

Policy Evaluation of the Department of Education K-12 Basic Education Program

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Abstract: *The study evaluated the implementation of the K-12 Basic Education Program of the Philippine government by examining its strengths and weaknesses. This study employed a critical analysis of evaluation given the implementation of the K-12 Basic Education Program, with the Department of Education as the implementing agency in charge of the delivery of basic education in the country. The authors followed a critical analysis approach in evaluating the policy supported and substantiated by evidence from published research articles and online documents. The study focused on the strength and weaknesses of the policy, the level of preparedness undertaken by the government, and the extent of effectiveness and efficiency to stakeholders. In addition, it discussed the gaps and advantages of the Program. Salient findings include learners showing enthusiasm, hope, and willingness toward learning and education. Parents viewed the Program positively and felt it helps their children choose careers that best fit their skills and interests. The K-12 Program is an educational policy by the Philippine government anchored from the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal No. 4 is education; this SDG is a call to end poverty and other forms of deprivation. The primary aim of the K-12 Program is to improve the country's social life condition and to produce skilled and lifelong individuals that meet global standards. The implementation of the K-12 Program offers notable improvement, given functional literacy in reading, writing, and numeracy. The Program also received numerous positive feedbacks from various stakeholders. The government must venture into other income-generating alternatives to contribute additional funding for the K-12 Program. It must include tightening tax collection and appropriate financial management at relevant educational institutions. The fastest way to improve the quality are to decongest the curriculum and to focus on the essential learning competencies.*

Keywords - K-12 basic education program; level of preparedness; implementation; 21st century curriculum; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd) issued a Department Order (DO) No. 021, s. 2019 otherwise known as the "K-12 Basic Education Program", to provide a framework and to enforce the implementing guidelines of the K-12 Program. It provides an extensive explanation of the components and serves as a framework for monitoring and evaluating the Program across all concerned participants in the DepEd agency (DepEd-Region VI, 2022). Moreover, the policy is a guideline for the implementation process of DepEd's offices and schools. It serves as the baseline of each department level in the Program's assessment, enhancement, and development (DepEd, 2016). The policy targets to benefit the education sector's stakeholders by providing them with a comprehensive understanding of the Program through orientations and training. Their concrete contribution led to the envisioned success of K-12 Program implementation.

The K-12 Program is a reform in the education system designed to advance the education status of the Philippines. Before this Program, the Philippines was the only country in Asia, along with the three countries in the world, that remains to offer a 10-year basic education cycle. Through the K-12 Program, the government forecasted that the country's education system could be comparable, if not level up, with the international standards by producing globally competitive and skillfully equipped lifelong learners (Guiamalon & Hariraya,

2021). Moreover, the government invested in this education program to contribute towards national development.

Policy implementation entails a rigorous and distinctive process before attaining tangible success (Tayoni & Abocejo, 2023). It requires intensive planning, collaboration, and participation of stakeholders at all levels, with due consideration of external and internal factors affecting the implementation process (Malinao et al., 2022). The K-12 Program follows the Top-Down Model of Gregory in 1970, integrating Trillanes' policy-making procedures, as cited in Lumanog (2019).

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) member countries, including the Philippines, adopted the 17 Sustainable Goals (SDGs) to be achievable by 2030. These SDGs are an urgent call for action to attain sustainable development and to end poverty and other deprivations through global partnerships. The Philippines crafted the K-12 Program from the Education for All (EFA) policy in response to the UN call. This move addressed the need for change and innovative development in the education system toward the country's sustainability.

The curriculum of K-12 possesses various characteristics. It replaced the 10-year primary education in the old curriculum with a 13-year basic education new curriculum. It follows the spiral progression based on Woods et al. (as cited in Wilson & Devereux, 2014) Scaffolding Theory. In the spiral

progression, the students take up the same subjects throughout the school year, but as their grade level increases, the complexity and reinforcement of the same subjects also increase. Moreover, the Program featured six domains: (1) Universal Kindergarten; (2) Contextualization and enhancement; (3) Spiral Progression; (4) Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education; (5) Gearing up for the future; and (6) Nurturing the Holistically Developed Filipino. The Program supports the tri-focalization of the DepEd, Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

The six domains conceptualize how the curriculum should take place. Under the Universal Kindergarten based on Republic Act (RA) 10157, the child is encouraged to enroll at age 5 to instill the foundation of learning and its total development. In the contextualization and enhancement, lessons must be relevant through teaching a culture, reality, and history based so that students can easily relate. In Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) education, the mother tongue is taught from K-Grade 3 (Dagalea et al., 2022). In grades 4 to 6, the medium of instruction should be in English and Filipino. The same subjects are taken throughout the grade level, but only the complexity increases as the grade level increases in the spiral progression. Moreover, Senior High School offers a Core Curriculum and Academic tracks. All these domains are geared up for the future.

Müller (2023) explained that policy implementation in the Philippines undergoes five steps: (1) agenda-setting; (2) policy formulation; (3) legislation; (4) implementation; and (5) monitoring. In the case of the MTB-MLE Program, the carrying out of these processes can influence the internal and external factors that would affect the entire success of its implementation. However, in its 9th year of existence from promulgation, many issues and challenges surfaced along its way. It is transparent that the performance of the K-12 Program employs a linear model that outlines a rational, balanced, objective, and analytical way of policymaking. Still, since it is linear, the response from the stakeholders is not automatic and dynamic. As a result, problems and deficiencies in the implementation process often result in intervention setbacks.

This study assessed the K-12 Program as implemented from top to bottom (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019). First, it is crucial to determine the barriers that impede policy implementation. Hudson et al. (2018) contend that the success or failure of policies like the top-down policy rely its progress not from its level but instead relies on how the implementation is carried out grounded on certain assumptions. These assumptions are chronological order (intentions precede actions), linear causal logic (goals determine instruments and instruments determines results), and hierarchy (policy formation is more important than policy implementation).

Adam et al. (2019) stressed that the common cause of the shortfall in policy design and implementation is the ineffective

vertical coordination between policymakers and implementers (or the stakeholders). Moreover, Molomoka et al. (2019) revealed that the top-down model has serious disadvantages, such as a lack of democratic control and transparency that leads to the postponement of the actual power of policy-making; it can create suspicion in the mind of some employees that can slowdown work or eventually produce low pass rates; and the system triggers dehumanization of subordinates which may limit the full utilization of decision-makers expertise.

These are contributing factors that could affect the implementation process of the policy. Examination of how the program implementation is being carried out from the top down to the bottom level must need to be analyzed in this study. It is essential to determine the barriers that impede policy implementation.

1.1 Study Objectives

The authors endeavored to critically analyze and evaluate the K-12 Basic Education Program of the Philippine government implemented through the Department of Education. Specifically, the study examined the strengths and weaknesses given the policy implementation's level of preparedness, effectiveness, and efficiency.

2. SUMMARY OF THE K-12 PROGRAM

The implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the K-12 policy render important factors crucial in assessing the progress of the curriculum. The "Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001" and the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013" (as cited in Molomolo, 2018) are associated with the policy and are systematized in four levels; the goal, sector outcome, intermediate outcome, and enabling mechanisms. In addition, the plan embodies gearing to achieve and improve education and readiness for international and global education.

Upon review of the Program's guidelines of DepEd Order No. 1 s. 2019, the policy is developed to strengthen and advance learners' skills as prospective beneficiaries and as part of the Program's stakeholders. Moreover, the Program was to yield successful outcomes. The outcomes of these reforms serve as tools to measure relevant information of appropriate implementation; assess the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation; provide an additional reference in the program planning and formulation of policy for successful implementation of curriculum; and identify system variability across curricular areas, programs and grade level in the country.

The program implementation considered various factors. The transition began in 2015 until the present when new pioneering K-12 university graduates have been produced. However, its implementation still has many issues and challenges in its sixth year. Pappas (2021), Pillay and Panth (2022) cited eight (8) different challenges in K-12 Education, including limited resources, minimal preventive measures during the COVID-19 crisis, minimal engagement of the K-

12, time pressure, moderate parent participation, congested classes, and emotional factors.

As to the progress report for the program implementation, 2010 posted shortages in classrooms, teacher items, water and sanitation, textbooks, and seats were addressed by the government in 2010-2014, which minimized the total resources lacking (Bozkurt et al., 2020). The government continuously supports the Program, aligning plans to address problems relative to the K-12 Program implementations. As the Program is in full swing, the past and present administrations have supported its success. In fact, under the education sector, the K to 12 Program is among those priorities in the annual budget allocations. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) allocated the DepEd PhP788.5 billion for the fiscal year 2022, which ranks top among ten other government agencies.

3. POLICY ANALYSIS

Any success in the implementation of the K-12 Program can result in educational improvement and could compete with the changing world of global needs and progression. Although the government faces different dilemmas in implementing and delivering the K to 12 education, emphasis on its delivery improvement and clear instructions must be taken seriously. Accordingly, the authors examined the different factors that affect the implementation process through this descriptive study. The study on the K-12 Program is timely and relevant of today's 21st-century education focused in the era of globalization and is contemporary.

The government is in pursuit of improving the K-12 Program. Through this Program, the government views the graduates as more competitive lifelong learners of the 21st century. Furthermore, the basic education system commensurate with the standards not only to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbors but to the global market as well. In addition, graduates of Senior High School land a job in technical and vocational aspects as long as they possess the required certifications, such as National Certificate (NC), to qualify for the needed skill based on Republic Act (RA) 10533, series 2013.

The government is taking initiatives to improve the social life status of the country through educational reforms such as the K-12 Program. Nevertheless, flaws and gaps are observed in the program policy implementation. As contended by Magallanes (2021), critics viewed that the K-12 Program policy did not address the crucial problems of the system. Moreover, its quick implementation can be a deterrent to society. The Program could add to parents' financial burdens, especially those in poverty (Magallanes (2021; Fernandez & Abocejo, 2014). He also noted that the increase in the span of educational patterns has nothing to do with improving the quality of education.

The Philippine government is a democratic system where a policy is instituted through the rule of the majority and

employs a linear approach. Essentially, legitimization becomes limited because the government is the controller and is the center of the policy-making process (Takagi, 2021). Because local stakeholders cannot participate directly, it may be difficult to identify solutions to problems and concerns of which program implementers are unaware when they arise at the grassroots level (Ng et al., 2022)

3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Policy

The K-12 policy (DepEd K-12 Basic Education Program) is one of the vital contributors to the development and success of the country. Ensuring quality education and a relevant curriculum system will respond to the needs of 21st-century skills (Yeh, 2019). As a result, graduates in primary education tend to be more skilled and globally competitive learners.

Moreover, the Program can increase primary education on functional literacy levels, reading and writing, and numeracy skills (Abril et al., 2022). The Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA] (2019) reported that there was about 91.6 percent of Filipinos ages 10 to 64 years old, or 73.0 million out of 79.7 million of that age categories, are functionally literate in 2019 as reported by the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), suggesting an improvement in the functional literacy among Filipinos.

However, as to the weakness of the policy, the accesses to resources are limited. For instance, in the sports track, as one of the strands in SHS, there must be more learning resources and materials for implementation and application. The access to interventions and feedback from the grassroots on how the policy works become limited. These results in backlogs to take immediate solutions to the issues and challenges of the program implementation (Tagare, 2022; Pañares & Abocejo, 2019).

Cruz (2018) stressed that learners experienced pressures on changes in the K-12 educational system. On the other hand, Dizon et al. (2019) contend that the schools need government support, such as sufficient classrooms, libraries, toilets, learning materials, and facilities to effectively and efficiently implement the Program. He further pointed out that financial resources represent the main weaknesses in the implementation process. It infers that educational facilities and infrastructure are scarce.

3.2 Level of Preparedness of the policy implementation

Adapting the K-12 Program is considered one of the solutions to end poverty and other forms of deprivation in the country. However, on the other side, the implementation process is hindered by some factors as barriers to successful program implementation. For example, Ednave et al. (2018) noted that the K-12 Program encounters challenges, such as the government's lack of preparation and support for the professional training of teachers relevant to the delivery of the Program.

A financial resource is a significant barrier to K-12 implementations. The government's financial capacity in

implementing the policy is a significant factor to consider because it relies on this funding for teachers' professional development and training. Insufficient funds can contribute to "paralysis" in the Program's implementation (Marisol et al., 2021).

Due to the pandemic, advanced technology was in high demand in the new educational setting in the Philippines. Even before the pandemic, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) strand, specifically computers in senior high schools, facilities like ICT equipment, and internet connectivity. These are needed learning tools to acquire 21st-century skills. However, more advanced technology must be provided and accessible to learners because of the eventual shift to another course (Mirasol et al., 2021).

Numerous curriculum competencies in K-12 that require teachers to impart in the lesson delivery, overlooking the time, and essential competencies (Cuaño & Abocejo (2018) are necessary for the learners to obtain towards achieving literacy and numeracy development (Marisol et al., 2021). The curriculum program must focus on the essential needs of learners. It must be aligned and match the competencies and educational goals (Balagtas et al., 2019).

3.3 The extent of effectiveness and efficiency of the policy

Despite the government's initiatives, the study found gaps and challenges in its implementation. For example, there needs to be more accessible to interventions and feedback from the grassroots on how the policy works due to the top-down approach, which requires ample time for intensive planning, collaboration, and participation of the stakeholders. In addition, immediate action must address issues such as the lack of financial resources to fund educational facilities, learning materials, and teacher training and the need for preparation to carry out the policy effectively.

For every policy implementation, the primary target is how it will benefit the intended recipients (Pañares & Abocejo, 2019). In the K-12 Program, the support and perspectives of the school, community, teacher, and learners are the central essential factors. Their contributions and participation are crucial to positively or negatively impact the entire implementation of the Program.

Although DepEd has faced many challenges in implementing the K-12 Program over the years, the government highlighted the need for improvement as it has been crucial to achieving quality primary education (Abueva, 2019). From the teachers' perspectives of the program implementers, predisposing factors such as competencies, recruitment process, course rationalization, excess workforce administration, and program substitution should be considered (Dizon et al., 2019).

Despite the pandemic, learners showed enthusiasm, hope, and willingness toward learning and education (Mirahmadizadeh et al., 2020). In addition, students showed a positive attitude and the importance of this Program,

especially in mathematics, as it will help in everyday life (Tabao & Faiz, 2020). Senior High School (SHS) students can choose career paths or specific academic tracks. Dizon et al. (2019) contend that parents viewed positively of the Program based on their belief that it will guide the learners in choosing the best career that best fits their abilities and interests.

The industry demands a skilled workforce. Therefore, Philippine education should prioritize learners to develop 21st-century skills relevant to a globally dynamic and competitive workforce (Culab, 2019). The SHS learners need to be more proficient in English, particularly in communicating orally. Canseran & Malenab-Temporal (2018) argued that the learners have a positive attitude toward speaking English, which will help develop vocabulary and writing skills (Sarape & Abocejo, 2020). This Program is a great way that will equip learners for future sustainable development.

4. CONCLUSION

Functional literacy in reading, writing, and numeracy is improving. However, the government's initiation to improve its citizen's social life conditions toward the nation's progress by implementing education reforms like the K-12 Program still needs to be addressed along the implementation processes. The access to interventions and feedback from the grassroots on how the policy works still need to be improved. Learners experienced pressures on changes in the educational system. Financial resources are needed to address the need for more infrastructure, educational facilities, materials, and resources. Financial resources represent the main weaknesses in implementation. The problems that exist within the program policy remain as backlogs.

The level of preparedness undertaken to carry out the Program suggests that the government still needs more preparation and support for the professional development of teachers. For example, the lack of infrastructure, ICT equipment, and internet connectivity led learners to change courses. In addition, various learning competencies could be better delivered during the lessons, neglecting the time and essential skills that learners need to achieve to acquire literacy and numeracy.

On the brighter side, the policy implementation received positive feedback from stakeholders, particularly teachers, parents, and learners. Notwithstanding the issues and challenges of the Program, students showed enthusiasm, hope, and willingness toward learning and education. Given the program context, they also acquired a positive attitude toward Mathematics and English skills. Likewise, parents positively viewed the program implementation. They agreed it would guide their children students in choosing the appropriate career paths that best suit their skills, thereby signaling that the Program is on the right track.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the preceding conclusions, the government takes doable interventions to address possible solutions to the problems arising from the K-12 Program implementations. First, the participation of the stakeholders as key players from the grassroots level must consider examining the actual situation on the ground. The government must consider other income-generating alternatives to increase the funding for the K-12 Program because financial resource is the most critical mechanism to carry out any government program. As such, the government should initiate tight tax collection, mandate appropriate financial management at relevant educational institutions, and participate in global partnerships for support, innovation, and assistance. Moreover, the faster way to at least uplift the quality of education is to decongest the curriculum and should only focus on the essential learning competencies.

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