

ANALYZING THE REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF STUDENTS' LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE IN BASIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks into the analysis of the regional variations of students' language performance in basic education through the National Achievement Test. The published results of the National Achievement Test in 2009 were utilized as basis for analyzing the characteristics of every region in their performances. Analysis revealed that regions have varied regional characteristics, which contributed to the performances of their students in both English and Filipino languages. Hence, to perform better in language subjects, every region must not only possess one or several characteristics, but most of the identified attributes that would contribute to the performance of the students, viz: leadership and management style; stakeholders and LGU strong commitment and partnership; hiring of qualified teachers; facilities; and class size.

Keywords: language, variations, NAT, performance

1.0 Introduction

Of the various cultural dimensions in human society, language is, perhaps, the most important component for it determines the nature of everyday interaction among people. In the Philippines, language policy in education vacillated from monolingual (Filipino) to bilingual (Filipino and English) medium of instruction since the mid-1900 until the more recent decade (2000-2010). Proficiency in both English and Filipino is expected of every basic education pupil in the country. Proficiency level in these two (2) official languages is monitored through an annual National Achievement Test (NAT) intended for Grades III and IV and fourth year high school students. Expectedly, variations in

the performance of students exist across regions which reflect the unique regional characteristics of the more rural areas in the country. This paper dissects these unique regional determinants of performance in NAT, especially in English and Filipino components.

Gonzales (1993) conducted an in-depth analysis of the Philippine language policy since the early 1900's to the 1990's where he explained the impact of policy changes in the educational performance of basic education pupils. He averred that such ambiguous policy shifts resulted in the underperformance of pupils in standardized tests. Earlier still, Sibayan (1975), Sibayan and Dagot (1980) and others highlighted the importance of having two (2) official languages in the country in light of the growing pressure to globalize. These authors also critically examined the nature of Filipino as the national language. They claimed that although Filipino is Tagalog-based, the national language itself is a mix of regional dialectal variants. Some, linguistic experts (Cortez, 1982), however, maintained that, in practice, Filipino as a language remained essentially Tagalog-based. For this reason, using Filipino as a medium of instruction is as "alien" as using English as a medium of instruction in rural non-tagalog speaking regions.

From the literature reviewed, it is evident that there are underlying regional determinants of the language performance of pupils in the country. Foremost among these determinants is dialectal variance—the further regional dialect is from Tagalog and English, the latter becomes the overall performance of pupils in standardized tests. Second, the visible regional administrative and logistical support for the language of instruction translates into better learning and consequently, better performance on standardized tests. Policies that do not equivocate between the uses of one or two official languages are extremely important to foster fluency in language use.

This paper focuses on the 2009 NAT results in English and Filipino. The test results were analyzed to determine regional variations. Once variations are detected, the paper proceeds to account for these variations in terms of the parameters mentioned in the literature review.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on the theory of language acquisition viz. that learners acquire fluency in a language as a product of the personal, social, cultural and demographic characteristics of the learners and the learning environment (Bandura, 1999). These characteristics, differ across learners in different geographic settings represented in this study by the Regions.

These characteristics often operate jointly in a setting rather than as separate single determinants of language performance.

Below is the schematic diagram of the study.

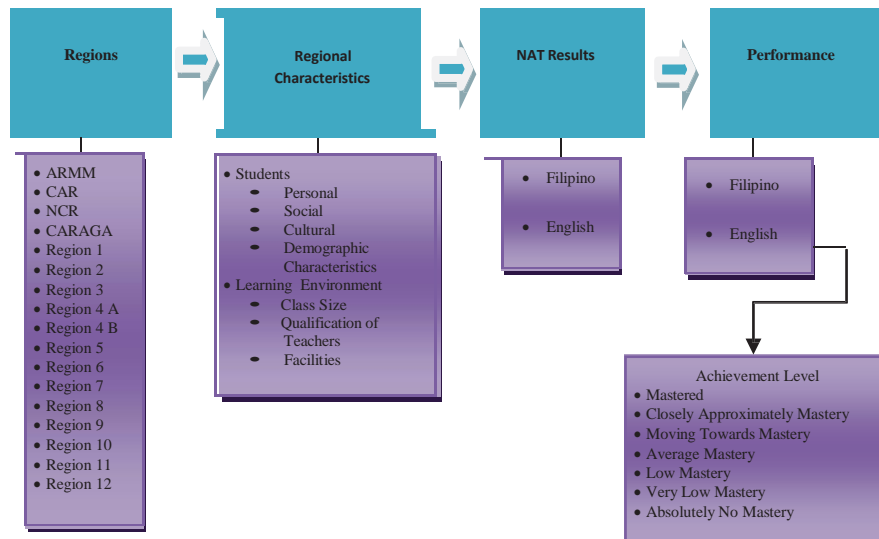


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

3.0 Methodology

This study employed the descriptive method utilizing the National Statistical Coordinating Board (NSBC) archives. These are the National achievement test results in 2009. These included the five subject areas, namely, English, Filipino, Math, Science and HEKASI.

However, only the test results in English and Filipino across regions were analyzed in this study.

The Mean Point Score of the NAT in English and Filipino from the different regions were cautiously analyzed, classified their achievement level. The average of the national achievement level or performance was then computed.

4.0 Results

Fig. 2 shows the performance of the students in English and Filipino across regions based on the National Achievement Test. The Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) had the lowest performance in Filipino and English.

On the other hand, Region 8 obtained the highest percentage in the Language subjects. This region consists of one highly urbanized city, one independent city and six provinces such as Biliran, Eastern Samar, Leyte, Northern Samar, Samar, Southern Leyte, Ormoc City and Tacloban. Eastern Visayas has remained top achiever in NAT, since 2001.

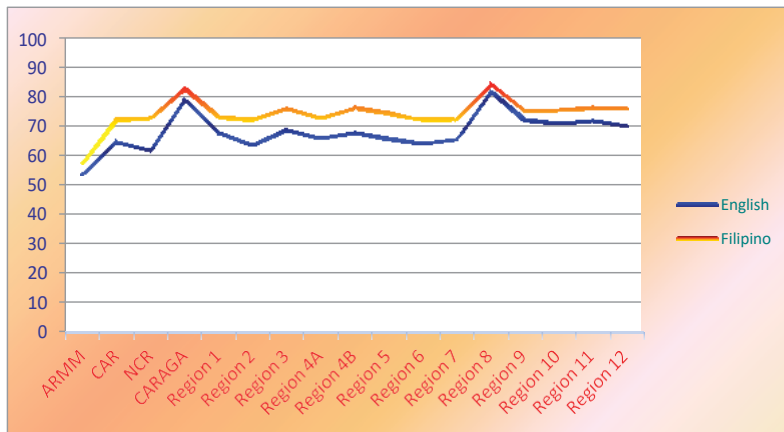


Figure 2. Overall Mean Point Score of the National Achievement Test of Grade 6 in English and Filipino in 2009

Fig. 3 shows the achievement level of the students in the Filipino subject across regions. The results indicated that out of 17 regions in the country, 16 regions or 94% are moving towards mastery while the ARMM region is still on the average mastery.

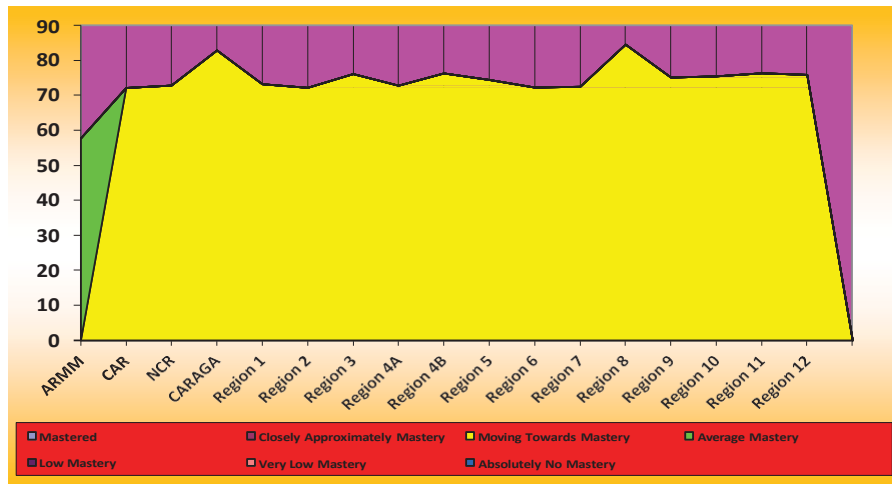


Figure 3. Achievement Level in Filipino Subject across Regions

Fig. 4 indicated that out of 17 regions in the country, 10 or 59% of the regions are moving towards mastery while 7 or 41 % are still on the average mastery.

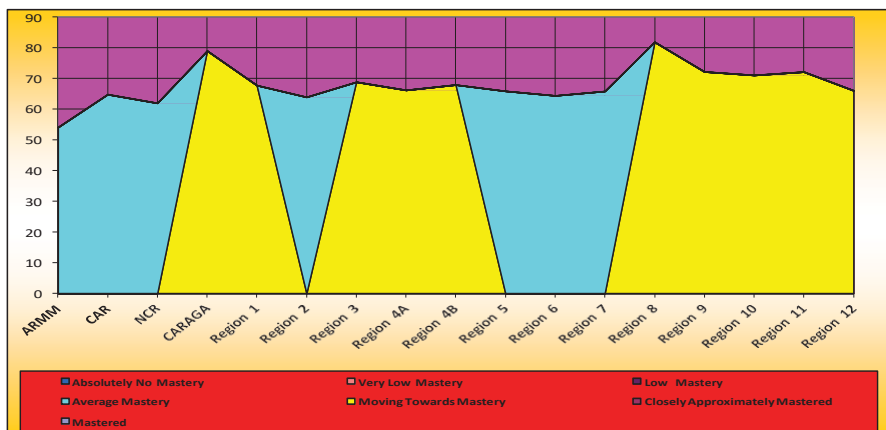


Figure 4. Achievement Level in English Subject across Regions

Discussions

Every region tended to have characteristics that contributed to the performances of their students in English and Filipino. Some of them shared the same features while others stand out with their peculiar uniqueness. In lieu of the performances of the two regions who were at the top rank in the NAT in 2009, they have almost similar characteristics that contributed a lot to the performances of their students. Since Region 8 and CARAGA are situated in close geographic proximity, the closeness of these two regions gave significant implications to the performances of their students in both two official languages for the possible reasons viz.; the leadership or management style of Region 8 is possibly patterned and benchmarked from the CARAGA region or the other way around; stakeholders and LGU had strong commitment and partnership in supporting the education in its region; the continuing interventions of teachers in assessing, training, and teaching students, particularly those who performed poorly in class; and the hiring of competent and qualified teachers for quality education. These reasons were perhaps employed since the DepEd Regional Director of Region 8 was the former Director of CARAGA. There are possibilities that whatever things accomplished and implemented in CARAGA Region were likewise implemented in Region 8.

The leadership of both regions had a strong direct effect on students' performance. Rayos (2012) averred that heads have a key role in the success of schools generally, and especially in student outcomes. The performance of the students shown in English and Filipino in both regions is a clear evidence of the effect of the strong leadership of the management in these two regions.

Although both regions performed better in NAT, the level of their performances is still on moving towards mastery. It only indicates that both regions still have to work hard in improving the proficiency of their students in both languages; Filipino and English, which are alien languages for them. The alienation of these languages is evident since English is their second language and Filipino is a Tagalog-based and these two languages have not been officially used in their normal conversation and even in most of their

classroom discussion. However, the use of their vernacular is what they are using.

Despite the fact that Region 8 and CARAGA are geographically distant from the main office of the Department of Education, the science schools in both regions have learning facilities that could help their students to have a better understanding especially in English and Filipino. Indeed, learning facilities play an important role in the academic performance of the pupils. Karemera (2003) as cited by Mushtaq and Khan (2012) found that students' performance is significantly correlated with satisfaction with the academic environment and the facilities of library, computer lab and other offices in the institution. These highlighted characteristics of Region 8 and CARAGA Region are the attributes that helped their students achieved the highest performance in NAT.

Meanwhile, ARMM and NCR were the top two regions in the bottom line of the students' achievement in NAT. They garnered the lowest rank in both English and Filipino languages. The low achievement level of ARMM can be attributed to the inadequate facilities, classrooms and competent teaching staff in the region. Moreover, the 2003 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) showed that the people in this region have difficulty in finding an employment because of their low skills in English and Filipino.

Furthermore, ARMM, the lowest performing region in both official languages had been deprived of facilities that can be utilized for enhancing the competency of the faculty and students due to lack of funds and likewise teachers were not updated or abreast with the new trends of teaching practices (Gumal, 2016). Additionally, the peace and order situation of the region also affects the performances of their pupils. Since, every time there is a war in the region, classes are also suspended leading to have limited time to study and gain more knowledge. It is then expected that students learning will be hampered. And because of the peace and order situation, competent faculty from other provinces may have hesitancy in accepting job opportunities in the region which may have significant impact in the low performance of the students in language subjects.

Besides, the ARMM Region is predominantly composed of Muslim provinces of whom the majority of them speak of Banguingui, Maguindanao, Maranao, Tausug, Yakan, Sama and other Muslim dialects. Consequently, it is expected for their pupils to have difficulty in pronouncing and using these languages, English and Filipino, in their classroom discussions, particularly in their normal conversations with other pupils.

On the other hand, NCR, which placed in the second bottom line of the low performing region in English and Filipino languages, have also different characteristics that contributed to their low performance.

The low performance in the region can be attributed to the class size of the congested population of the region. Since the population of the area is too large, it is anticipated that the class-size in basic education is more than 60. Classes of 60 above tended to score lower than that of classes less than 60 or more than 30. Teachers with more than 60 students in one class cannot guarantee to give quality education to students. Thus, the performances of students are far beyond the quality of education they envisioned. The study of Monks and Schmidt (2010) supports the claim that class size has negative impact to the performance of the students. In fact, their study revealed that class size and student load negatively impact students' performance.

5.0 Conclusion

The performance of the students in English and Filipino languages is affected by the different characteristics of each region. Therefore, every region must not only be a carrier of one or several characteristics, but most of the identified attributes that would contribute in achieving exceptional performance of the students in language subjects, viz: leadership management style; stakeholders and LGU strong commitment and partnership; hiring of qualified teachers; facilities; and class size.

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