

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PROJECT

PHASE I RESEARCH REPORT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this observational study was to identify baseline practices in the Philippines. The study focused specifically on classroom organization, teacher instructional and assessment strategies, lesson structure, resources used by teachers, student involvement in the classroom, and formal and informal assessment practices. This study was also designed to investigate how teachers are using formative assessment practices in Philippine classrooms, and to examine the links between assessment and teaching practices.

Classroom observations were conducted on a sample of 61 classroom lessons from the National Capital Region (NCR) to identify baseline practices. The observations were documented in a series of narratives, which were later used to identify variations between teachers within grade levels and disciplines. The narratives of the 61 classroom observations indicated that a standardized lesson structure was common, and that the lesson structure was associated with the following:

1. Summative assessment at the end of the lesson
2. Pressure on teachers to make sure the content of the curriculum is covered in each lesson
3. Limited individual feedback or feed forward for students
4. Pressure on teachers to monitor their own performance but not the performance of their students
5. Common format which was inflexible

It was clear that the majority of classes are conducted according to a standard structure, with an emphasis on covering curriculum content and with little evidence of formative assessment. Nevertheless, the K to 12 education reform and the implementation of assessment policies and frameworks provide a major opportunity for changes in pedagogy and assessment.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the Philippine's Department of Education (DepEd) started the implementation of a new curriculum, known as the K to 12 program. DepEd redeveloped the curriculum from a 1-10 structure to a K-12 structure to bring it into line with other school systems in the developed world. The goal of the revised education system is to produce 'holistically developed Filipinos who have 21st century skills and are prepared for higher education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship.' A significant part of the curriculum reform is an assessment framework that includes formative approaches to assessment. In the Philippines, assessment practices have centered on summative assessments (e.g., assignment of scores and letter grades to students), emphasizing results and grades rather than skill development. The assessment framework encourages teachers to use a mixture of formal and informal assessment data to improve student learning. The goal of the policy on formative assessment is to help teachers recognize relevant assessment practices that will improve student learning outcomes, especially in the basic skills assessed annually as part of the national testing program.

In the context of education reform in the Philippines, formative assessment is seen as the use of assessment information by the teacher to inform teaching instructions. It is well aligned with Black and Wiliam's 2009 statement, in that a practice is considered formative assessment if 'evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited' (p. 9). Black and Wiliam's definition of formative assessment contains some important elements. The first is that it is about interpreting the assessment information or evidence to make decisions about the next steps in instruction. It is about informing teaching in order to improve student learning. It does not exclude the teacher encouraging the students to be involved in their own assessment but instead emphasizes the responsibility of the teacher to use assessments in many different ways to improve student learning. In many instances the use of a developmental framework of learning can actively encourage students to understand their learning trajectory and become increasingly involved in monitoring their own learning development. However, for most situations the student and teacher need to collaborate in the monitoring process and ultimately the teacher's professional judgment is required. The second is that formative assessment can occur at the teacher-student level, peer level and also self-assessment level. Assessment information and evidence can be used by the teacher, peers and students themselves to monitor and improve student learning.

To identify baseline assessment practices and ways in which the emerging policy by the Department of Education in the Philippines could be disseminated, 61 classroom lessons were observed. Specifically, this study was designed to investigate how teachers are using formative assessment practices in Philippine classrooms, and to examine the links between assessment and teaching practices. The study also aimed to identify the variation in practices between and within schools, teachers, subjects, grade levels and regions/district within the system. Classroom observations were documented in narrative form and were explored to determine practices in the Philippines.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were schools and teachers in the National Capital Region. Table I presents the sample descriptions and the details of the schools. The year levels, subject observed (English and or mathematics), and typical class sizes and lesson duration across government and independent schools are presented.

Twelve public schools in Quezon City, in Manila, were visited. Most schools were under the supervision of the Department of Education (DepEd) (n = 11) and one was a laboratory school under the supervision of University of the Philippines (UP).

Table I Descriptive statistics of participating schools by grade levels of classes observed

Level	Frequency			DepEd Schools			UP Integrated School		
	Total	Math	English	No. of Classes	Average Class size	Average Duration (min)	No. of Classes	Average Class size	Average Duration (min)
Kind.	1	1	0	1	21	60	-	-	-
1	10	5	5	8	29	49	2	25	72
2	6	3	3	2	42	60	4	-	82
3	8	4	4	6	38	67	2	34	75
4	11	6	5	9	41	56	2	31	75
5	11	5	6	9	41	79	2	33	71
6	8	4	4	6	47	51	2	29	73
7	2	1	1	2	49	65	-	-	-
8	2	1	1	2	44	64	-	-	-
9	2	1	1	2	53	56	-	-	-
Total	61	31	30	47			14		

Note. Mean values are rounded to the nearest decimal place

In terms of class size, Kinder and Grade I levels for Department of Education schools were smaller in number than other grade levels. For the UP school, the class sizes were within the range of 25 to 35 students. The duration of a class session in a DepEd school is typically sixty minutes, and for UP the suggested length of class period is 75 minutes. The average class duration observed indicates that most classes are near the mandated length.

Table 2 displays the summary of class statistics of the Department of Education schools observed. Column 3 shows that the class sizes increase with the grade level of students in these particular schools, all of which were in Quezon City, which covers about a quarter of metro Manila, and is the most populated city in the Philippines.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for Department of Education classes observed

Department of Education Levels	Number of Classes	Average class size	Average Class Duration (min)
Basic Education: Kinder	1	21	60
Basic Education: G1 to G6	40	39	62
Secondary Education: G7 to G9	6	49	62
Total	47	40	

Note. Mean values are rounded to the nearest whole number

PROCEDURE

Systematic classroom observations were conducted in the last quarter of the school year 2013–2014. The observations ranged from Kindergarten to Grade 9 (or 3rd year of secondary school where students are normally within the age range 13 to 14 years old). Summaries of the classroom observations were documented in narrative forms and used in later analysis.

RESULTS

Analysis of the classroom observation narratives through a formative assessment lens revealed several classroom, student and teacher characteristics:

Common structure. The narratives of the 61 classroom observations indicated that there is a common structure for the lesson plan, and the formats used for lesson delivery appeared to be inflexible. Lessons usually began with a class activity, followed by small group activities, question-and-answers with show of hands, and a summary session. At times, the class activity consisted of a recitation activity. At other times, the recitation was performed by individual students at the front of the class. This would only happen if students were prepared to demonstrate that there was a chance that they did not understand what was taught. What may have been an attempt at formative assessment may have been counterproductive and provided signals that there is a need for teacher development in the use of data to promote learning for individual students. The primary focus of the teacher is on identification of correct responses and correct responders.

Student Behaviour. Assessment results were sometimes used to modify teaching strategies for an entire class. There was little evidence of the use of assessment results at the individual or small group levels. Teacher tended to intervene based on student behaviour (e.g., low interest, truancy), rather than student level of skill as indicated by assessment. Student behaviours were used as cues for teachers to determine whether students were paying attention, were uninterested or not motivated, were understanding the lesson or becoming confused, and were mastering the lesson. Many teachers evaluated the degree to which students had learned the lesson content based on students reaction rather than through formal assessment. For example, teachers associated behaviours such as raising of hands during question and answer; apparent attentive listening, participation in discussion; asking questions with students' mastery of skill or lesson content. The use of such indicators and anecdotal evidence can be valid, but few teachers understood that both responses and nonresponses could be used formatively. Generally, when the teacher asked questions, a show of raised hands was used by the teacher as an index of understanding at the class level. However, the teachers did not demonstrate realisation of the potential of the assessment information and did not maximise the effectiveness of the strategy. In part, this may be attributed to the preponderance of low order questions, requiring mainly closed or recall responses.

Only a few teachers marked or noted students' outputs, and when they did, they did not record results as part of the final grade. Many

teachers, however, did incorporate results of the routine class quiz as part of the evaluation of student performance.

Assessment. There was a uniform method of assessment in the class, and assessment results were interpreted at a class level, such as percentage of class above or below a given threshold. Sometimes, the teacher interacted with individual students. However these interactions rarely occurred and did not appear to involve the use of assessment data to inform intervention and direction of student learning. Typically, a quiz consisting of approximately five to eight true/false or short-answer, supply-type items is conducted at the end of the class. Teachers tend not to be involved in scoring students' quiz results. Students scored their own answers or exchanged tests with peers to score them. The teacher occasionally collected the student books or test sheets and recorded the performance on these quizzes at an individual student level. However, there was no apparent use made of the data.

Grouping. Students were typically grouped in the class. The actual grouping appeared to be random or based on subjective judgment of student ability. Student grouping was used to encourage learning through competitive participation and engagement. Students enjoyed, or seemed to enjoy, the competitive nature of some of the group tasks.

Curriculum pressures. Many teachers were aware of, and sensitive to, the time required for various activities in class. It is likely that the perception that the curriculum is difficult to cover terms of breadth of scope and sequence may have contributed to the formulaic approach to teaching. The formulaic nature of the lesson appears to achieve compliance with curriculum objectives on the part of the teacher but does not necessarily achieve learning on the part of the student. The classroom appeared to be an environment in which the teacher must deliver the set curriculum topic, rather than a venue where the focus is on the student learning. The content of lessons varied from teacher to teacher and was subjected to school level decisions.

Students. There was little evidence of students seeking or expecting formative feedback regarding their learning from the teacher. There was also very little evidence of the kinds of strategies students use in their efforts to learn. The only method of providing learning information or feedback to students was through identification of correct/incorrect responses from the quiz conducted at the end of the class. During the class, teachers sometimes asked if there were any questions. However, in some classes, this practice tended to discourage the students; students appeared to be scared due to the chance of being called to the front of the class to answer or explain in front of their peers.

Summary. Teachers taught different content within subjects and for the most part schools practised a fair amount of autonomy in terms of the delivery of lesson content. However, there was little or no autonomy in lesson design, structure and format, or assessment practices. From the narratives, it is clear that the lesson structure is associated with:

1. Summative assessment at the end of the lesson
2. Pressure on teachers to ensure that the content of the curriculum is covered in each lesson
3. Limited individual feedback or feed forward for students
4. Pressure on teachers to monitor their own performance but not that of the students
5. Common format

In terms of assessment practices observed in class, minimal emphasis was given to formative assessment and most assessment was summative and recorded as scores or percentage correct. Teachers' assessment skills were largely uniform across classrooms. This was brought about by the pressure of an intense content-focused curriculum, a formulaic lesson plan and structure, large class sizes, regular and mistargeted assessments, and a lack of accountability for student learning. Given the invariance in lesson structure and pedagogy, it became apparent that the original intention to survey the influence of variability between teaching strategies across grade levels, subjects, education levels and schools would not be possible. Differences and improvements in student learning were more likely to be a result of other factors. Nonetheless, if formative assessment is to be used to improve teaching and learning, evidence from this study highlights a need for change in pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the classrooms are environments in which:

1. Teachers asked questions of students to check knowledge, and used a show of hands as an indicator of learning success.
2. Teachers sometimes collected student's notebooks, but provision of written comments as feedback was unusual.
3. Teachers sometimes set group projects and group work, as well as individual assignments.
4. Records of student learning gains consisting of scores or grades are not well suited to planning instruction. Recorded descriptive information about progress of individual students in mark books was unusual. Anecdotal records were not observed at all. Most of the recordings appeared to rely on memory and in large classes these were problematic. Few records provided information about the class, the student, the topic, the syllabus, progress of students, or progress of the

- class, notwithstanding rigorous completion of marking spreadsheets.
5. Teachers recorded their own progress in terms of content coverage and lessons completed. Very few made evaluative or assessment comments about their own performance.
 6. The procedures for teachers to synthesise information at the end of term in order to provide a report are clear and are based purely on summative data.
 7. Records to students for purposes of instructional feedback, as opposed to feedback of grades, were non-existent.

This study highlighted the need for formative assessment of and by teachers. However, it is clear that most teachers lacked the ability to synthesize information about students' learning and skills using a developmental approach. Assistance and training for teachers to adopt an understanding of developmental approaches to learning and teaching is essential for the successful implementation of the K to 12 education reform. Pedagogical and assessment skills much be enhanced to support an educational philosophy of learning for all and achievement for all.

REFERENCE

Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (2009) Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 5-31.

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