



SHLC

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Local challenges, global imperatives: Cities at the forefront to achieve Education 2030¹

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How can cities ensure successful planning to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) by 2030? This has been the central question posed by the UNESCO [International Institute for Educational Planning](#) (IIEP-UNESCO) research programme ‘[Local Challenges, Global Imperatives: Cities at the Forefront to Achieve Education 2030](#)’. Faced with a global learning crisis, cities, through their local elected governments and local and regional education offices, are playing a crucial role in ensuring access to universal quality education on their territory, acting as privileged partners of ministries of education. Implemented in collaboration with the [Centre for Sustainable, Healthy Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods](#) at the University of Glasgow and a number of research institutes around the world, the project explored in a diverse group of cities the priority given to education, the policy formulation process and actors involved, the challenges faced and innovative strategies to build upon. Two of the institutions implementing this work, the University of the Philippines and the University of Khulna, Bangladesh are part of the directorship of PASCAL Asia. In this Briefing Paper, we summarise their work in this project.

Introduction

This research aimed to explore and provide insights into how cities conduct educational planning and management. It sought to identify relevant challenges and learn innovative responses and strategic choices for cities concerning the [Education 2030](#) Agenda.

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Bangladesh Case

Introduction

The study findings in Bangladesh showcase the crucial challenges for the cities of Dhaka and Khulna in offering a quality education service provision within the reality of urbanisation, climate change, inclusion and a centralised governance system. It provides evidence about the relevant forces associated with the governance framework, actors' roles in planning and management, and the availability of resources, which will inform future directions for achieving the Education 2030 Agenda.

Bangladesh is a lower middle-income country (LMIC) with a government that has pledged its commitment to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the Education 2030 Agenda. National and local policies, strategies, and programmes reflect associated context-specific targets and deliverables. In recent years, the authorities have started to realise the need to decentralise responsibilities and ensure the participation of community-level actors for an improved learning environment in schools. While access to education in cities has improved, low quality and efficiency of education provision remain a formidable challenge that primary and secondary education face. The education sector and SDG4 have received low significance in the city's spatial plans.

The country's capital, Dhaka, is the world's fifth fastest-growing megacities, and Khulna is one of the top ten large cities in Bangladesh and the regional headquarters. These two cities provided unique insights supporting the IIEP-UNESCO research programme.

As of the 2011 national census, the average literacy rate is 72.68% in Khulna (BBS, 2013a) and 74.55% in Dhaka (BBS, 2013b), which is much lower in poorer neighbourhoods. Many people in both cities do not have access to higher education. In addition, the unequal spatial distribution of educational institutions has influenced access to education in both cities, with people in poorer neighbourhoods being excluded from quality schooling. Due to low public spending on education provision and weak quality control mechanisms, it is primarily the private sector that meets the demand for schooling.

Through identifying barriers, challenges, and opportunities in these cities, this research sought to support Dhaka and Khulna in working towards the 2030 Agenda, especially in education, and potentially inform educational planning. In addition, the rich data gathered has stimulated knowledge sharing and strategic thinking between cities in Bangladesh regarding their crucial role in educational planning and management. The study and its associated knowledge exchange activities with city authorities, research communities and academics have sought to contribute to developing education policies and regulatory frameworks at the national level and in strengthening learning cities in and beyond Bangladesh.

Methods

The research took a qualitative approach to the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of education strategies applicable to the study cities and the ecosystem of actors involved in educational planning and management at the city level. A desk review of documents was conducted to explore information related to

- national decentralisation framework and profile and responsibilities that these cities have in planning and management of education in their cities;
- characteristics of educational planning and management cycles in both cities;
- available resources (city-level educational planning tools, education strategy, and policy documents; education budget, organisational charts, city's education infrastructure; teaching

and non-teaching staff including recruitment, evaluation, and training) and their management by each city;

- city-level education-related projects; and
- city-level indicators based on [SDG4](#) targets.

Data on the number of public, private and NGO-run schools, number of students by level of education, the share of drop-out students, student-teacher ratios, school infrastructure, human and financial resources available for education planning and management, and local projects involved in education were gathered from secondary sources to understand the current situation.

In addition to the desk review, researchers visited two schools and conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with various key actors responsible for education delivery, planning, and management in each city. The interviewees included local officials in charge of education, heads of education departments, heads of budget departments, education inspectors, chief engineers from the education engineering department, a local welfare officer, civil society members, teachers, and school principals. Parents, pupils, and non-teaching staff from two schools participated in six focus group discussions in each city to provide a broader perspective of education in the city.

Based on these data, the study determined the scope of responsibilities and duties of the local district and *Thana* (sub-district) offices in planning and managing education in these cities. The study identifies the main strengths, assets and challenges these cities face in designing, implementing, and monitoring education strategies. It proposes recommendations for improving city education planning and implementation to support key education actors in achieving SDG4. Specifically, analysis of pre-primary, primary, and secondary education provision in these cities offers insights into the service gaps.

Outcomes

The study offers a number of key findings as follows:

Supply, Demand and Infrastructure

Due to rapid urbanisation, demand for education infrastructure in Dhaka and Khulna is rising. The number of private kindergartens and primary and secondary schools has almost doubled in the last ten years. Still, the supply remains inadequate against growing demand, especially in low-income communities. The private sector dominates the provision of pre-primary, primary, and secondary education in both cities, where government investment in poor communities remains inadequate. Schools are distributed disproportionately with little regard to neighbourhood population density, which has implications for access to education and the well-being of children and their families. A large proportion of schools do not follow any standards for school infrastructure; mostly, these are non-government schools. Schools in the most deprived neighbourhoods often lack permanent school buildings.

Enrolment and Teaching Staff

Despite interventions such as ‘establishment of 1,500 primary schools in un-schooled areas’, ‘school feeding programmes in poverty prone areas’, and ‘reaching out of school children’, a high proportion of children in Dhaka and Khulna are yet to reach even primary education, mainly due to poverty. The drop-out rate within primary level education has been reduced to below 3%, but the rate is higher in secondary education (7% in Khulna from 2016 to 2021). Government schemes for girls’ education increased female enrolment rates in primary and secondary education. The teacher-student ratio for government primary and secondary schools is much higher than national standards. There are few male teachers compared to female teachers.

Planning and Implementation: Role of Actors

Education as a sector seems to receive little emphasis in the spatial plans for Khulna and Dhaka. National education strategies, policies, and action plans inform programmes, projects, and initiatives, formulated centrally at the national level and primarily guide education provision in these cities. District Education Offices gather the necessary information, suggestions and required data from Thana Education Offices (several Thanas make a city) and supply these to the concerned directorates in ministries. In primary education under the [Fourth Educational Development Programme](#) (PEDP 4) need-based infrastructure development programme, School Level Implementation Plan (SLIP), construction of WASH block, and water supply are some priority initiatives guided and implemented directly at the school level according to local needs where local stakeholders play a major role.

Resources

Despite all the efforts in developing a well-structured monitoring and evaluation process for the institutions and teachers, there are inadequate numbers of officials in Thana Education Offices in both cities, and they struggle to monitor a higher number of schools than the officials in the Upazila² Education Offices. Teacher training is run within the limit of a fixed annual budget. The overall public revenue share of the budget for education is under 2.08% of the GDP, one of the lowest in the world and lower than other neighbouring countries.

Concluding Remarks

Each city is unique, with different needs, problems, and priorities. Policies and programmes will be more effective when these differences are valued by focusing on identifying each city's unique needs and allocating necessary resource to meet those needs. Reflections from this study might encourage recognising the role of cities in achieving Education 2030 Agenda in Bangladesh.

Philippines Case

Introduction

The project in the Philippines was implemented in the City of Manila (Lungsod ng Maynila) which is the capital of the Philippines. Established on 24 June 1571 as a municipality, it later became the first chartered city by virtue of the Philippine Commission Act 183 in 1901. It was the first city in the country to gain autonomy with the enactment of Philippine Republic Act (R.A.) 409, the Revised Charter of the City of Manila. Manila is located on the eastern shore of Manila Bay and rests on the western shores of the country's biggest island of Luzon. Manila is part of Metro Manila (MM) or the National Capital Region (NCR) which is composed of 16 cities including Manila, and one municipality in the region. Manila has been one of the 20 most populous cities in the world based on population density for several years and was ranked the twentieth most populous city in 2021.

In the Philippines, the provision and financing of education services are devolved to Local Government Units (LGUs) in coordination with the deconcentrated units of the national Department of Education (DepEd). The city of Manila, as an LGU, is responsible for the provision of early childhood education through the Manila Department of Social Welfare. In contrast, the Regional Offices and School Division Offices (SDO), which represent the DepEd at local level, manage primary and secondary levels of education at the regional and city level, respectively, and coordinate with the city administration to provide infrastructure, learning and teaching resources, non-teaching staff, and subsidy programmes to students. Examples of this include providing students with access to tech devices and supporting their enrolment in tertiary and technical vocational education.

² The second lowest tier of regional administration in Bangladesh

The SDO-Manila, together with the city Local School Board (LSB), are the main government authorities for basic education at the city level. The SDO manages Manila's schools and learning centres and sets standards at the local level to ensure quality in the delivery of the basic education service. The LSB, chaired by the city mayor and the head of the SDO, manages the Special Education Fund (SEF), which constitutes the city's supplementary financial support to cover maintenance and operations of the school system in terms of infrastructure, connectivity and health care (annual check-ups for teachers). The LSB is responsible for the preparation, allocation and disbursement of the SEF. It has a say on the use of the local budget for education, and the appointment of education officers. The City of Manila works in close collaboration with SDO's officials for the recruitment of teaching and non-teaching professionals. This includes delivering training sessions to school staff and education officers.

In the Philippines, children and the youth particularly from the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sectors are continually facing learning challenges that are worsened by environmental and disaster risks and climate and health crises. Children's functional literacy level "has remained at 'critical risk' in which "below 50% of surveyed children are able to read with comprehension by end of basic education" (World Vision, 2019). The number of out-of-school youth – tied to early marriage, family matters, lack of personal interest, high costs, or financial concerns, and risks for child labour and abuse – was recorded at 16.9% in January 2020. It further increased three months later at the onset of the health pandemic to 25.2% (USAID, 2021). DepEd (2020) reported 23M enrollees in both public and private schools at the start of the school year in 2020, which constituted a significant decrease from the 27.7M enrollees in 2019. In addition, the health and nutritional status of many Filipino children was reported by World Vision (2019) to be "below the required acceptable national standards" stemming from factors like "poor maternal health, inadequate nutritious food intake" which can further result in increased vulnerability to infectious diseases and disrupted schooling and learning.

Methods

Project implementation started with desk research and document review on the main characteristics of the city and its education functions and services; field research involved data collection through online/virtual mode for interviews and focus group discussions on line with COVID-19 restrictions. Data collection protocols, ethical considerations, and budget items considered the shift to online/virtual interviews and focus-group discussions, as well as relevant sections from the UNESCO-IIEP practical organisation and ethics guide. These were also reflected in the local ethics review requirements. While observation visits to schools were eventually undertaken, due to the mobility restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus transition from face-to-face classes to blended learning delivery, the criteria for selection of schools for visits were adapted in the identification of schools' representatives invited for interviews and focus group discussions.

For education sector data and supply of documents for analysis the project team engaged local education stakeholders and partners in the following institutions from relevant city-level offices of the City Government of Manila; Department of Education (DepEd) Division of City Schools Manila; Commission on Higher Education (CHED); Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). For ethics review, the team coordinated with the Social Science Ethics Review Board of the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC). A report on the observance of ethics clearance is to be later submitted to the Board.

Data used in this study were collected from a series of five in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions with selected education stakeholders in the city of Manila. These interviews were conducted through online meeting platforms and phone calls between December 2021 and February 2022. Interviewees and focus group participants were identified from one small secondary school located at the outskirts of the city and one large elementary school located in the city centre with a special interest in special, gifted, and talented students. Additional interviews were conducted with the Superintendent

of the School Division Office (SDS) and with three representatives from the private and non-government sector involved with education within the city of Manila.

Although the city officials were not otherwise represented or available for interview, the team corresponded with the relevant city government offices to obtain data, relevant documentation and validate of information collected during the interviews and focus-group discussions. The offices consulted were the City Personnel Office, the Planning and Development Office, the City Records Office, the City Social Welfare Office, and the City Accounting Office.

Coordination with city education department and schools' representatives was facilitated through a designated Focal Person from the City Focal Point, Division of City Schools Manila, under a Collaboration Terms of Reference (TOR). The TOR covered coordination not only in the conduct of research but also in dissemination, and other future areas of collaboration such as research capacity enhancement for teachers, identified by the two schools. These are seen as future sustainability opportunities for the research team and the city education department, whose head appreciated the research as she has been involved in educational planning advocacy herself.

Outcomes

The project has resulted in the production of a case study report which will later be translated in other knowledge products, to cover the following sections:

1. General characteristics of the City of Manila such as location, population, administration, district/neighbourhood characteristics, and socio-economic situation.
2. Key city education indicators including student population, school infrastructure, education personnel, and school management; and education challenges and disparities encountered; and profile and responsibilities in planning and managing education in the City of Manila.
3. Available human, material, and financial resources for education in the City of Manila.
4. Main characteristics, preparation process, and respective strengths and weaknesses of the design of the city's education strategy
5. Thematic priorities, collaboration mechanisms, and strengths and challenges in the implementation of the city education strategy
6. Monitoring and evaluation process, tools, and results of the city education strategy
7. Main strengths and challenges in designing and implementing the city education strategy and corresponding recommendations.

During field work briefing and at the close of focus groups /interviews, participants from schools were universally thankful for the opportunity to share their insights and experiences of their schools. Heads of the education department and of schools as well as private sector interviewees expressed interest in the dissemination of findings, while a civil society representative gave the commitment of "support to future engagement... [and to] connect with [your organisation], and hoped that more NGOs will be involved because it is important that the achievements in their respective communities will contribute in terms of policy development and inject reforms in our educational system".

Our analysis suggests that Manila's education strategy contains ambitious objectives which are focused on improving access, quality and the governance of education within the city. The main strengths of the city's education strategy include its alignment with national and local strategies, the support it receives from stakeholder collaboration and the strategy's data-driven approach:

- i) The city's education mandate is clearly aligned with the national strategy in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the city implements its strategy for education through partnerships with private and non-government sectors.

- ii) The education strategy is co-designed with different education stakeholders and forged through formal partnership with private and non-government sectors through mechanisms such as Memoranda of Agreement and of Understanding.
- iii) In addition, the data-driven design of the strategy is reflected in the consultation processes required by the city when formulating plans and policies related to basic education.

This research highlighted several challenges that the city continues to face when it comes to implementing its education strategy.

First, although elements of the strategy are collaborative, the strategies are not always communicated clearly to stakeholders.

Second, changes in city leadership and a lack of devolution have hindered the long-term impact of the education strategy. This is due to city officials serving for a three-year period, which has meant that the priorities initiated by a previous administration are not always sustained into a new term.

Finally, despite some significant successes, there are some key flaws in the city's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Most notably, a focus on monitoring school expenditure by the DILG, has meant that some programmes have not been evaluated to determine whether they achieved their objectives.

Concluding Remarks

To enhance local educational planning and management, there needs to be further examination of various education sector indicators. This includes: policy environment, budget infrastructure, programmes, outcomes, relevant facilities and structure, teaching and non-teaching personnel, coordination and participation mechanisms of parents, the private sector and civil society.

Initial assessment or changes, however, to education services, public policy, and quality of life of citizens can only be reported after an adequate period from project completion and research dissemination. Partnerships formed with city education department include other areas of collaboration of mutual interest to the organisation's continuing knowledge sharing, policy engagement and advocacy, especially with an incoming set of local and national officials in the country and in the city, will be done to ensure project outcomes and strengthening and building new constituencies and advocates for quality education planning and management.

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