3.2714, respectively.

Table 9

Evaluating the Progress of Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Checklist	3.3725	.60731	Great extent
Portfolio	3.2714	.67401	Great extent
Overall	3.3220	.60506	Great extent

Support Systems to Headstart Program

Based from Table 10, the participants perceived a “great extent” level of support system of Headstart Program. The overall perception of the respondents in parent’s and school’s support garnered an overall mean of 3.2965. They viewed that the program is regularly evaluated in terms of its effectiveness’ in the holistic development of the gifted child.

Table 10
Support Systems of Headstart Program

Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive interpretation
Parents’ Support	3.3236	.67906	Great extent/Evident
School’s Support	3.2693	.71942	Great extent/Evident
Overall	3.2965	.68167	Great extent/Evident

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The discussion emphasized the results of assessment on the implementation of various aspects of SPED Headstart Program of Isabela, Philippines and the corresponding implications. These areas include program organization, screening, qualifying of gifted and talented preschoolers, teacher competencies, curriculum implementation, Headstart teaching and learning strategies, programs and services, evaluating progress of gifted and talented preschoolers, and support system.

Organization of Headstart Program

Participants in this study viewed the organization of Headstart Program as “very great extent”, which implies that grouping together of learners identified as gifted was acceptable to the participants. Thus, the benefactors are satisfied in the organization of Headstart Program.

In considering the different aspects of Headstart Program, meticulous planning and directing are valued. It was noteworthy that participants viewed the selecting of teachers managing the Headstart classes as “very great extent”. As stakeholders, they must be well-informed regarding teacher qualification and special services that cater the unique needs, talents, learning attributes and behavioral tendencies of gifted preschool learners (Talented and Gifted Students eTags, 2010).

Participants also regarded the selection of preschoolers for Headstart Program as “very great extent”. In the nomination of gifted as a preparation of Headstart classes, single dimension cannot measure all even if several similarities occur across giftedness. Hence, these needs maybe formally undertaken through standardized test of one kind or another (Department of Education, 2009). Unusual intelligence or giftedness is identified, then measured by external-performance and achievements. Sometimes this is done through personal observation or accomplished portfolio assessment of children’s writing or other sorts of hands-on projects.

However, many gifted learners are academically secluded in a non-selective school. Hence, they become unmotivated and fail to develop social abilities. Research recommended that these pupils must be given chance to be band together in self-contained schools or classes (Wormald, 2017).

The organization of preschool classes for the Headstart program was conveyed as “very great extent”. In the arrangement of Headstart classes, clustering gifted learners with similarly inclined peers, both in capacities and curiosities, may generate not just intellectual matches but also significant affection and social support (Wormald, 2017). Thus, school authorities should find avenues to collect samples of inclinations within diverse areas and perspectives (The National Association for Gifted Children, 2019b). In this aspect, teachers and school administrators should not be the only parties being involved. Parents, too, are more knowledgeable on their child’s strengths and/or weaknesses better than others do.

Screening of Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

The participants specified the extent of executing screening of gifted and talented preschool children as “great extent”. Each of the required screening procedures were carried out to a “great extent” such as: (1) assessment team; (2) submission of an application form; (3) conduct of an informal assessment; (4) undergo formal assessment; (4) consolidation of assessment results; (5) rules are strictly followed for informal assessment; (5) grading system; (6) acceleration of exceptional children through an informal assessment; (7) class size, and orientation of parents and/or guardians for the informal assessment. To ensure a successful implementation of the Headstart Program, screening procedures and identification processes are prearranged. Policies are provided and guidelines are set for a better discharge of assessment activities.

Previous researches recommend that teacher, parent, peer, and/or self-nominations should be blended when employing nomination as an instrument to categorize learners as gifted (Echo, 2010). Preferably, a learner must be selected by many teachers, parents, or peers to ensure that the preschool learner is indeed gifted and deserves additional attention. Some districts depend on teacher nominations before they begin the screening process (Alberta Learning, 2004). Hence, it is imperative to gather evidence on the learner's performance and potentialities through a combined quantifiable limit and personally observed credential mechanisms (The National Association for Gifted Children, 2019c).

For parents, they should agree whether or not to have their child gauged for giftedness. Usually, identification guidelines and measures are regulated at the district level. In the findings of this survey, stakeholders favour the management of screening process of gifted and talented preschoolers for the Headstart Program. Nonetheless, the level of impression implies that participants still recognize innovations in screening that are more customized to the Headstart prospective learners (Alberta Learning, 2004).

Extent of Qualifying the Gifted and Talented Preschoolers Based on Prescribed Indicators

Findings in this inquiry showed that participants deemed the qualifying gifted and talented preschoolers as “great extent” based on prescribed indicators. Most often, giftedness and talents of young children cannot be easily noticed. Therefore, it is important to select the most

appropriate means and to take careful steps in qualifying them. Performance appraisals, interviews, observations, and nominations are key elements of assessment, but seemingly, there is no specific instrument, which may warrant certainty in determining gifted attributes among early childhood population (Echo, 2010). In qualifying learners for Gifted Education, teachers may conduct observations and apply rating scales or checklists for learners who display a specific peculiarity or attribute during the course of instruction (The National Association for Gifted Children, 2019c).

Development of gifted learners in different domains are unequal. Although they are homogeneously grouped, individual differences are always expected (Silverman, 2018). Gifted and talented students are regarded as learners with special needs since they necessitate special training and adaptations to meet their extraordinary learning needs (Alberta Learning, 2004). It is important to keep in mind that there are children who can be gifted in other fields like interpersonal, kinesthetic, verbal or visual-spatial. Educators usually recognized learners as gifted when they achieve extensively beyond grade level in one or more academic subjects. However, seldom that artistically-advanced students are taken in this category as well (Dunlap, 2019).

Participants perceived the qualifying of gifted and talented preschoolers of the Headstart Program only as “great extent” based on prescribed guides. This finding implies that participants consider other practices that may improve the qualifying system. Aside from intellectual aspects, gifted educators and parents also regard other categories of giftedness such as those of artistic, social/leadership and emotional giftedness. More advance methods in this area of Headstart program are not limited to the confines of the school, therefore, stakeholders believe that this phase may still be enriched in accordance to local, national and global influences.

Level of Competencies of Headstart Program Teachers

All the competencies of the Headstart teacher as nurturer, observer, planner, facilitator, evaluator and communicator were regarded only on an “evident” level. This means that stakeholders expect Headstart teachers to advance their knowledge in supervising and evaluating gifted learners’ performance and to communicate clearly and consciously any feedback to concerned persons. In a related study on perceptions of parents about the ‘essential’ competences in teaching, it was underscored the significance of teachers’ expertise and their adeptness to teach with passion (Dozza, 2014). Equally important are their abilities to inspire gifted learners, engage the family, value diversities and effectively handle the classroom. Thus, it is expected that emphatic and proficient teachers are capable of promoting a wholesome relationship with parents, which allows better communication and collaboration (Westergard, 2013).

Teachers of Headstart Program have voluminous responsibilities as compared with other elementary or secondary teachers. Their duties involved several dedicated undertakings such as to: (1) plan stimulating lessons and assignments for intelligent learners; (2) upgrade and discover advanced instructional techniques; (3) develop instructional materials and learning technologies; (4) enlighten gifted learners and their parents on breakthroughs and hardships of exceptional aptitudes; and (5) motivate learners to cultivate self-control, accountability, productivity, creativity and leadership skills (All Education Schools, 2019). Thus, gifted educators of ECE from national to international level promote the deployment of teachers who

are trained in gifted education and are more exposed to handling young learners of similar abilities (Wormald, 2017).

As revealed in this assessment, participants measured the competencies of teachers handling Headstart classes only on the “evident” degree. Results indicate the need to enrich abilities of Headstart teachers in rearing; facilitating learning; and in managing activities that stimulate or even challenge higher level of interest and abilities among gifted young pupils.

Implementation of Preferred Curriculum for Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

This current study disclosed that participants appraised the preferred curriculum only on the “evident” level. In the study of Proyalde (2018) parent- participants were alarmed that in curriculum implementation, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was restrained in its suitability for teachers not to the gifted students. Nevertheless, it was revealed that teachers of gifted learners employed varied types of curriculum in managing special education particularly for those with exceptionalities. It was further uncovered that the general perception of participants on Gifted Education curriculum was that, it challenged, motivated, enhanced learning, and encouraged students to pursue their interests and improve their skills (Gray & Favaro, 2009). Projects and undertakings were learner-centred and learner-directed (The National Association for Gifted Children, 2019a).

The desired curriculum for gifted and talented preschoolers is established not just to meet the academic needs of qualified learners but also to mould in them a well-balanced personality (Department of Education, 2009). These groups of learners have the tendency to regard the curriculum as very easy and may cause disappointments at the lack of consideration to their capability and to anything they are adept to achieve (Wormald, 2017).

It was revealed that participants of this study gauged only the preferred curriculum such as interest-based curriculum, thematic-based, and situational approach on the “evident” level. Finding infers a more meticulous effort in providing suitable teaching-learning experiences that may still be related around the desired learning themes and are within the level of interest of every gifted learner. Result also denotes necessity for appropriate equipment and school facilities for more progressive learning. If budget warrants, administrators may consider advancement in terms of educational digital technologies and instructional materials for holistic learning activities.

Evidence of Preferred Headstart Teaching and Learning Strategies

In this investigation, the overall mean indicated only an “evident level” of desired teaching and learning strategies of Headstart program. In an evaluation of SPED Program of Elementary Schools of the Division of Zambales, Philippines, sixty percent of school heads considered the attainment of the IEP goals and objectives as a measure of victory of their SPED programs. So, once a pupil achieved the goals and the objectives postulated in his/her IEP, then Special Education is regarded successful (Proyalde, 2018). In the system standard of Gifted Education of Peel District School Boards, teachers were likewise encouraged to expand learning by targeting on extensiveness and substance of subject contents; foster creativity, problem-solving, and self-directed learning skills; as well as uphold healthy competition, teamwork and sense of social responsibility (Gray & Favaro, 2009).

There has been many strategies noted to be very effective in handling learners who are considered gifted and talented. One of these is fast-tracked learning, which enables gifted learners to perform at a swifter speed or at an advanced grade level. Another is academic competitions which do not only test gifted learner's scholastic capacities but also provide them with opportunities to enhance their social abilities. Other strategies include brainstorming and cooperative learning. Nevertheless, the principle of individualized instruction put an equal importance in Headstart teaching and learning (Kufen, 2019).

In this investigation, employment of each of the desired Headstart Program teaching and learning strategies such as: cooperative learning; brainstorming, simulation, discussion, semantic webbing, storytelling, games, teaching reading strategies, and teaching writing, was estimated on an "evident level" only. This finding implies a thorough evaluation on the application and effectiveness of each instructional method. It denotes more emphasis to the range of utilising every instructional technique to motivate every learner become interactive and productive. The importance of principle of individuality and diversity may also be contemplated. Giftedness and talents are distinct among children identified as "gifted". Hence, the Headstart Program requires individualized instruction based on wide-ranging educational needs and qualities of gifted and talented preschoolers.

Programs and Services for Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

The participants perceived the implementation of programs and services of the Headstart such as acceleration, enrichment, mentorship, ability grouping, Inclusive Education, integrated core curriculum, learning center, flex grouping, and small group instruction only as "evident".

In the education of the gifted, stakeholders are best challenged to offer appropriate educational services to exceptional pupils (The National Association for Gifted Children, 2019b). School heads are ardently advised and compelled to give more focus to talent. It still relies on the decision of the learning institution what kind of support and programs are to be offered and how this may be carried out in a gifted education condition. The demand now are focused on requirements and adaptations for teaching gifted learners. Programs which primary levels use for the instruction of gifted students may include the following: (a) differentiation and/or skipping a grade; (b) part time integration with an enhancement group (within their school); (c) pull-out class (partial integration in another school; and (d) education in a separate cluster/class (De Boer & Minnaert, 2013).

In the provision of various programs and services for gifted preschool children, involvement of various stakeholders is crucial. Previous studies attested that even parents' participation is a parcel in the arrangement of customised academic tasks and required assistance for homework and co-curricular events. Parents' belief that family's reinforcement on the gifted child have an immense influence on a child's personal and educational success (Flemmings, 2013; Williams, 2008). In school, administrator and Headstart teacher should be partners in the delivery of packages to build up basic skills and heighten multiple intelligences at a speed and intensity that suit the aptitudes of gifted and talented preschoolers (Department of Education, 2009).

The deduced "evident" level of perception among participants, implies that they are somewhat satisfied with the management of the Headstart programs and services. This result indicates their anticipations for more pertinent and profitable platforms of educational deliveries

that are focused on customized instructional enrichments for the gifted child to reach his/her maximum development. Home and school also have to work more closely and cooperatively for the efficient and effective provisions of appropriate instructional services to advance distinctive potentialities of gifted preschool child.

Evaluating the Progress of Gifted and Talented Preschoolers

Assessment of gifted child's performance is very critical to the success of Headstart Program because it discloses individual performance of Headstart program stakeholders – teachers, parents and school administrators. The National Association for Gifted Children (2019c) claimed that awareness of assessment practices is vital for educators in recognizing and gauging each learner's progress. Challenging learning situation should be instituted wherein learners exhibits their gifts and talents, then varied forms of assessment evidence are collected. Children of various ages do diverse things at diverse age-levels, thus, Osborn (2019) suggested that assessments and tests differ with the age of the child.

One of the many ways by which gifted children vary from their peers is the effortlessness and/or swiftness with which they learn skills in academics. It is generally observed that the more intense their intellectual proficiency is, the most probable that they will not match in with the normative curriculum. That is why, it is crucial to assess gifted child's capacity to recognize words, understand written articles, grasp mathematics procedures and writing in different forms (Osborn, 2019). In the study of White, Campbell, & Ridley (2006), it was recommended that information from several origins maybe involved in analysing gifted learner's progress like merit-enhanced data, individual education plans, and exclusive learner information.

In this study, participants perceived the utilizing of checklist and portfolio in evaluating performance progress of gifted learners only on a "great extent" level. This finding implies that aside from checklist and portfolio, stakeholders consider engaging better ways of collecting, recording, and keeping of information to best reflect strength, weaknesses and progress of each gifted and talented preschooler.

Support Systems to the Headstart Program

The participants perceived a "great extent" support system of Headstart Program, which implies that there is collaboration among benefactors in helping gifted children adjust academically, socially and emotionally. Partnership between school and home of every gifted learners is vital for their maximum growth and holistic development. Parents, too, are the best collaborators of teachers and school heads in nurturing inherent yearning to learn (Education World, 2019).

In other countries, research disclosed that teachers and administrators are satisfied with their Gifted Education Program in meeting academic and social/emotional needs of their students (Gray & Favaro, 2009). However, in some countries, report declared that parents are more apprehensive with the well-being of their gifted children. Furthermore, they are not culturally convinced with educational system to mediate their children's academic activities (Education World, 2019).

Results of this investigation proved the claims of previous studies that Headstart teachers are not the only ones responsible to deliver suitable support and learning experiences to gifted learners. Aside from the care and support of the school, parents play vital roles as partners in nurturing children with exceptional needs. Findings of this study likewise affirmed the importance of parental support as a factor in attaining success of any school program (Inciong & Quijano, 2009). Administrators, gifted education authorities, reading and numeracy specialists, guidance staffs and parents must work together to improve Gifted Education support systems (White et al., 2006).

CONCLUSION

Results of the investigation conclude that school administrators, teachers and parents viewed the implementation of Headstart Program of the Division of Isabela, Philippines as “great extent”. The grouping of learners identified as gifted was acceptable to the participants. Hence, stakeholders are contented in the organization of Headstart Program. They support the execution of screening procedures of preschoolers for the Headstart Program but still value improvements of screening practices. Participants also take into consideration better qualifying systems. On top of intellectual characteristics, educators and parents also give importance to other traits of giftedness such as creativity, leadership and social abilities.

Headstart teachers’ competencies need enhancement, particularly in planning and facilitating learning; appraising and conveying performance of gifted preschoolers to concerned persons; and in handling undertakings that inspire advanced level of interest and skills among gifted preschoolers. More conscientious effort is expected in the delivery of prescribed curriculum and the provision of teaching-learning experiences, which are still interrelated with the pre-arranged learning themes.

The participants, to some degree, were contented with the application of desired teaching and learning strategies, thus implying an in-depth assessment on the efficacy of instructional techniques. They assume an intense engagement of preferred strategies, and eventually stress on motivating and challenging each learner become responsive and constructive. Participants are fairly convinced with the administration of the Headstart programs and services. So, there is an expectancy for educational provisions that underscore the unique abilities and talent/s of the gifted preschooler.

For the participants, checklist and portfolio as means to evaluate progress of the gifted and talented child are not sufficient. They recognize other approaches of gathering, documenting, and safeguarding of information about the strength, limitations and progress of the gifted. In line with support system, there is partnership among stakeholders, however, participants realize the need to strengthen collaboration between school and home to better respond to the needs of preschool learners with exceptional performance both in academics and non-academic undertakings. As a whole, there are still target enhancement in every area of Headstart Program for gifted and talented preschool learners.

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