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**A PROVISION OF A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION TO THE BANGSAMORO
AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO'S PROBLEM IN LOW LITERACY
RATE**

A Research Paper presented to the Faculty of
Department of English and Applied Linguistics
De La Salle University Manila

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course
PURPOSIVE COMMUNICATION
(GEPCOMM)

by

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Jun 27, 2023

Abstract

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is one of the Muslim-dominated regions in the Philippines, and its 12,288km² of land area is home to a wide variety of natural resources. Despite this, the region's order, stability, and development have been hampered by its location, being 888 km away from the country's capital, where the issue of illiteracy has gone unaddressed for far too long. Its widespread impact has negatively impacted the region's economy, society, and politics, further setting BARMM back and making progress harder. It was found that the low literacy rate in BARMM was further exacerbated by the following reasons: poverty, a significant percentage of out-of-school youth (OSY), unstable status of the nation's law and order, and reduced desire to pursue literacy. This paper discussed and evaluated the proposed solution to BARMM's low literacy rate, which included tightening internal control and transparency, which can help to create a climate conducive to addressing low literacy rates, as well as increasing government spending, which can be used to renovate BARMM schools, libraries, and learning centers. Although the offered solutions have the potential to be beneficial, there are various restrictions that can impede their implementation, including technological gaps, misallocation of funds, and a lack of human capital. Targeting the root causes and addressing the underlying issues behind the low literacy rate in the Bangsamoro region is crucial in making education accessible and inclusive for all.

Keywords: Literacy rate; out of school youth; poverty; human capital; education

Situation

Economic

The region has not evolved much economically because of the different constraints that hinder them from further growth. Despite its growth in 2019 with a slower increment of 5.9% compared to the previous year, capital formation still has a sluggish growth rate (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). Owing to the fact that most laborers in the region are unskilled due to illiteracy, the region has been set to face the ordeal consequence of a highly illiterate workforce and low economic productivity for the past decades.

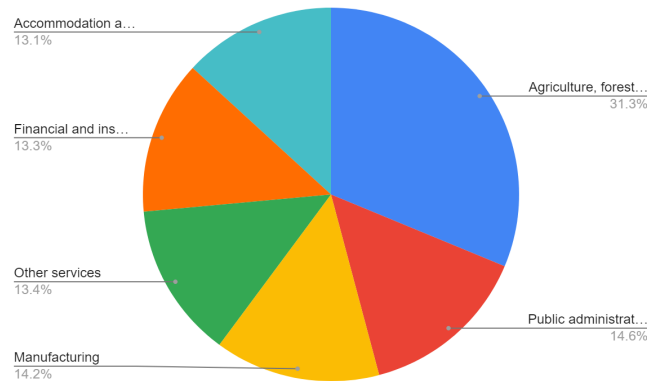


Figure 1. Industries in BARMM

With agriculture accounting for 34.5% of the region's economy, we can deduce that the majority of the labor force is centered on agriculture, where people aged 15 and up give their talents. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2019), more than half of the region's population is employed, with approximately 95.64% of the working-age population employed. This means that the majority of people aged 15 and up work rather than attend school in order to support themselves and their families.

Social

The Philippines' Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is distinguished by its rich culture and is well recognized for its distinctive social life and status. Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi make up the five provinces that make up BARMM. Muslim ethnic groups including the Maguindanaons, Maranaos, Tausugs, and Yakans make up the majority of the population.

In terms of demographics, BARMM has unique difficulties. Population growth in the area has been rapid, which has raised demand for basic services like healthcare and education.

Due to limited access to the said services the people are deprived of their necessities, with low literacy rate being one of the emerging effects. Furthermore, the region struggles to provide its people with proper healthcare services, which leads to its citizens' greater incidence of poor well-being.

Political

According to a joint report by DFAT Australia and the World Bank (2014), the BARMM region has faced high-profile corruption in its early years, indicating a history of governance issues in the region. The corruption runs deep within the Department of Education - Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao that it has earned a notorious reputation as being the region's most corrupt agency. (The Philippine Star, 2015 para. 4) It is reported that the agency's payrolls were filled with ghost teachers, and operating funds have been channeled towards non-existent schools.

Ineffective leadership can be observed through the absence of dedicated officials, incomplete development plans, and mismanagement of funds. The regional government allocates limited funds for services, resulting in insufficient provision of healthcare and education in the area (GSDRC, 2014.). Much-needed funds that should be allocated to improving schools, providing quality education materials, and training teachers end up being misappropriated or used for self-interest. As a result, students suffer from inadequate resources, hindering their access to quality education.

Furthermore, the conflict in the BARMM region has created an unstable security environment, making it challenging for schools to operate effectively. According to Acaps (2023), the recent conflict has resulted in the displacement of approximately 34,500 people in the BARMM region as of 15 May 2023. A report by PhilStar (2014) shows that the fear of violence and instability hampers the enrollment of children and discourages teachers from accepting assignments in the region.

Problem

Every 5 years, a household-based survey conducted nationwide called Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey is done. According to the results based on their 2019 survey, BARMM's basic literacy rate of the population 5 years old and older is only 78%; an alarming number that ranks the lowest among all the regions in the Philippines. This indicates

that only 78% of the BARMM people who participated in the survey can read and write a basic message in any language or dialect. This survey was conducted based on the parameter below:

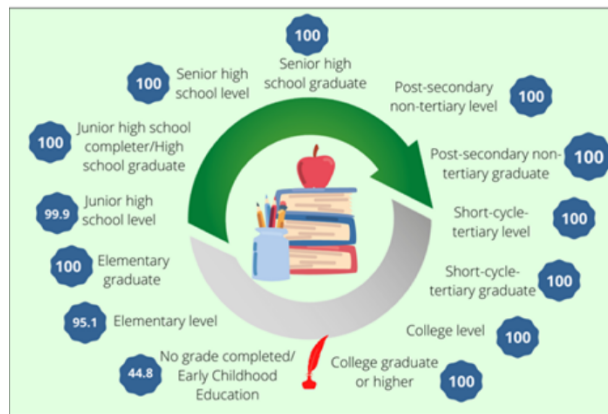


Figure 2. Basic literacy rate of population 5 years old and above by highest educational attainment (in percent)

The results also show that access to electricity plays an important role in the region's literacy rate. According to Philippine Statistic Authority (2021) in their Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey 2019, BARMM's basic literacy rate in urban areas with access to electricity is 86.2%. On the other hand, those who do not have access to electricity is only 58.1%. This disparity between those who have access to electricity and those who do not have access to electricity is salient information that has to be emphasized to be able to devise a program that can address this issue.

There are various reasons for the low literacy rate in BARMM. Poverty is one important aspect. Many families in the area struggle to cover their basic expenditures, which includes paying for children's education. Children are thus frequently compelled to leave school in order to help their families financially.

The issue of illiteracy is additionally exacerbated by the significant percentage of young people who are not in school (OSY). The lack of formal education options for young people, especially females, is hindered by early marriage, inadequate educational possibilities, and cultural norms.

The unstable status of the nation's law and order is another factor contributing to BARMM's low literacy rate. It might be difficult for children to attend school on a regular basis

when conflicts and security concerns disrupt routine operations. Parental apprehension over violence and instability is another reason why parents choose not to send their children to school.

The issue might also be exacerbated by some people's lack of enthusiasm in schooling. Reduced desire to pursue literacy may be caused by elements like a perceived lack of relevance of formal education to daily life and a lack of understanding of the advantages of education.

An all-encompassing strategy that prioritizes reducing poverty, expanding access to high-quality education, fostering peace and stability, and increasing awareness of the value of literacy and education is needed to address the issue of illiteracy in the BARMM. In order to break the cycle of illiteracy and poverty in the area, it is equally important to make efforts to empower women and girls via education.

Effects on the region's economy

Low literacy rates indicate a lack of basic education and skills among the population. This implies that a significant proportion of the labor force may not possess adequate competencies to undertake higher-skilled employment or engage in sectors calling for specialized expertise. The lack of skilled labor due to a decline in human capital could hinder economic growth. This can limit job opportunities and cause higher rates of unemployment and underemployment.

Effects on the region's society

Possessing basic literacy skills is an essential means of advancing one's position in society and gaining power. The presence of low levels of literacy can sustain economic inequalities, restricting chances for personal advancement on both a professional and individual level. Additionally, inadequate literacy levels may constrain individuals' capability to obtain and comprehend information, resulting in a deficiency of awareness regarding important issues, current events, and government policies. This may lead to a less educated and involved population, posing difficulties in creating an informed and proactive community.

Effects on the region's politics

Low literacy rates can result in limited political awareness and understanding among the population. Poor reading ability hinders people from knowing updates on current events, government programs or policies and political disputes which can cause disinterest in engaging with what is happening around their community. As a result, This can lead to a less engaged and informed community, reducing the overall political awareness in the region. Individuals with low literacy rates are vulnerable to political manipulation as they heavily rely on information and guidance from others and from unreliable sources, making them susceptible to misinformation or persuasive tactics.

Solutions

Because low literacy rates in the region are a complicated problem that affects people's survival and growth, the government's ineptitude, and the region's future, a wide range of government measures can be undertaken to solve the issue. While some existing government legislation can be modified, others can be repealed for a variety of reasons, including ineffectiveness as a strategy to solve the region's literacy crisis. In line with this, this section of the paper will attempt to suggest solutions that can possibly alleviate BARMM's issue in literacy rates.

Tightening of internal control and transparency

Tighter internal controls and transparency can lobby local governments to address low literacy rates in BARMM because they can prevent resource misallocation. Strengthening internal control and transparency ensures that educational resources, such as funds, materials, and facilities, are properly managed and allocated.

Increasing government expenditure

BARMM schools, libraries, and learning centers can be upgraded with government subsidies. This will improve education for rural students. Increased spending can also incentivize and maintain top BARMM teachers by offering competitive compensation. Furthermore, basic public assets like roads and renewable energy can also boost regional employment with increased

government financing. It's crucial that the region has affordable, accessible energy because the lack of it lowers literacy rates.

Evaluation

SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Efficient resource allocation. By ensuring efficient utilization of funding, materials, and facilities, unnecessary waste and inappropriate allocation can be avoided.● Tight internal controls promote accountability within the education system, ensuring that responsible parties are held accountable for their actions.● By increasing government expenditure, families will get sufficient income which could potentially reduce the number of children who drop out of school to seek employment.● Better-equipped schools, libraries, and learning centers, providing a conducive learning environment for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Making changes to how things are done within the education system can be met with opposition from those who are satisfied with the current way of doing things.● Requires systematic changes and the establishment of new processes, protocols, and systems.● Complex and time-consuming, as it requires coordination and cooperation from various stakeholders.● Funding for education initiatives may decrease or become inconsistent over time due to budgetary limitations and shifting priorities of governments.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overall improves resource management, promotes accountability, enhances infrastructure, attracting qualified educators, and fostering economic development. 	
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opportunity to identify and address inefficiencies in resource allocation. ● Investing more in education can benefit other areas, like healthcare, infrastructure, and social development. ● Increasing government expenditure on education can attract international support and investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insufficient capacity or expertise within the education system can impede successful implementation and maintenance of necessary measures. ● Opposition from those who profit from the current lack of transparency and control measures may hinder the enforcement of tighter controls. ● Economic changes can affect funding by the government.

Constraints/Availability of Resources

The first issue is technology gaps. Although technology may improve literacy, not everyone will benefit as BARMM's technological access and infrastructural disparities may create a digital divide in marginalized or distant populations. Technology-based literacy programs may not reach those who need them most, exacerbating literacy issues. In addition, Low reading rates sometimes lead to low digital literacy. If the target demographic lacks digital literacy, the government's technology-based literacy initiatives may fail, not to mention that dependable internet and energy may not be accessible everywhere, making it difficult to operate

technology-based literacy programs without electricity or the Internet. Digital tools cannot solve low literacy rates if the infrastructure is lacking.

The second issue is the misallocation of funds. Literacy rates may be reduced if BARMM government funds for education and literacy programs are misallocated which can be caused by corruption, inefficiency, or inadequate monitoring and evaluation. To overcome low literacy rates, government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and community stakeholders must collaborate. These organizations must work together to avoid fragmented efforts and wasteful spending.

The last constraint would be the lack of quality human capital. Literacy rates depend on teacher quality and training. BARMM's literacy policies may fail if instructors aren't well-trained. Insufficient training can lead to ineffective teaching methods, obsolete curricula, and poor student support, sustaining low literacy rates. BARMM, having many indigenous languages and communities, can make educational policy and program design difficult. The government may need to customize tactics to meet different communities' demands, which can be difficult, not to mention that families in poverty-stricken BARMM may struggle to support their children's education.

Overall Sustainability of the Project

Improving economic efficiency through improved internal controls and transparency has far-reaching implications for society. Literacy outcomes can be increased, as well as create a more competent workforce by properly managing and distributing resources, especially in the field of education, which will ultimately result in economic growth and long-term poverty reduction. As access to education gives people the ability to think critically, it also increases their chances of getting a better job or access to higher education, hence fosters a far more inclusive atmosphere. Additionally, increased government investment in education shows the people transparency, accountability, and effective governance, hence generating public trust and confidence in the government's ability to acknowledge and address social issues, showing that it prioritizes the welfare of its citizens.

Conclusion

Overall, addressing the issue of low literacy rates in BARMM requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration and full participation among government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and community stakeholders. This challenge serves as a poignant reminder that education should not be regarded as a privilege, but rather as a fundamental right that is accessible to all. By actively acknowledging the root causes of the issue, as well as continuously providing and prioritizing solutions that aim to reduce the region's low literacy rate, not only will the community be strengthened, but also promote social equality within the region and empower the people to reach their full potential. Advocating and taking prompt action to address this issue will contribute to a brighter and more inclusive future for BARMM.

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