A local study published by the HEALTH Research and Development Information Network (Herdin, 2022) titled “Accessibility of school facilities for students with disabilities in the Philippines” highlighted that many public schools, particularly from rural areas, struggle to implement inclusive structures due to the lack of budget and awareness. While this provided qualitative evidence of poor infrastructure and unexplored areas, the lack of investigation affected how these gaps affect the emotional and social experiences of students with physical disabilities. Other pieces of literature and studies tend to focus more on Metro Manila or privileged urban areas, leaving a gap in investigating the situation in provinces or rural areas, such as in Pampanga. Meanwhile, a 2023 article by Philstar reported that the Department of Education was questioned for removing a specific budget line for “learners with disabilities” in its national funding proposal. Although DepEd claimed the funds were reallocated under broader categories, the move raised concerns over the government’s prioritization of inclusive education. While statistical data from DepEd reports show that over 60% of learners with disabilities enrolled in public schools do not have access to proper SPED support or facilities, lived experiences go further to illustrate the personal toll of these systemic gaps (Philstar, 2023).

The inadequate inclusive facilities not only create physical barriers for students with disabilities but also contribute to psychological and social challenges, such as peer interaction. The lack of inclusive facilities hinders their ability to participate in school activities, limiting opportunities to connect with peers and fostering a feeling of exclusion. It creates a barrier with their educational well-being, leading to increased stress and anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and a reduced sense of belonging. By creating an environment suitable for their needs, creates a sense of inclusion, comfort, and confidence. Knowing they can freely navigate spaces—without facing physical obstacles—further encourages a more supportive and delegate educational experience.

The lack of compliance in infrastructure within public schools in Pampanga needs to be addressed as it results in making public school facilities inaccessible for persons with disabilities (PWDs). This study aims to seek an understanding of public-school students around Pampanga with physical disabilities, focusing on their real-life experiences and school facilities that lack inclusivity. The potential of students to learn, feel included, and have free will to roam is influenced by the barriers they experience. The purpose of this study is to describe the hidden voices of the daily struggles that students with physical disabilities encounter. This study would be the way for other students, teachers, and even other individuals to understand the needs of inclusivity in school facilities in order to give PWD students a better learning experience.

**Review of Related Literature**

Barriers in accessibility remain a major problem in the Philippines. Many students with disabilities continue to struggle with their day-to-day lives, especially in the academic aspect. A disability informs the condition of a person who is unable to perform a task due to a physical or mental impairment, particularly if their environment has not been designed to accommodate them. People with physical disabilities often experience barriers in public or school that others fail to notice, including classrooms lacking appropriate support, such as a lack of ramps and elevators, narrow doorways, and inadequate signages. Thus, the related literature review of this study further examines the conditions of secondary-level public schools, with particular attention to non-inclusive facilities, physical barriers. It also integrates existing recommendations on improving the accessibility of public spaces to provide more comfort and support for learners with physical disabilities.

Secondary-level Public Schools

Secondary-level public schools refer to junior and senior high schools where students are aged 13-18 years old. There are approximately 47,144 public schools in the Philippines. According to the Department of Education (2025), these institutions are all mandated to accept all types of learners regardless of gender, religion, place of origin, or disability, including out-of-school children, youth, and adults (OSYA) in special cases. Each of these public schools are also funded by the government and by the taxes of the Filipino people(Ocampo & Buenviaje, 2024). The government is the ones who pass and implement laws—they are in-charge of allocation of budgets with compliance to these laws (Cabanero, 2023). However, according to the Department of Education in 2022, the proposed budget for learners with special needs was not considered by the National Expenditure Program (NEP), showing that the government itself lacks in prioritization and focus towards inclusive education.

Navarro (2024) explains that many public schools here in the Philippines, especially in far remote places, are still overcrowded and do not have important things, such as ramps, steady electricity, and clean restrooms. Because of these gaps, students with disabilities are having a tough time going to school, which holds them back from fully participating in learning and goes against the purpose of inclusive education.

Non-Inclusive Facilities

Many public facilities lack inclusivity when it comes to the physically disabled. Many spaces do not have the proficiency that everyone needs. Features in public facilities like ramps, curbs, and other resources should be accessible for people with disabilities (PWD). As stated by Sarza, B. (2024), comprehensive and secure mobility can have an effect in amplifying inclusivity that ensures no one is left behind. Due to the instances of these non-inclusive facilities, architects constructed two main methods, which are universal design and reasonable accommodation in making inclusive facilities (Makbura, 2024).

An inclusive facility must prioritize accessibility by ensuring that its location is easily attainable, its floor plan includes reachable architectural features, and complies with Batas Pambansa Blg. 344, also known as the Accessibility Law of the Philippines. This law serves as the legal foundation, enforcing the mobility of persons with disabilities (PWDs) by mandating the by commissioning the installation of appropriate facilities for public buildings and utilities. As the official document outlines these requirements, Batas Pambansa Blg. 344 provides a complete framework for understanding and implementing the necessary standards for accessible infrastructures and facilities (National Council on Disability Affairs, 2025).

Physical Barriers

Physical barriers refer to the infrastructure’s limits that challenge individuals with impairments' experiences based on the overall care and services. It significantly affects their lived experiences, especially those who are in real need of medical assistance. In a study by Awang et al. (2024), researchers found different types of physical barriers in healthcare facilities. They identified problems related to inadequate facilities provision, accessibility to navigation information, non-compliance with the design, and facility maintenance issues (Awang et al. 2024). The frequently reported breakdowns are PWD toilets, followed by poorly built covered walkways, which increase the risk of accidents. These findings support the current study by showing how hospital designs can violate BP 344, increasing the danger for people with disabilities instead of providing them with safety.

Impacts of Inaccessible Public Spaces

Inaccessible public spaces refer to those that present physical and psychological barriers that limit or prevent full participation in public spaces. With these physical barriers, it diminishes the participant’s autonomy, social engagement, and overall well-being (Hale et al, 2024). Moreover, inaccessibility may deprive people with physical disabilities of their liberty to access public transportation, micromobility infrastructure, and intermodal transportation (Pineda, 2022). Additionally, in the study conducted by Kapsalis et al. (2024), it was revealed that physical barriers and non-accessible designs affect the persons with disabilities quality of life in terms of their health, safety, independence, and social participation. The lack of inclusivity in designs impacts their ability to easily access public infrastructures like hospitals; it also hinders their engagement in community events and navigation of their daily life.

Suggestions to Improve Inaccessible Public Spaces

Designing accessibility in mind requires attention to multiple physical features, including ramps, restrooms, hallways, and shared public areas. For instance, ramps must be constructed with safe, gradual inclines and slip-resistant surfaces to ensure user safety. Ramps have been the entrances of people with mobility issues; however, many researchers have questioned their safety and usability, which explains the need for more improvement in designing and building ramps for public spaces. Additionally, restrooms should offer adequate space to accommodate wheelchair movement and must be equipped with support features such as grab bars. Similarly, hallways should be sufficiently wide to allow easy navigation for individuals using mobility aids. To support those with visual impairments, public areas should include clear, readable signage and tactile guiding paths to facilitate safe and independent movement (Fulgar, 2023).

Individuals with disabilities often encounter barriers in built environments that include the prevalence of manual doors, stair-dependent infrastructures, and establishments that only provide escalators as the main means of access. By replacing manual doors with automatic ones and creating elevator lifts will significantly improve the experience and accessibility of people with mobility issues (Kapsalis et al., 2022)

In conclusion, people with physical and mental disabilities in Pampanga face many challenges and still struggle due to poorly designed schools and facilities that limit their access. Many public schools are not built for everyone, especially public facilities like ramps, curbs, and other resources that should be accessible for persons with disabilities (PWD). These problems in public schools impact their learning and their connection with others, such as making friends and participating in society. These problems can lead to feelings of stress and a lack of belonging in school and in the community. By understanding the lived experiences of these students and other persons with disabilities, this study hopes to push for better and more inclusive and improved facilities that allow every individual using public facilities to learn and grow without barriers, physical limitations, and without worry for their safety. It is important that schools make a move to create a safer environment for all. Small changes can make a significant impact in helping public school students with physical disabilities feel more supported and included in society.

Laws like RA 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, and RA 7277, which is the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, were created in the Philippines to encourage inclusive education. However, there are still public schools that continue to lack the proper facilities to adequately accommodate students with physical disabilities. Although their study focused on elementary schools in the United States, Schulke et al. (2024) found that non-inclusive play environments have a greater negative impact on students with disabilities. Biado and Arias (2025) observed that although some schools in Northern Samar had ramps, accessibility issues persisted in the restrooms and hallways of the remaining schools. Even with strong policies, poor implementation leads to a lack of infrastructure and support in educational institutions, as highlighted by Borja (2025).

A study conducted by Sol Cruz et al. (2021) titled “Philippine Disability Sector Research” presented an initial analysis of the disability sector in the Philippines by examining the extent to which the rights of people with disabilities are upheld across various sectors, including social and public life, social work, education, employment, and governance. This study conducted interviews and focused on group discussions with 58 participants from government and non-government agencies from all over the Philippines. They found that despite encouraging physically-inclusive policies, persons with disabilities in the Philippines still encounter significant barriers when accessing public and social services, quality education, and employment. Some of the key challenges include inaccessible infrastructure, communication, and limited social participation, as well as a lack of awareness regarding the rights of persons with disabilities and frequent negative attitudes that lead to exclusion.

To add on, Dado et al.’s study in 2021 titled “A Study on The Lived Experiences of Person with Disability in the Workplace” examined the lived experiences of people with disabilities, which were mostly conducted quantitatively, resulting in not being able to delve deeper into the experiences of individuals. The study was carried out in a workplace setting in the Philippines, utilizing a Phenomenological approach within a qualitative research design to further understand the lived experiences of persons with disabilities in the workplace. The researchers found that as persons with disabilities in the workplace were treated as insignificant, especially in employment, it does not change the fact that they can still join and integrate into the mainstream. Although the study focused on workplaces, it still shows the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in their everyday job life in the Philippines, similarly to the experiences some students may encounter in schools, which can significantly support the current study.

Extending the discussion, Caingcoy's research in 2021 titled “Lived Experiences of Learners with Disabilities (LWDs) in the Delivery System of Student Services in Inclusive Education” explored how learners with disabilities perceive the availability, accessibility, and responsiveness of student services within inclusive educational institutions. The study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the unique experiences of LWDs, highlighting that many still feel underserved despite the implementation of inclusive education policies. Participants expressed challenges such as the lack of trained personnel, inaccessible learning environments, and limited accommodations that directly affect their academic participation and success. The study emphasizes that while inclusive education has progressed in the Philippines, student services must evolve to address the specific needs of LWDs in a holistic, proactive manner. These findings align with broader research showing the need for systemic improvements in support structures for persons with disabilities in both educational and workplace settings.

From a local governance perspective, a 2022 study by Billote titled “Issues and Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities in Basco, Batanes” for Batanes State University assessed public spaces that continue to lack PWD-friendly facilities. Additionally, the findings of the research reveal that persons with disabilities continue to face obstacles such as a lack of access to public spaces, hostile attitudes from others, and a deficiency in social confidence, which impacts their daily existence. Despite the existence of laws such as Batas Pambansa Blg. 344 or the Accessibility Law of the Philippines, many public spaces remain non-compliant. The lack of adherence not only creates notable barriers for the physically disabled, but also undermines the very intent of the legislation.

In a study conducted by Berana (2023) titled “The Right to Inclusive Quality Education of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)” in De La Salle Lipa, the findings stated that the Philippine laws tend to focus more on giving an inclusive education for primary to secondary school students but comparatively less emphasis for tertiary education. Although the study states that there are already multiple existing legislative laws regarding the rights of persons with disabilities to an accessible education, there are still barriers that PWDs continue to experience in their day-to-day lives. This is compounded by the deficiencies, such as inadequate budget provision, insufficient teacher training, lack of awareness campaigns, and faltering implementation measures. These reasons collectively limit the involvement of PWDs in social activities and daily functioning.

Following the previous findings, a study by Bognot et al. called “Assessment of Access in the Barrier-Free Facilities for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in the Municipality of Guimba” in 2023 examines public facilities and their accessibility for people with disabilities based on the “Accessibility Law” or BP 344 in the Municipality of Guimba, Nueva Ecija. The findings of this study stressed that there is a continuing gap between legislation and practice, as many public infrastructures remain without basic accessibility features such as ramps, signage, and appropriate restrooms. This reflects the urgent need for improved facilities, assistive devices, and stronger policy implementation, particularly in educational institutions.

Supporting earlier insights, Bognot et al.’s study titled “Assessment of Access in the Barrier-Free Facilities for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in the Municipality of Guimba. (2023)” assessed municipal buildings and health centers in Guimba, Nueva Ecija, to determine the extent of barrier-free facilities for persons with disabilities. Their findings revealed that while certain areas attempted to implement inclusive features, key accessibility elements like ramps, tactile paving, and accessible restrooms were frequently absent or noncompliant. This points to the disconnect between the policies outlined by Philippine laws (e.g., BP344) and their actual execution, reinforcing the need for continuous local monitoring and more inclusive planning.

From a regional perspective, Nahdatunnisa and Tahir’s study titled “Assessing the performance of the pedestrian path accessibility standards for people with disabilities (2024)” conducted a case study on pedestrian paths in Kendari City, Indonesia, revealing widespread noncompliance with universal design standards. Their findings resonated with the Filipino context, where most pathways lacked basic accessibility infrastructure such as ramps, guiding blocks for the visually impaired, and trash bins. Their work highlights the challenges faced by pedestrians with disabilities in urban environments and emphasizes the urgent need for accessible design integration in city planning and policy enforcement.

With this, a study by Manalo‑Asay and Abiog‑Adriano (2024) titled “Implementation of BP344 in Both Private and Public Establishments: A Case Study” in Camarines Sur examined the implementation of the Accessibility Law (BP344) across public and private establishments in the Philippines. Their study revealed that they have only found partial implementation. Inclusivity can happen anytime and anywhere, whether it is a device or a facility. Infrastructures are one of the major components in promoting inclusivity. Establishments like ramps, doorways, elevators, accessible comfort rooms, and railings are supported by BP344 or the “Accessible Law” of the Philippines.  The lack of accessibility, unusable devices, and unnecessary accommodations conveys the need for proper policies, resources, and institutions for persons with disabilities (PWD). This study highlights the importance of accessibility in facilities that are accessible to people with disabilities.

In the educational sector, Mateo et al.’s study, called “Private and Public Secondary School Accessibility Among Persons with Disabilities in Ilocos Norte (2024),” conducted a study that uses a comparative approach to examine how both public and private secondary schools in Ilocos Norte comply with BP344 and the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities. It found that while most schools had visible efforts, such as installed ramps, accessible restrooms, and signage, awareness of legal obligations was generally high. However, the research also revealed broader issues between formal compliance and actual usability, such as ramps that are too steep or bathrooms that are inaccessible in practice.

Further expanding the discussion, Gupta, Yadav, and Nayak’s study, “A systematic literature review on inclusive public open spaces: Accessibility standards and universal design principles (2025),” reviewed literature on the design of inclusive public open spaces, focusing on whether accessibility and universal design principles are genuinely embedded in urban planning. Their analysis revealed that many projects treat accessibility as an afterthought, leading to barriers in usability for persons with disabilities. The researchers advocate for proactive and inclusive planning that starts with ensuring the growth of cities with accessibility issues as a core value rather than a late-stage add-on.

In relation to this, a phenomenological study by Caliso et al. (2025), titled “Exploring the Lived Experiences of Students with Disabilities in a Philippine State College”, where the researchers sought to understand how these students navigate their academic and social life within a higher education context. The study surfaced three central themes: overcoming challenges, excelling despite limitations, and bridging faith with self‑acceptance. Participants described facing exclusion, social stigma, and inaccessible infrastructure—but also demonstrated remarkable resilience, drawing on personal faith, supportive relationships, and inner motivation. The authors emphasize the urgent need for educational institutions to review and strengthen inclusive policies, improve physical accessibility, and launch awareness campaigns to cultivate empathy and acceptance.

A lot of the time, for people with physical disabilities, transportation is another issue. Santos and Dizon’s 2025 study titled “Inclusive transport policies in Southeast Asia: A policy review of disability-inclusive mobility programs,” conducted a regional review of inclusive transportation policies across Southeast Asia. Their study found that while national mobility policies for PWDs exist in countries like the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia, actual implementation is limited at the local level. Gaps in infrastructure—such as inaccessible terminals or a lack of low-floor buses—continue to exclude persons with disabilities from full participation in public life. The authors recommend participatory planning and consistent policy enforcement to bridge these gaps.

From a local perspective, Gaspar-Pacana & Cornelia’s study in 2025, “Knowledge and Challenges in the Accessibility Law among PWDs and Building Owners in Dumaguete City: Implications for Effective Implementation,” assessed the implementation of BP344 in Dumaguete City by surveying building owners and persons with disabilities. Despite high awareness levels of the law, actual compliance remained moderate due to financial constraints, lack of proper guidance, and weak enforcement. The study concluded that legal knowledge alone does not translate into accessible infrastructure. Effective implementation requires resources, training, and political will.

In a 2025 study titled “Inclusive Education Practices for Physically Disabled Learners in Northern Samar Elementary Schools, Philippines” by Biado (2025) examined how students with physical disabilities experience their school environment. They found that some schools had ramps and wider doors, but other key areas, such as restrooms and hallways, were still hard to access. This makes it difficult for students to move around freely and feel included. The study shows that although some improvements have been made, the schools are still not fully equipped to support these learners. This relates to the current study by investigating whether similar physical barriers exist in public secondary schools in Pampanga, especially in how students with physical disabilities face these challenges daily.

On the other hand, some studies such as the research conducted by Borja (2025) in Manila, Philippines, titled “Inclusive Education and the Challenges Encountered by the Selected Diocesan Schools in the National Capital Region”, disclose that there are several laws in the Philippines that support and emphasize the commitment to an inclusive education, such as the Republic Act 11650, DepEd Order No.72, s. 2009, and Republic Act 9442 or the "Magna Carta for Disabled Persons". Findings suggest that although the study’s statistics have revealed significant progress in implementing inclusive instructional practices, certain factors continue to hinder the development. These factors include insufficient resources and funding, inadequate infrastructure, resistance to change, lack of training for teachers, and curriculum challenges. This supports the need for contextualized studies such as the present research, which examine how these gaps are experienced by students with disabilities in real secondary school environments, particularly in terms of physical accessibility. While most studies discuss inclusive education in elementary schools or focus on laws and policies, there is still a lack of research that looks into how these issues are experienced by students with disabilities in secondary schools. There is still a clear gap in understanding how these issues affect students with disabilities in a high-quality learning environment.

In conclusion, most studies talk about how people with disabilities have a hard time using public transportation, health centers, and government buildings. While these are important, there are only a few studies on accessibility in public schools in the Philippines. Many studies highlight the struggles of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in moving around the community, but few explore how inclusive schools are. Even though the Philippines have laws like BP344 or the Accessibility Law, the needs of students with disabilities in schools are often ignored. That is why there is a need for more local studies to understand if public schools truly support and include learners with disabilities. Schools should be safe and welcoming for everyone. Making schools more accessible gives all students a fair chance to learn and grow.

**Research Gap**

A local study conducted in Calbayog City, Samar (Faller, N.L., 2024) found that while the Philippines has laws supporting persons with disabilities, their practical applications remain weak. Policies often fail to translate into real improvements for students with physical disabilities, despite the number of laws and executive orders introduced since the 1950’s. Cruz et al. (2021) also noted that the idea of rights-based inclusive education is not yet fully understood in local policy-making and implementation. Although national laws and recommendations exist, there is still little evidence of their effectiveness, especially in terms of actual impact on students with disabilities in Pampanga.

**Research Framework**

This study is grounded in the Universal Design Theory of Accessibility, proposed by Ronald L. Mace in 1973 (Kavitha, 2023). Mace was an American architect and an active disability rights advocate, diagnosed with polio at a young age, and relied heavily on a wheelchair for better mobility. His personal experience in navigating inaccessible facilities stresses the lack of properly built facilities, motivating him to develop a framework that incorporates inclusivity in design.

Universal design gives emphasis on creating spaces, products, and facilities that are accessible and inclusive for all individuals, regardless of their abilities, age, or circumstances. This is done to design from the foundation to meet everyone’s requirements. This tackles the environmentally friendly devices that are not only attainable to people with disabilities, but to everyone.

It has the means of planning the design of objects, systems, or places that are functional to everyone. Mace (1978) mentioned that the Universal Design Theory of Accessibility states that it started arising and gained attention in the 1970s and urged the overall design of products, amenities, and environments to incorporate accessible solutions. (Mace 1997; as cited in the study of Makhbura, 2024).

This theory is highly relevant to the present study, which gives an in-depth clarification on the impact of non-inclusive facilities on persons with disabilities in public secondary schools in Pampanga. By aligning the Universal Design Theory of Accessibility, it serves as the basis which aims to promote the designing of facilities that are designed to be inclusive from the start. Therefore, with this theory, it can further expand knowledge and give coherence to the study that acknowledges the lived experiences of students in the secondary level with physical disabilities.