

"Crossing the bridge while it is being built": UA's experience on the K to 12 transition from the perspective of the administrators

*Emmanuel M. Bagtas
Arnel T. Sicat
Joel Q. Calaguas
Oliver G. Yalung
Ralph Jayson D. Calbang*

Abstract

This interpretive qualitative study aims to explore pertinent data in the University of the Assumption regarding the experiences of the administrators on the K to 12 basic education program. Specifically, the research aimed to: 1.) Identify the coping strategies utilized by the administrators during implementation the K to 12 basic education program; 2.) Enumerate the barriers or difficulties they have faced on the implementation of the abovementioned program; 3.) Determine future possible obstacles or problems regarding the execution of the K to 12 program; and 4.) Describe the institution's best practices. There were 12 administrators who participated in the research. The study was conducted on the respective offices of the administrators in a Catholic university. The researchers utilized an interview guide that includes four open-ended questions which are specific to the topic of K to 12 experiences of the administrators. Based on findings, the strategies utilized by the university to cope with the K to 12 transition were the formation of a K to 12 committee and early preparation. The problems encountered by the institution were the renovation of buildings and facilities, selection and training of faculty and changes in the curricula. The foreseeable obstacles perceived by the administrators are the maintenance of current buildings and facilities and hiring and retention of faculty members. The University of the Assumption's best practices include the top management's initiative and effective information dissemination. It may be concluded that the university achieved a smooth transition of the K to 12 basic education program through the administrators' utilization of coping strategies, best practices and experiences when faced with problems and difficulties. Findings of the study suggest that the administrators must remain vigilant on the implementation of the K to 12 basic education program.

Keywords: K-12 transition, administrators, coping strategies, obstacles, best practices

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the Philippines has transitioned to a K to 12 basic education program that seeks to revert decades of academic decline and promote an effective and inclusive educational system (Arbolencia, 2015). This specific program, which is comparable to a bridge interconnecting the local basic education, must be trodden in order to provide solution to the mentioned dilemma. According to the Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines (2016), the K to12 program aims to offer ample time for mastery of knowledge and skills, advance lifelong learners and prepare graduates for tertiary education, middle-level skills development, work hiring and entrepreneurship. This specific program, which includes kindergarten, primary education, junior and senior high school, is the government's response for the Filipinos to be globally-competitive (Department of Education, 2016).

According to NISMED, since the K to 12 program was only introduced in the academic year 2012-2013, the Philippines is still on the verge of discovering and learning on its national implementation. Since there is no such thing as a perfect master plan for this program, most likely, it will face some obstacles and experience difficulties along the way that need to be solved. The presence of barriers that need to be trodden on the learning curve is already expected and is usually a major consideration during the planning phase. Hence, interventions that will possibly solve the foreseen problems must also be identified beforehand.

In the United States, the common difficulties faced by schools in the K to 12 program are resources, subject culture, attitudes and beliefs, knowledge and skills and assessment (Hew & Brush, 2007). In Spain, the K to12 curriculum integrated computer programming and coding (Moreno-Leon, Robles & Roman-Gonzales, 2016). This is considered a barrier in the curriculum's achievement of objectives because of the current limitation in resources.

Locally, there are also problems and barriers on the components of K to12 program namely: academic competence, labor opportunity, global competitiveness and economic development (Du, 2012). According to Palatta (2013) as cited in Calderon (2014), public secondary schools are ill-prepared on textbooks, instructional materials and content in the execution of the K to 12 program. However, mentors still continue to face challenges and deal with concerns. Parents also consider the additional two years as longer time and added financial burden on their children's education (Cabansag, 2014).

Academic institutions had prepared for the actual implementation of the K to 12 basic education program. Administrators of local universities and colleges have devoted their time and efforts for the K to 12 program to be in full swing. As of the moment, there were foreign and local studies conducted on K to 12 with parents and students as participants. Researches were conducted to look into the viewpoints of parents and students who are considered to be greatly affected by its implementation (Tonido & Dela Pena, 2015). However, it is imperative to gather pertinent information and insights from school administrators because they were included in the planning and implementation of the abovementioned government-initiated program. Therefore, it is relevant to conduct this study which may be advantageous in the future planning and implementation of the K to 12 basic education program.

The K-12 basic education program

For years, the Philippines is the lone Asian country and one among the three remaining countries throughout the world to have a ten year intended pre-university program (Bigcas, 2016). In 2012, the K-12 basic education program was introduced locally with the main thrust of producing graduates who will be globally-competitive in coping with the international standards (Okabe, 2013).

K to 12, also termed as K-12, is an education program which targets to improve the students' fundamental skills and produce more proficient citizens. "K" represents Kindergarten while "12" stands for the subsequent 12 years of basic education comprising of six years of elementary education, four years of junior high school and two years of senior high school (K12Philippines, 2015).

The primary objectives of the K-12 basic education program are to: 1.) Improve early childhood education. 2.) Provide a timely and relevant curriculum to students. 3.) Confirm cohesive and continuous learning. 4.) Establish proficiency using mother tongue-based education. 5.) Prepare for the future and 6.) Inculcate the holistic values of being a Filipino (Department of Education, 2016).

Stakeholders of the K-12 program

The main stakeholders of the K-12 program are the administrators, teachers, parents and students. They all have concerns about education so it is necessary to listen to their voices (Arbolencia,

2015). Hence, there were studies and surveys conducted to look into the viewpoints of parents and students who are considered beneficiaries of its implementation (Tonido & Dela Pena, 2015). These clientele can have a thorough assessment on the school administrators' competence (Magno, 2013).

K-12 administrators have real life field experience and can relate theory to practice (Styron, Maulding & Hull, 2006). They are also called curriculum managers who supervise curriculum implementation, select and recruit new teachers, admit students and procure equipment and materials for effective learning. More often than not, administrators are usually appointed after being identified as effective and successful teachers (Borra, 2001).

Challenges/Problems experienced on the K-12 program

One of the main challenges raised in the K to 12 program is teacher education training (Vizconde, 2015). According to Cabili, Capilitan and Sequete (2015), teachers in K to 12 have struggled in delivering some topics which are not related to their major. They are likely to discuss the lessons literally on how they understand the lessons.

A major concern of teachers is the difficulty in finishing the modules as stated in the curriculum (Ocampo, 2015). This is because not all the topics can be covered in the given limited period of time. They also tend to pace over in order to finish the modules eventually causing superficial student learning. Teachers also need to reintroduce the topics prior to the actual discussion of topics in the modules (Aranas-Romulo, 2015). This is due to the students' hard time in relating topics from the previous year level to the current lessons.

There is also an issue regarding the inadequate resources such as teaching materials and facilities (Ocampo & Delgado, 2014). This is congruent to the study of Calderon (2014) where public secondary schools are ill-prepared on textbooks, instructional materials and content in the execution of the K to 12 program. According to Capangpangan (2015), activities in K to 12 programs are so tedious wherein the needed materials are not accessible to all students.

Problem objectives

The study's main thrust is to describe pertinent data regarding the experiences of the administrators on the K to 12 program. Specifically, the research aims to: 1.) Enumerate the barriers or difficulties they have faced

on the implementation of the abovementioned program 2.) Identify the strategies utilized by the administrators of a Catholic university during implementation the K to 12 basic education program; 3.) Determine future possible obstacles or problems regarding the execution of the K to 12 program; and 4.) Describe the institution's best practices.

METHOD

Research design

Interpretive qualitative was utilized as the research design. It allowed the investigators to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, feelings and responses of the participants. Phenomenology is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced by people living those experiences.

Participants and setting

There were 12 administrators who participated in the research. They are the president directors, deans and principals of a higher education institution (HEI).

Instrument

The researchers utilized a researcher-made interview guide. It includes four open-ended questions which are specific to the topic of K to 12 experiences of the administrators. It was content and face-validated by three experts in the field of educational management.

Data collection

A letter of intent to conduct the interview was made and presented to the administrators prior to the collection of data. After the approval to conduct research in their respective offices was granted, the participants notified their secretaries for the preferred schedule. Actual interviews were conducted on the specified dates with 30 to 60 minutes of time allotment. Note-taking and sound recording were utilized for the transcription of data from the participants.

Ethical consideration

The researchers ensured that the participants of the research were adequately notified about its overall purpose through a cover letter.

The voluntary nature of participation in the study was observed through the attached informed consents prior to the interview guide. Participants' freedom to refuse or withdraw at anytime was included in the consents. The anonymity of the participants for this study was strictly followed.

Data analysis

Content analysis was used for this qualitative study. Pertinent data were classified. Themes were formulated based on the related answers of the study participants in order to further interpret the findings.

FINDINGS

Strategies utilized to cope-up with the K to 12 transition

Formation of a K to12 committee - It is a group of administrators which is composed of the president, three vice-presidents, principals and select directors for student services. Seven of the participants responded that the established committee for the K to 12 was essential to its implementation.

"I think, the university was able to cope with the K to 12 transition very well because it has a committee tasked with the preparation for it. It was something that really contributed positively to our preparation. We had a small group, small number of people whose focus was really on K-12. It attended to the different aspects of this program, initiated by the government."

P2

"The best preparation we had in coping with K to 12 transition was the creation of the K to 12 committee. I think, if I am not mistaken, this was created last June 2013, three years before the actual implementation. I supposed even before that, during the incumbency of the former president, there were already initial plans already. However, I think the creation of that committee really directly addressed the K to 12 concerns and it was able to focus on K to 12 only."

P3

"Before the implementation in Grade 11, we already created a committee in anticipation of what we should do. The committee is composed of representatives from multi-sectors. All the members of the executive committee are with them. Somebody took charge of the

marketing, another one with the program, others with financial aspects, some with curriculum and all the other components needed to successfully implement the program."

P5

"It would be noted that we have in our university the K to 12 committee with members who meet regularly to discuss everything about K to 12 and its transition process."

P6

"In the academic year 2014-2015, the K to 12 committee was constituted by the president with the mandate to plan, strategize and monitor the opening of the newest department, the Senior High School. The creation of the committee is very crucial because all those who were appointed there have important tasks to do for the efficient implementation of the Senior High School. If you notice, these are the members of the executive and university committee whose offices will play vital role in whatever the K to 12 committee will be able to carry-out."

P7

"We had a K to12 committee and we meet regularly in order to identify the concerns of the university, with regard to the implementation of the K to12 program. Now, I think that is a very good measure for the university in order to prepare, plan and implement what have been identified as issues, concerns and matters involving the K to 12 transition program."

P10

"Basically, when the president was able to come up with a memorandum, there was the establishment of the committee on K to 12. I think, there were more or less 10 members of the K to 12 committee. The president was the chair of the committee."

P12

Early preparation - The laying of ground work for the K to12 program was well ahead of time prior to its actual implementation. Seven of the participants answered early preparation was crucial to the success of the program.

"Positively, our preparation was just in time in the sense that as early as I think, three or four years ago."

P1

"First of all, I think the most basic was through early planning."

P3

"We really prepared beforehand. I think two or three years before the K to 12 even before the roll-out of the K to 12."

P4

"Way back 2012, we have already been preparing for the implementation of K to 12 transition. So since 2012, we started the implementation in Grades 1 and 7. Now, the first graduates of K to 12 finished their Junior High in 2015."

P5

"I saw it like our university had early planning about our K to 12 and the transition process."

P6

"We have prepared early for that so it is a great help that the university became cognizant of the needs that need to be undertaken."

P8

"Actually, even before we were asked to have this K to 12 with the grade school, we were given at least two years to prepare. We were given time to be oriented and actually, our administrators were very generous in giving us seminars regarding K to 12. The very first thing that we did was to be oriented. We were allowed to have different seminars regarding K to 12, all of us teachers."

P11

Obstacles/ Difficulties regarding the K to 12 program which were addressed

Renovation of buildings and facilities - This comprises the institutional infrastructures and equipment. Two of the participants responded that there is a need for physical preparations.

"Well, on my part, of course, is with the facilities. I had to look into that because that was my concern. We had some vacant rooms at the Benedictine Building that were not being used, particularly at the 3^d floor. So, we had some extra rooms that need to be fixed and would easily be ready for use. We did that months before the program was launched."

P2

"There was a problem on classrooms and facilities. We first have to rehabilitate the Benedictine Building."

P3

Selection and training of faculty - These include the teachers, especially in the senior high school. There were three participants who responded that the teachers should be properly screened and trained.

"There should be capacity-building, especially for the senior high faculty who are not LET passers. These are the general education teachers who were not required to take teaching units, but now, they are already required."

P3

"Ing pung milyari, general education teachers from the School of Arts and Sciences ay na-transfer to Senior High School. Sila ang mga teachers who were supposed to be displaced. Isa po yun sa mga difficulties ng K to12 transition. Apektado po yung college kasi may madi-displace. Ayon sa board of trustees and executive committee, hangga't kaya, walang maaalis." [What happened is that general education teachers from the School of Arts and Sciences were transferred to Senior High School. Those are the teachers who were supposed to be displaced. That is one of the difficulties of the K to 12 transition. The college department is affected because some teachers will be displaced. As per the decision of the board of trustees and executive committee, nobody will be displaced as much as possible.]

P4

"Isang issue that I have to face is college teachers transferring to senior high. It is not easy to transfer. There are some parang internal conflicts that need to be resolved. Parang yung mga tao, lilipat from college to senior high, akala nila mas mababa ang level yung pag nalipat ka duon, so that has to be resolved." [An issue that I have to face is that college teachers transfer to senior high school. There is somewhat an internal conflict within them. For some of them, they feel degraded when they switch to senior high.]

P7

Changes in the curricula - These are based from the K to 12 program offerings of the academic institution. Two participants emphasized the shift in the course curricula.

"I think, a year or two before the actual implementation of the K to 12 program, there were only three strands: academic strands such as STEM, HUMSS and ABM. Then, they added general academic strand. The continuous changing of the curriculum give us problems."

P3

"At first, we had difficulty regarding the curricula. They were late. They would give us different curricula in let us say in Mathematics."

P11

Obstacles/ Difficulties regarding the K to 12 program which still need to be addressed

Maintenance of buildings and facilities - This is the foreseeable problem on school infrastructures and equipment. There was one participant who emphasized this.

"My real concern is for long term. On my side, we did not want to create so much capacity for students because we know that the public schools are also constructing buildings. That is why we did not construct a new building because we know that the transition is only temporary."

P3

Hiring and retention of faculty members-This deals with the projected composition of teachers. One participant projected this concern.

"I am more concerned come 2018 because this school year 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, we have planned to offer the same options to some faculty members. Now, I am afraid that we would not have the best teachers we can get comes 2018. That is yet to be a problem which we have to anticipate this time."

P2

Institution's best practices on the K to 12 program

Top management's initiative - The executive committee is composed of the president, three vice-presidents and quality management officer. Five of the participants answered that the administrators show the school's best practices.

"I think, it is the executive committee's effort to cope with the problems. It is obvious that it is really putting its best foot forward."

P1

"From the very start, the university president paved the way by insisting on the importance of quality of education."

P2

"The best practice of the executive committee is being hands-on. I think, that is the best that I could describe it."

P4

"I think, it is the support of all sectors coming from particularly, the top management."

P5

"One that I saw as one of the best that we handled our K to 12 was it came from the top administrators themselves, who worked on our K to 12 transition program. So coming from the top, down to the bottom, helped a lot such that the management of this transition comes from no less than from executive committee."

P6

Effective information dissemination - It includes the swift relay of school instructions. There were two participants who answered effective information dissemination as the institution's best practice.

"Number one, I think it is information dissemination. The teachers and personnel were well-informed about the impact of K to 12 on them."

P3

"Information dissemination po talaga. We had early preparation kaya may early announcement of admission and enrolment." [It is indeed information dissemination. Early preparation led to early announcement of admission and enrolment.]

P4

DISCUSSION

The Philippines has to cope with the biggest shift in its educational system, the implementation of the K to 12 basic education program. It has a curriculum with clearer model consisting of four tracks compared to two tracks of Japan and the United States with different number of tracks depending per state (Sarmiento & Orale, 2016).

This curriculum aims to address the gap between the local Filipino graduates to that of the other countries by further enhancing their skills, amassing their knowledge and developing other abilities in order to make them truly globally competitive. Through proper education, equipping the citizens with what is needed and is expected from them, the nation where they belong can also be elevated because of the empowerment given to them, which can lead to an increase of the caliber of its human resources (Du, 2012).

Regarding the first objective, despite of early and comprehensive preparations, a lot of challenges and dilemmas were faced by the school administrators in the implementation of the K to 12 program. The problems which were addressed are the following: renovation of buildings and facilities, selection and training of faculty and curricular changes.

Facility management in buildings and infrastructures was identified and addressed as an utmost concern. A systematized facility management is essential in the development of the physical performance, aesthetics and systems of a building in order to satisfy the stakeholders

and increase the efficiency of the building and its equipment (Lavy, 2008). The university's facilities must be constantly maintained in order to facilitate ease of learning. These can be renovated if the needs arise. Renovations can be done annually or even semi-annually. There is also room for some repair works.

Selection and hiring of teachers, especially in the senior high school can be rigorous but organized. However, there are requirements such as documents that need to be submitted in order to be among the candidates for hiring. Apart from this, there is still a teacher's evaluation based on the criteria of education, teaching/industry/workplace experience, specialized training, interview, English communication skills, portfolio/outstanding achievements and demonstration teaching (DepEd Order No. 3, Series of 2016).

Recalibrating and enhancing the curriculum is not enough, people behind it must also be recalibrated in order to update not only their knowledge as well as their skills in order to transmit these among their learners (Calderon, 2014). Seminars and trainings are conducted among the faculty of the university in order to be assured of the quality education they can offer to their students. This is in order to cope as well with the demands of the 21st century learning and teaching process.

A curriculum change may have an impact on teaching and learning (Tshiredo, 2013). The Department of Education presents a curriculum and this is considered to be the minimum requirement for the program. Changes may be in forms of addition in SHS strand or even modification in subjects such as Mathematics. These subtle or major changes were addressed by the administrators because there must be a corresponding plan of action. This will serve its purpose of smoothing-out the implementation of the curriculum.

In answer to the second objective, the university was able to effectively cope with the much anticipated K to12 basic education program. This is due to the two major strategies utilized by the academic institution. These were identified by the administrators to be the formation of a K to 12 committee and early preparation for the abovementioned program.

The K to 12 committee is a special type of committee where it is assembled with a specific purpose in mind and a specific time frame. This committee is composed of the university president, vice-presidents and directors of student services. These experts in committees are often consulted when multifaceted decisions have to be solved (Hahn, 2016).

The member administrators are considered to be knowledgeable and experienced regarding planning, which is essential. Their expertise is definitely a major contributory factor in bringing forth success in the K-12 program.

Early preparation provides numerous advantages, especially in the field of education. The issue of early preparation is critical for programs (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Possible obstacles are already discussed and future problems can be ironed-out from the start. Being early in preparing for the documents is advantageous in order to have enough time to produce, re-check and deliver these necessary requirements. Some necessary adjustments can also be done prior to actual implementation.

For the third objective, some problems in the K to 12 program have not yet been encountered. With this, there are two foreseeable obstacles perceived by the administrators. These are the current buildings and facilities and future faculty line-up.

Buildings and its facilities will still remain a probable challenge in the future. These denote financial investment in physical capital accounts (Crampton, 2009). It is not only building new infrastructures and purchasing new equipment but being able to maintain them for the purpose of facilitating learning. This will also entail future planning because addition of other infrastructures must be parallel to the existing buildings.

The faculty line-up will most likely change every year. This may be the result of some varying factors. One of which is faculty evaluation wherein only teachers who have very satisfactory evaluation are retained. Some of the mentors will soon retire and would not be on the next faculty line-up. Others may be transferred again to college after two years. Some would work in public schools. There may also be the problem of faculty attrition where there will be less teachers needed if there would be less students as the curriculum is implemented in the country (Bucklin et al., 2014).

For the fourth objective, the university was able to cope-up with the K to 12 transition. This may be attributed to its commendable practices. The administrators identified the two best practices to be the top management's initiative and effective information dissemination.

The top management's initiative or support causes a substantial impact on an academic institution's commitment to innovation and development (Daellenbach, McCarthy & Schoenecker, 2002). This holds

true in the university because these administrators serve as motivators for the employees to work efficiently. They are the driving force which inspire their subordinates to be creative and innovative in their own fields of work.

Information dissemination in any platform such as social media is indeed necessary (Zhang et al, 2014). The university's administrators were able to execute effective information dissemination through proper channeling from the top management to the middle management and other stakeholders. It is but imperative that the data to be delivered is factual and complete to prevent distortion in the process of communication. If this is not strictly followed, information will be delayed or will not be properly relayed, hence, this will cause miscommunication among administrators with their subordinates which may likely impede the K to 12 implementation.

Conclusions

This study depicted the viewpoints of the university administrators, the premiere leaders of the academic institution regarding the K to 12 preparation and implementation. The group of participants was composed of competent managers who had numerous personal experiences regarding academic and curricular changes and transitions. It consisted of the president, three vice presidents and eight directors for student services.

The university achieved smooth transition of the K to 12 basic education program. This feat was accomplished through the administrators' utilization of coping strategies, best practices and experiences when faced with problems and difficulties.

The academic institution's coping strategies in the K to 12 transition were the formation of a special committee and early preparation. The K to 12 committee was composed of the executive committee, principals, deans and directors. There was an early preparation for the mentioned program, roughly two years prior to its actual implementation.

The school faced the obstacles of renovating buildings and facilities, selecting and training of faculty and curricular changes. There was a need to recondition some buildings for the upcoming senior high school. Teachers in the senior high school were stringently screened prior to actual hiring and had rigorous training on the

K to 12 program. There were also modifications on the K to 12 curricula, specifically on the offered strands.

Probable problems or difficulties of the university regarding the K to 12 program that need to be addressed were maintenance of buildings and facilities and hiring and retention of faculty members. School infrastructures and its equipment need to be well-taken cared of or repaired if necessary. There is a need for old and new teachers in senior high school.

The UA's best practices include the top management's initiative and effective information dissemination. The administrators were the prime motivators to the school's stakeholders. These managers were able to relay the essential data in a correct and timely manner.

Recommendations

Findings of the study suggest that the administrators must remain vigilant on the implementation of the K to 12 basic education program. This is important because the university has started on the right footing and has coped very well with the adversities of the mentioned program. The school managers must continue to be updated with the possible proposed changes and be abreast of the updated regarding K to 12.

It is suggested that all of the problems or obstacles be addressed by the administrators in order to continue the already smooth facilitation of the K to 12 program with the aid of UA's best practices, strategies and coping mechanisms. Probable problems need to be given proper interventions or actions so that these will not hinder the teaching and learning in the university.

Since this research depicted only the viewpoints of the school administrators, it is imperative that other main stakeholders such as teacher, parents and students be added as participants. Hence, this will comprise the readiness of the teachers, awareness of the parents and satisfaction of the learners or students. This will make subsequent studies to be more holistic in nature.

It is also recommended that subjects such as Christian Life Education (C.L.E.) be incorporated to the basic K to 12 curriculum. This will further strengthen the claim of the academic institution as a Catholic university and be able to instill its mission/ vision and inculcates its values

and virtues. This ingenuity will truly set the university apart from other academic institutions.

Future researchers are encouraged to include a quantitative study in order to triangulate the findings of this study. This mixed method will further improve the study regarding its content. They may also include more respondents in order to gather relative and substantial data to support this research.

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