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Article

Impact of Policy Implementation on Education Quality: A Case Study on Philippines' Low Ranking in International and Local Assessment Programs

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Abstract
In the recent report released by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Philippines was ranked as one of the lowest in Mathematics, Science, and Reading Comprehension among 79 participating countries. The country also ranked low in other assessment programs, including TIMSS, SEA-PLM, and NAT. Despite the educational reforms established to improve the Philippine Education System, the Philippines remains low and significantly below its neighboring countries regarding quality education. Therefore, this study (1) describes how the Department of Education has undertaken the objectives of R.A. 10533, (2) determines the effect of policy implementation on the ranking of Philippine education quality in local and international assessment programs through the perspective of education experts, and (3) identifies the importance of local and international assessment programs in analyzing the current condition of education quality in the Philippines. This research has employed a qualitative approach using thematic analysis on narratives coming from (1) DepEd-OUCI, (2) DepEd-BEA, and (3) Education Policy experts, as well as documents used by the Department of Education and the Curriculum Consultative Committee. This study concludes that there are still challenges plaguing the implementation process. Hence, the need for further improvement in certain aspects is enumerated in this research. Moreover, considerable discrepancies in the disorganized and incoherent implementation system amongst and within the Department of Education, administrators, and other stakeholders, as well as confounded policy interpretation due to system instability, were all deduced.

Keywords
Curriculum, policy implementation, PISA, assessment, Enhanced Basic Education

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Introduction

Due to the drastic changes in the educational system, online distance learning is one of the alternative modalities to sustain continuous educational programs during pandemics, which develops the new literacies in Information Communication Technology (ICT) necessary to improve 21st-century learning. The students practice 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity in instructional technological tools (Bedir, 2019; Budiarti et al., 2021; Hendy, 2020; Pardede, 2020). In online learning, the learners collaborate with their classmates through virtual meetings, email, messenger, and google and Microsoft collaboration links in online applications. Internet access is used for communication between the teacher and students and students to their fellow students by using varied technological applications that exchange information between the messenger and the receiver. At the same time, the learners practice critical analysis on how to manipulate technical tools with the procedural steps on how to use the learning materials. Also, the students become independent learners who discover and search the lessons with creativity and productivity. Thus, the learners become creative in operating computer-based learning in the classes where the learner construct their learning designs. Therefore, reviewing the learners' online education skills is crucial in new normal times.

The United Nations released its Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, which are set to be provided with a plan of action coordinated by all participating countries towards achieving it by 2030. One of its goals is to guarantee an inclusive and good quality of education that will instill lifelong learning applicable to one's daily life (UN, 2015). In addition, the United Nations intends to solve the issue of the growing problem of maleducation due to the unclear reception of formal learning as a fundamental human right and the discrepancy between the standard of basic education from a local and global standpoint (Thaung, 2018). To combat this problem, states, through accountability, coordination, and regular monitoring, reviewing, and financing, must be able to resolve the low quality of primary education, inequitable access to higher and technical vocational education, and ingraining of skills that can be used for work, inequality in gender, and education on global citizenship.

The Philippines is no exemption among countries experiencing the effects of the growing global recession. According to the World Bank (2019), a growing learning crisis exists in relatively emerging economies like the Philippines, Kenya, Tanzania, South American countries, etc. Because of this, the World Bank posited that the lack of substantial and extensive monitoring in policy and curriculum implementation is the root cause of a persistent global learning crisis.

National agencies such as the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) continuously campaign towards awareness and resolving the issue (Roldan, 2018). The highlight of the government's actions was the enactment of the Enhanced Basic Education Act, or Republic Act 10533 last 2013, which sought to reform and improve the existing curriculum by adjusting the standards and principles that educational institutions must uphold to improve the quality of education in the Philippines and compete in a global scale. The Department of Education, the central agency for implementing the enumerated standards, was mandated by the law to partner with agencies like Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Technical Education for Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Different local and international assessment programs were adopted to gauge the necessary actions, such as

Programme for International Student Assessment, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics, and National Achievement Test (Elliott, Stankov, Lee, & Beckmann, 2019).

However, despite the actions by the government and seven years of implementation of the law, there is minimal to no progress in terms of the quality of education manifested by the Philippines' low ranking (Roman, 2019). It is for this reason that this study aims to know the impact of administrative negligence in terms of implementing Republic Act 10533 in the Philippines' low ranking and why the Philippines is heading on a downward trajectory.

With the condition of the Philippine education system, it is evident that an aspect of the system needs to be checked to get into the cause of this issue. Hence, this study aims to determine the impact of implementing state education policy in the Philippines on international and local assessment programs. Specifically, this study intends to evaluate whether the objectives of R.A. 10533 are being emphasized by the Department of Education, determine the effect of policy implementation on the ranking of Philippine education quality in local and international assessment programs, and identify the importance of local and international assessment programs in analyzing the condition of education quality in the Philippines.

The study intends to provide an understanding of the importance of global consciousness in the decline of quality education in the country. Existing literature provided various approaches to factors that affect the student's academic performance and determinants of quality education. However, these studies focus only on the environmental factors that affect the student's academic performance and their linkage to the teachers' quality of teaching. The lacking discussion led this study to focus on the Philippines joining PISA and SEA-PLM. Hence, the Top-Down Approach of the Implementation Process of Public Policy theory manifests an avenue for disseminating curricular data from the macro-institutions to its micro-counterparts (Marsh & Huberman, 1984). Also, the premise of this theory will aid in understanding that the interventions of the institutions and administrators play a considerable role in fulfilling the objectives of RA 10533 through standard monitoring and implementing procedures for education quality improvement. Furthermore, this research may be presented to the Department of Education to develop better policies for educational reforms since the study evaluates the government agencies' compliance with curriculum implementation and its development based on the standards presented in Republic Act No. 10533.

This research has utilized the Top-Down Approach of Implementation, co-authored by Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian in 1979 in their journal article entitled, "The Conditions of Effective Implementations: A Guide to Accomplishing Policy Objective." This theory considers policy framers as the principal element of the implementing process of a policy and takes policy implementation as an administrative and managerial process more than a politically motivated procedure (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). This theory was created to respond to the growing dispersion of comprehension of the limited extent of applicable programs and types of policymaking and implementing institutions.

The Top-Down approach posits that decisions by government officials are the starting point of the policy implementation process (Sabatier, 1986). The framing of policies is succeeded by raising specific questions revolving around the process of implementation itself, such as the extent of the implementing action in achieving the goal, the extent of the impact of policy, aspects affecting

the implementation, and the reformation of the policy based on responses that are given after undergoing a process of evaluation. This theory also argues that there are six (6) necessary conditions for a successful and efficacious implementation: (a) Obvious and stable provision of objectives; (b) Sufficient justification of causation; (c) Legalization of the implementing process to enhance the urgency for compliance of the officials and target groups; (d) Officials' commitment to an effective and productive implementation; (e) Maintained political support from interest groups and constituencies; and (f) Socio-economic factors that may have an impact on the support of people to the policy. The discourse on its merit continues today since its publication (Bardach, 1978; Berman and McLaughlin, 1976; Elmore, 1978; Jones, 1975; Lance, Lautenschlager, Sloan, & Varca, 1989; Murphy, 1973; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). The applicative properties of the theory were already being tested in different fields to know the limits and boundaries of its capabilities, such as its application in disseminating curricular data from the macro-institutions to their micro-counterparts (Marsh & Huberman, 1984).

The premises of the Top-Down theory aided this study in arguing that the burden of advancing the policy and evaluation is on the educational institutions, i.e., the Department of Education and the whole Curriculum Consultative Committee, affirming that the knowledge in the national-scale curriculum implementation is the lead determinant of practical curriculum reformation. Using the approach, this study argues that enhancing the focus and attention of the national agencies in implementing the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 can increase the ranking and rating of the Philippines in both local and international assessment programs.

Literature Review

Curriculum and Policy Implementation

The curriculum is a prime factor in enhancing students' academic participation and performance (Yu & Mocan, 2019). It is a chosen, arranged, unified, and evaluative provision of experiences among students that will help them attain different learning objectives, resulting from development and maturation for its application in real-life situations (Mulenga, 2018). Thus, the educational system of the Philippines is no different from its neighboring countries because it also passed through phases of improvement due to the dramatic changes brought by educational evolution (Guzman, 2003). However, despite numerous educational reformations, it is still clear that any systematic change in the education system should be accompanied by a high level of pro-activity, which defines the system's quality. It is a process that involves focusing on exceeding expectations, continuous development, and sharing responsibilities (Schargel, as cited in Guzman, 2003). Therefore, if the education system will firmly contribute to the improvement of a proper social order to fight social ills, then there should be a sustained re-examination of its retooling since it has become clear that reforms introduced at both national and local levels are geared toward the achievement of effectiveness, quality, responsiveness, and excellence (Guzman, 2003). Also, students who experience an improved curriculum have seen a significant improvement in interest and engagement in learning. It also manifested positive student development, resulting in better performance (Yu & Mocan, 2019). Therefore, in order for the Philippines to be as progressive as it can be and be globally competitive, the education curriculum shall adhere on a specific set of standards that the Department of Education, with its cooperation with Commission on Higher Education and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, which includes the following: (a) Student-centered, inclusive and development-focused curriculum; (b) Curriculum shall always remain relevant, responsive

to national issues and Research-based; (c) Curriculum shall be careful and sensitive to other culture; (d) Curriculum shall be based on the Philippine context but can compete with the global arena; (e) Curriculum shall apply constructivist, inquiry-based, reflective, collaborative and integrative form of pedagogies; (f) Curriculum shall impose a Mother-Tongue Based System of learning - starting from the language being used in their houses to a foreign language; (g) A spiral progression approach on the students mastery and skills of different lessons shall be applied in the curriculum; and (h) Different local areas shall be able to modify and bend the curriculum in accordance to their educational, social and cultural contexts (Enhance Basic Education Act of 2013).

Policy implementation is a process of upholding the basic standards and principles of the curriculum and putting into practice a set of plans and programs that aims for a change to whom and where it will be applied (Fullan, 1982). Implementing the K to 12 program aims to improve the education system in the Philippines to advance and further the recognition of a globally competitive Filipino. In this goal, the students shall master the necessary skills to attain the demand of the global education system (Dizon et al., 2019). Under Rule II, Section 10 of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, the Department of Education, in its purpose of developing the curriculum, shall be governed by the following:

> 10.1 The devising of the curriculum itself in fulfillment of Section 5 of the Act, the DepEd is responsible for the liaison with both the CHED and TESDA to make a coordinated educational curriculum concurrent with the basic, tertiary, and technical-vocational education in generating globally competitive Filipino students.
>
> 10.2 In developing the enhancement of the curriculum, the Department of Education shall be guided by the prescribed standards and principles listed under Section 5 of the law.
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> 10.3 The production and development of materials, such as locally produced teaching and learning sources, shall be highly promoted to strengthen the learning resource development and distribution systems at the regional and divisional educational units.
>
> 10.5 The essentiality of stakeholder's engagement and association, not directly on the implementation of the Enhanced Basic Education Act, but for the assessment of what is there to be addressed.

Furthermore, Rule II, Section 30 mandates the key role of the DepEd, CHED, and TESDA in creating a mechanism and tactical plans for the transition towards achieving an Enhanced Basic Education within a 10-year cycle that will end in 2021-2022; on the other hand, Rule VIII, Section 33 orders the establishment of a “Joint Congressional Oversight Committee for Enhanced Basic Education which serves as the evaluation and assessment committee of the reports, including budgetary, facilities and curricular summaries. It was also delegated the responsibility of evaluating the progress and deficiencies in aspects that greatly affects the performance of the students, teachers, and other stakeholders. The said law also imposes the necessity for establishing a "Curriculum Consultative Committee” that is delegated the power to oversee the implementation and evaluate whether the newly developed curriculum

adheres to the provisions of the law.
In addition, curriculum development in enhancing basic education focuses on professional development since it is deemed necessary to improve the students. However, policies that aim to improve the teaching profession lack continuous follow-ups on reforms, making the changes look fragmented and insufficient (Miço, 2019). Thus, in addressing such challenges, CHED coordinated with DepEd to establish a curriculum that is both research-based and globally competitive. TESDA also participates in the curriculum's implementation by ensuring that students can apply the knowledge handed by the curriculum through work (Martin, Patacsil & Nieva, 2019). With the help of these macro-agencies, the evaluation of the effectiveness of policy implementation will be acquired. According to Swarnakar, Singh, & Tiwari (2019), assessing the effectiveness of the policy implementation is vital to the pursuit of improvement and contextualization by identifying the lacking and excess factors that impede the supposed positive contribution of the policy itself to take place. Furthermore, by assessing the implementation procedure, the government will also be able to put light on the current conditions of the subject and target groups which necessitates deeper and more contextual attention and response to better the relationship between the macro and micro agencies.

Assessment Programs
Assessment programs compare the educational attainment of students of different countries to provide a direct response to education reforms. It is one of the best ways to determine whether the Philippine education system, through engaging both locally and internationally, is improving (Balagtas et al., 2019; Martens, Niemann, & Teltemann, 2016). International assessments for education became a globally accepted standard because of their extensive and far-reaching inference and indication for reorganizing and restructuring national education systems. It establishes an international benchmark for the theoretical and applicable understanding which influenced and dominated the ideas of educational policymakers and even researchers since it provides two purposes: (1) the data gathered can be used to impact and influence policymakers; and (2) it focuses on a high-performing country to set as an example for other countries to understand and imitate its success (Schmidt & Burroughs, 2016).

According to Balagtas et al. (2019), one of the best ways to determine whether the Philippine education system is improving in the present is through its performance in Trends in Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS). Therefore, countries that performed well on the mathematics and science examinations given by TIMSS are most likely also performing well on the PISA assessment (i.e., Hong Kong-China, Singapore, and Japan).

The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics is another large-scale assessment program designed to fit the contextual problems in education within the region; that will provide an opportunity for each participating country to determine the growing issues and resolve these in a manner that will improve the country's education system.

The results of large-scale international assessments are putting pressure on participating countries to reshape their curriculum to adhere to the standards imposed by the Program (Fischman, Topper, Goebel, & Holloway, 2019). However, the pressure being felt did not reflect nor manifest the reformation of education in all these countries; instead, it paved the way for large-scale comparisons from regional to global standards. The problem is that many countries are not deliberately qualifying education as a priority, which

engenders their education security despite having adequate financial resources (Tatarinov, V. V., & Tatarinov, V. S., 2020).

Methodology

This qualitative and exploratory paper is a case study focused on the government agencies' engagement and participation in policy implementation and their adherence to the standards provided by Republic Act 10533. It analyzed documents about the transition from the Basic Education Curriculum to the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum, progress reports from agencies subjected to the same law to oversee the policy implementation, and narratives from the Department of Education and different Education Policy experts. These data cannot be quantified and calculated by mere numbers hence, requiring an in-depth understanding for the establishment of more conclusive interpretation, especially the statements gathered from interviews which necessitates a more composite, rich, and multi-faceted approach.

This research gathered data from the statements from educational policy experts in the Philippines and the Department of Education Bureau of Education Assessment and Office of the Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instructions. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was applied to the department representatives and the experts. In addition, reports and documents from the Curriculum Consultative Committee, the transition report from the Basic Education Curriculum to the Enhanced Basic Education Program, the midterm report from the Joint Congressional Committee, and the government agencies comprising the Curriculum Consultative Committee were utilized. Furthermore, the study was conducted using documents from 2016 to 2020 only since these are the succeeding years after the mandatory midterm report of the Department of Education as presented in the Congress of the Philippines. The researchers have also gathered data from the latest results coming from international and local assessment programs, including the PISA, TIMSS, SEA-PLM, and NAT.

Experts on education policy and policy implementation have provided insights regarding the Philippines' current education status and the Department of Education as the mandated spearhead for education policy implementation. The criteria for choosing the Department of Education as a respondent were embedded in Section 5 of RA 10533. As for the educational policy experts, they should at least attain a master's degree in Educational Administration or Education Management and Leadership with 10-year experience in the field. In addition, the experts should also reach Level 7 or Level 8 of education following the Philippines Qualifications Framework, which is responsible for establishing the national standards for education and training outcomes (Resolution No. 2014-03, 2014).

Content analysis was used to simplify the data collected from statements and documents from government agencies and congressional committees. The researchers read through the documents collected from the various data sources to create a margin note in formulating initial codes using Microsoft Excel and a code book. This was applied for qualitative data analysis to help the researchers look for a thematic analysis of the study to have effective data management.

The data from the semi-structured interviews and document analysis were categorized according to variables. Hence, the data analysis concentrated on answering each research objective by focusing on the data collected from all

methods of data collection.

Results

The data gathered from the three education experts and the representatives of the Department of Education's Bureau of Education Assessment and Office of the Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instructions have conveyed responses to the research objectives, classified as the following: (a) incoherent and disorganized system of implementations; (b) confound policy interpretation due to system instability; (c) assessment programs as performance indicators for policy improvement.

Incoherent and Disorganized System of Implementation

The experts have agreed upon the necessity of a holistic overview of implementing the education system, with Expert 1 mentioning that "It should be a chain. So, CHED's teacher training should also be safeguarded there. The research skills, the critical analysis, should be focused and not memorization, the identification of frameworks, or memorization of valence or atomic number." Expert 2 added, "My first issue is the language used for assessment. I think language plays a very vital role," which emphasizes the factor of using the mother-tongue language in assessing the quality of education (Masaazi, Ssentanda, & Ngaka, 2018). While Expert 3 focused on the external factors that may have affected the student's performance.

In response to the lack of a holistic education system, the Department of Education asserted its commitment to improving the implementation and the education system itself. The Office of the Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction (OUCI) stated that "…we are always mindful of the need to improve, so we have a very strong monitoring mechanism that allows us to continue to refine the existing programs and projects", which is manifested on the "Sulong Edukalidad initiative which is our banner initiative to push for a higher attention to the need for quality education that is in the K to 12 program that was launched even before the release of the PISA results."

The amount of emphasis that the Department of Education puts on the objectives of RA 10533 heavily affects the quality of education being imparted among students, resulting in difficulty maximizing capacity at the grassroots level (Barrot, 2018). Unfortunately, the Philippines is currently challenged by the disorganization and incoherence of the system of implementation of the Department of Education, manifested in many ways.

A gap between the intended curriculum and implementation of the national agencies based on their interpretation was raised by Expert 2, saying:

> The curriculum is very beautiful. However, when it comes to the implementation, in the middle of the 3rd and 4th year, the expectation versus reality was far, that is one. I am saying that in that sense, there are quite some problems in terms of interpretation, even among regions and divisions; there are confusions in terms of interpretation, most especially in the classroom.

This has been seconded by Expert 3, who bureaucratized this interpretation system, pointing out the discretionary freedom of teachers within the classroom in interpreting the curriculum based on what they inferred as the best viable manner of teaching.

The absence of an authentic assessment, as defined by Expert 2 as "the assessments that bring you into concretizing the knowledge into practical knowledge." is also observable. This emphasizes the importance of veering

away from the strictly theoretical focus of understanding into more applicative learning should be further enhanced by encouraging the students' demonstration of higher-order thinking skills and better problem-solving skills (Koh, 2017).

However, amidst the vast agreement between the Department of Education and the Education experts, they have exhibited a certain level of a dispute regarding the cause and effect of frequent reformations in the education system. In defense of the DepEd, the OUCI has exclaimed the necessity of frequent reformations to cope with the dynamic system of education and cater to the rising needs of the department towards different aspects of education as time passes. They, therefore, see this as a necessity rather than an obstruction, with which Expert 1 disagreed. Expert 1 stated, "Because of so many reforms, is something happening? Yes, something is happening. However, I felt like it was just going to happen again and again that there will be a change once every six years." This only means that the previous challenges were not used as a deterrent, causing the country to miss many opportunities. Expert 2 recommends having a road map to secure a more consistent and continuous implementation of the curriculum regardless of who is seated as the Department Secretary or the President. At large, the agreements still managed to outweigh the disagreements that occurred.

To further solidify the statements given, government documents have shown several points leading to the claims of the experts and the DepEd representatives regarding the aspects that need to be addressed. For example, the Transition Report on Enhanced Basic Education raised the need to strengthen the curriculum further regarding contextualization, learning opportunities, and inclusive participation. Moreover, the DepEd also ensures the actualization of the intended curriculum, as evident in the Curriculum Guides through a strong Curriculum Support System. Also, the Basic Education Monitoring and Evaluation Framework presented key education objectives with the learner's characteristics as the leading indicators of success.

Confound Policy Interpretation Due to System Instability

The quality of education, as manifested in different assessment programs, has been compromised due to the impact caused by problems plaguing the implementation process of DepEd and other agencies regarding policy interpretation. As stated, it is likely to face challenges regarding ensuring consistency in its delivery at the subnational level (Norris et al., 2014).

The data gathered shows that there are significant disagreements in some critical respects between the Department of Education and the experts since, according to the Department of Education, liaising between agencies is not a problem but more of a challenge “in terms of unifying the focus of everyone on the more essential aspects that will help to develop high performing teachers, highly committed and highly competent teachers.” Also, for the DepEd, it is necessary to intensify capacity-building, and “there is still room for improvement in terms of current efforts at coordinating and harmonizing the priorities of CHED, TESDA, and even the PRC.” As for the experts, the coordination between DepEd and CHED was seen as both a challenge and a problem because, as Expert 3 stated, even if “the DepEd restructures the system, and they fix the governance system to make sure there is cooperation among agencies. The communication between DepEd and CHED should still be strengthened”. After all, the expected knowledge, skills, and competencies that should develop in the students' basic education deemed necessary for higher education are not adequately achieved.

Furthermore, to be as impactful as possible, educational policies should move beyond mere "paper compliance," which only aims to meet the minimal requirements. The Department of Education acknowledged a problem regarding policy implementation, stating that implementation is their weakest point that needs to be addressed immediately.

Although the DepEd acknowledges the effort to change its ways, Expert 2 reiterated the focus of DepEd on paper compliance, stating that:

> The government agencies are paper champions. They produce reports, but it is not validated on the ground. The problem is, there is a report, they were able to submit the reports, we can read the reports, some are quite acceptable, some are not so good, but the gap is what is happening? In the context of the ground.

With, Expert 1 further explained that it is not enough that we only look at the structures alone or the policies. We should also look at the policy actors since, as agents of policies, there should be an enhancement of leadership development to move away from the culture of mere compliance towards a culture of excellence and accountability. Also, according to Expert 2, "the only flaw is in terms of implementation, and there are qualified and good educators in the Philippines, the problem is in the learning transfer," which can be seen in the lack of training in terms of usage which is a part of leadership management. Therefore, to have an effective educational reform, a strategic policy that is holistic and long-term is needed (Miço, 2019).

One factor that the experts also mentioned hinders the progress of the Philippines in terms of monitoring is the lack of necessary mechanisms that will monitor and categorize the data on a much larger scale. Fortunately, both the Experts and DepEd agreed that the country has not yet reached its limit in terms of implementation, therefore manifesting opportunities that will improve the implementing system.

Lastly, although the Midterm Report of the Department of Education and the Evaluation Report of the Curriculum Consultative Committee lean more toward supporting DepEd's agenda towards compliance with RA 10533, House Resolution No. 473 generally backs up the experts toward a confounded policy implementation.

Performance Indicators for Policy Improvement

The Philippines' participation in different international assessment programs, and the facilitation of the local ones, play an essential part in gauging the performance to determine the current and immediate condition of Philippine education quality.

Identifying the importance of local and international assessment programs with the current condition of education quality shows that as performance indicators for policy improvement, assessment programs are vital since they provide evidence that should be a part of the decision-making process in the government. However, the problem lies in the resistance of those in position to the results. According to Expert 2, "if you were given feedback, it means you have something to do," and "they should not be threatened by a low score or a low ranking because it does not entirely reflect that you have failed, but simply that there is something that you need to address right now." Therefore, for Expert 3, "you cannot start the learning process if you do not own up to the mistake or failure." Moreover, even the Department of Education agreed that:

> We have to continue providing benchmarks to determine whether what we are doing is slowly delivering the impact or the results that we want to accomplish. Otherwise, we would not have the basis to say that improvements are being recorded, although we would still have the national assessments as a mechanism to measure on my part, although the secretary's open to the idea of resting for a while in terms of taking part in the PISA but my take is we must continue because the benchmark has to be there.

Moreover, assessment programs as a problem indicator are essential for policymakers because the results of assessments are "a good measurement in determining the immediate condition of our system, and it is also a predictor" as Expert 2. In addition, indicators have a significant role in policy monitoring by producing unbiased and objective observations on the progress toward policy objectives. Assessment programs as problem indicators are a quantitative presentation of the conditions in a policy field that can be used as an instrument to inspect further and delve into the effects of policies and provide information for policymakers to determine the effectiveness of policies and to make any adjustments where it is required (Schumann, 2016). Hence, for Expert 3, "for a reasonable and logical policy maker, all evidence should be part of the decision-making process, what to do, what not to do" since it shows the problem in the educational system and assessment programs also provide straightforward suggestions. Also, the Department of Education (DepEd) stated that "if those flaws are eliminated, potentially, the quality of education that we have might also improve."

Also, assessment programs are necessary for evidence-based policymaking because they generate policy recommendations. For Expert 3, "we need to emphasize that when we talk about curriculum implementation, assessment, especially third-party assessments, these are part of the evidence-based policymaking and being a responsible policy maker. You should not omit evidence simply because it does not sit well on you on a personal level". Therefore, assessment programs empowered the education system by providing evidence-based analysis of students' academic performance to improve the country's educational policies, as evidence-based policymaking has seen significant advancements even at the local levels. Even the DepEd recognizes the importance of both international and local assessment programs because:

> These assessments, their objective, are external to the learning delivery, and they are external to the department. Besides they follow high-quality protocols, like, following the line of testing and measurement, have protocols that we follow, and they are fair because of their objective. They want to improve SDG 4, or sustainable development goal 4, which is quality education.

Conclusion

This study concludes that there are still numerous challenges afflicting the implementation process, hence a hindrance to achieving the objectives of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. Despite the pieces of evidence provided by the documents, implying the commitment of the different agencies to achieving a good quality of education, the data coming from the experts have directed the root of the problems towards the misalignment and misinterpretation of the process of implementing and monitoring of the policies and not on the policy per se. The researchers have therefore navigated

towards the role of the involved government agencies in the achievement of an enhanced basic education curriculum and a significant improvement of the Philippines in both international and local assessment programs since, per the premises of Top-Down theory, the weight of developing the policy and evaluation is on the educational institutions. Therefore, by enhancing the attention of national agencies in charge of the implementation process, the country's ranking in assessment programs can significantly increase. This sheds light on a possible suggestion for the recalibration of the implementation and monitoring system to ensure that there is an existing universal understanding of the objectives and principles of both the Republic Act 10533 itself and other released orders from the Department of Education as an extension of their duty under the law.

This study recommends that for subsequent research on educational policy, the gaps that the researchers identified in the literature should be addressed, which includes further research on the following: (1) the role of teachers in curriculum development and enhanced outcomes in assessment programs; (2) the gap between understanding the intended curriculum and implemented curriculum; (3) the detrimental effect of mere paper compliance about educational policies; and (4) future studies on other policies that focus on aspects that might affect the quality of education in the country. Also, as a recommendation to the Department of Education for the Improvement of the Policy Implementation Mechanisms, the following are being emphasized by the researchers: (a) creation of a roadmap for the implementation process of the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum to ensure its continuity despite the inevitable change of administrators; (b) formation of leadership development training on structural leadership; (c) strengthening of the communication and cooperation of DepEd and CHED to achieve the goals of RA 10533; and (d) continuation of the Philippines' participation in international assessment programs. Furthermore, to highlight the development of a more inclusive learning system, the following are also recommended: (a) establishment of different learning action cells; (b) adjustments in terms of the manner of training these teachers; and (c) refocusing and rechecking of Assessments Tasks to go beyond the traditional and theoretical forms of assessments, including Pen and Paper Tests, and adopt Authentic Assessments as a significant part of the curriculum.

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