

Towards a More Effective and Efficient Assessment System for K to 12 Educational Reform in the Philippines

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The Department of Education introduces the K to 12 Educational Reform with the target full implementation by school year 2018-2019. With this, the Department of Education faces challenges on its assessment system for the new educational reform on K to 12. Drawing from the current challenges of the assessment system in the Philippines, this paper proposed an assessment framework to improve the assessment system of education in the Philippines. In particular, a National System for Quality Education that has a quality assessment system branch which can monitor if all assessment strategies are aligned with the goal to develop among students the 21st century skills was recommended. Specific recommendations on assessment for the K to 12 educational reform were also forwarded.

The K to 12 Educational Reform aims to enhance the quality of basic education. The K to 12 curriculum enhancement will be tailored in line with the desired competencies and skills of a K to 12 graduate. K to 12 envisions that through the enhanced curriculum, every graduate of the enhanced K to 12 Basic Education Program will benefit from a reformed and updated curriculum that is focused on enabling every child to achieve mastery of core competencies and skills. (Department of Education, 2010). It is important to note that the intention of K to 12 is not just to add two years of schooling but more importantly to enhance the basic education curriculum, and more so the students' mastery, and to teach students how to learn.

With the goal of the Enhanced K to 12 Basic Education Program to create a functional basic education system, it envisions that it will produce productive and responsible citizens equipped with the essential competencies and skills for both life-long learning and employment. The program is expected to enhance the basic education system to full functionality to fulfill the basic learning needs of students. This is in line with the agenda of the President Aquino of having quality education as a

long-term solution to poverty (cf. Department of Education, 2010). To be able to achieve these goals, K to 12 aims to give every student an opportunity to receive quality education based on an enhanced and decongested curriculum that is internationally recognized and comparable to other nations worldwide. With this, some steps that were outlined by the Department of Education include the development of a curriculum that is rational and focused on excellence (decongested, uses research-based practices, uses quality materials and textbooks, etc.), production of a pool of highly qualified and adequately trained teachers, achievement of high academic standards, especially in Mathematics, Science, and English at all levels, and producing graduates who are globally competitive and whose credentials are recognized internationally.

The program also aims to change public perception that the high school education is just a preparation for college to recognizing it as sufficient for one to take advantage of opportunities for gainful career or employment and/or self-employment. It aims to produce graduates who possess skills and competencies that will allow them to be productive members of society or pursue higher education. And together with the coordination between the academic and business sectors, to change industry hiring practices taking into account the enhanced skills and competencies of K to 12 graduates is also one of the goals of K to 12. Although there was no definite mention that K to 12 aims to measure the 21st century skills, the spirit of the curriculum is towards that goal.

Given the K to 12 curriculum, Grades 1 to 6 will have the basic education curriculum. Grades 7 to 10 will undergo junior high school. Grades 11 to 12 will undergo the senior high school. During senior high school, the students will continue taking up core subjects such as English, Mathematics, and Science; and compulsory subjects such as Arts, Science, Liberal Studies, Social Studies, Values Education, and Music, Arts, Physical Education and Health. The elective subjects will be added such as career-oriented studies (e.g., Business Studies, Information-Communications Technology, Design and Media, Community Care and Social Services, Food and Beverage Operations, Culinary Arts, Beauty and Wellness, Banking Services, and Retail Services). After graduating from Grade 12, the students are expected to be employable while at the same time ready to pursue higher education.

According to SEAMEO INNOTECH (2012), the curriculum has been prepared and the production of materials is on-going but the specifics of assessment framework are yet to be conceptualized.

Current Challenges on Assessment in the Philippines

Several challenges to the current assessment have been raised. For one, assessment is mainly summative and very little is formative or diagnostic (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012). With this, the students have rare opportunity to be given a feedback regarding his performance hence, his chances of improving his performance is little. Another is that national achievement test scores are difficult to interpret due to methodological problems with National Education Testing and Research Center's scoring processes (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012).

The proposed assessment framework for K to 12 has gaps which have to be filled up (see Figure 1). According to the framework, an overall assessment will be conducted when the students finish Grade 6, Grade 10, and Grade 12.

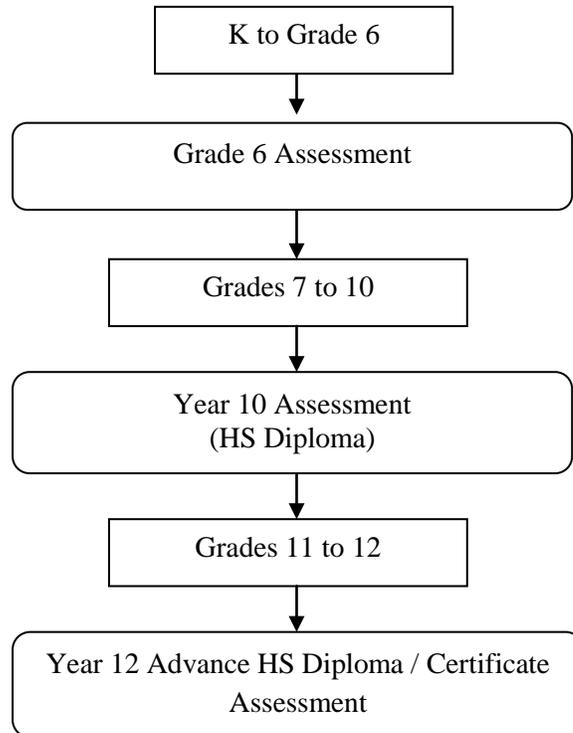


Figure 1. Framework of Curriculum and Assessment Pathways(SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012)

As the Philippines move towards K to 12, an effective and efficient national testing and assessment system is a mission that needs to be fulfilled. In order to fulfil this mission, a framework is proposed to improve whatever is existing in the system (see Figure 2).

In this framework, there is a national system for quality education that monitors and evaluates the assessment from school level up to the national level. With this the assessments being used for Grade 6, 10, and 12 are integrated, and that there is continuity of what is expected to be developed among students. Also, the assessments from school to national level are conducted periodically at all grade levels to have a profile of progress of students' learning and development.

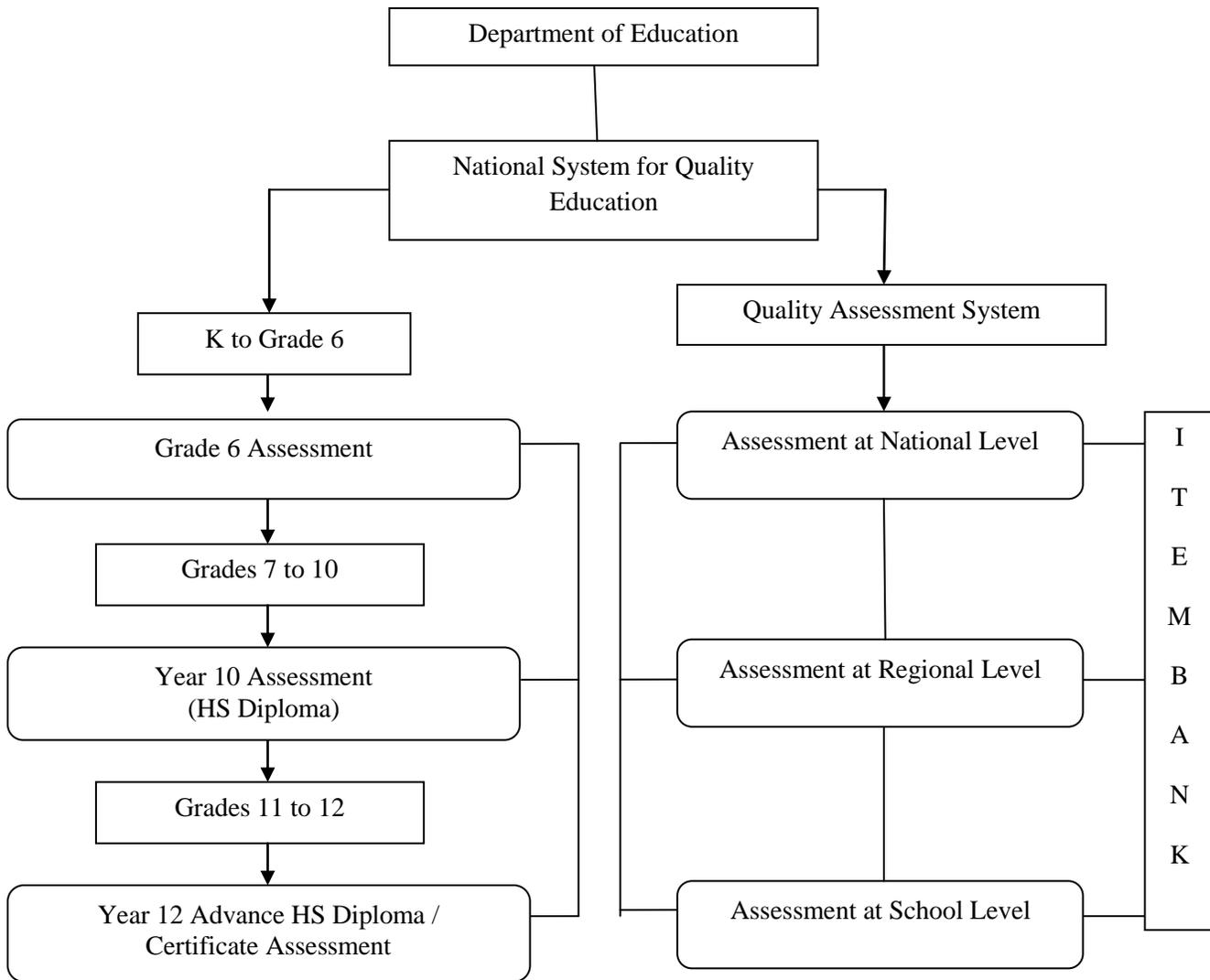


Figure 2
Proposed Framework Towards a More Effective and Efficient Assessment System in the Philippines (Adapted from Thanh, 2010)

Recommendations

Since President Aquino envisions that all students will have an equal chance of succeeding, it is recommended to create a National System for Quality Education (Figure 2) that has a quality assessment system branch that can monitor if all assessment strategies are aligned with the goal to develop among students the 21st century skills. This is to ensure that our noble aim to develop among students the 21st century skills is not only in paper, but in practice. This aims to create an accountability system that will

also allow educators at every level how students progress and in case they fail, know the reasons why.

Second, our current assessments should be benchmarked with other international assessments. Likewise, a system must be created to ensure that the mastery of 21st century skills is the one being assessed in ways that allow comparisons with students from other countries. As the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2010) states, to be able to compete in a global economy, students must be able to demonstrate excellence on a global scale and not just on a local or national scale.

Third, various measures not limited to summative assessments should be performed continuously to assure that assessment is effective. To be truly effective, assessment should also be formative (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). Formative assessments focus on identifying and responding to the students' learning needs. In the classrooms which feature formative assessment, teachers make efforts to know how students understand the lessons. It can be through interactive assessments of student understanding. In this way, the teachers are able to adjust their teaching strategies to meet individual student needs, and to better be of help to all students to reach high standards (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). In the process of formative assessment, teachers also actively involve students in the process, helping them to develop skills that enable them to learn better. Given the changing world, it is also important to have formative and summative assessment of the information and communications technology (ICT) literacy of students starting grade school level.

Fourth, throughout the K to 12 levels, the use of performance-based assessments, that is using student activities, rather than tests or surveys, to assess skills and knowledge should be enhanced. Activities such as class assignments, auditions, recitals, and projects can be used hand in hand with paper-and-pencil tests to provide a complete picture of student skills and abilities. One of the most significant advantages of a performance assessment is that they allow evaluation of skills which cannot be assessed by written tests (Oosterhof, 2009). It is ideal to develop performance-based measures that focus on higher-order thinking and measure skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication skills, ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy.

Fifth, the process of developing assessment should not be limited to individual efforts but should be collaborative, involving not only assessment experts, but practitioners, education leaders and, where appropriate, outside parties who provide assessment-related services and products (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010). In this way, assessment becomes a product of a participative effort of all stakeholders.

Department of Education is also encouraged to provide funds for research and development of the 21st century skills assessment. Topics to research on should include how to develop and enhance among students the 21st century skills, and how to assess 21st century skills effectively. Likewise competence in assessing 21st century skills should be developed among educators especially among teachers who have the hands-on assessment on students.

In addition, Department of Education shall create avenues for professional development of educators. If the main goal of K to 12 is to produce graduates who are globally competitive and whose credentials are recognized internationally, each division

of city and regional schools should have centers of excellence for measuring 21st century skills. Centers of excellence in the division of city and regional schools hand in hand with the Department of Education should exert efforts on the educational agenda to work on and have major competence in the assessment of 21st century skills. Creation of item banks, and repositories for assessment items and rubrics that help in measuring 21st century skills can aid the centers of excellence in this matter. Through this item bank, sharing of assessment items and best practices is possible.

If the assessments for K to 12 will be well -guided by the goals and objectives, and well-anchored in the curriculum, instruction, and activities, students' learning is better assessed, and direction of learning is better facilitated. Consequently, the K to 12 is made more meaningful.

These recommendations, however, would take time to be successful. Much still needs to be done not only in the curriculum but more so in the assessment and the implementation of the K to 12 educational reform. In the end, the author hopes that these recommendations on making a National System for Quality Education that has a quality assessment system, benchmarking with international assessments, use of various measures not limited to summative assessments, enhancing performance-based assessments, collaborative effort on developing assessments, provision of funds for research and development of the 21st century skills assessment, and creation of centers of excellence for measuring 21st century skills all geared towards a more effective and efficient assessment system for K to 12 educational reform in the Philippines, are not merely the ends but the means to a greater goal.

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The K to 12 Curriculum*