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The Curriculum Review Project and Policy Implications: a summary

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ACTRC is a partnership between the University of Melbourne and the University of the Philippines, supported by the Australian Government.

This report was authored by:

Pam Robertson

Field Rickards

Thida Kheang

Therese Bustos

Marlene Ferido

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UP Campus, Diliman 1101, Quezon City

P: 632-8064680

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Introduction

In 2011, the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Republic of the Philippines introduced changes to the education system to respond to national interests and to align with an international education development agenda. The changes were formalised with the passing of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which shifted the school curriculum from a 10-year to a 13-year education system, known as the K to 12 Basic Education Program. The K to 12 system aims to provide enough time for learners to master concepts and skills, develop lifelong learning, and prepare for higher education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship (*Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013*).

When the rollout was completed by the end of the School Year (SY) 2017-2018, a comprehensive curriculum review, known as the Curriculum Review Project, began. The purpose of the review was to provide an evidence base which could be used to inform future curriculum and policy decision-making, and to build the capacity of relevant bureaus within the Department of Education (DepEd) to independently conduct high-quality reviews in the future.

The Curriculum Review Project addresses four key curriculum components, namely, (1) the **Intended Curriculum**, (2) the **Implemented Curriculum**, (3) the **Tested Curriculum**, and (4) the **Attained Curriculum**. It focuses on the degree of alignment between these components because strengthening links between the intended curriculum, implemented curriculum and tested curriculum has been found to result in increase the quality of the attained curriculum (Squires, 2012). Further, the degree of alignment can inform policymakers and teachers as to how well the teaching of the curriculum reflects the education standards specified (Blank, Porter & Smithson, 2001).

This report presents an overview of the findings of each curriculum component and the policy implications for the Curriculum Review. It briefly summarises the methodologies used, highlights the major findings, and draws conclusions that can be used to inform education assessment and curriculum policy making. Full details are available in the separate reports for each review component.

Summary of Review Methodology

The Review of the **Intended Curriculum** examined necessary prerequisites of the essential learning competencies, compared cognitive demand across and within grade levels, and conducted an international comparison with learning topics and cognitive demands in the Philippine curriculum. The Expert Judgement Method was used (Robertson, Bustos, et al., 2020). This part of the review focused on the curriculum of Grades 3, 6 and 10.

The Review of the **Implemented Curriculum** used quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and focus groups to examine how the intended curriculum is implemented in classrooms (Robertson, Cagasan, Kheang, et al., 2020). It explored factors that help and/or hinder teachers in implementing the curriculum, providing insights into what is working well and what could be further strengthened, and, where problems exist, allowing for these to be addressed. The review focused on three key aspects: time needed to teach learning competencies, prerequisite skills and knowledge needed by students, and factors affecting the implementation of the curriculum. Over 2,200 teachers were involved in this review.

The Review of the **Tested Curriculum** again adopted the Expert Judgement Method to explore the extent to which the national tests are assessing the intended curriculum, with a focus on students from Grades 3, 6, 10 and Senior High School (SHS) (Robertson, Cagasan, Guanio, et al., 2021).

The Review of the **Attained Curriculum** compared students' attainment with intended curriculum outcomes, and, through focus group discussions, with the expectations of prospective employers and tertiary education institutions (Robertson, Kheang, et al., 2021). This provided insights into the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing learners for higher education and/or employment. The attained curriculum review captures what students know and can do on leaving school. It provides an

outcome measure of the effectiveness of the basic education system. It reviewed two different sources of evidence of the attained curriculum: student test results in national tests at Grades 3, 6, 10 and SHS); and the views of higher education providers and employers about the preparedness of graduates of the K to 12 Curriculum.

Summary of Findings of Each Review

The Review of the **Intended Curriculum** showed that the current learning area and grade curricula have an excessive number of essential learning competencies (Robertson, Bustos, et al., 2020). The viability of this load is challenged in the reviews of the subsequent components of the curriculum. While some of the prerequisites of the essential learning competencies were explicitly stated in the curriculum, others were implicit and/or misplaced. Implicit and misplaced prerequisites may have a negative impact on the implementation of the intended curriculum in the classroom. International comparisons indicate that while similar topics are taught in other countries, the Philippine curriculum tends to have higher cognitive demand; that is, the level of difficulty is comparatively higher relative to what students know of the work that they are studying.

The Review of the **Implemented Curriculum** revealed that:

1. Few teachers reported having adequate time to teach all learning competencies. The percentage varies by learning area, grade level and quarter, but typically fewer than 20% of teachers reported having adequate time to teach all learning competencies assigned to a quarter. In some subjects, almost half of the teachers did not have sufficient time to teach even half the learning competencies. This finding adds weight to the recommendation arising from the earlier Review of the Intended Curriculum that the number of learning competencies within the curriculum be reconsidered, to ensure that all learning competencies can be taught to the required cognitive depth in the time available in schools.
2. Many teachers identified a mismatch between the prerequisite skills and knowledge assumed by the learning competencies within the curriculum and the current skills and knowledge of the students who were expected to learn them. For the learning areas and grade levels surveyed, on average 25% of teachers responded that their classes, collectively, were not prepared for the learning competency being taught.
3. The lack of readiness of students for the learning competencies impacts the time it takes to teach the curriculum. In most learning areas, grade levels and quarters, there was a moderate to strong correlation between the teachers' rating of the prerequisite skills and knowledge of their students and their rating for having adequate time to teach the same learning competency; that is, the teachers were more likely to indicate that they did not have adequate time to teach learning competencies where students did not have the prerequisite skills and knowledge. These findings provide additional support for the recommendations of the earlier Review of the Intended Curriculum requiring changes to the sequencing, clarity of expression, and cognitive demand levels of the learning competencies, and to associated grade-level standards in the curriculum (Robertson, Cagasan, Kheang, et al., 2020).

The factors affecting the implementation of the curriculum, as reported by teachers, were studied. The most helpful factors included professional support for teachers, not only through professional development opportunities, but also through support from school leadership and positive interactions with school colleagues and staff provided by various professional support mechanisms for curriculum implementation. In particular:

1. Training opportunities outside the school were well regarded, especially those addressing content knowledge. The majority of teachers surveyed (76%) had attended training outside their schools on the curriculum (National, Regional or other programs), and most teachers (73%) attended Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, which were seen as very helpful, particularly those

involving invited external experts. However, access to professional learning varied greatly across learning areas and grades. Access was high for Grade 6 and 10 teachers, with approximately 95% having access to at least one form of professional learning, while the proportion dropped to approximately 83% for elementary literacy teachers, and to as low as 64% for teachers of some SHS subjects.

2. Professional support from school leaders in assisting teachers to implement the curriculum was ranked highly by them. Many teachers reported that close working relationships with school leaders provided both technical and emotional support, while some who lacked such relationships stated that these would be beneficial.
3. Teachers also relied on collegial interactions with peers, either directly or via chat groups online, and found this to be an especially helpful form of professional support. These views suggest that professional support for teachers is an important facilitating factor in curriculum implementation that could be further leveraged.

Regarding negative factors, school resourcing inadequacies were reported to be a hindrance to curriculum implementation. These included aspects that are difficult and costly to address, such as class size and the quality of school facilities.

Some that are easier to change, such as access to sufficient teaching and learning materials and extra-curricular activities, were explored further in this study. In all the survey data reviewed, teachers agreed or strongly agreed on the high quality of DepEd's Teacher Guides (TG), and the Learner Materials accompanying these. This was echoed in the focus groups, where the contextualization of materials, and the inclusion of drills and practices to help students consolidate important competencies, were the only themes for improvement raised by teachers. A lack of access to DepEd's valued resources was a consistent negative theme. Only 80% of teachers surveyed had a hard copy of the Teacher Guide, and only 52% of teachers reported that their classes had hard copies of the DepEd Learner Materials, with only 29% of students having an individual copy.

Concerning assessment, the Review of the **Tested Curriculum** shows that the national achievement tests for Grades 3, 6, 10 and SHS are aligned to the content of the intended curriculum (Robertson, Cagasan, Guanio, et al., 2021). This suggests that the tests are representative of the intended curriculum and can indicate the extent to which learners have reached the expected standards. Given the alignment of the test items with the intended curriculum, it is not surprising that here too the cognitive demand of the test items was found to be high and would challenge the knowledge and understanding of most students.

This review also highlighted concerns regarding the double mapping of the tables of specifications, for the Grade 6 and Grade 10 National Achievement Test (NAT) and the Basic Education Exit Assessment (BEEA), to two different working frameworks, one originating from the Bureau of Educational Assessment (BEA) and the other from the Bureau of Curriculum Development (BCD). This might send inconsistent messages to schools implementing the curriculum, and to those using the results of the national tests to make inferences about the quality of learning of students.

The Review of the **Attained Curriculum** revealed that students are not attaining skills and knowledge at levels expected by the intended curriculum (Robertson, Kheang, et al., 2021). The examination of the national test results showed that students achieved low levels of attainment, and this was consistently observed at Grades 3, 6, 10, and SHS. These findings are congruent with those of the focus group discussions with higher education professionals and employer representatives, indicating that graduates of the K to 12 Curriculum lack foundational knowledge and skills expected for higher education and employment. The attainment of 21st century skills follows a similar trend to that of the overall attainment, with all data sources in this review indicating that student attainment is lower than the expectations in the curriculum. While recognising the development of researcher skills and being more mature, higher education providers expressed concern about the lack of 21st century skills among the K to 12 graduates. Data from focus group discussions with employers was more explicit, with no difference observed in 21st skills between graduates of the K to 12 Curriculum and those of the Basic Education Curriculum.

Moreover, the Review of the **Attained Curriculum** highlights that the lack of foundational knowledge and skills expected has an impact on the futures of students, both for those going on to higher education and those moving directly to employment. Higher education institutions and employers have felt the need to support K to 12 graduates through the provision of post-school bridging courses and in-house training programs. Both higher education and employer representatives expressed the importance of further improvements within the K to 12 provisions to better support students in meeting the curriculum expectations.

Consolidated Recommendations and Policy Implications

The examination of the findings across the components of the Curriculum Review Project has provided crucial evidence on the implementation of the K to 12 Curriculum as follows:

Key Finding 1

Teachers experience difficulties implementing the intended curriculum and students experience difficulties attaining the expected competencies, resulting in graduates who lack knowledge and skills required for further education and employment (Implemented and Attained Curriculum reviews)

Recommendations

1. Reduce the number of learning competencies to ensure all learning competencies can be taught to the required cognitive depth in the time available (Intended, Implemented and Attained).
2. Revise the sequencing, clarity of expression, and cognitive demand of the learning competencies, and associated grade level standards, to ensure prerequisite skills and knowledge are built systematically from one grade to the next. This will improve the proportion of students who enter each topic with the relevant prerequisite skills and knowledge (Intended, Implemented and Attained).
3. Improve the articulation of learning competencies within the intended curriculum to make explicit the content to be taught, cognitive demand required, and the connections with prerequisites in other grade levels and learning areas, especially through more specific phrasing and language choice within learning competencies (Intended).
4. Address the cognitive demand expectations within the intended curriculum to ensure students have practice in performing basic skills as well as in using higher order thinking skills (Intended and Tested).

Key Finding 2

Adequate resourcing and support for teachers and students aid the implementation of the intended curriculum.

Recommendations

5. Further embed LAC sessions as a regular feature of in-school professional development.
6. Promote the benefits of using informal mechanisms for collegial support among teachers.
7. Increase teacher professional development of all kinds, especially for elementary literacy subjects and for SHS subjects with a focus on content knowledge.
8. Enhance the provision of professional development for school leaders to increase the consistency of support they can offer teachers in implementing the curriculum.
9. Improve access to quality teaching and learning resources.

10. Increase the available resources on the DepEd portal.

Key Finding 3

Innovations within an individual DepEd bureau might not be communicated to all bureaus, leading to a fragmented approach.

Recommendations

11. Improve communication and collaboration across DepEd bureaus (Implemented and Tested).
12. Adopt a consistent, explicit framework for 21st century skills across DepEd (Tested and Attained).
13. Link the ELLNA, G6 NAT, G10 NAT and BEEA national assessments to a single scale to improve reporting of changes in learner attainment over time, and to facilitate monitoring of the impact of major policy innovations across DepEd bureaus.

As national and international tests indicate, young learners in the Philippines are facing enormous challenges. Addressing the recommendations highlighted in this Curriculum Research Project is a first step to significant education reform.

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