IGNATIAN
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH
www.icceph.com
ISSN 2984-9942

THE SPECIAL PROGRAM IN THE ARTS: IMPLEMENTATION, MILESTONES, AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the implementation, milestones, and challenges of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) among six recognized public secondary schools in DepEd Region VII, Philippines, during the school year 2021–2022. Employing a qualitative research design, data were gathered from 88 participants comprising six school principals, six SPA coordinators, 46 teacher-specialists, and 30 students through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The responses were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that five of the six schools offered all six prescribed arts specializations, while implementation was constrained by shortages of qualified teacher-specialists, inadequate facilities and instructional equipment, limited funding, and inconsistencies in curriculum delivery and student admission practices. Despite these limitations, the program achieved notable milestones in character and relationship formation, public recognition, participation in competitions, community engagement, organizational collaboration, project-based learning, student completion, and alumni accomplishments. Thematic analysis further identified challenges involving administrative coordination, teacher workload and competencies, weak foundational arts skills among students, limited instructional resources, negative perceptions of arts education, and conflicting academic and specialization schedules. The findings underscored the need for strengthened curriculum management, professional development, resource allocation, and institutional partnerships. An Innovative Management Plan was proposed to address implementation gaps, sustain program milestones, and enrich specialized arts education for Grades 7–10.

Keywords: *Special Program in the Arts, curriculum implementation, arts education, program milestones, implementation challenges, innovative management plan*

INTRODUCTION

Arts education plays an important role in developing learners' creativity, cultural awareness, aesthetic appreciation, and artistic expression. Beyond cultivating individual talents, it contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and promotes opportunities for meaningful participation in artistic and cultural activities. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006) recognized arts education as an essential component of holistic human development and emphasized the importance of ensuring learners' access to cultural and artistic experiences. Within basic education, specialized arts programs provide opportunities for students to develop their artistic potential while acquiring the competencies required by the national curriculum.

In the Philippines, the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) was introduced in 2001 through Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) Memorandum No. 135, s. 2001, to nurture young Filipino artists and promote appreciation of the country's cultural heritage. Initially implemented in selected secondary schools, the program provided specialized instruction in music, visual arts, theater arts, media arts, creative writing, and dance alongside regular academic subjects. Its implementation subsequently became part of broader curricular reforms under the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533), which institutionalized the K to 12 Basic Education Program. The Department of Education (DepEd) also issued policy guidelines for special curricular programs, emphasizing curriculum standards, instructional requirements, and the progressive implementation of specialized learning pathways (DepEd, 2012). These policies established the institutional context for implementing SPA across junior high schools.

Despite its intended contribution to artistic development, SPA implementation has encountered curricular, instructional, and administrative challenges. Pañares and Cabangon (2016) discussed the use of drama in Philippine schools, highlighting its role in the educational process and the importance of integrating drama into classroom instruction. Their findings indicated that teachers sometimes supplemented prescribed learning materials to address gaps in curriculum content. These findings suggested that establishing specialized arts curricula did not necessarily ensure consistent implementation across schools.

The availability of qualified teacher-specialists, appropriate facilities, and instructional resources also influenced the delivery of specialized arts education. Brillantes (2022) examined the implementation of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) curriculum in selected secondary schools in Western Visayas, highlighting the importance of faculty qualifications, adequate instructional resources, and institutional support in strengthening program implementation. Likewise, Sabit (2019) examined the condition of SPA facilities and emphasized the need for improved resources, teacher development, and stakeholder involvement. In relation to student specialization, Lusdoc and Namoco (2019) investigated students' selection of arts majors and identified considerations involving personal interests, career opportunities, and associated expenses. Collectively, these studies highlighted the interconnected roles of school resources, teacher

preparation, curriculum delivery, and student placement in implementing specialized arts programs.

The study was theoretically informed by Dewey's (1934) concept of *Art as Experience*, which viewed artistic learning as an active interaction between individuals and their environments. From this perspective, meaningful arts education involved participation, experimentation, expression, and reflection rather than the passive acquisition of artistic knowledge. This perspective provided a foundation for examining how SPA implementation supported students' artistic experiences across different specializations. The study also drew on Taba's curriculum development approach, which emphasized identifying learners' needs, formulating objectives, selecting and organizing content, providing learning experiences, and evaluating curriculum outcomes. These principles supported the examination of curriculum design, instructional practices, and monitoring and evaluation within the SPA.

Constructivist perspectives further emphasized learners' active participation in developing knowledge and artistic skills through meaningful experiences and social interaction. In arts education, this orientation complemented Discipline-Based Art Education, which incorporated art production, aesthetics, criticism, and art history into a comprehensive approach to artistic learning (Clark et al., 1987). These perspectives provided a basis for understanding the importance of structured specialization content alongside opportunities for creative exploration. Moreover, Pawilen and Manuel (2018) proposed a curriculum development framework for gifted learners in the Philippines that emphasized situational analysis, curriculum goals, framework development, implementation, and evaluation. Their work reinforced the importance of responsive and systematic curriculum planning in specialized educational programs.

Although previous research examined SPA implementation in selected Philippine schools, further investigation was needed to understand its implementation across the recognized SPA schools in DepEd Region VII. Earlier studies focused largely on curriculum guidelines, facilities, student specialization, and individual institutional experiences. A broader assessment encompassing arts specialization offerings, teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum design, student enrollment and selection, facilities and resources, and monitoring and evaluation could provide a more comprehensive account of implementation practices. Examining program milestones and students' challenges could further identify institutional accomplishments and areas requiring administrative and curricular improvement.

Hence, this study investigated the implementation, milestones, and challenges of the Special Program in the Arts among six recognized SPA schools in DepEd Region VII during the school year 2021–2022. Specifically, it examined SPA implementation in terms of arts specialization offerings, teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum design, student enrollment and selection, facilities and resources, and monitoring and evaluation. It also identified program milestones as assessed by the respondents and the challenges encountered by SPA students. The findings served as the basis for proposing an

innovative management plan intended to enrich the SPA curriculum for Grades 7–10 and strengthen the delivery of specialized arts education.

Research Questions

This research aimed to investigate the implementation of the existing Special Program in the Arts and the challenges encountered by the administrators and teacher-specialists, and to identify the milestones in the implementation, among the six (6) recognized SPA schools in Region 7 DepEd, for the school year 2021 – 2022.

Specifically, the research sought to answer the following:

1. How is the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) implemented in terms of;
   1.1 arts specialization offering;
   1.2 teacher specialists qualification;
   1.3 curriculum design
   1.4 enrolment and selection of students;
   1.5 facilities and resources; and
   1.6 monitoring and evaluation?
2. What are the milestones of the SPA as assessed by the respondents?
3. What are the challenges encountered by the SPA students of this special program?
4. What innovative management plan can be proposed to enrich the SPA curriculum offered in Grades 7-10?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine the implementation, milestones, and challenges of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) in selected public secondary schools in DepEd Region VII during the school year 2021–2022. The design facilitated an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and assessments of program implementation. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to gather information on arts specialization offerings, teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum design, student enrollment and selection, facilities and resources, monitoring and evaluation, program milestones, and challenges encountered by SPA students.

Research Environment

The study was conducted in six public secondary schools recognized by the Department of Education (DepEd) Region VII as implementing schools of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) during the school year 2021–2022. Three schools were located in Bohol: Dr. Cecilio Putong National High School in Tagbilaran City, Cangawa National High School in Buenavista, and Camayaan National High School in Loboc. The other

participating institutions were Mandaue City School for the Arts–Secondary Department in Mandaue City, Cebu; City of Bogo Science and Arts Academy in Bogo City, Cebu; and Dumaguete City National High School in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental.

These schools implemented the four-year SPA curriculum for Grades 7–10, offering specialized instruction in six major arts disciplines: dance, theater arts, music (vocal and instrumental), creative writing (English and Filipino), media arts, and visual arts. The participating schools provided the institutional settings for examining SPA implementation in terms of arts specialization offerings, teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum design, student enrollment and selection, facilities and resources, and monitoring and evaluation. Their inclusion also enabled the study to examine program milestones and challenges across different school contexts within DepEd Region VII.

Research Participants

The study involved 88 participants from six recognized Special Program in the Arts (SPA) schools in DepEd Region VII during the school year 2021–2022. These comprised six school principals, six SPA coordinators, 46 teacher-specialists, and 30 students. Each participating school was represented by one principal, one SPA coordinator, and five students, while the number of teacher-specialists varied according to the school's staffing complement. Student participants were selected based on the recommendations of their respective teacher-specialists. The inclusion of school administrators, SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists, and students provided multiple perspectives on program implementation, milestones, and challenges.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Participants

Participating school	Principals and SPA coordinators	Teacher-specialists	Students	Total
Camayaan National High School	2	6	5	13
Dr. Cecilio Putong National High School	2	8	5	15
Cangawa National High School	2	8	5	15
Mandaue City School for the Arts–Secondary Department	2	8	5	15
City of Bogo Science and Arts Academy	2	8	5	15
Dumaguete City National High School	2	8	5	15
Total	12	46	30	88

Research Instrument

The study utilized researcher-developed semi-structured interview guides as the primary data-gathering instruments. Separate sets of open-ended questions were prepared for school principals and SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists, and students, with each set aligned with the research objectives. The questions focused on SPA

implementation, program milestones, and challenges encountered by students, particularly in relation to arts specialization offerings, teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum design, student enrollment and selection, facilities and resources, and monitoring and evaluation.

Individual interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences and perspectives in detail. Follow-up and probing questions were used to clarify responses and obtain additional information relevant to the research questions. Interview responses were transcribed verbatim and organized for subsequent analysis.

Focus group discussions served as a supplementary data-gathering method to explore shared experiences, common concerns, and recommendations concerning SPA implementation. The discussions provided opportunities for participants to elaborate on curriculum delivery, institutional challenges, program assessment, and possible management improvements.

Research Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher secured permission from the concerned Schools Division Superintendents and school principals. Preliminary interviews were conducted to review and refine the interview guides. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or by telephone with SPA administrators, teacher-specialists, and selected students. Focus group discussions were also conducted to gather additional insights into program implementation, milestones, and challenges. Responses were documented, transcribed verbatim, and organized into themes for analysis. Parental permission was secured for student participants, confidentiality was maintained, and applicable COVID-19 health protocols were observed throughout data collection.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from individual interviews and focus group discussions were organized and examined to identify recurring patterns, common concerns, and emerging themes. The responses were considered in relation to the study's research questions, particularly the six dimensions of SPA implementation, program milestones, and student challenges. Similar responses were grouped into thematic categories to facilitate comparison across the participating schools and respondent groups. The resulting thematic findings provided the basis for identifying areas requiring curricular and administrative improvement and informing the proposed innovative management plan for the Special Program in the Arts.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study on the implementation, milestones, and challenges of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) among six recognized SPA schools in DepEd Region VII during the school year 2021–2022. Data gathered from

school principals, SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists, and students through interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis and organized into emerging themes. The findings focused on three major areas: the implementation of SPA in terms of arts specialization offerings, teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum design, student enrollment and selection, facilities and resources, and monitoring and evaluation; the milestones achieved in program implementation; and the challenges encountered by SPA students. The findings also served as the basis for developing the proposed Innovative Management Plan to enrich the SPA curriculum for Grades 7–10.

Table 2. Arts Specialization Offerings of the Six Public Schools in Visayas

SCHOOLS	SPECIALIZATION (*as per DECS Memo 135, series of 2001*)					
	Visual Arts	Music (Vocal and Instrumental)	Theater Arts	Media Arts	Dance	Creative Writing
School A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School C	✓	✓			✓	
School D	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School F	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 presents the arts specialization offerings of the six participating Special Program in the Arts (SPA) schools in DepEd Region VII. The findings revealed that five schools offered all six prescribed specializations, namely visual arts, music, theater arts, media arts, dance, and creative writing. However, School C offered only three specializations: visual arts, music, and dance. These three disciplines were consistently offered across all six schools, indicating broader implementation than the other arts specializations.

The limited offerings in School C were attributed to the lack of qualified teacher-specialists in theater arts, media arts, and creative writing, as well as low student interest in these disciplines. School administrators further reported that the availability of teaching personnel and instructional resources, as well as student demand, influenced the specializations offered. These findings indicated that although most participating schools implemented the complete SPA curriculum, differences in institutional capacity affected the consistency of specialization offerings across schools.

The findings were consistent with Pawilen (2019), who emphasized the essential role of teachers in curriculum implementation, particularly in adapting instructional content and learning experiences to students' needs. Similarly, the Department of Education

(2012), through DepEd Order No. 46, s. 2012, established guidelines for implementing special curricular programs in secondary schools. These perspectives highlighted the importance of qualified teacher-specialists, adequate instructional resources, and responsive curriculum planning in sustaining specialized arts education. The findings suggested that strengthening teacher recruitment, professional development, and resource allocation could help address gaps in SPA offerings and expand students' opportunities to pursue their preferred arts specializations.

Table 3. Teacher Specialists Qualifications

Schools	Teacher Specialists' Qualifications							
	Bachelor's Degree in Music	BSED MAPEH	BSED English/Com.	Dance Major/ Theater	BSED Math/ Science	BSED Fil	AB Psych/Phil./Val. Educ.	ICT
School A	1	2	2	1			1	
School B		3	2		1	1		1
School C	1	2	1		2			
School D	2	1	2	1		1	2	
School E		3	2		1	1		1
School F	1	4	1		2			

Table 3 presents the educational qualifications of the 46 teacher-specialists assigned to the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) across six participating schools in DepEd Region VII. The findings revealed that the largest number of teachers held degrees in MAPEH (15), followed by English and Communication (10), Mathematics and Science (6), and Music (5). Other qualifications included Filipino (3), Psychology, Philosophy, and Values Education (3), Dance and Theater (2), and Information and Communication Technology (2). These findings indicated that the participating schools employed teachers from diverse academic backgrounds, some of which were not directly aligned with their assigned arts specializations. Interviews further revealed difficulties in securing teachers with specialized academic preparation in particular arts disciplines. Nevertheless, respondents reported that teacher-specialists participated in training programs and workshops to strengthen their instructional competencies. SPA coordinators and consultants emphasized the importance of relevant academic qualifications, practical artistic experience, and continuous professional development in delivering specialized arts instruction.

The findings were comparable to those of Brillantes (2022), who evaluated SPA curriculum implementation in selected secondary schools in Western Visayas, including faculty qualifications, subject offerings, facilities, instructional resources, and administrative support. Similarly, Pawilen and Manuel (2018) emphasized the importance of responsive curriculum planning in addressing the educational needs of gifted learners. Although these studies examined different dimensions of specialized education, they reinforced the importance of aligning teacher preparation, instructional competencies,

and institutional support with program requirements. The findings underscored the need to strengthen teacher-specialists' qualifications, provide sustained professional development, and improve instructional support to enhance SPA curriculum implementation.

Table 4. Curriculum Design and Implementation

Specialization	Curriculum Design	Content Standards	Implementation Activities
Dance	Subject-Centered	Generally, the schools adhere to the existing curriculum standards prescribed by DepEd. And observe the identified most essential learning competencies (MELC). It was also disclosed that teachers teach content learned from relevant training, such as “Sanay Guro.”	The schools emphasize cultural preservation by showcasing and performing folk dances and other genres such as basic ballet, jazz, and contemporary.
Music	Subject-centered	Focus on the basic music elements while strictly observing the curriculum designed by DepEd.	Schools conduct drills, exercises, and actual performances as a practicum.
Theater Arts	Subject-centered	Largely followed the curriculum prepared by DepEd and the utilized resources gathered from the internet and related training.	The majority of the schools revealed that most of their activities are only focused on discussing the theories and very minimal on the actual performance. Only one school was able to come up with a big production.
Creative Writing	Learner-centered	Materials are mostly taken from the mandated curriculum and pertinent local sources, and inputs are taken from NCCA Husay Sining Website.	Activities are focused on the needs of the students since this is the specialization with the least enrollees. Only an average of 5 students per class from grade 7 to 12.
Media Arts	Subject-centered	Schools stick to the recognized most essential learning competencies (MELC) for this area, supported by the knowledge learned by the specialists during training. Most teacher specialists	Activities are very limited due to the lack of facilities and deficiency on having qualified and skilled specialist. Schools employed the use of students’ smartphones to produce outputs. Lessons and discussions are also limited

		also utilized the data on the internet for additional input.	to what the teachers learned during training.
Visual Arts	Subject-centered	Basic topics in the mandated curriculum.	Activities are limited to teaching the basic concepts and theories to allow the students to demonstrate the basic principles of the necessary skills such as drawing and freehand sketching.

Table 4 presents the curriculum design, content standards, and implementation activities across the six arts specializations offered in the participating Special Program in the Arts (SPA) schools. The findings revealed that five specializations—dance, music, theater arts, media arts, and visual arts—primarily adopted subject-centered curriculum designs, while creative writing followed a learner-centered approach. The schools generally adhered to the prescribed Department of Education curriculum standards and Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), although teacher-specialists supplemented the prescribed content using professional training, online materials, and locally available resources. Implementation activities varied across specializations. Dance and music emphasized practical exercises, rehearsals, and performances, while theater arts relied largely on theoretical instruction because of limited opportunities for major productions. Creative writing activities were adapted to students' individual needs and small class sizes, whereas media arts and visual arts were constrained by inadequate facilities, equipment, and specialized instructional resources. Interviews further revealed that insufficiently detailed curriculum guides prompted teachers to modify instructional content based on their training and available materials. These findings indicated that although schools generally followed the prescribed SPA curriculum, institutional resources and teachers' competencies influenced the delivery of specialized learning experiences.

The findings were consistent with Pañares and Cabangon (2016), who examined the role of drama in Philippine schools and highlighted the importance of integrating drama into classroom instruction and educational practices. Similarly, Department of Education (2012) guidelines permitted schools to enrich special curricular programs while maintaining prescribed standards. These findings highlighted the need for clearer specialization guides, adequate instructional resources, and sustained professional development to strengthen curriculum implementation across participating SPA schools.

Table 5. Required SPA Facilities

Required SPA facilities	Required per school	A	B	C	D	E	F
Classrooms for regular classes	8	4	6	3	8	8	6
Music classrooms	2	1	0	0	1	0	1
Practice rooms	2	1	0	0	0	0	0

Workshop area	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Drama room	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Computer room	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
Special library	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dance studio	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total facility units	17	8	8	3	11	11	7

Table 5 presents the availability of required facilities across the six participating Special Program in the Arts (SPA) schools in DepEd Region VII. The findings revealed that none of the schools fully met the facility requirements identified in the study. Schools D and E recorded the highest number of available facility units (11 each), followed by Schools A and B (8 each), School F (7), and School C (3), against the required 17 units per school. Although Schools D and E met the requirement of eight regular classrooms, shortages were evident in specialized learning spaces. None of the schools had a special library, only School A had a practice room and a drama room, and only Schools A and D had dance studios. These findings indicated considerable gaps in the availability of facilities necessary for specialized arts instruction.

Interviews further revealed that participants attributed these deficiencies primarily to limited government funding, which affected the provision of specialized facilities and instructional resources. The findings were comparable to those of Sabit (2019), who documented inadequacies in the availability, adequacy, and usability of facilities in a Philippine SPA school. Similarly, Parojenog and Pabalan (2024) identified sufficient instructional facilities, laboratories, educational resources, and institutional funding as important factors contributing to basic education quality. Their study also emphasized infrastructure development and stronger stakeholder partnerships as strategies for educational improvement. Although conducted in different educational settings, these studies reinforced the importance of adequate institutional resources in supporting curriculum implementation. The findings underscored the need for sustained financial support, improved infrastructure planning, and stronger collaboration among school administrators, local government units, and external stakeholders. Addressing facility deficiencies could expand opportunities for practical artistic activities and strengthen the implementation of the SPA curriculum across participating schools.

Table 6. Availability of Required Equipment in the Six SPA Schools

Required SPA equipment	Required per school	A	B	C	D	E	F
Recorders	8	4	2	1	4	3	2
CD players	2	1	1	0	1	1	1
Television sets	2	1	0	0	1	2	1
LCD projector	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Video camera	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Still cameras	4	2	1	1	2	2	1
Computers	10	4	2	2	5	8	4
Printers and scanners	3	1	1	0	1	2	1
Total equipment units	31	14	8	4	15	20	11

Table 6 presents the availability of instructional equipment across the six participating Special Program in the Arts (SPA) schools in DepEd Region VII. The findings revealed that none of the schools met the complete equipment requirements indicated in the study. School E recorded the highest number of available equipment units (20), followed by School D (15), School A (14), School F (11), School B (8), and School C (4), against the required 31 units per school. Shortages were particularly evident in recorders, cameras, computers, and other technological equipment. Notably, only School E had a video camera, while all six schools had fewer than the required ten computers. These findings indicated considerable differences in equipment availability among participating schools. Interviews further revealed that limited instructional equipment prompted teacher-specialists to adopt alternative teaching strategies, including the use of indigenous and locally available materials. The findings were comparable to those of Sabit (2019), who documented inadequacies in facilities and instructional resources in a Philippine SPA school and emphasized the need for improved resource allocation and stakeholder support. Similarly, the Department of Education (2012) established policy guidelines for implementing special curricular programs, providing an institutional basis for assessing their resource requirements. These findings highlighted the importance of adequate instructional equipment in supporting practical activities and specialized arts instruction. The results suggested that school administrators should prioritize equipment acquisition, resource maintenance, and partnerships with local government units and other stakeholders. Addressing these shortages could expand opportunities for hands-on artistic activities and strengthen the delivery of specialized arts instruction across the participating schools.

Table 7. Challenges Identified by School Principals

Respondents	Emergent themes
School principals	Teacher deficiencies
	Inadequate classrooms and facilities
	Insufficient budget allocation
	Curriculum feasibility issues
	Student selection and admission concerns

Table 7 presents the challenges identified by school principals in implementing the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) across six participating schools in DepEd Region VII. Thematic analysis revealed five major challenges: teacher deficiencies, inadequate classrooms and facilities, insufficient budget allocation, curriculum feasibility issues, and student selection and admission concerns. Principals reported difficulties in recruiting qualified arts specialists and providing sufficient professional development opportunities. Limited funding also restricted the acquisition of instructional resources, improvement of specialized facilities, and participation of teachers and students in relevant training and artistic activities. Curriculum-related concerns included extensive content requirements, limited instructional time, and competencies that were difficult to implement using available resources. Principals further reported modifying admission practices to address declining enrollment, particularly in specializations with few applicants. These findings were comparable to those of Pañares and Cabangon (2016), who discussed the

implementation of drama in Philippine schools and the challenges of integrating drama into educational practices. Similarly, Pawilen and Manuel (2018) highlighted the importance of responsive curriculum planning and institutional support in addressing challenges associated with specialized education. The findings emphasized the need to strengthen teacher preparation, resource allocation, curriculum implementation, and student admission mechanisms to improve SPA delivery.

Table 8. Challenges Identified by SPA Coordinators

Respondents	Emergent themes
SPA coordinators	Traditional administrative setup
	Weak community linkages
	Ineffective program promotion
	Limited institutional collaboration

Table 8 presents the challenges identified by SPA coordinators in the implementation of the Special Program in the Arts. Four major themes emerged: traditional administrative setup, weak community linkages, ineffective program promotion, and limited institutional collaboration. Coordinators reported that the existing administrative structure provided insufficient attention to SPA-specific concerns because school principals simultaneously supervised multiple academic programs. This arrangement was perceived to limit program monitoring, instructional support, and timely responses to implementation difficulties. The findings further revealed limited parental involvement, inadequate community awareness, and insufficient collaboration among teachers, administrators, and external stakeholders. Coordinators associated these limitations with declining student interest, weak institutional support, and reduced opportunities for resource mobilization. These findings were consistent with Pañares and Cabangon (2016), who examined drama in Philippine schools and discussed the challenges of implementing and sustaining drama education within the school system. The results highlighted the importance of strengthening program coordination, community partnerships, promotional activities, and collaborative institutional practices to support the sustainability of specialized arts education.

Table 9. Challenges Identified by Teacher-Specialists

Respondents	Emergent themes
Teacher-specialists	Weak foundational arts competencies among students
	Teacher workload and professional development constraints
	Curriculum inconsistencies
	Negative social stereotypes about arts education
	Insufficient funding and facilities

Table 9 presents the challenges identified by teacher-specialists in implementing the Special Program in the Arts. Five major themes emerged: weak foundational arts competencies among students, teacher workload and professional development

constraints, curriculum inconsistencies, negative social stereotypes about arts education, and insufficient funding and facilities. Teachers reported that some students entered the program without adequate foundational knowledge and skills, requiring additional instruction in basic concepts before progressing to advanced competencies. Heavy teaching workloads, limited training opportunities, and personal expenditures for instructional materials further complicated curriculum delivery. Teacher-specialists also identified curriculum content that was difficult to implement because of inadequate equipment, limited references, and differences in students' learning readiness. Negative perceptions of arts-related careers reportedly reduced parental support and student interest in the program. These findings were consistent with Pawilen and Manuel (2018), who emphasized the importance of responsive curriculum development in meeting the needs of gifted learners. Similarly, Sabit (2019) documented deficiencies in facilities and instructional resources in a Philippine SPA school. The findings underscored the need for strengthened foundational instruction, appropriate teaching assignments, continuous professional development, improved curriculum responsiveness, and adequate financial support.

Table 10. Challenges Encountered by SPA Students

Respondents	Emergent themes
SPA students	Inadequate learning resources and facilities
	Limited depth and progression of arts instruction
	Teacher-related instructional constraints
	Conflicting academic and specialization schedules

Table 10 presents the challenges encountered by students enrolled in the Special Program in the Arts across the six participating schools in DepEd Region VII. Four major themes emerged: inadequate learning resources and facilities, limited depth and progression of arts instruction, teacher-related instructional constraints, and conflicting academic and specialization schedules. Students reported shortages of functional instruments, instructional materials, reference books, and specialized learning spaces, which restricted opportunities for hands-on practice and artistic development. Some students also relied on personally acquired materials and equipment because of insufficient school resources. The findings further revealed concerns regarding repetitive instructional content, limited exposure to advanced artistic techniques, and insufficient opportunities for practical application. Students associated these difficulties with teachers' varied specialization backgrounds, limited subject mastery in certain disciplines, and competing instructional responsibilities. Conflicting schedules between regular academic classes, specialization subjects, and rehearsals also created difficulties in managing academic requirements and artistic commitments. These findings were comparable to those of Sabit (2019), who documented inadequacies in facilities and instructional resources in a Philippine SPA school. Similarly, Pañares and Cabangon (2016) examined drama education in Philippine schools, emphasizing the role of institutional and educational practices in supporting the integration of drama into the school curriculum. The findings highlighted the need for adequate learning resources, progressive

specialization instruction, strengthened teacher competencies, and coordinated academic scheduling to improve students' learning experiences in the SPA.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the implementation, milestones, and challenges of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) among six recognized public secondary schools in DepEd Region VII during the school year 2021–2022. Using a qualitative research approach, the study gathered perspectives from school principals, SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists, and students through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis identified patterns concerning arts specialization offerings, teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum design, student enrollment and selection, facilities and resources, monitoring and evaluation, program milestones, and challenges encountered during implementation. The findings provided insights into the strengths and limitations of the SPA and served as the basis for developing an Innovative Management Plan to enrich the curriculum for Grades 7–10.

Findings

The thematic analysis of data gathered from interviews and focus group discussions across the six Special Program in the Arts (SPA) schools in DepEd Region VII yielded the following findings:

1. Implementation of the Special Program in the Arts. Five of the six participating schools offered all six prescribed arts specializations: visual arts, music, theater arts, media arts, dance, and creative writing. However, the schools experienced shortages of teacher-specialists with academic qualifications directly aligned with their assigned disciplines. Curriculum implementation generally followed DepEd standards, although teachers adapted instructional content and activities according to available resources and students' learning needs. Schools implemented a three-phase admission process involving an interest inventory, a readiness assessment, and a specialization selection, with some adjustments reported to address enrollment concerns. All six schools experienced deficiencies in specialized facilities and instructional equipment. Monitoring and evaluation primarily involved performance-based assessments, including artistic outputs, practical demonstrations, and portfolios, with a reported grading allocation of 70% for outputs and 30% for written assessments.

2. Milestones of SPA Implementation. Eight major milestones emerged from participants' accounts: character and relationship formation, public recognition, participation in competitions, community engagement, collaboration with external organizations, project-based learning, high student completion rates, and successful alumni. These accomplishments reflected the program's contribution to artistic development, student participation, institutional recognition, and community involvement despite implementation limitations.

3. Challenges Encountered in SPA Implementation. The challenges differed across respondent groups. Principals identified teacher deficiencies, inadequate classrooms and facilities, insufficient budget allocation, curriculum feasibility issues, and student selection concerns. SPA coordinators reported traditional administrative arrangements, weak community linkages, ineffective program promotion, and limited institutional collaboration. Teacher-specialists identified weak foundational arts competencies among students, workload and professional development constraints, curriculum inconsistencies, negative stereotypes about arts education, and insufficient funding and facilities. Meanwhile, students reported inadequate learning resources, limited depth of arts instruction, teacher-related instructional constraints, and conflicts between academic classes and specialization schedules.

Conclusions

The study concluded that the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) provided meaningful opportunities for young learners to develop their artistic abilities, creativity, and appreciation of Filipino culture and heritage. Despite notable milestones in student development, artistic achievements, community engagement, and alumni accomplishments, program implementation remained constrained by shortages of qualified teacher-specialists, inadequate facilities and instructional resources, limited funding, curriculum inconsistencies, and administrative challenges. Students also experienced difficulties related to limited practical learning opportunities, instructional constraints, and conflicting academic schedules. These findings underscored the need to strengthen teacher qualifications and professional development, improve specialized facilities and technological resources, enhance curriculum delivery and student support, and establish stronger institutional and community partnerships. The proposed Innovative Management Plan provided a framework to address these limitations, sustain program accomplishments, and improve the delivery of specialized arts education for Grades 7–10 in DepEd Region VII.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were proposed to strengthen the implementation and sustainability of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA):

1. **Strengthen teacher-specialists' professional development.** Institutionalize continuous training, specialization-based workshops, and postgraduate studies related to the arts to enhance teachers' competencies, instructional proficiency, and curriculum implementation.
2. **Enhance community engagement and institutional partnerships.** Establish stronger linkages with local government units, cultural organizations, arts institutions, and other stakeholders to expand program resources, promote artistic activities, and sustain community support for SPA implementation.
3. **Strengthen project-based and experiential learning.** Integrate meaningful artistic projects, performances, exhibitions, and collaborative activities into the

curriculum to develop students' creativity, practical competencies, innovation, and ability to produce quality artistic outputs.

PROPOSED INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SPECIAL PROGRAM IN THE ARTS

Rationale

The proposed Innovative Management Plan was developed based on the findings of the study on the implementation, milestones, and challenges of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) in six recognized schools in DepEd Region VII. The findings revealed limitations involving teacher-specialists' qualifications, curriculum implementation, student selection, instructional facilities, financial resources, administrative coordination, and community engagement. Despite these challenges, the participating schools demonstrated accomplishments in artistic development, public recognition, competitions, project-based learning, student completion, and alumni achievements.

The management plan was designed to address these institutional limitations while sustaining successful practices. It emphasized professional development, curriculum enhancement, resource mobilization, student support, collaborative management, and stronger community partnerships to improve the delivery of specialized arts education.

Implementation Approach

The proposed management plan adopted a collaborative and continuous improvement approach involving school principals, SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists, students, parents, local government units, and partner organizations. Responsibilities were distributed according to institutional functions, while regular monitoring, stakeholder consultation, and program evaluation were proposed to guide implementation and necessary adjustments.

Vision

To develop artistically competent, creative, and culturally aware learners committed to preserving and promoting Filipino culture and heritage.

Objectives

The proposed management plan aimed to:

1. Strengthen the professional qualifications and instructional competencies of SPA teacher-specialists.
2. Enhance curriculum delivery through relevant, learner-centered, and performance-based artistic activities.
3. Improve the availability and utilization of specialized facilities, equipment, and instructional resources.

4. Strengthen student admission, academic support, and specialization scheduling.
5. Enhance administrative coordination, community engagement, and institutional partnerships.
6. Sustain program milestones through artistic performances, exhibitions, competitions, project-based learning, and alumni involvement.

Proposed Management Framework

Key result area	Proposed strategies	Responsible stakeholders	Expected outcomes
Teacher development	Specialization-based training, workshops, mentoring, and postgraduate development	School principals, SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists, DepEd	Improved teacher preparation and specialization competencies
Curriculum enhancement	Review learning competencies, strengthen practical activities, and integrate project-based learning	SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists	More responsive and feasible curriculum delivery
Facilities and resources	Prioritize equipment acquisition, improve specialized learning spaces, and mobilize external support	School administrators, DepEd, LGUs, partner organizations	Improved availability of instructional facilities and equipment
Student admission and support	Review screening procedures, provide foundational arts instruction, and coordinate academic schedules	SPA coordinators, teacher-specialists, guidance personnel	Improved student placement, learning support, and scheduling
Administrative management	Strengthen program coordination, clarify responsibilities, and establish regular implementation reviews	School principals, SPA coordinators	More coordinated and responsive program management
Community engagement	Develop partnerships with cultural organizations, parents, LGUs, and alumni	School administrators, SPA coordinators, stakeholders	Increased community participation and institutional support
Program sustainability	Maintain exhibitions, recitals, competitions, collaborative projects, and alumni involvement	Teacher-specialists, students, SPA coordinators	Sustained artistic opportunities and program achievements

Monitoring and Evaluation

The proposed management plan included regular monitoring of curriculum implementation, teacher development, instructional resources, student participation, and institutional accomplishments. Program reviews, facility inventories, student performance records, stakeholder feedback, and documentation of artistic activities were identified as potential evaluation mechanisms. The results of these assessments would guide necessary adjustments and support the continuous improvement of SPA implementation. The proposed framework provided a structured basis for addressing implementation challenges, sustaining program milestones, and strengthening the delivery of specialized arts education for Grades 7–10.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study observed ethical considerations throughout the research process. Permission was secured from the concerned Schools Division Superintendents and school principals before conducting interviews and focus group discussions. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and the confidentiality of their responses was maintained. Parental permission was obtained for participating students through their respective SPA coordinators. The information gathered was used solely for research purposes, and applicable COVID-19 health and safety protocols were observed during data collection.

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APA Citation:

Valenzona, A. R., & Pabalan, A. P. (2026). THE SPECIAL PROGRAM IN THE ARTS: IMPLEMENTATION, MILESTONES, AND CHALLENGES. Ignatian International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 4(11), 83–101. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23875908

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