



KPUP and Standards-based Grading in the Philippines: A Policy Analysis

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Abstract: In 2012, the Department of Education (DepEd) implemented a new system for assessment and grading with Order 73 s.2012, “Guidelines on the Assessment and Rating of Learning Outcomes Under the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum.” This document includes general guidelines for the rating of learning outcomes, prototype rubrics, prototype formative and summative assessment, and sample assessment matrices, among others. Moreover, this document mandates that all students will be assessed based on KPUP (**k**nowledge, **p**rocess and **s**kills, **u**nderstanding, and **p**erformance/product). In this regard, there is a need to analyze the policy by using the lens of standards-based grading and reporting framework to uncover its strengths and limitations. Results show that stakeholders need to review the policy to meet the objectives of the assessment reform. Suggestions for the implementation of standards-based assessment and grading are presented, such that policymakers, teacher trainers, teachers, and other stakeholders can continue the discussion to make assessment and grading learning-centered.

Keywords: KPUP; grading for learning, standards-based assessment, DepEd assessment; classroom-based assessment, grading and reporting

1. Introduction

Standards-based assessment (SBA) has been receiving increasing attention in the field of education because of its role in ensuring that all students are achieving the content standards of the curriculum. Consequently, this implementation is causing a ripple of change on grading and reporting. Assessment experts, for example, claim that traditional grading through averaging cannot explain if students are meeting the standards for each subject. In addition, experts also point out that the common grading practice does not separate product, process, effort, and behavior. The grade, therefore, may not be an accurate reflection of student learning.

Reeves (2008) points out that “the difference

between failure and the honor roll often depends on the grading policies of the teacher. To reduce the failure rate, schools don’t need a new curriculum, a new principal, new teachers, or new technology. They just need a better grading system” (p.85). However, studies on the implementation of a new grading system show that inconsistencies in policy documents as well as teachers’ lack of shared understanding and lack of resources are roadblocks to the achievement of the goals of the reform (Urich, 2012; Plata, 2011, 2007). This situation serves as the impetus for this paper because the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines has reformed its assessment and grading through the policy document, “Standards-based Assessment and Rating” (DepEd, 2012) (henceforth, SBAR).



This paper intends to answer the following questions:

1. How is DepEd's SBAR aligned with international standards-based grading (SBG) practices?
2. Is there an alignment between the objectives of SBAR and its policy?

These questions are worth answering because of several reasons. First, in the Philippines, classroom-based assessment and grading are the only basis for gatekeeping, promotion, and academic awards. Second, successful implementation of SBAR depends on the policy documents that will serve as teachers' resource. Lastly, rating scales, such as KPUP, are critical tools for teacher development, student placement, remediation, and lesson planning.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a policy analysis of DepEd's SBAR as well as international policies related to standards-based assessment and rating of English language arts in international contexts. The policy documents analyzed were *DepEd Memo 73, s. 2012, Introduction to K to 12 Integrated Language Arts Curriculum*, and *Grade 7 English Competency Matrix*. The policy documents of WIDA, ALTE, and Common Core SBAR were also analyzed to compare the Philippine SBAR with other similar policies in the international context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into four sections based on the four research questions.

3.1 How is SBAR aligned with international SBG practices?

SBG "involves measuring students' proficiency based on well-defined course objectives" (Tomlinson and McTighe, 2006). The following are the features of SBG:

1. The grade is based on the evidence of mastery of content standards and is not based on assessment methods, such as quizzes, tests, and homework (Townsend, 2014).
2. It separates progress from effort (Guskey and Jung, 2006).

3. It involves expanding the report card to inform intended readers to see how each student has achieved the key content standards for each subject. For example, the grade for English Language Arts is divided into content standards of the macro skills, namely, reading, writing, listening/viewing, and speaking (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2013).
4. It does not record everything and does not record zeros for missed work. Students are given a chance to complete any missed work (O'Connor, 2002).
5. Can-do statements help students and parents to see clearly the learning progress and achievement of content standards per subject (Board of Regents of the University of the Wisconsin System, 2009).

"Scriffiny (2008) reports the following benefits of SBG:

1. It gives more meaning to grades.
2. It avoids confusion caused by inconsistent grading practices among teachers.
3. It reduces paperwork because only the evidence of mastery of the contents standards is graded.
4. Teachers can adjust instruction to help all students achieve the content standards.
5. It "teaches what quality looks like."

"Countries, districts, and schools that have adopted SBG determine the audience for grades and reports, eliminate grading practices that block achievement, such as recording zeroes and averaging, grade only final products that serve as evidence of the achievement of content standards, and focus on demonstration of learning, not task completion" (Johnston, 2011). In addition, some organizations have designed can-do statements with proficiency scales, such that there is a common reference.

Meanwhile, SBAR "shall be used primarily as quality assurance tool to track student progress in the attainment of student progress, promote self-reflection and personal accountability of learning,



and provide a basis for the profiling of student performance” (DepEd, 2012). Compared to other standards-based grading, the audience of the SBAR policy document is unclear. Although by reading the above, one can surmise that the target audience will be the students themselves and those who need to be accountable. In addition, schools that practice SBG include parents as one of the readers. Their inclusion is understandable because parents help monitor the progress of their children and support the learning of their sons and daughters.

Another point of comparison is the nature of assessment. Compared to international SBG, SBAR does not record quizzes, homework, classroom tasks, major tests, and class participation. Instead, SBAR uses the KPUP model that comprises knowledge (15%), process/skills (25%), understanding, (30%), and products/performance (30%). Instead of reporting the attainment of content standards, the model indicates that teachers record assessment evidence for each aspect of SBAR. Hence, the assumption is that students who need to assess themselves may be confused on how they are meeting the standards because the terms are not aligned with the content standards included in their lesson or unit of study. Furthermore, SBAR uses letter grades:

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| A | Advanced | 90% and above |
| P | Proficient | 85%–89% |
| AP | Approaching Proficiency | 80%–84% |
| D | Developing | 75%–79% |
| B | Beginning | 74% and below |

This model reports a letter grade per quarter for every subject in the report card. However, other SBG reporting systems, such as those in some districts in the U.S. and in Canada, have expanded report cards that reflect how students are performing on key content standards, such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and literature. A single grade for each subject cannot reflect differing progress on different content standards. Stiggins (2008) points out that grades provide feedback, and this feedback affects how students see themselves as learners. A grade for each content standard will help struggling students in areas where they need better

performance. Thus, this mechanism may build the confidence and self-efficacy of students.

3.2 Is there an alignment between the purpose of SBAR and its policy?

The policy document states “assessment shall be holistic, with emphasis on formative or developmental purpose of quality assuring student learning. It is also standards-based as it seeks to ensure that teachers will teach to the standards and students will aim to meet or even to exceed the standards. The students’ attainment of standards in terms of content and performance is, therefore, critical evidence of learning” (DepEd, 2012, p. 1). Several issues can be raised regarding the alignment of the purpose and policy of SBAR. First, the policy document intends to focus on formative assessment. However, what students see in the teacher’s grade book are levels of assessment: knowledge, process/skills, understanding, and product/performance (KPUP). If students wish to take charge of their own achievement of content standards, these levels of assessment might not be helpful for them.

Second, English Language Arts targets eight learning competencies, namely, reading, listening, and viewing comprehension, vocabulary development, literature, writing and composition, oral language and fluency, and grammar awareness. There are 9 to 12 content standards per learning competency per quarter. The task of teachers, namely, assessment and the recording of student evidence of attainment of each content standard, is more practical. Hence, teachers can design tasks that can target all learning competencies. Instead of designing one assessment task per KPUP level (4) times the number of content standards (12) times the number of learning competencies (8), teachers can plan, implement, grade, and give feedback on the learning evidence. One of the main goals of SBG is to reduce paper work and to focus on achievement rather than just mere compliance. In this way, assessment is not only holistic, but also more authentic as the results will indicate how students could actually use the language.



Lastly, the proficiency levels in SBAR may not be aligned with the standard-based purpose of the policy. The single grade cannot reflect the complex nature of the content standards in English Language Arts that cover reading, listening, speaking, writing, and viewing. In addition, proficiency levels in English Language Arts are created by organizations and research centers to have a common reference for various stakeholders in diagnosis, remediation, lesson planning, and in giving feedback to students (Council of Europe, 2011; Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2012; Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2014).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This policy analysis uncovered some areas of SBAR that need to be addressed to help teachers implement this reform properly and to ensure that students achieve content standards. First, the audience or intended user of SBAR is not specified. Identifying the audience is important because any grading reform is a communication process directed to various stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, principals, researchers, and other policy-makers. Second, the KPUP levels of SBAR may not help achieve the purpose of assessing the content standards because of the complicated nature of assessment and rating systems. Therefore, a section must summarize the key findings of the study and describe potential areas for further research. Lastly, the proficiency levels in the prescribed reporting system and the averaging of the marks in computing the final grade seem to be misaligned with the research-based practice of giving a grade for each domain of each subject.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy analysis may serve as a discussion point among policymakers, researchers, and concerned teachers to review the goals of SBAR as well as the intended audience for grades and reports. Action research that addresses assessment and grading of content standards can be conducted in schools as a professional learning community. In this way, teachers and students can actually use SBAR to achieve the main goal of mastering the content standards. Rethinking the traditional report card used in the Philippines is another area of concern. The single grade report does not reflect the complex nature of learning and the progress of

students. Finally, there is a need to review how existing English proficiency scales can be localized to have a common framework of reference for diagnosis, remediation, lesson planning, assessment, and grading.

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