

PROMOTING A GREENER CURRICULUM THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH

ORGANIZATIONAL PROGRAM: A POLICY EVALUATION

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Abstract

The growing number of environmental problems in the modern world call for a more effective and efficient environmental education. Local educational leaders emphasized that the enrichment of learnings about the environment can be done through co-curricular activities. Accordingly, the Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O) is the only recognized co-curricular environmental organization in the basic education that serves as a venue for students' actions and movements towards safeguarding, protecting and conserving the environment for future generations.

The question is: how responsive is YES-O to the needs of the youth today? Hence, this study aimed to evaluate the implementation of the Youth for Environment in Schools (YES) Program through internal and external factors affecting it. Specifically, the study featured a SWOT analysis to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of its implementation. This policy evaluation was conducted in the Schools Division of Bulacan, Philippines.

With the different environmental activities mandated to the YES-O, it can be considered as a holistic approach in promoting environmental care and sustainable development, and proven to be more relevant today. From its establishment in 2003, it has been a frontrunner in empowering the youth to protect and care for the natural environment by providing relevant and meaningful activities. However, even though schools are mandated to establish YES-O, in the recent years,

the monitoring and evaluation had been weak. Now, with greater focus to revive and strengthen the program, different stakeholders must be aware and take part in improving it. Issues like weak monitoring and evaluation, time constraint in the conduct of activities and uncoordinated and overlapping projects by different youth organizations must first be addressed before it can be considered truly responsive to the needs of the 21st century learners.

Introduction

Filipinos have so much to protect and care for in their environment. Since the Philippines is considered as one of the top biodiversity hotspots of the world, they are blessed with the abundance of natural resources as reflected by the rich flora and fauna in various parts of the archipelago.

For decades, Filipinos relied on their natural environment for food, shelter and other necessities. Apparently, the natural environment is of prime importance not only for the welfare of the people, but also for the development of society.

Unfortunately, several studies proved the growing number of environmental problems in the modern world which call for a more effective and efficient environmental education. It was supported by David (2015) who pointed out that it is high time that the education sector should amplify its emphasis on environmental education because of the harsh environmental conditions that the world experiences presently.

Accordingly, schools play a vital role in supporting the people's constitutional rights to life and property by capacitating them for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation (DRR-CCA). Consequently, several environmental policies were legislated, and for the past years, better environmental education expected to uplift the awareness and achievement of people especially students was recommended and promoted. For instance, Republic Act no. 9512, or the National

Environmental Awareness and Education Act of 2008 was enacted. It promotes national awareness on the role of natural resources in economic growth and the importance of environmental conservation and ecological balance towards sustained national development. In compliance with this, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued DepEd Order No. 52, series of 2011 entitled “Strengthening Environmental Education in Public and Private Schools”. Later that year, it also issued DepEd Order No. 93, series of 2011 that provided the programs, projects and activities for the Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O) which is the only recognized co-curricular environmental organization that serves as a venue for students’ actions and movements towards safeguarding, protecting and conserving the environment for future generations. Upon its establishment through DepEd Order no. 72, series of 2003, it consolidated all other environmental and/or ecological organizations in schools with the primary programs or projects for the environment. Furthermore, all public and private elementary and secondary schools in the Philippines are mandated to establish YES-O. Thus, all learners may benefit from the programs, projects and activities of the organization. Following the principle that “it takes a village to raise a child”, all members of the community are considered stakeholders of the organization.

Thus, the education sector showed that it considered co-curricular activities conducted in youth organizations as one of the keys in uplifting the quality of environmental education offered to learners. Accordingly, Perez and Bua (2019) reported that local educational leaders emphasized that the enrichment of learnings about the environment can be done through co-curricular activities of environmental youth organizations like YES-O.

With the urgent call to protect and care more for the natural environment, is the organization truly serving its purpose of environmentally empowering the youth? How good is the

implementation of its program? These questions bothered a number of educators, and became the purpose of this policy evaluation.

Hence, this study aimed to evaluate the implementation of the Youth for Environment in Schools (YES) Program through internal and external factors affecting it. Specifically, the study featured a SWOT analysis to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of its implementation. In addition, the future direction of the YES Program was also a key component of this analysis. This policy evaluation was conducted in the Schools Division of Bulacan, Philippines that is composed of four educational districts. This paper focused on the secondary level which is composed of 94 schools.

Overview of Current Knowledge

The Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O) was established through DepEd Order no. 72, series of 2003. This DepEd order pointed out that relative to the holding of the 2003 Youth for Environment Summer (YES) Camp on April 30 to May 4 2003, one of the concrete resolutions and actions adopted by the delegation from all over the Philippines was the establishment of a school- based co-curricular organization which can serve as a significant venue for students' actions and movements toward safeguarding, protecting and conserving the environment for future generations.

Furthermore, pursuant to Republic Act no. 9512 entitled, an act to promote environmental education, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order no. 52, series of 2011 entitled "Strengthening Environmental Education in Public and Private Schools". This DepEd Order mandates all schools to intensify lessons regarding the environment on all Science subjects, use environmental concerns as tools for classroom drills, discussions and activities, and integrate these concerns in related learning areas. The order also promotes students' participation in

environmental activities and advocacies and instill in their minds the need to preserve and protect the environment. Likewise, it encourages teachers to attend seminars, workshops and conferences related to environmental education which may be considered in their application for promotion. Moreover, it mandates every school to establish their own Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O), and register the same with the Division Office (DO) through its Division Coordinator.

In the same year, the DepEd issued another order to support its earlier issuance- DepEd Order no. 93, series of 2011 entitled “Mandated Programs, Projects and Activities, Various Forms, and Targets Pertinent to the Youth for Environment in Schools (YES) Program”. It identified relevant programs, projects and activities to the goals of the organization together with the various forms to be accomplished by each school. The YES Program consists of the following: (a.) seed bank and nursery establishment, (b.) planting, growing and caring for trees, (c.) awareness campaigns and symposia on environmental issues and actions, (d.) outreach programs like clean-up drives, (e.) waste management program, (f.) plastic free environment, (g.) watershed protection and conservation, (h.) energy, water and power supply conservation, (i.) fire prevention and disaster risk reduction and management, (j.) promotion of ecotourism sites, and (k.) environmental camps. With these DepEd issuances, the YES Program seemed like a holistic approach to address the concerns of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation (DRR-CCA). Likewise, Fernandez and Shaw (2015) emphasized that the youth, through co-curricular activities can become a link to their school and local community.

Existing Policy Related to the Topic

Various forms were enclosed to DepEd Order no. 93, series of 2011. These forms primarily pertain to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the YES Program. Since each

school is mandated to register their own YES-O to the Division Office (DO), registration form and certificate of registration were also enclosed in the DepEd Order.

Accordingly, YES-O events can be planned through the Calendar of Annual Proposed Activities (CAPA). Meanwhile, the accomplishments of the organization must be reflected in Enclosure no. 5, the Annual Accomplishment Report (AAR). As per the DepEd Order, it must include the programs, projects and activities, their key performance indicators, individuals involved, time frame, targets and actual accomplishments and status.

Furthermore, Enclosure no. 7 entitled “YES-O Monitoring and Evaluation Form” can provide details on how evident the attainment of the goals of the organization is. It also allows the organization to reflect and identify gaps, concerns and issues within the implementation of the program. Finally, the DepEd Order also concerns the sustainability of programs, projects and activities initiated by the organization as evidenced on Enclosure no. 8 entitled “Five- Year Action Plan/Target”.

Therefore, the policy makers involved in the implementation of the YES-O Program provided complete set of instruments necessary for the analysis of the given program.

On the other hand, several school- based youth organizations share some of the goals of the YES-O. The Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP), Girl Scouts of the Philippines (GSP) as well as the Supreme Student Government (SSG) also promote environmental care through participatory leadership in activities like tree planting and proper waste management. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) is one of the mandates of YES-O but there are also existing DepEd policies which particularly focus on building disaster resilience.

In one viewpoint, these other youth organizations maximize the opportunity to environmentally empower the learners. However, if the environmental activities are conducted

separately, the exact opposite may happen- efforts may be wasted. Therefore, joint activities must be conducted to attain shared and multiple goals of these organizations although YES-O still remains as the main venue for environmental programs, projects and activities. Hence, all activities of YES-O must be reported and evaluated as per DepEd Order no. 93, s. 2011.

Key Issue

With the different environmental activities mandated to the Youth for Environment in Schools Organization (YES-O), it can be considered as a holistic approach in promoting environmental care and sustainable development.

However, the question that this policy analysis would like to answer is: How good is the implementation of the YES Program?

The approach made in this paper was the SWOT analysis. This analysis was made through interviews with the Project Development Officer in- charged of the YES Program and YES-O Division Coordinator.

Since everyone is ultimately influenced by the natural environment, every member of the community is expected, in some ways, to contribute to the attainment of the goals of the organization. Community leaders are expected to provide good examples while teachers and school administrators lead capacity- building programs for the learners by giving opportunities for environmental activities. Everyone must recognize that empowering the youth is one of the keys in mitigating, if not solving, drastic environmental problems not only in the present but also in the future.

The SWOT Analysis

In order to evaluate the implementation of the YES Program, this paper examined the internal and external factors that may affect success.

The Project Development Officer (PDO) and Division Coordinator, both in-charged of the YES Program were interviewed.

The figure below summarizes the SWOT analysis.

Internal Factors	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *schools are expected to support the YES Program *complete documents needed for analysis of the program *increasing interest of stakeholders in environmental education 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *weak monitoring and evaluation in the recent years *unclear roles of educational leaders in the program* *uncoordinated and overlapping environmental projects of school organizations
External Factors	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *government and non- governmental organizations offer environmental activities *revival of YES-O projects *start of allocation of funds 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *possibility of limited time and manpower for co-curricular activities in the future

Accordingly, it was confirmed that secondary schools in the Schools Division of Bulacan are required to establish YES-O (M. J. Tacdol & M. K. Olimba, personal communication, December 11, 2019). Likewise, school administrators are expected to support the YES Program since each school is required to submit a calendar of activities at the start of the academic year and an accomplishment report at its end. Furthermore, due to the increasing interest in environmental concerns even at the local community level, active involvement of learners, teachers and other stakeholders is viewed as another strength of the implementation of the program.

The organization served as a frontrunner in safeguarding and conserving the environment in the past years. Unfortunately, it was confirmed that in the few recent years, there was no substantial monitoring and evaluation activities of the program due to the unclear leadership roles between the middle and upper management levels in the Schools Division (M. K. Olimba, personal

communication, December 11, 2019). This led to the inactivity of a number of schools. In addition, there was lack of training for teacher-advisers as well as student leaders, and lack of support fund to organize massive and meaningful environmental activities. There were also uncoordinated and overlapping environmental projects of school organizations. These instances, instead of maximizing resources for the benefit of a larger group, focus only on a smaller number of individuals with lesser gain and lead to duplication of activities. Sadly, there is also a possibility that not all school administrators recognize the organization as an important DepEd program (M. J. Tacdol, personal communication, December 11, 2019). These issues that internally weaken the implementation of the program were the focus of the current leadership in the Schools Division.

Propitiously, there is a number of individuals and organizations that may be tapped in the conduct of various environmental activities. Local government agencies like the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office (MENRO) as well as non- governmental organizations in the community offer tree planting and other environmental programs students can participate in. Likewise, with the greater focus to address past issues, there were revival of distinct programs of the organization like SIGA (School in a Garden), and allocation of funds from the DepEd Central Office (M. J. Tacdol, personal communication, December 11, 2019).

Apparently, the YES Program is still relevant to the needs of learners and their respective communities. However, with the number of mandated activities of the organization, it is quite hard to attain all its goals especially with limited manpower and time for co-curricular activities. As per the YES-O camp conducted last July 23- 27, 2019, the constitution and by-laws of the organization were redeveloped and contemporized to address current gaps but the output was not yet streamlined and implemented to field offices for the time being.

Conclusions

The YES Program is proven to be more relevant today due to the growing number of environmental problems. From its establishment in 2003, it has been a frontrunner in empowering the youth to protect and care for the natural environment by providing relevant and meaningful activities. Even though schools are mandated to establish YES-O, in the recent years, the monitoring and evaluation had been weak. Now, with greater focus to revive and strengthen the program, different stakeholders must be aware and take part in improving it. Issues like weak monitoring and evaluation, time constraint in the conduct of activities and uncoordinated and overlapping projects by different youth organizations must first be addressed before it can be considered truly responsive to the needs of the 21st century learners.

Recommendations

1. Monitoring and evaluation of the YES Program must be improved. Technical working groups must be created to assist the middle and upper management in the Schools Division in this important component of the policy cycle.
2. Echo- training, and sharing training manuals and best practices through the social media can augment the capacity building of teacher-advisers and student leaders. This may partially address the lack of training due to lack of fund.
3. Joint activities must be conducted to attain shared and multiple goals of different school organizations to maximize the utilization of available resources. Environmental activities must be coordinated with YES-O to ensure that there will be no overlapping and uncoordinated projects.
4. There must be a reward system for best YES Program implementers in the Schools Division. A search for the best YES-O can encourage schools to uplift the kind of program they offer to their learners.

5. Recognize YES-O as an accredited youth organization. Management committee meetings can clarify this issue to educational leaders. With better support from school administrators, the YES Program in each school can surely be enhanced.
6. Education leaders must synergize in looking for potential partners in conducting environmental projects. Proper coordination and cooperation of all stakeholders, whether in school, community or offices are prerequisite to the success of the program.
7. Good practices identified in this paper must continue.

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