EXPLORING ASSESSMENT REFORM POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION IN PHILIPPINE PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION

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This paper analyzes aspects of the assessment reform that started in 2003 in the Philippines by evaluating its policy and its implementation. Documents from the Department of Education pertaining to the reform were reviewed to trace the alignment of pedagogy, assessment, and proficiency in English. In addition, focus group discussions and interviews were also conducted to see how English teachers in rural and urban public secondary schools interpreted the changes mandated to them by the Department of Education. Data collection started in 2003 up to 2007. The study uncovered some factors that might have led to the limited implementation of the assessment reform by the participants in the study.

1. Introduction

Educators, parents, and business people are acknowledging the importance of a new breed of learners and leaders because of the explosion of information and instant communication. It is for this reason that nations are clamoring for educational reform to prepare their students to become knowledge producers rather than knowledge absorbers (Kozma, 2000; Maurer, 1996). For example, the United States came up with Workforce 2000 (Marzano, Pickering, and McTinghe, 1993), while New Zealand came up with *Curriculum Framework* that provides the learning outcomes and assessment framework which intends to improve student's learning and the quality of its learning programs (Philips, 2000). On the other hand, Singapore's educational reform entitled 'Learning to Think, Thinking to Learn' has aligned its curriculum and assessment with its vision of developing citizens who are critical and creative thinkers and who are communicatively competent (Kozma, 2005). Similarly, Hong Kong has initiated its 'Learning to Learn' reform which aims to help learners to attain all-around development and life-long learning skills (Carless, 2005). In the Philippines, the new Basic Education curriculum was implemented in 2002 to acknowledge the changing landscape of education and globalization (Revised Basic Education Curriculum Handbook, 2002).

As the curriculum changes, debates about assessment and testing continue because stakeholders like parents, school administrators, and government officials, clamor for greater accountability (Acharya, 2003). For example, some policymakers believe that tests improve standards and the media evaluate the status of education through test scores in fixed alternative tests like multiple-choice exams. However, despite the popularity of traditional tests to measure student achievement, there seems to be a shifting view that there is a need to design better classroom assessment instruments that can tap higher-order cognitive skills, problem-solving, and authentic communication (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Rothman, 1995). Rothman (1995) adds that because the knowledge economy requires everyone from those in the assembly line to the managers to become decision-makers, educational systems should make sure that the students are trained and assessed on their ability to analyze situations and solve problems.

Because of the crucial role that assessment plays in educational reform, studies have been conducted to describe and evaluate assessment reform policies and implementation. Examples are Carless' (2005) analysis of the implementation of assessment for learning reform in Hong Kong and Philips' (2000) examination of the issues related to the curriculum and assessment reform in New Zealand. Another body of research covers how teachers, the center of the assessment reform, implement assessment reform mandates in their classrooms (Renandya, Lim, Leong, & Jacobs, 1999; Davison, 2004; Rea-Dickins, 2004). The present research aims to add to the ongoing conversation on assessment reform by analyzing the policy and practice of educational reform that started in 2003 in the Philippines. The value of this paper lies in its analysis of factors that affect the implementation of educational reform in a country that calls for urgent measures to counteract declining English proficiency.

There are several reasons why a review of the assessment reform policy in English, its system implementation, and English teachers' interpretation is crucial. First, there is an urgent call for reform in English language education because of the declining proficiency of Filipino students (Abad, 2006). This is very important in the Philippines because it boasts of its people's proficiency in English and because of the vast opportunities in the call center industry. According to Hernandez (2004), it is projected that the employment potential will rise to between 250,000 and 310,000 by 2009. However, out of 100 applicants, only 4% pass the qualifying exams which require conversational skills (Hernandez, 2004). Second, as Filipinos compete in the global market, their proficiency in English will be their advantage. In fact, there are more than eight million Filipinos working abroad, and everyday around 2500 Filipinos leave the country to look for greener pasture (Collymore, 2003). Lastly, scores in Science and Math were

below world average based on the TIMMS (Trends in Math and Science Survey) in 2003 (del Mundo, 2006). It was assumed that because the tests required reading skills, Filipino students did not make the grade. In addition, Contreras (2006) cites World Bank's study that concluded that the teacher is the single most important factor behind a student's performance. Therefore, studies that look into policies that affect classroom assessment and teachers' decisions will shed light on ways to improve assessment for learning in the classroom.

2. Framework

In order to describe and evaluate the assessment reform in English in public secondary education in the Philippines, the following framework will be used:

2.1 Policymaking steps for human and economic development (Kozma, 2005)

Take time to create a vision.

Develop a plan that specifies measurable goals, the means to 'align curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher development, and school restructuring' (p. 149)

Align educational policies with policies of other related government and non- government agencies.

Evaluate implementation process and outcomes.

2.2 Assessment paradigm (Renandya, Lim, Leong, & Jacobs, 1999, p. 40)

Table 1. Second language assessment paradigm

Traditional paradigm	Current paradigm
Focus on language	Focus on communication
Teacher-centered	Learner-centered
Isolated skills	Integrated skills
Focus on accuracy	Focus on fluency
Discrete points	Holistic tests
Traditional tests (multiple choice, true or false, matching)	Authentic assessment such as portfolios or performance assessment
More summative	More formative

The traditional assessment paradigm adheres to behaviorist learning theory that posits that language learning is learning bits of information like grammar. This knowledge can be tested through discrete items that ask students to choose the correct form in a multiple-choice test format. It is generally more summative because teachers teach the rules and then test students' understanding of the rules. On the other hand, the current paradigm is anchored on cognitive learning theory that posits that learners create their own knowledge as they engage in authentic tasks. Through performance assessment, teachers can design real-world tasks and clear assessment criteria to directly measure target competencies. Assessment tools such as rubrics, checklists, reflection sheets, observation, and interviews will help both the teachers and students to measure growth and authentic learning. Because the framework is learner-centered, the students are encouraged to learn how to learn by developing their ability to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, to set their own learning goals, and to monitor their progress (Burke, 1999). The current paradigm is also more formative because assessment is continuous.

2.3 Theory of proficiency and authentic assessment

The overall goal of teaching English to second language learners is to develop their proficiency. In the knowledge economy, this proficiency must be translated to the ability to decode, to synthesize, and to transmit information in a form that meets its purpose and the demands of the context. Traditionally, proficiency is defined as the ability to use the language to read, to write, to speak, and to listen. However, Hudson (2005) points out that the current view of proficiency defines it as the ability to use language in context, rather than as a decontextualized cognitive skill or ability. He adds that assessment should anchor on the fact that language takes place in a social context and that assessment of proficiency through well-designed scales will help all stakeholders understand set standards. These scales are used in criterion-referenced tests and assessments that provide qualitative feedback to students and their parents instead of just grades or numbers.

Hudson (2005) reviewed three language testing and assessment projects that exemplify criterion-referenced assessment of proficiency. These are the Canadian Benchmarks Project (CBP), the Common European Framework (CEF), and the Assessment of Language Performance Project (ALPP). The common features include rubrics and scales that include a "continuum of performance quality, significant traits to be assessed, and criteria for each level of scoring." The purpose of the CBP is to place adult second language learners into appropriate language programs. The test is task-based anchored on the functional view of language use. Test takers are rated based on a scale composed of three levels of proficiency: basic,

intermediate, and advanced. Each level has four benchmarks: initial, developing, adequate, and fluent. On the other hand, the Common European Framework is different because it has three scales divided into six bands and because the descriptors indicate what the learners can do. One of the objectives of the Framework is to "assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies, and educational administrators to situate and coordinate their efforts" (Council of Europe, n.d.). Finally, according to Hudson (2005), the proponents of Assessment of Language Performance believe that task-based assessment is evaluated by pre-determined, real- world criterion elements such as task processes and outcomes, as well as criterion levels such as authentic standards related to task success. The goals of this project are to discuss ways to assess authentic performance using real-world criteria, to show the potential of task-based performance assessment in making generalizations about the second language learners' abilities, and to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real world language use.

In a nutshell, proficiency in a second language can only be measured through authentic tasks and real-world criteria using scales or rubrics that will help all stakeholders to understand what learners can do. Scales of overall proficiency are also helpful to clarify targets, to describe the current level of students as well as describe their achievements.

2.4 Assessment reform implementation

Black and William's (1998) review of studies on assessment reform has been cited in numerous literature because of their data-driven insights about what make reform implementation possible in the classrooms. The authors' first premise is that standards can be raised if teachers can effectively implement them. Their second premise is that instruction and assessment cannot be separated. Their third premise is that any policy has to recognize that the classroom is the crucible for change. They believe that by focusing on professional development of teachers, policies can be translated into practice. Consequently, they suggest the following scheme for empowering teachers:

- Learning from development. Black and William (1998) recognize that teachers are busy and that they will not just accept any idea unless they see living examples of implementation. They, therefore, suggest forming teams of committed schools and teachers to experiment and to find out if a particular idea is practical and effective. In addition, schools should give their teachers time to plan, to implement, and to reflect on their experience.

- Dissemination. According to Black and William (1998), any policymaking body should start slowly by just making general

suggestions about why it is important to change an educational practice. However, as soon as reports from those who had experimented with the implementation of the reform start to come out, in-service training may start.

- Reducing obstacles. Black and William (1998) also point out that an obstacle to improvement of formative assessment in the classroom is external examination like national achievement tests. It cannot be denied that results of these tests affect teachers' performance rating and promotion. The writers add that they believe that teachers should be given a greater role for accountability because they are the ones who actually know their students.

- Research. They suggest investigations that will uncover how teachers understand and deal with the tension between summative and formative assessment.

In a nutshell they believe that the government can take the lead by reviewing its policies that do not take into consideration the central role of teachers in raising standards.

In sum, this framework will be used to answer the following questions to evaluate the policy and implementation of assessment reform in the Philippines:

1. Do the policy documents include a clear vision, measurable goals, plan for alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, as well as a clear plan for monitoring progress?

2. What is the overall assessment paradigm of the reform policy?

3. How did the English teachers from public secondary schools in the National Capital Region (urban area) and from Region 4 (rural area) interpret the assessment reform?

Before answering these questions, a background on the Philippine educational system and the Revised Basic Education Curriculum is provided.

3. Philippine educational system background

The Philippines is a developing country with a population of more than 80 million. It is composed of 7,100 islands spread across an archipelago of 115,831 square miles (Vorderstrasse, 2001). The Philippine educational system is divided into two: public (free education) and private education. In order to train its human resource, the Philippine government through the Department of Education provides free education from kindergarten through high school. Basic education is from kindergarten to grade six. Secondary

education is four years. The elementary and secondary school curricula include the following subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, Filipino, Physical Education, Civics/Culture/History, and Music and Arts. There are state universities and a national university that provide education with more affordable tuition fee compared to private colleges and universities. However, there is a growing discontent in the education provided by public elementary and secondary schools because of large class size, lack of classrooms, and insufficient books and learning materials (Magno, 2005). There is a great divide that separates private school children from those enrolled in public schools.

The Department of Education (DepEd) is the central government agency that makes decisions about curricula and assessment. It is divided into two. The Central Office is in charge of overall basic education at the national level, while the Field Offices are responsible for implementing the Department's policies in the regional level. In addition, because the Philippines is divided into 16 regions, DepEd has 16 Regional Directors. The DepEd website also points out that each region is further divided into Provincial or City Divisions headed by a Division Superintendent. The District Superintendent is assisted by District Supervisors who directly monitor schools.

Under the supervision of the Schools Division Offices are forty-eight thousand, four hundred forty-six (48, 446) schools, broken down as follows:

40,763 elementary schools (36,234 public and 4,529 private)

7,683 secondary schools (4,422 public and 3,261 private)

(http://www.deped.gov.ph/history, 2007, par 22)

According to reports, the following facts show the state of Philippine education: highest pupil to teacher ratio of 36.4 in 2000 compared to 17 in China and 21 of Korea, and average government spending per student is $170, whereas Thailand spends $550, while Malaysia spends $930 (Lopez, 2004). Of 100 students who enter primary school only 64 enter secondary school and only 45 will finish it. Only 26 enter college and only seven will finish it (Wallace report in Lopez, 2004). Finally, former DepEd Secretary Florencio Abad (2007) points out that

in the National Achievement Test, the national average for 4th year was 44.36% and 50.03% for Grade 5. In high school readiness test, only 8000 out of 1.2 million students passed with a national average 32.13%. The competency level of these students is only Grade four. In the Trends in International Math and Science Study, we placed 36th out of 38 countries. (p.2)

4. Revised Basic Education Curriculum

The Department of Education in the Philippines has recognized the explosion of information and the need to educate learners who can "filter information critically, seek credible sources of knowledge, and use data and facts creatively so that they can survive, overcome poverty, raise their self-esteem, develop patriotism, and realize a gracious life in our risky new world" (*The 2002 Basic Education Curriculum*, 2002, p. 1).

This educational reform was fueled the poor performance of secondary students in NSAT (National Secondary Achievement Test) over the last four years, according to *The 2002 Basic Education Curriculum* (2002). This was attributed to the one-size-fits-all approach that makes education irrelevant to learners from different backgrounds. In addition, the document also points out the overcrowded curriculum as one of the main reasons for the poor test results.

The overall goal of the Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC) is functional literacy which is defined as self-directed learning. This means that Filipino learners will be motivated to seek new knowledge on their own. This requires restructuring to develop learning how to learn, to provide experiential learning to develop deeper appreciation of Philippine culture, and integrate values in all levels, and to emphasize critical and creative thinking skills. RBEC also increased the number of contact hours for English, Science, and Math from 40 minutes to 60 minutes.

In order to disseminate the information regarding the revised curriculum, the Department of Education through the Bureau of Secondary Education created an Operations Handbook in English in 2002 in time for the series of training programs for Superintendents and Division heads in the same year. This Handbook is divided into 10 parts: Introduction, Description, Unit Credit, Time Allotment, Expectancies, Scope and Sequence, Suggested Strategies and Materials, Grading System, Learning Competencies, and Sample Lesson Plans. In addition, from year 2003-2004, there were more policies on assessment. These changes in assessment are summarized in the table below.

Table 2. Assessment reform policies

DepEd Order	Title	Mandates
No. 79 series 2003 dated October 10, 2003	Assessment and Evaluation of Learning and Reporting of Students' Progress in Public Elementary and	Exam scores will be computed based on raw score divided by the total score times 100. Grades shall be based on assessment that covers the range of learning competencies

Signed by the DepEd Secretary Edilberto de Jesus	Public Secondary Schools	specified in the Philippine Elementary learning competencies (PELC) and Philippine Secondary Schools Learning Competencies (PSSLC). The test shall be designed as follows: 60% easy items focused on basic content and skills expected of a student in each grade or year level; 30% medium-level items focused on higher level skills 10% difficult items focused on desirable content or skills that aim to distinguish the fast learners The use of rubrics or scoring guides for non-traditional assessment is strongly encouraged. Prototype rubrics are in Enclosure 2. Non-traditional assessment (e.g. open-ended questions, performance assessment) appropriate to the learning area shall be encouraged to complement traditional assessment (e.g. multiple choice, completion type, and matching type) in order to gather holistic information about student performance.
Deped order 37 s 2003 dated May 15, 2003	Revised Implementing Guidelines for the 2002 Secondary	Grading system Periodic test 25%

Signed by the DepEd Secretary Edilberto de Jesus	Education Curriculum effective school year 2003-2004	Participation & classroom interaction 30% Performance (reporting, role play, argumentation, Simulation, etc.) 30% Project (theme writing, book report, weekly written outputs, etc.) 15%
DepEd Order 425 series of 2003 Signed by the DepEd Secretary Edilberto de Jesus	Program on Rubric and Portfolio Assessment	Training for school-based teacher trainers
DepEd Order 04 series of 2004 Signed by the DepEd Secretary Edilberto de Jesus	Additional Guidelines on the New Performance-based Grading System	Additional guidelines to ease the transition into the new, performance-based grading system. 1. For the fourth grading period, the test will be designed to the 70% of the items will be easy, 20% moderately difficult, and 10% items difficult. 2. The passing mark this year is 70% instead of 75%. 3. The lowest rating to be indicated in the card remains 65%.
DepEd Order 92 series of 2004 Signed by the DepEd Secretary	5-day Training of regional Teacher-Trainer in the Use of Assessment Tools and	

Edilberto de Jesus	Alternative Approach	
DepEd Order 106 series of 2004 Signed by the DepEd Secretary Edilberto de Jesus	Summer Program on Rubrics and Portfolio Assessment for Assessment of Authentic Learning for School-based INSET Trainers	
DepEd order 5, series of 2005 Signed by the DepEd Secretary Florencio Abad	Student Assessments at the National Division levels of Basic Education	Recognizing the vital role that the testing or "assessment" plays in education, this Department will conduct national student assessments for the following purposes: monitor the public education system and schools for public accountability; help provide information to better identify instructional practices; measure student achievement; and evaluate student's mastery skills. Since the test results are often a major force in shaping perception about the quality of education,, the following assessments shall be done at the national and division level:..... Selected response tests shall be given to the total population while constructed response tests, e.g. essay shall be given to a sample.

N.B. The mandates have been quoted verbatim to show the alignment of these policies.

In 2004, the Philippine Normal University, a teacher education institution in the country, created the "Rubrics and Portfolio Assessment Trainer's Sourcebook" that contains the powerpoint presentations of the trainors, DepEd Memoranda regarding the changes in grading and

assessment, and sample rubrics for different subjects. It is also worth noting that in the same year, DepEd through the Bureau of Secondary Education, conducted a Writeshop to create model tests for first year to fourth year English classes in public secondary schools. The model tests were finalized after one year. They contain mostly fixed-alternative tests of reading, grammar, vocabulary.

4. Discussion

The evaluation of the policy and implementation of the assessment reform in English in public secondary education in the Philippines will be divided into three sections. The first section evaluates the policy's vision, goals, and plan for implementation and monitoring. The second section will describe the assessment paradigm, while the last section describes how selected English teachers from rural and urban areas implemented the assessment reform.

4.1 Evaluation of the vision, measurable goals, plan for alignment, and plan for monitoring

The vision of the revised curriculum is to develop "an empowered learner who is competent in learning how to learn and is equipped with life skills so that s/he becomes a self-developed person who is *makabayan* (patriotic), *makatao* (mindful of humanity), *makakalikasan* (respectful of nature), and *maka-Diyos* (godly)" (*The 2002 Basic Education Curriculum: An Overview*, 2002). However, the reported declining English proficiency of Filipinos (Arenas, 2006), the increasing opportunities in call centers in the country, and the expanding opportunities abroad seem to call for a vision that includes the ability to communicate effectively in multicultural situations. Because a vision is a powerful means to set the direction of reform, writing this vision should be a collaborative effort among concerned government institutions, non-government agencies, and the business sector.

There are several guide questions that can be used in clarifying the vision of an educational reform or assessment reform. The first question is about the rationale for the vision. Kifer (2001) differentiates an economic rationale from a good citizen rationale. An example of economic rationale is that of Singapore's 2004 Curriculum (*The Outcomes of Education*, 2004). Eight of the 16 outcomes are shown below.

Table 3. Outcome of education

All post-secondary and tertiary students should	Potential leaders should
be able to think, reason and deal confidently with the future, have courage and conviction in facing adversity	be able to chart our destiny and lead
be able to seek, process and apply knowledge	be able to forge breakthroughs in a knowledge-based economy
be innovative - have a spirit of continual improvement, a lifelong habit of learning and an enterprising spirit in undertakings	be creative and imaginative
think global, but be rooted to Singapore	have the tenacity to fight against the odds and not quit

By answering this question, policymakers can prioritize those outcomes that are urgent and important. The following questions will also help.

- What standards can be set to achieve the vision
- How can these standards be evaluated?
- How can progress be monitored?

Finally, the vision of the 2001 Revised Basic Education Curriculum is to develop learners who learn how to learn. The question that can be asked is this: what are the parameters that can be used to find out if Filipino students have developed this skill?

In terms of measurable goals and alignment of pedagogy, assessment, and professional development, the policy documents merely define the expectancies and competencies per subject area. Consider the expectancies after first year of secondary school:

At the end of the First Year, the student is expected to determine how sentences are used to perform communicative acts, such as describing, defining, classifying, etc., to make use of real world knowledge and experience with emphasis on cross-cultural items; work at the denotative meanings of a text; identify and explain the different literary types with emphasis on Philippine literature; and show appreciation of art forms and familiarization with the common mass media forms. (*Operations Handbook*, 2002, p. 4)

Consider the seemingly low-level expectations of producing sentences rather than discourses and identifying literary types. It can be inferred that such expectations will not develop learning how to learn and communication skills. Compare these expectations to the characteristics of self-regulated learners or those who know how to learn: students select their goals, they have expectations for success, they know how to use available resources, they know how to collaborate, and they construct their own meaning (Paris & Ayres, 1994, p. 29).

It would also help if the policy documents detailed important information that schools, teachers, students, and parents should know about the reform. For example, The Singapore English Language Syllabus 2001 includes the following information:

1. The overall goal of the English language curriculum

2. Aims of the syllabus – limited to five

3. Philosophy of language underlying the syllabus

4. Principles of language learning and teaching

5. Main features of the syllabus (a single document for primary and secondary for continuity)
    5.1 Language use: language for information, language for literary response and expression, language for social interaction
    5.2 Learning outcomes are expected attainment at the end of each two-year level. They are specific, measurable, attainable, and time referenced.
    5.3 Text types and grammar

The European Framework also explains its theoretical framework for language teaching and learning. Although the Operations Handbook in English states that the "prevailing theory of language, language acquisition, and pedagogical thrusts provide the theoretical basis of the curriculum" (p. 2), it does not explain these theories and thrusts.

With regard to pedagogy, The Operations Handbook in English of 2002 of the Basic Education Curriculum suggests the following strategies and materials: "process writing, simulations, advanced organizers, cloze, cooperative learning, and debate" (pp. 9-10). However, there is no theoretical framework of language teaching and learning in the Operations Handbook compared to other policy documents. The Council of Europe (n.d.) explains the importance of aligning methods and objectives:

By providing a common basis for the explicit description of objectives, content and methods, the Framework will enhance the transparency of courses, syllabuses and qualifications, thus

promoting international co-operation in the field of modern languages. The provision of objective criteria for describing language proficiency will facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts, and accordingly will aid European mobility. (p. 1)

4.2 Assessment paradigm

The goal of the assessment reform under the Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC) is to shift to performance-based assessment in the classroom by changing the grading system, by training the trainers on alternative assessment, rubric-making, and portfolio assessment from 2003 to 2004. At the same time, the Bureau of Secondary Education under the Department of Education spent one year to develop model tests for dissemination to English teachers in public schools. These model tests are mostly multiple-choice items on reading, grammar, and vocabulary. Moreover, the National Achievement Test (NSAT) and the Division Test have been given administered to students for accountability. These tests comprise multiple-choice items that tested reading, grammar, and vocabulary.

RBEC's education reform policy seems to be sending two signals. The first message is clear through the model tests and NSAT. The format of the test items seems to tell the teachers and students that English proficiency is measured by the ability to choose the best answer in a multiple-choice reading, vocabulary, and grammar tests. Because the model tests also ask students to rearrange sentences to test writing and outlining skills, these tests are sending the signal that these are the means to assess writing ability.

Table 3. Distribution of items in model tests for English teachers

Skills/Knowledge	Second year items	Third year items	Fourth year items
Listening	10	10	10
Reading	31	30	34
Grammar	17	40	31
Vocabulary	26	0	0
Writing (arranging sentences/outline headings	6	10	10
Actual writing	10 (without a rubric)	0	5 (with a rubric)
Speaking	0	10 (without a rubric)	10 (with a rubric)

The table above shows that in the model tests, reading and grammar took more that fifty percent of the items. This suggests that the Bureau of Secondary Education believes that proficiency in English consists of linguistic knowledge and ability to select the best answers. It is also surprising that performance assessment of writing and speaking is almost neglected. It is also worth noting that there seems to be inconsistency with regard to the use of rubrics which lend objectivity to performance assessment.

These model tests play a very important role in assessment reform because these are samples that teachers in public schools will use. It can be assumed that the constructs of proficiency of these tests will affect the way teachers view their students' ability to use English. Furthermore, the fact that listening and speaking take minor roles in the assessment is sending a signal that they are not as important as reading and grammar. It can also be surmised that this could be one of the reasons for the poor performance of Filipino applicants in call center examinations.

Another aspect of the assessment reform policy worth discussing is the new grading system. DepEd Order 37, series of 2003, mandates the following:

Periodic Tests	25%
Participation	30%
Performance	30%
Projects	15%
	100%

The periodic tests are major examinations after every quarter. A closer look at these periodical tests from a public national high school from Region 4 showed that the test questions mostly focused on reading and grammar in multiple-choice format. It is not surprising that the skills and knowledge measured in the teacher-prepared tests are almost the same as those tested in the National Achievement Test and the Model Tests.

There are several issues that can be raised with regard to the new grading system. First, the policy document does not provide guidelines such as standards, authentic tasks, rubric or checklists that teachers can use to help students understand the expectations. For example, grading participation (30%) is based on students' classroom interaction according to the DepEd Order 37 and grading performance (30%) and projects (15%) is based on sketchy details such as including role plays and argumentation in grading performance while book reports and weekly written outputs are to be used in grading projects. It seems that the policymakers who designed the grading system would like to increase the students' practice in using English to communicate orally with their peers and with their teacher. However, without

clear parameters for assessment, the teachers would resort to subjective evaluation without any mechanism for formative feedback.

Second, it can be assumed that only those who were the usual active participants would get the highest grade for participation. If the goal of DepEd was assessment for learning, the policymakers could help teachers use this aspect of assessment to develop the English proficiency and confidence to participate of those who really need help. Third, projects could be powerful means to develop critical thinking, collaboration, and authentic integration of reading, research, writing, listening, and speaking if they were designed with clear objectives, authentic tasks, and clear criteria for evaluation. Moreover, according to Littlewood (2003), a project such as conducting extended research would allow students to develop communicative and cognitive skills as well as motivation and creativity. However, DepEd Order 37 series of 2003 requires small projects such as book reports and weekly written projects that do not require collaboration, research, and critical thinking. For example, some projects found in sample portfolios from participating teachers from Region 4 included a movie critique, a list of parts of speech, and a sample text where the students underlined the target language such as adjectives.

In a nutshell, the revised curriculum seems to adhere to the transmissive approach to learning because the scope and sequence details the knowledge and skills to be mastered (Kozma, 2005). Bransford, Brown, and Cocking in Kozma (2005) believe that it is better for the students to focus on core concepts, principles, and procedures rather than superficially covering a large number of topics. In addition, the assessment paradigm is still traditional because of the emphasis on discrete language in fixed-alternative tests. Moreover, the assessment reform does not provide any mechanism for self- assessment, monitoring, and evaluation. These are important skills in learning how to learn.

4.3 Implementation

Based on focus group discussions involving 21 teachers from 12 public schools in Metro Manila including those from the top schools such as Manila Science High School and Ramon Magsaysay High School and 29 teachers from various schools in Region 4, the following findings were noted. First, it is surprising that in Metro Manila only a handful were able to attend a seminar on alternative assessment. Since Metro Manila is the capital of the Philippines, it would be safe to assume that the teachers in this city would receive the first training. It seems that training in public schools depends on the priorities of the subject supervisors who serve as conduits to the schools. These subject supervisors per Division are those who are trained first and then they are responsible for echoing what they had learned. Second, most of

the time, the subject heads per school are encouraged to attend the echo seminar from the division subject superintendent. However, according to the participants in one public school, the subject head for English was not able to attend the seminar on alternative assessment, and so the English teachers in their school did not get the rubrics that were given away. Lastly, compared to the availability of teacher support materials in other countries such as online standards, online scales, and online rubrics, the website of the Department of Education in the Philippines contains minimal support for teachers.

Most of the teachers in the focus group discussion also reported that they did not follow the zero-based grading system because many students would fail. If their students failed, this would affect their performance rating and their promotion. They also pointed out that because their students were poor, the teachers wanted to pass them, so these students could start working. In addition, the teachers were not consistent with the use of portfolios that DepEd Order 37 also encouraged. Of the 21 teachers from schools in Metro Manila, only three required their students. Those who did not include portfolios in their assessment reported that they had not attended any seminar on this form of assessment. On the other hand, almost all of the participants from Region 4 required their students to keep portfolios. However, these portfolios did not contain a cover letter which would allow the students to explain their growth as students through the pieces of evidence in their portfolios. There were no rubrics nor checklists that were used to evaluate the student outputs. In a nutshell, the portfolios were merely containers for students' papers. Lastly, the Basic Education Curriculum details the competencies for reading, writing, listening, speaking, and literature per level of students. However, the participants reported that, although they would use the list of competencies in preparing their lesson plans, there was no mechanism for the teachers and students to assess whether the competencies were developed or not.

A majority of the teachers also reported that topics such as alternative assessment, rubrics, and portfolios were not taught in college. Finally, they also pointed out because of large classes, it was difficult to give feedback to each student. They also lamented about the lack of materials that they could use for teaching and for assessment.

There are a number of implications arising from the present study for professional development of English teachers in public secondary schools. Despite the small number of respondents, the present study observed the need to provide more resources on authentic assessment and more training to assess process and strategies in the Philippines. For example, in other countries like the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, teachers can access online rubrics, rating scales, and checklists, as well as guidelines for the implementation of portfolio assessment. Second, the fact that the

participants in the present study tested grammar knowledge and lower-level thinking suggests the need for more reflection on the part of the teachers and on the part of the Department of Education. The teachers and the government have been observing the continuous deterioration of English proficiency for years, and yet the same principles of traditional testing are still implemented by the Department of Education.

5. Conclusions

This paper analyzed the assessment reform in English subjects in Philippine public secondary schools by evaluating the policies through the policy documents and sample assessment tools and by conducting focus group discussions with teachers from public schools in Metro Manila and from Region 4.

Kozma (2005) argues that policymaking for educational reforms includes a clear vision, specific and measurable goals, and the means to align the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher development, and evaluation of process and outcomes. However, this study observed that the policy documents do not contain measurable goals and concrete plans for alignment of factors for successful implementation of the reform. In addition, the sample tests and assessment tools from DepEd are still anchored on tradition paradigm because they focus more on language, are teacher-centered, and test discrete items using multiple-choice items. Moreover, the national achievement test and the model tests are unanimous in their attempts to measure students' reading, vocabulary, and grammar. This observation suggests that the Department of Education defines proficiency as decontextualized cognitive ability (Hudson, 2005) rather than the ability to use language in context. The absence of proficiency scales, authentic tasks and projects, self assessment, and standards of performance also point out to the traditional paradigm that is anchored on transmissive approach to learning.

Finally, Black and William (1998) claim that successful reform implementation can only happen if policymakers recognize that teachers themselves are the catalysts of change. They also suggest that implementation should start slowly by giving incentives to a few teachers and schools who would be willing to experiment with the reform because they believe that once success stories start coming out, teachers' fears and apprehensions would be allayed. They also believe that reduction of obstacles such as the use of external evaluations and large classes would help the teachers to focus on formative assessment. However, the present study found that the seemingly limited information and the short time for training hindered the teachers from actually implementing the mandates. The teachers were not given enough time and resources to improve their assessment practice.

If the Department of Education wanted to develop Filipino students who are globally competitive and who practice learning how to learn, the policymakers could look closely at how other assessment reform has succeeded in other countries. Instead of setting standards by raising the passing grade in fixed-alternative exams and changing the grading system, the Department of Education in the Philippines could start by clarifying targets and by creating a proficiency scale and rubrics that would set standards for all students.

This pilot study has uncovered issues that might have affected the extent of implementation of the assessment reform. However, the observations are just the tip of the iceberg. Further investigation on classroom assessment would bring to the fore other issues that might affect teachers' formative assessment decisions. In addition, studies on best practices both in public and private schools could uncover success factors in assessment reform. Moreover, the Department of Education could look into reforms conducted by non-government organizations in some public schools to discover best how change can happen despite minimal funds.

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