

Article

Policy Analysis on Education in Emergencies (EiE) and Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) for Senior High School (SHS) in the Philippines

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Abstract

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the basic education sector in the Philippines. In the public school system, the pandemic has not only disrupted schooling by shifting the beginning of the school year (SY) 2020-20201 at a later time, it has also necessitated a shift to alternative learning delivery strategies including the use of more flexible face-to-face, distance and blended learning. This paper focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on the K to 12 senior high school (SHS) program and the need to offer flexible learning options (FLOs) to upper secondary learners. It examines the policies the Department of Education (DepEd) has initiated in continuing learning during the pandemic and providing education through FLOs using the INEE's domain standards on EiE. From this policy analysis, the paper identified some gaps that need to be addressed through the following recommendations 1) intensify FLO guidelines to meet the different needs and contexts of learners especially the marginalized; 2) develop an EiE policy; 3) improve teaching-learning by strengthening communication channels, formative assessment, and multimedia learning materials; 4) provide offline and online options for SHS tracks; 5) explore the use of videos, mobile training centers and flexible times of study.

Keywords:

basic education, COVID-19, education in emergencies, flexible learning options, K to 12, senior high school

Introduction

K to 12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines

The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 or Republic Act (RA) 10533 brought about many reforms by integrating successful programs and instituting needed interventions in the basic education system of the Philippines. RA 10533 identifies Kindergarten as the first stage of mandatory formal education, followed by six years of elementary education, and another six years of high school, which is composed of Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS) (DepEd 2019a). Putting a premium on student preferences and community needs, the SHS programs provide learners with options by offering four tracks, which are the Academic, Arts and Design, Sports, and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Tracks. Annex A shows the list of SHS subjects per track and strand. Giving students choices in SHS is indicative of building in flexibility in the basic education program. However, this flexibility was not sufficient to meet the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Flexible learning options (FLOs) and ICT integration

The Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 states the need to “provide alternative modes of learning and education for children and adolescents who are not in school at both primary and secondary levels, and put in place equivalency and bridging programs, recognized and accredited by the state” (UNESCO 2015, 38). This ensures education institutions to allow flexibility in both formal and non-formal settings where there are disruptions of classes especially during emergency situations (UNESCO 2015).

Flexible learning is a set of educational approaches and systems concerned with providing learners with increased choice,

convenience, and personalization to suit their needs (Lee and McLoughlin 2010). Gordon (2014) and Ryan and Tilbury (2013) discussed dimensions of flexibility, such as when and where learning occurs, what and how students learn, types of learning resources to be provided, when and how to provide assessments and evaluation, what technologies are appropriate, and what kind of support and services should be provided. Similarly, other studies reflect flexibility in terms of meeting the needs of individual learners, possibility of making learning choices in terms of class times, course content, instructional approach, technology use, learning resources, location, and even requirements for entry or completion dates (Collis, Vingerhoets, and Moonen, 1997; Goode, Willis, Wolf, and Harris 2007).

A significant component of these flexibilities is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for teaching, learning, and administration (Collis, Vingerhoets and Moonen 1997; Goode, Willis, Wolf, and Harris 2007; Ryan and Tilbury 2013; Gordon 2014). ICTs allow learners access to educational resources and provide opportunities for communicating with educators and peers and, in fact, continuation of learning sometimes becomes dependent on these if traditional or regular schooling is not accessible.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has been offering flexible learning options (FLOs), which it defines as “learning interventions and pathways that are responsive to the needs, context, circumstances, and diversity of learners” (DepEd 2019a, 96). Depending on existing circumstances and resources, FLOs allow flexible schedule, venue, and approach in learning (Fontanos, Gonzales, Lucasan, and Ocampo 2020).

The DepEd started implementing FLOs as separate programs and projects to improve participation rates and reduce the number of students at risk of dropping out. Later on, the DepEd took on some of these projects as regular programs under the Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM) or the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as subsets of FLOs with a specific line-item budget at the different governance levels. ADMs and ALS have proven useful in addressing dropouts in the upper secondary level (Albert, David, and Vizmanos 2018). These programs are implemented in schools and communities to provide

access to learners who are not able to go to school for various reasons such as health, economic responsibilities, and disasters.

To meet the needs of individual learners, ADMs do not follow the set-up of a regular classroom but follow the formal K to 12 curriculum and allow learning through *face-to-face learning* where teachers and learners meet in person, *distance learning* where learners have access to learning resources but do self-directed study away from the school, or *blended learning* which combines face-to-face and distance learning (DepEd 2019a). The ALS, on the other hand, makes use of the non-formal curriculum aligned with K to 12.

Various ICTs such as radio, television, and computers and the internet have also been long utilized by the DepEd in various educational programs. These educational technologies have not only been used to support classroom instruction in regular schooling, but also as an important component of flexible learning. ICTs have served as a platform for delivering educational content and for providing ways to communicate with teachers and peers (Fontanos, Gonzales, Lucasan, and Ocampo 2020).

In the past, the DepEd was able to successfully broadcast lessons through radio and television (Rosario 1964; Marinas 2000; Vergel de Dios 2016). These allowed learners, and sometimes parents, to access lessons and study at home even when they are away from school. To ensure quality, learning resources underwent meticulous development involving collaboration of different experts, including a curriculum specialist, scriptwriter, artist, and teacher training expert. The curriculum specialist designed the individual lesson while the script writer turned the lesson into a radio script. The artist created the worksheet while the teacher training expert developed the teacher's guide. However, Rosario-Braid (2020) argues that this setup should not be stand-alone, describing the process as being one-way. As for the Radio-Based Instruction (RBI) program in ALS, learners communicate responses and clarifications about the lesson by sending messages through mobile phones during the airing of the lesson, which became the basis for additional explanations to be aired later on (National Education for All Committee 2010). In other ADMs such as the Open High School Program (OHSP), printed modules or worksheets were distributed to learners to answer at

home. The accomplished modules were then brought to school and sent back to their teachers for feedback (PIDS 2009).

Eventually, the use of digital technologies and the internet gave more opportunities for accessing learning resources and allowed the teaching-learning process to be more interactive. Digital resources such as e-learning modules and multimedia materials were stored and distributed through flash drives and compact disks (CDs). Later on, using the internet, teachers and learners accessed digital libraries and data repositories such as the Learning Resource Management and Development System (LRMDS) for their lessons (Vergel de Dios 2016). The DepEd also developed a Learning Management System (LMS) to manage online classes facilitated by teachers of the Internet-based Distance Education Program, a subset of OHSP. These teachers were equipped with computers with internet connectivity, web camera, microphone, speakers, and white board for teaching demonstration (DepEd n.d.a). These lessons could be reviewed at a certain time agreed upon by both teachers and learners depending on the circumstances.

Emergencies and the Philippine basic education experience

From 2009 to 2018, the DepEd has reported that a total of 43,810 schools have been affected by natural hazards, and 21,949 schools have experienced the impact of human-induced hazards (DepEd 2019b). Given this, the DepEd has responded to emergency situations at various levels of governance following a comprehensive disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) framework for basic education. It covers themes on prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery and rehabilitation (DepEd 2015). At the school level, DRRM plans are integrated in the school improvement plan (SIP). School heads are expected to develop plans on how to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to hazards such as typhoons, earthquakes, fires, and even in wars and violent situations. This includes emergency situations that necessitate the temporary closing of schools and provision of flexible learning options (DepEd, n.d.b.).

In 2015, the DepEd addressed the need for mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) of learners who were affected by typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan. Teachers were trained to provide MHPSS to learners based on a manual developed by DepEd. It contains psychological first aid activities that promote a sense of safety, calm, connectedness, and self- and community efficacy to recover from adversity and traumatic stress. It was a shift from the original DepEd MHPSS framework on critical incident stress debriefing that elicits reactions from survivors on critical incidents to facilitate recovery (Ramos, Hechanova, Caligner, and Bersamin 2015).

Global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on basic education delivery

According to the United Nations (UN), the education of a total of 1.58 billion children all over the world has been affected by the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This encompasses 94 percent of learners worldwide, across 200 countries (UN 2020). The length of time of the disruption varies, with some countries opting to continue the opening of schools in spite of COVID-19 cases in the country and some opting to close schools immediately to stop its spread.

Moreover, experts warn that the COVID-19 pandemic has a “pile-on effect” particularly on marginalized children. The pandemic not only puts them at-risk for regression in learning but also exposes them to health and well-being risks (Education Cannot Wait, n.d.). Other challenges faced by learners during this pandemic as identified by psychologists are social isolation, family financial concerns, greater childhood adverse experiences, trauma, grief and increased screen time (Song, Wang, Espelage, Fenning, and Jimerson 2020). According to the World Bank (2020), the disruption caused by the pandemic will even worsen the education outcomes across the globe.

In the Philippines, the upper secondary school age (16 to 17 years old) is the most vulnerable to dropping out, having had the highest number of out-of-school children from 2014–2017

amongst all the schoolchildren age brackets (Albert et al. 2018). Their reasons for dropping out include a lack of interest due to poor academic performance, employment, early pregnancy, and poor attitude towards authority figures and schooling. In addition to the above-mentioned concerns, those enrolled in the Arts and Design, Sports, and TVL tracks may not be interested in enrolling since it will be difficult to practice and master target skills because of the lack of materials and equipment at home. Also, the closure of offices, businesses, and industries because of the pandemic may directly affect SHS learners who are due to participate in work immersion. This may again especially affect those in the TVL track because their work immersion schedule may be spread out across the school year (DepEd 2017).

About 1.4 million learners enrolled in Grade 11 in 2016 (Mateo 2018), which is an 8 percent jump in enrolment rate for 16- to 17-year-olds (Ducanes and Ocampo 2020). Over 1.2 million learners of the same cohort graduated in 2018 (Mateo 2018). The same volume of SHS enrollees have been observed in 2019. During the pandemic however, these numbers have not been sustained for School Year 2020-2021 with the implementation of different alternative modalities (DepEd 2020), with a decrease of 418,952 learners noted as of September 2, 2020 (DepEd Planning Service 2020).

Student support should not be one-size-fits-all (Preclaro-Ongtengco 2019). This is especially true during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to address the needs of SHS students should be focused on measures that will harness their strengths and enable them to continue their education despite limited or no access to distance learning. SHS learners are at the developmental level where they are already capable of abstract and logical thinking and can apply previous learning, allowing them to study independently or in small groups (Bastable and Dart 2011). SHS learners welcome getting involved in their own study plans, which is something that they can do when given the option to use FLOs.

Education in emergencies (EiE) during the pandemic

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) defines Education in Emergencies (EiE) as “quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocational, higher and adult education. It provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection that can sustain and save lives” (INEE 2010, 117). Education in emergencies not only provides a safe space during crises but as well as psychosocial support for children and their communities. It lends support to other interventions such as water or health, and plays a role in maintaining peace and stability in countries. Evidence also suggests that it is highly prioritized by affected children and their communities (Nicolai and Hine 2015). Thus, in 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution affirming the right to education in emergencies and urging Member States to implement the minimum standards set by the INEE (UN General Assembly 2010).

Studies reveal that although the primary focus of EiE is on post-conflict recoveries (Versmesse et al. 2017), the desired goals are identified to be applicable in many, if not all, emergency situations. This includes improved quality of education response; increased resilience of the education sector; increased education sector contribution to better prediction, preparedness, and prevention of emergencies; and development of evidence-based policies and efficient operational strategies (UNICEF 2011, 7).

With the recognition of education’s life-sustaining and life-saving role and its inclusion in humanitarian response as critical in emergency contexts, minimum standards to ensure education preparedness, response, and recovery were developed in 2004 and updated in 2010 by the INEE (2010). The INEE minimum standards include 19 standards across five domains including Foundational Standards, Access and Learning Environment, Teaching and Learning, Teachers and Other Education Personnel, and Education Policy as shown in Figure 1. The standards aim to “provide guidance



Figure 1. INEE Minimum Standards Domains

on how to prepare for and respond to acute emergencies in ways that reduce risk, improve future preparedness and lay a solid foundation for quality education” (INEE 2010, 5).

The standards intersect with one another making the domains interlinked and interdependent. Foundational Standards of Analysis, Community Participation, and Coordination should be applied to ensure a holistic and effective approach as well as building and strengthening the links among Access and Learning Environment, Teaching and Learning, Teachers and Other Education Personnel and Education Policy (INEE 2010). Table 1 shows the description of the INEE Minimum Standards Domains, as well as the Response Considerations during a pandemic as suggested in the INEE technical note to support education during COVID-19.

Table 1. INEE Minimum Standards Domains Descriptions

Domains	Description	Pandemic Response Considerations
Foundational Standards	These include community participation, coordination, and analysis. These standards need to be applied across all domains in order to ensure a quality response.	Cluster coordination, Needs assessment and data gathering
Access and Learning Environment	These standards pertain to access to safe and relevant learning opportunities and emphasize critical linkages with other sectors such as health, water and sanitation, nutrition and shelter that enhance security, safety and physical, cognitive, and psychological well-being.	Home spaces, Distance or remote learning, Availability of technologies and resources
Teaching and Learning	These standards include the elements necessary to ensure effective teaching and learning such as curricula, training, professional development and support, instruction and learning processes, and assessment of learning outcomes.	Curricular content, Teacher learning circles, Parents as teaching partners, Psychosocial response
Teachers and Other Education Personnel	These standards pertain to the administration and management of human resources in education including recruitment and selection, conditions of service, and supervision and support.	Conditions of work environment, Supervision and support for distance or remote learning
Education Policy	These standards include policy formulation and enactment, planning and implementation.	School preparedness, Response and recovery strategies, Discrimination against learners

Note: Adapted from INEE (2020)

Furthermore, INEE recommends that during a pandemic, education response should be primarily on protecting and mitigating harm that may be affecting children especially in the vulnerable sectors. In order to ensure equal access, it is important to widen technology spectrum from no-tech to high-tech options (INEE 2020).

Various countries have contextualized the EiE framework to address specific concerns and prioritize strategies relevant to their context during pandemic times. For example, to address the foundational standards on community participation, coordination, and analysis, Uganda organized an education consortium and spelled out ways to collaborate based on the perceived steps on how learning will continue (Corbishley 2020). A community organization partner identified the most vulnerable households, with less than 25 percent having access to radio. To address concerns in the Access and Learning Environment, Teaching and Learning domains, the consortium advocated for a “mix of context-specific approaches and genuine low-resource remote learning” (ibid., 1) providing various kinds of available technologies and resources to learners. Other solutions included provision of bicycles and training of community on physical distancing so they can hold small group learning in communities. They also identified the most vulnerable groups, including learners with disabilities, and equipped their parents with phone and load through which they can communicate with teachers and specialists (Corbishley 2020). The European Commission (2020a; 2020b) conducted a survey to identify concerns and possible solutions to ensure continuity of learning provision in the COVID-19 emergency, specifically on technical vocational programs. Results show that most respondents suggested establishing a common platform for online learning that allows access and sharing of free learning materials developed by experts and in different languages.

In the Philippines, the adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (DepEd 2020) serves as the primary policy guidelines of the Philippine basic education response during the pandemic. The policy described alternative learning delivery modalities based on the FLOs (ADM and ALS programs) including face-to-face learning, distance learning, and blended learning. It provided specific details on distance learning through modular,

online, and radio/TV-based instruction as school closure is required during the nationwide lockdowns. The policy also identified the role of DRRM units in disseminating relevant mental health, and preventive and safety information, as well as psychosocial support.

Policy making and policy analysis

Foxell and Cooper (2015) describe two models which may be used in policy making. One model is “the policy cycle,” which is composed of four steps. These are (1) understanding the problem; (2) developing solutions; (3) putting solutions into effect, and (4) testing solutions and making it stick. Another model is called the ROAMEF or the Rationale–Objectives–Appraisal–Monitoring During Implementation–Evaluation–Feedback Model which follows the steps outlined by its name. It is also proposed, however, that policy making does not take place in distinct steps or stages, and that it is often a result of events. Policy making may be reactive and is a live and continuous process.

Policies made for emergency or disaster preparedness are crucial and lifesaving (Capano 2020). Given the perennial problems due to hazards, disasters, and calamities in the Philippines, developing a policy that provides what the stakeholders ought to do during emergencies fits into the policy cycle mentioned by Foxell and Cooper in developing solutions. However, since new contexts and factors arise in emergency situations, new policies are continuously being developed to address these concerns. This is the case for FLOs in SHS. Though there are existing ADMs, as well as the ALS, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled those in basic education to think of ways to ensure that delivery of education continues.

To analyze these kinds of policies, Jabal et al. (2018) recommend examining texts in terms of completeness (ensuring that they cover all important points and factors), correctness (consistent with intended goals), consistency (no contradicting statements), and relevance (gains from the policy). This method can be used in what Patton, Sawicki, and Clark (2016) describe as descriptive policy analysis for which the

review can be conducted before and after policies have been issued. For example, Capano (2020) examined policies issued by Italy when it was hit by the pandemic, but at the same time, reviewed existing rules prior to COVID-19.

Aim

It is crucial for countries to have a comprehensive policy for education in emergencies as preparation for and response to pandemics and prolonged class disruptions. This should promote flexibility in terms of learning delivery to address the needs and contexts of different learners. However, there is a dearth of research that analyzes Philippine policies on EiE and FLOs during health emergencies. Furthermore, no study has been conducted to analyze whether these policies include guidelines for SHS implementation. With adolescents and youth identified as one of the most vulnerable during this COVID-19 pandemic, this paper aims to identify policies adopted by the DepEd relevant to EiE and FLOs and analyze gaps and possible implications for SHS.

Methods

The paper reviews what the DepEd has done and what policies have been adopted in activating measures for EiE such as offering FLOs to learners affected by crises or limited resources, and ensuring preparedness, response, and recovery in basic education during disasters and emergencies vis-à-vis the components needed for SHS curriculum implementation.

The main policy document used by the DepEd for the opening of classes during the pandemic is the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) (DepEd 2020). Other relevant policies issued from year 2010 up to the year when the pandemic hit the country in 2020 were also determined, including the policy guidelines on Flexible Learning Options (DepEd 2019a). These policies were then downloaded through the official DepEd website which limited the analysis to policies published only at the national level.

To identify policy gaps, prevalent information and strategies from the BE-LCP were examined and mapped into the INEE's domain standards on EiE. Furthermore, other existing DepEd policies were also aligned according to relevant domains and standards. Results were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Krippendorff 2004; Prasad 2019). QCA is an analytical approach that includes textual analysis of available documents with the attempt to identify consistencies and meaning (Rosengren 1981, as cited in Prasad 2019). As QCA combines both inductive and deductive processes through text and concepts (Schreirer 2014, as cited in Prasad 2019), the domain standards were used as the main conceptual framework.

Based on the identified gaps and existing policies, recommendations were then formulated to answer the two research questions. Special attention, however, was given to (1) INEE domains on Access and Learning Environment, and Teaching and Learning, as well as (2) FLO policy to examine possible implications for SHS curriculum implementation during the pandemic.

Policy Analysis

EiE in basic education in the Philippines

Although EiE was initially articulated through the Comprehensive DRRM in Basic Education Framework (DepEd 2015), emergencies such as disease outbreaks and epidemics that are characterized by prolonged lockdowns were given very little attention in the policy. As such, the DepEd during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic adopted the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (DepEd 2020) as the overall framework that describes measures in the resumption of classes amid the pandemic lockdowns and lays down the direction for SY 2020–2021.

The policy generally covers all EiE minimum standards domains as provided by the INEE. The policy addressed Foundational Standards with the continuation of the DepEd Task Force COVID-19 and the inputs from the Philippine Forum for Inclusive Quality Basic Education or Educ Forum, as well as provision of data including the Pre-COVID baseline, Epidemiological Picture for the Incoming School

Year, and DepEd’s Readiness for Distance Learning. Furthermore, domains for Access and Learning Environment, and Teaching and Learning were identified under a section on learning strategies and modalities that includes topics related to Streamlining the Curriculum to Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs); Learning Delivery Modalities; Learning Resources; Strategies for K to 3; Adaptations for Learners with Disabilities; Assessment; ALS; and Committee for Development, Acquisition, and Deployment of Learning Resources. A separate section on Preparing our Teachers and School Leaders for Multiple Learning Delivery Modalities directly aligns with the domain Teachers and Other Education Personnel. Moreover, provisions on the Legal Context, Finance, Communications, and Monitoring and Evaluation cover INEE domain standards for Education Policy. Table 2 shows the initial mapping results.

Table 2. Policies vis-à-vis identified gaps based on the INEE Framework domains and pandemic response

INEE Domains	INEE Pandemic Response Considerations	Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (DO 12, s. 2020)	Gaps	Other Relevant DepEd Policies which may Address Gaps
Foundational Standards	Community participation and coordination: Participate in local education coordination group (2.1)	Creation of DepEd Task Force COVID-19 and Educ Forum (pp. 9–10); Communication (pp. 55–56)	Unclear if Educ Forum has counterparts at subnational levels	DO 37, s. 2015 (DRRM Policy) stakeholder participation
	Analysis: Undertake needs assessment (4.1); Response strategies, monitoring and evaluation	Pre-COVID baseline, Epidemiological picture for the Incoming School Year, DepEd’s Readiness for Distance	Lacks needs assessment framework; readiness survey conducted online	DO 37, s. 2015 (DRRM Policy) risk and need assessment protocols; DO 44, s. 2015 (School improvement planning)

INEE Domains	INEE Pandemic Response Considerations	Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (DO 12, s. 2020)	Gaps	Other Relevant DepEd Policies which may Address Gaps
		Learning (pp. 11-26)		hazard mapping
Access and Learning Environment	Equal Access: Ensure guidance on home spaces (5.1)	Learning Delivery Modalities (pp. 30-32), Strategies for K to 3 (p. 35), Alternative Learning System (ALS) (pp. 36-42), Contextualizing Learning Strategies and Modalities in Regions (pp. 46-47)	Lacks details on how to operationalize roles of the teachers, students, schools	DO 21, s. 2019, Annex 3 (FLOs: ADMs and ALS)
	Ensure guidance on distance learning (5.2)		Unclear how to choose modalities in schools	DO 21, s. 2019, Annex 3 (FLOs: ADMs and ALS)
	Facilities and Services: Ensure ways to make resource and technology available (5.2)	Learning resource inventory (pp. 33-35), Establishing a Committee for the Development, Acquisition, and Deployment of Learning Resources (p. 40)	Lacks baseline data of resources at home, and details on developing and provision of resources and equipment	
	Protection and Well-being: Support learners with disabilities (5.3)	Adaptations for Learners with Disabilities (p. 35)	Lacks details on how to procure/obtain resources, and how to implement	DO 21, s. 2019, Annex 5 (Inclusive Education)

INEE Domains	INEE Pandemic Response Considerations	Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (DO 12, s. 2020)	Gaps	Other Relevant DepEd Policies which may Address Gaps
Teaching and Learning	Curricula: Prioritize curricular content on health, psychosocial wellbeing, and functional literacy numeracy (6.1)	Streamlining the K to 12 Curriculum into the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) (pp. 28-30); Mental health support and interventions (p. 43)	Lacks details on how to ensure curriculum coverage of MELCs during pandemic times	DO 21, s. 2019
	Training, Prof Development and Support: Develop teacher learning circles (6.2)	Preparing our Teachers and School Leaders for Multiple Learning Delivery Modalities (pp. 40-41)	Lacks details on how to implement	DO 35, s. 2016 (Learning Action Cells for Teacher Professional Development)

INEE Domains	INEE Pandemic Response Considerations	Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (DO 12, s. 2020)	Gaps	Other Relevant DepEd Policies which may Address Gaps
	Instruction and Learning processes: Support parents as teaching partners (6.4)	Orienting parents on the new learning modalities; encourage parents to support child's learning (p. 49)	Lacks details on specific strategies on how to improve capacities of parents	
	Assessment	Assessments: Use of portfolios/ e-portfolio (pp. 35-36) For ALS	Process lacks details, national examinations to continue in face-to-face setup	DO 8, s. 2015 (Classroom Assessment)
Teachers and Other Education Personnel	Consider conditions of service (7.1)	Preparing our Teachers and School Leaders for Multiple Learning Delivery Modalities (pp. 40-41), Baseline pre-COVID data of school personnel (p. 14)	Unclear if systematic and recurring capacity building of teachers and school leaders for teaching in pandemic times was conducted	
	Provide guidance and support to teachers and personnel (7.2)		Lacks details of pre-COVID data on school personnel	
Education Policy	Review school preparedness guidance on	Legal Context (pp. 51-53), Finance	Lacks details on plans for the safe re-	DO 44, s. 2015 (School improvement)

INEE Domains	INEE Pandemic Response Considerations	Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (DO 12, s. 2020)	Gaps	Other Relevant DepEd Policies which may Address Gaps
	COVID-19 (8.3)	(pp. 54–55), Monitoring and Evaluation (pp. 56–59)	opening of schools	planning) disaster emergency risks data
	Review response and recovery strategies (9.1)		Unclear details on continuous monitoring and meeting of targets	

However, there are certain gaps that need to be addressed. To meet the foundational standards of the INEE framework on timely assessment of situation, there is an analysis of pre-COVID data, epidemiological situation in the Philippines, and baseline data on DepEd’s readiness for distance learning gathered through an online survey (pp. 9–10). However, there is not much data on what kind of material and human resources learners have at home and in their communities, and the process of collecting baseline data is problematic since not all participants may be able to access an online survey.

In terms of Access and Learning Environment, and Teaching and Learning domains, the DepEd identified MELCs based on the K to 12 curriculum (pp. 28–30), learning modalities (pp. 30–32), assessments (pp. 35–36), and available learning resources (pp. 33–35) to be used for SY 2020–2021, however it lacks details on how these are operationalized and communicated to learners, especially to those with limited resources. It is unclear whether the learning modalities described in the policy will be decided upon at a school, division, or regional level or what kinds of evidence or preparation is needed for decision-making. For example, a rural school may implement a radio-based distance learning modality because majority of its learners have radios at home, but the school loses the opportunity to provide interaction to several learners who might have access to other devices. As ICTs play a significant role in flexible learning and alternative

learning delivery (Collis, Vingerhoets, and Moonen, 1997; Goode, Willis, Wolf, and Harris 2007; Ryan and Tilbury 2013; Gordon 2014), a separate committee will identify the “process for the development, evaluation, selection, acquisition, and deployment of various learning resources and platforms” (p. 40), but there were no other details and key indicators provided which could have been used as bases for various modalities. There were also activities specified to provide psychosocial support to learners. But there are no provision for schools on how to address problems such as “social isolation, family financial concerns, greater childhood adverse experiences, trauma, grief, and increased screen time” (Golberstein et al. 2020, as cited in Song et al. 2020).

It is also unclear how the BE-LCP ensures curriculum coverage of MELCs and how learners will be assisted if members of their family do not support their learning. Information on how learners will be tracked especially those whose parents opted to implement homeschooling are also lacking. The section on ALS is discussed in detail, but there is no mention of adult learners as its target population. Furthermore, the section on adaptation for learners with disabilities (p. 35) identified additional resources needed to support special needs, but there are no details on how teachers or schools will implement and provide additional support in distance learning. Similarly, there are provisions in the BE-LCP that can be identified with the INEE standards domains Teachers and Other Education Personnel, and Education Policy. However, it has no sufficient information on how to implement specific programs during pandemic times.

According to the UNICEF Evaluation Office (2011), EiE interventions in basic education are “reactive” and seldom focused on prevention. Based on the INEE Framework, the BE-LCP lacks a logical framework and clear strategies which are needed to implement education in emergencies. Some of these lacking provisions however may be found in existing older policies such as the DRRM Framework in Basic Education (DepEd 2015) and the FLOs (DepEd 2019a) as shown in Table 2.

Moreover, the epidemiological picture provided by the IATF shows that although schools are one of the last priorities to reopen, there is a possibility of face-to-face instruction in low risk areas. But

there are no clear guidelines or protocols on how to setup schools with physical distancing and health checks. This could have been a good measure for recovery as indicated in the preparedness, response, recovery steps of EiE.

Flexible learning options (FLOs) for SHS

The identified gaps in the DepEd's BE-LCP encompass all grade levels including the SHS. The FLO policy (DepEd 2019a) provides possible solutions to address these gaps in terms of INEE standards domains Access and Learning environment, and Teaching and Learning. However, not all FLOs are designed for SHS learners. Since SHS learners have the maturity to cope with very flexible learning arrangements, home school, night high school, and open high school program (OHSP) may be very viable options for them.

In a home school scenario, parents, guardians or tutors serve as the primary educators. They plan and decide on the schedule, learning approach, assessment, resources and learning spaces at home. Prior to the pandemic, this option targets learners with illness or special educational needs, who travel frequently, or with parents who prefer to teach their children. Learners may be enrolled through a public school or a private school with a home school program (DepEd 2019a).

A similar learning option that offers flexibility in terms of schedule and venue is the OHSP. Unlike in home school, the OHSP was designed for independent, self-paced study with scheduled interaction with an ADM or OHSP teacher (DepEd 2019a). It has been available for junior high school (JHS) for years and has been offered more recently to SHS learners (SEAMEO Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (2017).

In night high school, learners may take classes in the evening to accommodate those who are working or cannot attend classes during the day. It was conducted in a school-based setting with a teacher. However, it allows completion of Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) competencies at the learner's

workplace, which may be considered for a hybrid scenario in a no face-to-face context during this pandemic (DepEd 2019a).

Recommendations

Policy recommendations for EiE

Based on the gaps identified and review of literature, the DepEd must intensify FLO guidelines with provisions for no-technology, low-technology, and high-technology resources as measures for EiE. DepEd should also revisit its DRRM framework to give attention to hazards including disease outbreaks as well as vulnerabilities of the community, specifying how education can be identified as both a response and recovery strategy. There is also a need to strengthen DepEd's MHPSS policies as part of EiE to provide physical, psychosocial, and cognitive support to learners in emergencies. These policies should be aligned to its mandate as stated in Republic Act No. 11036 or the Mental Health Act of 2018 (Fontanos, Gonzales, Lucasan, and Ocampo 2020).

Furthermore, various learning options should be designed to address the different needs and contexts of learners, relying on good data collection and analysis. With this, the DepEd should strengthen their information systems and databases that aggregate school-level data and initiatives during emergencies that identify vulnerabilities and low resource communities. These systems can be lined with dashboards of other agencies including datasets from the DOH and other local government units to come up with community-level data. Additionally, roles of various governance levels of the DepEd including the central, regional, and schools division offices should be spelled out in policies for emergency response. Furthermore, the DepEd should institutionalize as part of emergency response collaboration with other agencies and stakeholders to address other gaps in emergency responses. For example, partnering with the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) to look for innovative technological solutions for remote areas.

Aside from actual implementation data, an EiE policy should be developed based on trends and possible future scenarios. There should be protocols for transitioning to physical face-to-face classes especially if there are communities with no COVID-19 cases, or such a time that vaccines are available and certain areas are considered as low-risk. However, the DepEd should also be able to prepare itself for a worse scenario wherein another pandemic of a stronger strain hits the country. Moreover, there should be a priority system where learners who are most vulnerable are identified and given support and resources.

Additional recommendations that address specific concerns include improving teaching-learning processes by ensuring communication happening between teachers and all their students and strengthening formative assessments that encourage useful feedback. Furthermore, since education response heavily depends on the use of available resources, learning materials and resources to be distributed in multimedia platforms should be developed in collaboration with content experts, instructional designers, and multimedia specialists to ensure quality.

Policy recommendations for FLOs in SHS

Though there are existing FLOs for high school, the provisions in these programs are not specific enough to address concerns pertaining to the delivery of the SHS tracks. These existing FLO programs however may be leveraged to develop a more streamlined set of policies for FLOs for SHS, especially for tracks which need specialized equipment and facilities or require space for practice or rehearsals.

Aside from looking at the instruction and materials side of the SHS program, the timing of learning areas offered may be another aspect to consider. Schools may opt to offer learning areas which do not involve or have minimal required hands-on activities during the semesters where face-to-face lessons are not possible. Policy iterating a menu of possible schedules may be designed, taking into consideration the possibility of offering core and applied track subjects first instead

of specialization subjects which are more technical in nature and may need practical demonstration of skills learned.

Specific provisions for a highly independent learning scenario will have to be drafted for SHS learners during the time of the pandemic. Schools should work with their students in identifying the best possible modes of learning for their contexts. Special arrangements will have to be made for learning areas which will need access to laboratory, sports, or technical-vocational equipment.

Conclusion

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the need for a comprehensive education in emergencies policy that integrates concepts and principles of flexible learning and disaster risk reduction response. The DepEd policy released in response to the learning needs for SY 2020–2021 lacked clear provisions for foundational standards, access and learning environment, teaching and learning, teacher and education personnel, and education policy. Some of these domains are contained in policies released in the past. However, because of the pandemic's unprecedented scale, existing provisions need further iteration to address the needs of learners. SHS learners are especially affected because of the need for specialized instruction and equipment for some learning areas. Despite this however, they are still at an advantage compared with their younger counterparts because, developmentally, they are able to manage themselves better, and are therefore more capable of coping with flexible learning options. Within the paper are policy suggestions which provide solutions to prevent widening of gaps and ensure protection of all learners which may be applicable not only for the pandemic but for different education in emergencies contexts.

This paper also reflected on policy making as an iterative process of problem solving and evidence gathering. There is a need to come up with better data gathering and analysis strategies to be able to produce more effective and evidence-based policies. Future policies must not only improve emergency response but also be a means to improve education delivery and outcomes. For further studies, it is recommended to look at how these policies were implemented and to provide feedback on future policies.

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Annex A

K to 12 Basic Education Program Senior High School (SHS) Tracks and Strands

The Academic Track

The Academic Track has four strands:

1. Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) Strand;
2. Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) Strand;
3. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Strand; and
4. General Academic Strand (GAS)

ABM Strand

- a. Applied Economics
- b. Business Ethics and Social Responsibility
- c. Fundamentals of Accountancy, Business and Management 1
- d. Fundamentals of Accountancy, Business and Management 2
- e. Business Math
- f. Business Finance
- g. Organization and Management
- h. Principles of Marketing
- i. Work Immersion/Research/Career Advocacy/Culminating Activity (i.e., Business Enterprise Simulation)

HUMSS Strand

- a. Creative Writing/Malikhaing Pagsulat
- b. Creative Nonfiction
- c. Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems
- d. Community Engagement, Solidarity, and Citizenship
- e. Philippine Politics and Governance
- f. Trends, Networks, and Critical Thinking in the 21st Century
- g. Disciplines and Ideas in the Social Sciences
- h. Disciplines and Ideas in the Applied Social Sciences
- i. Work Immersion/Research/Career Advocacy/Culminating Activity

STEM Strand

- a. Pre-Calculus
- b. Basic Calculus
- c. General Biology 1
- d. General Biology 2
- e. General Physics 1
- f. General Physics 2
- g. General Chemistry 1
- h. General Chemistry 2
- i. Work Immersion/Research/Career Advocacy/Culminating Activity

GAS

- a. Humanities 1
- b. Humanities 2
- c. Social Science 1
- d. Applied Economics
- e. Organization and Management
- f. Disaster Readiness and Risk Reduction
- g. Elective 1
- h. Elective 2
- i. Work Immersion/Research/Career Advocacy/Culminating Activity

The Sports Track

1. Safety and First Aid
2. Human Movement
3. Fundamentals of Coaching
4. Sports Officiating and Activity Management
5. Fitness, Sports and Recreation Leadership
6. Psychosocial Aspects of Sports and Exercise
7. Fitness Testing and Exercise Programming
8. Practicum (in-campus)
9. Work Immersion/Research/Career Advocacy/Culminating Activity (i.e., Apprenticeship (off-campus))

The Arts and Design Track

1. Creative Industries I: Arts and Design Appreciation and Production
2. Creative Industries II: Performing Arts
3. Physical and Personal Development in the Arts
4. Developing Filipino Identity in the Arts
5. Integrating the Elements and Principles of Organization in the Arts
6. Leadership and Management in Different Arts Fields
7. Apprenticeship and Exploration of Different Arts Fields
8. Work Immersion/Research/Career Advocacy/Culminating Activity (i.e., Exhibit for Arts Production/Performing Arts Production)

The Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track

1. Agri-Fishery Arts
 - a. Agricultural Crops Production (NC I)
 - b. Agricultural Crops Production (NC II)
 - c. Agricultural Crops Production (NC III)
 - d. Animal Health Care Management (NC III)
 - e. Animal Production (Poultry-Chicken) (NC II)
 - f. Animal Production (Large Ruminants) (NC II)
 - g. Animal Production (Swine) (NC II)

- h. Aquaculture (NC II)
 - i. Artificial Insemination (Large Ruminants) (NC II)
 - j. Artificial Insemination (Swine) (NC II)
 - k. Fish Capture (NC II)
 - l. Fishing Gear Repair and Maintenance (NC III)
 - m. Fish-Products Packaging (NC II)
 - n. Fish Wharf Operation (NC I)
 - o. Food Processing (NC II)
 - p. Horticulture (NC III)
 - q. Landscape Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
 - r. Organic Agriculture (NC II)
 - s. Pest Management (NC II)
 - t. Rice Machinery Operations (NC II)
 - u. Rubber Processing (NC II)
 - v. Rubber Production (NC II)
 - w. Slaughtering Operations (Hog/Swine/Pig) (NC II)
2. Home Economics
- a. Attractions and Theme Parks Operations with Ecotourism (NC II)
 - b. Barbering (NC II)
 - c. Bartending (NC II)
 - d. Beauty/Nail Care (NC II)
 - e. Bread and Pastry Production (NC II)
 - f. Caregiving (NC II)
 - g. Commercial Cooking (NC III)
 - h. Cookery (NC II)
 - i. Dressmaking (NC II)
 - j. Events Management Services (NC III)
 - k. Fashion Design (Apparel) (NC III)
 - l. Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
 - m. Front Office Services (NC II)
 - n. Hairdressing (NC II)
 - o. Hairdressing (NC III)
 - p. Handicraft (Basketry, Macramé) (Non-NC)
 - q. Handicraft (Fashion Accessories, Paper Craft) (Non-NC)
 - r. Handicraft (Needlecraft) (Non-NC)
 - s. Handicraft (Woodcraft, Leathercraft) (Non-NC)
 - t. Housekeeping (NC II)
 - u. Local Guiding Services (NC II)
-

- v. Tailoring (NC II)
 - w. Tourism Promotion Services (NC II)
 - x. Travel Services (NC II)
 - y. Wellness Massage (NC II)
3. Industrial Arts
- a. Automotive Servicing (NC I)
 - b. Automotive Servicing (NC II)
 - c. Carpentry (NC II)
 - d. Carpentry (NC III)
 - e. Construction Painting (NC II)
 - f. Domestic Refrigeration and Air-conditioning (DOMRAC) Servicing (NC II)
 - g. Driving (NC II)
 - h. Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
 - i. Electric Power Distribution Line Construction (NC II)
 - j. Electronic Products Assembly and Servicing (NC II)
 - k. Furniture Making (Finishing) (NC II)
 - l. Instrumentation and Control Servicing (NC II)
 - m. Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW) (NC II)
 - n. Gas Tungsten Arc Welding (GTAW) (NC II)
 - o. Machining (NC I)
 - p. Machining (NC II)
 - q. Masonry (NC II)
 - r. Mechatronics Servicing (NC II)
 - s. Motorcycle/Small Engine Servicing (NC II)
 - t. Plumbing (NC I)
 - u. Plumbing (NC II)
 - v. Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning (Packaged Air-Conditioning Unit [PACU]/Commercial Refrigeration Equipment [CRE]) Servicing (NC III)
 - w. Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC I)
 - x. Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC II)
 - y. Tile Setting (NC II)
 - z. Transmission Line Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
4. Information and Communications Technology
- a. Animation (NC II)
 - b. Broadband Installation (Fixed Wireless Systems) (NC II)
-

- c. Computer Programming (.Net Technology) (NC III)
- d. Computer Programming (Java) (NC III)
- e. Computer Programming (Oracle Database) (NC III)
- f. Computer Systems Servicing (NC II)
- g. Contact Center Services (NC II)
- h. Illustration (NC II)
- i. Medical Transcription (NC II)
- j. Technical Drafting (NC II)
- k. Telecom OSP and Subscriber Line Installation (Copper Cable/POTS and DSL) (NC II)
- l. Telecom OSP Installation (Fiber Optic Cable) (NC II)