



Annex 4: Factors influencing basic education learning outcomes and teachers' performance in selected public elementary schools in the ARMM: a qualitative assessment



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Executive Summary

This study identified and described factors influencing teachers' performance or competencies and student achievement (NAT scores) in core subject areas, i.e. English (Reading), Math and Science.

From the first week of February to the first week of March 2017, BEAM–ARMM researchers conducted fieldwork for a qualitative study on the factors influencing teaching competencies and students' learning outcomes. The study is the last in the series of four assessment studies on the improvement of students' learning outcomes (the program's strategic objective) and in the enhancement of teachers' performance (intermediate objective).

The study aimed to provide a description and explanation of factors influencing learning outcomes, as shown in the 2016 NAT scores, and in teachers' performance in delivering quality instruction to the region's elementary school pupils (Grades 1 and 2), as shown in the teachers' scores in the parallel post-tests.

In order to achieve the intermediate objective of teachers increasing competency in core subjects, Grades 1 and 2 teachers were trained in the teaching of Math, Science and English (Reading), from 2013 to late 2014. Of more than 2,000 teachers who went through the trainers' and roll out training, a sample of 452 were given a parallel post-test in August 2016, more than two years after the initial series of trainings (late 2013).

A review of the scores of teachers' parallel post-tests compared to the NAT scores of the students they taught in Grades 1 and 2 showed that increases in teachers' performance scores did not translate to increased NAT scores among their pupils. Moreover, some teachers also decreased in their parallel post-test scores (compared to their pre-tests), but the students they taught increased their NAT scores in 2016. The research team came up with four categories of teachers-students tandem to determine some possible influencing factors on their performance after the training and other program support from BEAM–ARMM.

The categories are:

- > **Group A:** teachers who scored low in the parallel post-test with students whose scores in the 2016 NAT increased, compared to their 2012 scores (before BEAM–ARMM interventions). Teachers and students from the divisions of Basilan and Sulu belong to this group.
- > **Group B:** Teachers who scored high in the parallel post-test with students whose scores in the 2016 NAT decreased. Teachers and students from the division of Tawi-Tawi belong to this group.
- > **Group C:** Teachers who scored low in the parallel post-test with students whose scores in the 2016 dipped significantly. Teachers and students from Lamitan City division fall under this category.
- > **Group D:** Teachers who scored high in the parallel post-tests with students who also increased their 2016 NAT scores. The teachers and students from the divisions of Maguindanao 2 and Marawi City belong to this group.

Using a highly participatory approach, the research team leader¹ gathered a small team of field researchers from divisions of DepEd-ARMM, and trained them in the intricacies of doing qualitative research. Researchers were trained in how to conceptualise research problems and their specific questions, and in different techniques of gathering qualitative data. After the intensive training (five days in all), the research team came up with two main research tools: key informant interview schedules and focus group discussion guides. A specific key informant interview tool and focus group discussion guide was developed for each sector of informants and focus group participants.

¹ BEAM–ARMM's National Inclusive Education and Gender Specialist (NIEGS) was given this extended task to lead the qualitative research on learning outcomes. She was assisted by the program's National Curriculum and Professional Development Specialist for Teachers in ARMM.

A purposive sample of 63 key informants (teachers, principals or school heads, district and division supervisors and division superintendents) and 226 focus group discussion participants (teachers, parents, students) was drawn up from the list of teachers and students in each of the six divisions that belonged to the four categories. The names of teacher informants and focus group participants matched with the names of their students in Grades 1 and 2.

In addition, the field team also gathered documents from each division regarding the number of days classes were suspended as well as reasons for the suspension; municipal profiles and numbers of schools in each division.

A modified version of Guskey's² (2002) framework on learning outcomes vis-à-vis teaching competencies or performance as a result of professional development, guided the analysis of the data gathered in the field.

Main findings and insights

Teaching competencies can be classified as low, medium and high, based on characteristics identified to be indicative of these three categories. Less than half of the total number of teachers interviewed as key informants and as focus group discussion participants assessed themselves as having a 'high' level of teaching competencies, based on their own assessment of their performance in the parallel post-tests, and on their teaching experience. The classification of competencies is based on the quantitative study earlier conducted on teachers' scores in the pre to post then to the parallel post-test scores. Many of the interviewed teachers manifested slight to moderate levels of learning decay, as shown in their responses that they could only recall one or two topics and activities for each subject area training they participated in. They also tended to mix topics from different training and claim that they learned those from the BEAM-ARMM training. This is to be expected because there is considerable time lapse between the time of training and the time of assessment (one to two years).

All informants and focus group discussion participants expressed in various ways their appreciation and gratitude to BEAM-ARMM program interventions. Among others, they said that without these interventions, the learning outcomes would have been worse, and teachers would not have the levels of confidence they have in their teaching now.

Many of the factors that contribute to enhancing and limiting or constraining teacher performance are context-bound or extrinsic in nature. These are factors that teachers have very little control of, or are quite powerless to change, considering that they occupy the lowest rung in the education hierarchy in the region. Among these are the following: their working environment (perennial lack of supplies and teaching materials; dilapidated classrooms and inadequate facilities for teaching, among others); and the varying levels of support they get from their school heads, principals, supervisors at both the district and division levels, and from the regional office of DepEd-ARMM. The lower a teacher is in the hierarchy, the more limited is support for them.

Some teachers showed evidence that they are qualified and have long years of experience as teachers, and are also committed in their tasks. However, they are confronted with several socio-political dynamics that dampen their interest and motivation to perform at their best in their jobs. These include indicators of weak governance and poor leadership. Weak governance permeates through the educational hierarchy in the region in the form of policies and decisions that demotivate and demoralise education front liners—the teachers—to perform at their optimum level. Among others, are protracted promotion processes; hiring of teachers and other education specialists on the basis of close family ties or 'kinship' with the regional decision makers or appointing officers; the lack of

² The lead researcher developed this framework based on an article on the effects of teachers change (as a result of professional development) on student learning, by Thomas R. Guskey (2002), "Professional Development and Teacher Change," in *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, Vol. 8 No. 3/4. The framework was further enhanced with another relevant article, by Lim, D. H., & Morris, M. L. (2009). Learner and Instructional Factors Influencing Learning Outcomes within a Blended Learning Environment. *Educational Technology & Society*, 12 (4), 282–293.

transparency in the disbursement of the MOOE funds and of the vacancies for upward mobility of teachers, including criteria for promotion, transfer and movement; and the lack of regulation of the numbers of times classes are suspended. Poor leadership is also shown in the infrequent classroom observations of direct supervisors (from some school heads). However, this problem is related to the status of school heads that is lower than the teachers they are supervising. For example, a Teacher 1 holder may be appointed School Head in Charge of a school where teachers hold higher ranks.

Suspension of classes for extended periods of time hampers the accomplishment of specific learning targets within each grading period. The data on class suspensions from each division showed that in addition to the 15 government-mandated holidays, classes are suspended for a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 32.5 to 59 days. On April 21, 2016, the national Department of Education issued DepEd Memorandum Order 23, Series of 2016, on the required or 'non-negotiable' number of contact days that teachers must observe with their students. Out of the maximum of 202 days in one school year, teachers need to spend at least 180 contact days with their students. But, in the six divisions in the ARMM covered in this study, the highest number of contact days on which there were classes was 165. Lamitan division stands out as having the most number of days when classes were suspended: 34 to 44 days.

Exacerbating the influence of the above context-bound factors are some dismal socio-economic and political realities in the region. These are exposure to sporadic and intermittent violent conflict, climatic vulnerabilities (owing to unfavourable topography), and abject poverty. All these act in confluence with each other to aggravate negative development outcomes, especially in education.

Students feel they learn more from teaching strategies that allow for collaborative group work and activities where they do things together with their classmates. Students also noted that they learn and understand lessons better if they are taught first in the mother tongue, then in Filipino. English is the preferred medium of students whose families are providing them a conducive environment for reading, where all members of the family are supportive in assisting their children in assignments and in providing them additional materials to read at home. Some students like to speak in English only because they are fascinated with the language; but some students are self-conscious and nervous when asked to read aloud in English because for most of the time they do not understand what they are reading.

There is a prevailing mismatch between teachers and the subject areas they are teaching after training and also mismatch between teachers assigned to areas where students speak a mother tongue different than theirs. These problems can be attributed to political dynamics, starting at the level of the school heads, district and division supervisors, to the division superintendent. Choosing the participants for certain training does not necessarily depend on the teachers' field of specialisation nor his or her present assignment. It depends largely on the decision of the principal, the division supervisor and ultimately the division superintendent. This is the politics of patronage at the lower levels in the education hierarchy.

Community support is moderate to high, in many areas in the six divisions covered in this study. The support is coursed through the Parents-Teachers-Associations and the Local School Boards. However, their support is largely focused on funding small building projects, like perimeter fences of schools, 'simple' toilets, minor repairs of classrooms, building makeshift classrooms for kindergarten, or building of a school stage. Both Parents-Teachers-Associations and Local School Boards have provided for the honoraria of volunteer teachers, especially in remedial reading classes. The greatest support of many Local School Boards, however, is in the provision of uniforms and travel funds for students to participate in regional meets. The Lamitan Local School Board's support in hosting the previous ARMMAA stands out as the greatest with PhP1.5 million from the Local Government Unit of Lamitan, coursed through the office of the mayor. The Assistant Schools Division Superintendent there says that Lamitan Division has always been in the top three placers in regional athletic meets, and they want to maintain that.

Ways Forward

Finding ways to solve the problems surrounding education in the region is like decoding a perplexing riddle. After several years of education interventions and development assistance, huge gaps in achieving desired learning outcomes among the children of the region still persist. The problems seem to be insurmountable, and the challenge to reverse the consequences of the complicated contexts described above is a huge hurdle.

There are no guarantees for a 'perfect' program that can become a panacea to the ailing educational outcomes besetting the region. But it is possible to conceptualise future interventions that may start reversing the adverse consequences of a highly challenged socio-economic-political environment in the region.

But of all the aspects in human development, education plays a pivotal role in creating much needed changes that can contribute to a liveable and wholesome future for the next generation. Educational institutions, starting with early childhood and basic education, have their built-in multiplier effect: one teacher does not only teach the children in his or her classroom, but all the other individuals in direct contact with those children. Education is the linchpin that creates a more peaceful and inclusive future for all.

The following broad interventions are envisioned to start the slow process of reversing poor learning outcomes, and of creating a more conducive and enabling environment for all important stakeholders in education for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. The list is not exhaustive, and it is meant to jumpstart an assiduous process of educational development in the region that is highly sensitive and responsive to its complicated socio-political-economic contexts.

For the short-term (six–twelve months)

- > A thorough environmental scanning of the social, political, cultural, economic and conflict dynamics of the region, to understand the varying contexts of educational development. This will include in-depth studies on the drivers of socio-political dynamics, understanding the power that each stakeholder in the region plays and identifying key stakeholders or gatekeepers who hold sway over their constituencies to create favourable conditions for basic social and political reforms.
- > A stringent conflict analysis that can lead to a better grasp of operational challenges that confront international donor agencies implementing programs in the region. This means tapping on previous repositories of research and conflict monitoring systems already put in place by other players, e.g. Bangsamoro Conflict Monitoring System supported by The World Bank and implemented by International Alert, among others.
- > Review of lessons learned in dealing with conflict-affected areas – and how the challenges associated in this work have been managed in previous donor interventions. (This includes a review of reports from all internationally funded projects and programs). A painstaking review can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the range of problems and issues that confront externally funded programs, and the pitfalls that can occur if not considered in project or program design.
- > The results of these in-depth studies (largely review of existing literature, documents) should be an input in conceptualising specific projects or programs addressing the context-bound factors in educational development in the region.
- > Development of a common template for all education stakeholders and development actors in the region to base their interventions on. Such a template should be informed by the results of the in-depth studies as described above.

- > Series of strategic thinking meetings and workshops with key education stakeholders – from the districts to the regional levels. These are to be designed as 'no holds barred' sessions of stocktaking the prevailing problems confronting each area, or district. In this series of workshops, education stakeholders themselves agree to basic 'rules of engagement' in the promotion of a more accountable, transparent, and merit based system of governance in the education sector.
- > Review of current policies and decisions on the hiring, firing, promotion and deployment of teachers in different areas in the region. This review could be part of the series of strategic thinking workshops or could be done independently, or in tandem with the strategic thinking workshops.
- > A capabilities and needs assessment of all the key stakeholders in education, especially teachers from early childhood to secondary education. This will help address problems related to the mismatch of teachers and their areas of assignments.
- > Review of policies on the suspension of classes, especially for reasons other than government mandated national or local holidays. The review should also include conceptualising an integrated teaching and learning program that makes the celebration of certain holidays or special days in the region an educational one. For instance, athletic meets should be used as a platform for learning the values of sportsmanship, of fair play and of other life skills, and not just a mere avenue for instilling flawed ideas of competition and playing on the position of strength. Nutrition month culminating activities can be used as a practical application of science and social science classes regarding the nutritional values of different kinds of food, and of different foods that are valued socially and culturally in the region. United Nations Day celebrations can teach geography and the need to accept diversity as a reality in human interactions, and therefore social cohesion that leads to the teaching of the culture of peace.

For the Medium Term (two–five years)

- > A comprehensive and holistic system for the reconstruction of schools and educational buildings ravaged during episodes of armed conflict. As a holistic intervention, this does not only focus on the physical construction or reconstruction of the buildings and related infrastructure. It should also be accompanied with a highly contextualised recovery program of complementary socio-economic programs, and even institutions. Education systems in conflict-affected areas depend on supply-side efforts as well as demand-side initiatives. This means conceptualising innovative training programs that are gender-sensitive and culturally-sensitive with a view to producing skilled human resources for in-demand industries and professions. Programs of infrastructure reconstruction of educational facilities must be accompanied with economic and stability programs that keep children in school, and encourage parents to always be supportive of their children's education. This means that economic programs for impoverished families must also be designed in tandem with these infrastructure-related programs.
- > Abject poverty is a perennial and persistent problem in many areas in the region. This is more pronounced in areas that are also experiencing serious challenges due to armed conflict. As shown in this report, some children are prevented to go to school due to the need to contribute to the family income or to ensure food security for their families. To address these problems, a well-thought out social amelioration program that considers all these factors plus in-depth understanding of the contexts of poverty alleviation programs could be implemented. This would entail a review of past conditional cash transfer programs for impoverished families in the region, and creation of a better alternative than the existing national 4Ps³ program. The program should be designed especially for the needs of families in the region, and it should be informed by policies

³ Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, a conditional cash transfer program implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development

that will not burden impoverished families further, like the provision of school needs (uniforms, school supplies, and possibly school meals or feeding program).

- > Creating an 'education in emergencies or conflict' unit within Pathways in partnership with the DepEd-ARMM and DepEd National, in order to address immediate and pressing problems and issues that recur in the 'hotspots' in the region. Such a unit can benefit from several studies and assessments already published as a series of reports of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC). The TJRC was commissioned to undertake studies that will inform how to address basic drivers of conflict in the Bangsamoro and adjacent regions. Recommendations in the TJRC reports include several implementable programs and projects for early and basic education reforms applicable and appropriate to the region.

For the Long Term (five plus years)

- > Legislation of a regional enabling law, like the one that creates a truly autonomous region, under which the educational system of the region will be designed and honed to appropriate cultural, social, and political dynamics in the Bangsamoro.