



RESEARCH ARTICLE

APPRECIATING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TO BASIC EDUCATION IN
LAMBAYONG DISTRICTS

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines' Local Government Code of 1991 promulgated the Special Education Fund (SEF) for local government units (e.g. municipalities, cities, and provinces) to help public schools in their areas. This study explored and linked the local support, through SEF, and basic education performance in Lambayong, Sultan Kudarat, for the period, 2009 to 2013. As standard of the Department of Education, performance was measured through the indices of quality, access and efficiency. Results revealed that the establishment of extension classes received the largest support, while, sports activities got the least. Funding supports were relatively increasing annually except in 2011 when calamity hit significant parts of the locality. Quality-wise, the uptrend in NAT MPS emerged very promising, but, the steady decline in pupil-textbook ratio was rather alarming. With the exception of completion rate, access to school showed desirable proportions in graduation, participation, and gross enrolment. Cohort survival was low indicative of schools' inefficiency, while drop-out rate was regarded acceptable as it is relatively lower than the national average. Indeed, the funding support from the local government was statistically related to the basic education performance in the districts.

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INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Education for All (EFA) 2015 Report aptly states: "Education occupies a central place in Philippine political, economic social and cultural life. It has always been strongly viewed as a pillar of national development and a primary avenue for social and economic mobility." Accordingly, Section 5(5) of Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution explicitly provides that the State shall give "the highest budgetary priority to education." In consonance with this mandate, the Department of Education (DepEd) always gets the lion's share of the annual State budget. Indeed, the 2015 budget of PhpP367.1 billion for DepEd is 18.6% higher than the PhpP309.5 billion in 2014 (CPBRD, 2014). The growing trend had been very consistent in recent years. Quismondo (2012) wrote that apart from the sizeable budget coming from the National Government, DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro admits that still it cannot fully respond to the wide-ranging needs of the basic education sector; hence, he considered other sources of funds including the LGU and private sectors. By law, the local governments are enjoying fiscal autonomy thus required to assist in funding public education.

Under RA 5447, the law that created a Special Education Fund (SEF) and School Boards, these municipalities, cities and provinces have corresponding shares from the collections taken from the additional 1% real property tax. School boards are mandated to decide the allocation of the SEF for the operation and maintenance of public schools within the province, city or municipality using the criteria set by the Bureau of Public Schools or by the Bureau of Vocational Education, and approved by the Secretary of Education. In 1991, the Local Government Code was enacted, there by partly amending RA 5447. The new law provides that proceeds from said additional levy will solely accrue to the SEF that will be automatically released to the Local School Boards (LSB). In the case of provinces, the proceeds are divided equally between the provincial and municipal school boards. The LSB is mandated to determine the allocation of the school board budget that will give priority to: (1) construction of school buildings and facilities; (2) repair and maintenance of school building; (3) establishment and maintenance of extension classes; and (4) sports activities. Practically, the status of the SEF collection and utilization varies from one local government unit (LGU) to another subject possibly to transparency and accountability of the LSB as administrator of the fund. Actual expenditure is a critical mechanism to be evaluated a sit purportedly measures the local support to public schools. In Yasay's (2009) study, the utilization of the funds

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did not influence the elementary schools in the locality; yet, it apparently helped realizing the goals of education. Even so, such provoking finding will be checked in this investigation. The results of the study are expected to serve as testament to school heads, District Supervisors, LSB members, and the concerned local leaders regarding the responsible collection, allocation and utilization of SEF to significantly augment the national budget pertaining to basic education, and to boost its impact on basic education. In this light, the present study was conceived and carried out.

Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on the principle that education is a State function. Educating the citizens is the duty of any government (Brubacher, 1978). Public schools are to be established, while the students' needs are to be provided and funded. In Figure 1, the working paradigm is clearly illustrated. It shows the relationships of the independent variable, dependent variable and the expected outcomes. The local support via SEF expenditures on the four (4) priorities serve as the independent variables, while basic education performance expressed in DepEd indices of quality, access, and efficiency, serves as the dependent variable. It is presumed that local support is associated to basic education performance, such that, an improved support through adequate funding may stimulate higher quality, access, and efficiency of schools. Evaluating these variables and exploring their links will ultimately trigger responsible SEF budgeting, and enhanced school effectiveness.

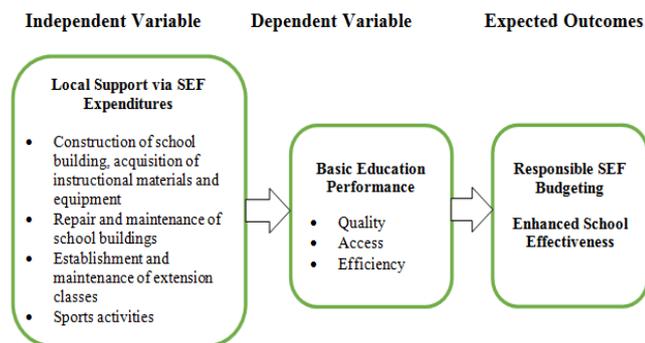


Figure 1. Research paradigm showing the relationships of variables (e.g. local support, basic education performance, and expected outcomes)

Statement of the Problem

Primarily, the study explored the influence of local support through Special Education Fund (SEF) to basic education in Lambayong, Sultan Kudarat.

In particular, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent is the local support to elementary schools in terms of SEF expenditures from 2009 to 2013 as regard these priorities:
 - 1.1. construction of school building/facilities and acquisition of instructional materials and equipment;
 - 1.2. repair and maintenance of school buildings and facilities;
 - 1.3. establishment and maintenance of extension classes; and
 - 1.4. sports activities?

2. What are the basic education performance using DepEd indices of quality, access, and efficiency?
3. Do local support related to basic education performance?
4. What are the issues and problems regarding SEF expenditures?

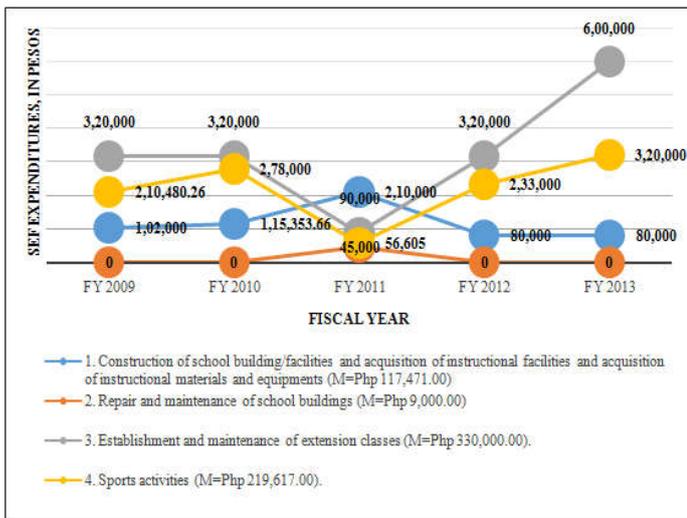
METHODS

This investigation utilized a descriptive-case study because it merely described the magnitude of local support through SEF expenditures and basic education performance, as well as their relationships. Besides, it was only concentrated in one municipality. The data used in the analyses were taken from the records, documents and reports available in the Municipal Budget Officer and the Lambayong I, II and III School Districts. In securing information for the problems and issues encountered relative to SEF utilization, and to validate the secondary data, interviews with teachers, school heads, District Supervisors, and Local School Board members were carried out. Statistical tools like mean, Pearson r, percentage, and ranking were used to analyze in response to each specific problem. Line graphs were also utilized to present data and demonstrate effectively the trends in SEF expenditures as well as the performance.

RESULTS

Local Support to Basic Education

Basically, the local support to public elementary schools is quantified based on the annual SEF expenditures. As shown in Figure 2, the SEF expenditures demonstrated two (2) evident patterns observable in the following pairs: 1) between the establishment and maintenance of extension classes, and sports activities; and 2) between the construction of school building/facilities and acquisition of instructional materials and equipment, and repair and maintenance of school buildings. For the first set, it is noted that both have similar trends in expenditure from 2009 to 2010, and have simultaneously dropped in 2011. Remarkably, the LGU expenses for said priorities revealed a stable growth from 2013 to 2014, i.e., from Php 90000.00 and Php 56605.00 to Php 600000.00 and Php 320000.00, respectively. Comparably, the construction of school building or facilities, and acquisition of instructional materials and equipment, and the repair and maintenance of school buildings have conformed to the same spending manner. Unlike the first two (2), both items experienced outlay upsurges in 2011. Despite similar tendencies, it is significant to note that repair and maintenance of school buildings had documented a lone expenditure in 2011-- the least expense among the priorities. In contrast, Yasay's (2009) study among municipalities in Misamis Oriental, showed that majority of the LSBs in the province received the highest allocations on this priority. Overall, the expenditures of the LGU in 2009-2013 were Php 3380439.00; this can be translated to an annual average of Php 676087.78. Obviously, the expenditure is not enormous as compared to other LGUs. This reality is more likely, owing to a limited SEF as Lambayong municipality is 2nd Class and rural (DILG, 2012). On the average, the establishment and maintenance of extension class has the biggest expenditures among the mandated priorities for the last



Source: Municipal Budget Office, 2014

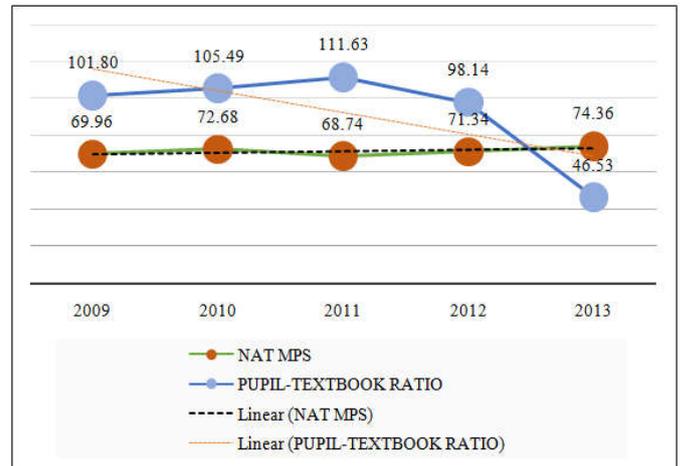
Figure 2. SEF Expenditures of Lambayong Municipality, FY 2009-2013

five years (M=Php 330000.00). The outlay covers the paying of the salaries of LSB teachers, the procurement of instructional materials, and to support other operating expenses of schools. According to the LSB Chairperson, no allocation for repair and maintenance of school buildings in 4 years was fixed because focus was shifted to other priorities. Some members of the Board justified that, ordinarily, maintenance of school buildings were carried out through asking solicitations and donations from stakeholders primarily during Brigada Eskwela. School administrators also clarified that part of the school’s MOOE was committed for the purpose. Sports activities was ranked second as it achieved an average annual spending of Php 219 617.00. Manasan’s study, as cited by Llanto (2010), confirmed this finding as she still noted large allocation on sports activities from the Special Education Fund even if RA 9155 clearly provided for and already stripped off DepEd with this responsibility.

Basic Education Performance

Quality of Basic Education

In DepEd standards, quality is measured according to the National Achievement Test (NAT) mean percentage scores (MPS) and the pupil-textbook ratio. Figure 3 illustrates the quality indices of elementary schools in the 3 School Districts of Lambayong municipality. Linear trends are also indicated to distinctly demonstrate estimates or likelihoods. As shown, the NAT MPS increased thrice within the last five (5) years, i.e. in 2010, 2012, and 2013. It has a lowest record of achievement (MPS=68.74) in 2011, while highest (MPS=74.36) in 2013. On the average, the NAT MPS of the elementary schools in Lambayong, Sultan Kudarat is 71.42; this is understood as “moving towards mastery.” At this level, the pupils have already developed the fundamental knowledge and skills, and core understandings with little guidance from the teacher, and or with some assistance from peers. They, too, can transfer these understandings through authentic performance tasks.



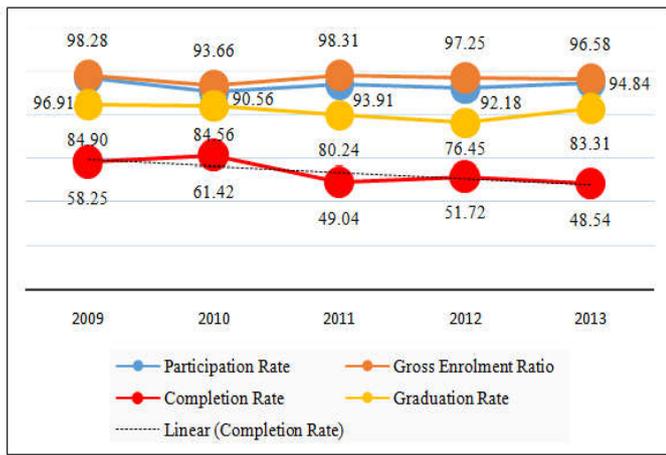
Source: District Offices, 2014

Figure 3. Quality of Elementary Schools in Lambayong Municipality, SY 2009-2013

Despite the modest achievement, the local NAT MPS is categorically higher than the national MPS for the same period which is merely 65.11 (*DepEd Data Factsheets*, 2015). Based on the linear trend (black dotted line), it is evident that the achievement level will gradually rise in the next few years. On pupil-textbook ratio, the ideal condition should be 100 or 1:1. As shown, the line graph indicates the maximum level (111.66) in 2011, while minimum (46.53) in 2013. On the average, the ratio of pupil against textbook is 92.72. A careful evaluation of the linear trend (red dotted line) raises alarm as it exhibits a negative slope indicating the ratio’s worsening condition. In one Commission on Audit (COA) report, it indicated that the late delivery of textbooks causes DepED’s failure to achieve its desired target of 1:1 (Geronimo, 2015). The deteriorating status should therefore awaken both government and education officials and create proactive and practical measures to promptly arrest the imminent challenge.

Access in Basic Education

Normally, DepEd used gross enrolment (GER), participation, graduation, completion rates, among others, as measures for access in basic education. Disparities and trends of these statistical measures in 5-year period are shown in Figure 4. It is evident from the chart that gross enrolment rate outweighs the other indicators. UNESCO (2015) defined it as “the total enrolment in elementary level of education as a percentage of the population, which, according to national regulations, should be enrolled at this level.” In terms of GER, Lambayong School Districts underwent a single increase in 2011 and the highest ever in 5-year accounts. In contrast, the lowest record is observed in 2010 with only 93.66. On the average, the GER for the period under study is 96.22. This figure is relatively lower than the national average from SY 2008-2009 to 2012-2013, that is, 111.52 (UNESCO, 2015). As shown, the trend of participation rates among elementary schools indicates a “saw-tooth” characteristic as it keeps on fluctuating at regular amplitude every year. It actually implies unpredictability of pupils’ participation in school. On average, however, the participation rate is 93.68 percent.



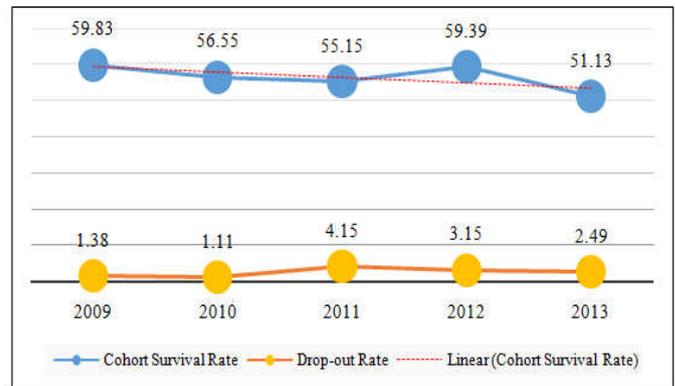
Source: School District Offices, 2014

Figure 4. Access in Elementary Schools in Lambayong Municipality, SY 2009-2013

Fortunately, this local figure is very close to the national average on the same period which is registered at 93.41. This suggests that around 6 percent of the Filipino children in the school-age range are still out-of-school. Moreover, the difference between GER and participate rates, i.e., 2.54 percent shows the proportion of children in elementary schools who are over-aged. For graduation rate, the graph and the data show that it steadily declines from 2010 to 2012, but then it starts to improve in 2013. Nevertheless, the data during the fifth year (83.31) is still relatively lower than its initial level (84.90) in 2009. In 5-year period, the average graduation rate is 81.89. In terms of completion rate, it is apparently found at the bottom compared to other indicators of access. Its average from 2009 to 2013 is merely 53.79 far below the national average of 72.44 on the same period. The 54 percent average suggests that only 54 out of 100 pupils who started Grade 1 have finished elementary on time. It also denotes that nearly one-half (46 percent) of them failed to graduate in Grade 6 as expected. Unlike other indicators, the completion rate is steadily subsiding, hence, not stable and critical. This eventually resulted to higher illiteracy rate among elementary school-aged children.

Efficiency of Basic Education

Figure 5 shows how efficient schools are when described using cohort survival and drop-out rates as measures. Cohort survival rate explains the percentage of a cohort of pupils who are able to reach Grade VI. In contrast, drop-out rate (or school leavers rate) is the proportion of pupils who leave school during the year as well as those who complete the grade but fail to enroll in the next grade level the following school year, to the total number of pupils enrolled during the previous school year (Llego, 2015). As illustrated, it is apparent that cohort survival rates keep on declining since 2009 until 2013; except in 2012, wherein, it almost recovers its previous level three (3) years ago. The average rate for cohort survival is only 56.41, that is, extremely low from the national average of 74.55 percent. It means that out of 100 pupils who entered Grade I, merely 56 of them have completed elementary in 6 years-time or so.



Source: School District Offices, 2014

Figure 5. Efficiency of Elementary Schools in Lambayong Municipality, SY 2009-2013

In terms of drop-out rate, the trend denotes apparent probability as the pattern demonstrates a regular fluctuation every year. The highest occurrence of drop-out is noted in 2011 reaching extremely high as 4.15. Despite this mealy achievement, the typical drop-out rate remained at 2.46 or nearly 3. By chance, this is relatively better than the national average computed on the same period, that is, 6.24 percent.

Linking Local Support and Basic Education Performance

Table 1. Correlations of Local Support through SEF and Basic Education Performance

Basic Education Indices	r	R ²
Quality		
•NAT MPS	0.98*	0.9604
•Pupil-Textbook Ratio	1.00*	1.0000
Access		
•Completion Rate	1.00*	1.0000
•Graduation Rate	0.99*	0.9801
•Gross Enrolment Ratio	0.96*	0.9216
•Participation Rate	0.98*	0.9604
Efficiency		
•Cohort Survival Rate	0.99*	0.9801
•Drop-Out Rate	0.96*	0.9216

Note: Critical value of $r_{@.05} = .878$

Table 1, each index of basic education performance is statistically correlated with the total SEF expenditures annually. Correlation coefficients showed that mostly of the relationships are very strong. In the case of pupil-textbook ratio and completion rate, both measures have perfect correlations as indicated by the values of r and R². This means that 100% of the variance in pupil-textbook ratio or completion rate is explained by the SEF expenditures. Generally, the results signify that the influence of local support to basic education performance is overwhelming and straightforward. Empirically, it is confirmed that higher performance of schools on quality, access and efficiency is likely to occur when substantial local support through SEF are utilized for basic education services. Besides, it can be interpreted that whenever schools desire to achieve superior NAT MPS, more textbooks, desirable number of completers, graduates, and enrollees, or participation among school-aged children, in that case, there should be adequate appropriations

from the Local Government. In a nutshell, a guaranteed way to improve basic education performance is through increasing the support from local funds. This argument can be used by school heads and supervisors to justify request to LSB for allotment or even supplementary assistance, not just from SEF, but other potential sources as well, that can be tapped at LGU's discretion. The foregoing result, however, is not inherently meaningful to school drop-out rate. It is obvious that the number of school leavers cannot be prevented solely by increasing the school budget. Therefore, the idea that pouring more money in schools to presumably solve the perennial drop-out problem is not true in the present case. This insight connotes that other strategies or options may be undertaken and tested to find out indeed the eventual solution vis-à-vis pupils' dropping out of schools; it is only then that this peculiar challenge can be squarely resolved.

Issues and Problems on the Utilization of SEF

Table 2. Common Issues and Problems Meet in SEF Expenditures

Problems	Rank
Late processing of Project Proposals	1
Delayed releasing of budget	2
Insufficient procurement of sports facilities	4
Transparency of utilization of fund	3
Improper use of fund	5

As shown, the late processing of project proposal tops the list of the problems and issues encountered in utilizing SEF in Lambayong municipality. In interviews with the three District Supervisors, they admitted that the cause of last-minute handling of their proposals usually hampers the prompt implementation of programs to support the needs of and services for basic education. It seems that concerned offices in the LGU give more priorities to other transactions. As expected, the delayed releasing of allotments was noted as the second most felt problem in the utilization of SEF. According to the experience of the supervisors, it is caused by the delay of necessary documents submitted in the accounting office and the unsympathetic employees who checked the completeness of the vouchers. Evidently, the transparency in the utilization of funds comes third in the rank. In most cases, this is the perception of the school heads, teachers and some parents considering that no consultations are being done from LSB's end. The Board, however, justified that utilization of SEF funds does not deviate from the guidelines of the Local Government Code; it is always compliant with the law. Respondents also cited the insufficient procurement of sports facilities as another issue. This observation is made due to the absence of sports facilities or inadequacy of equipment in most schools. Yet, the LGU expenditures on sports activities showed that it ranks second after establishment and maintenance and extension of classes. Implicitly, the current allocation is not enough to satisfy all needs relative to sports since these activities require bigger expenses.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In compliance with the law, the local government of Lambayong effectively extended support to basic education. Despite of that, as a 2nd class municipality, it cannot suffice all

the needs of public elementary schools within its jurisdiction; thus, for the period 2009 to 2013, higher priority of support was accorded to the establishment and maintenance of extension classes while the lowest was to repair and maintenance of school buildings. Performance in access, quality and efficiency vary annually and across indicators. With respect to *quality*, the upward trend of NAT mean percentage score is encouraging which signifies a progressive basic education in the municipality. However, the dropping curve of the pupil-textbook ratio should stimulate teachers, school administrators, LSB officers and DepEd officials to reexamine the textbook program. Understandably, the Department cannot provide all the textbook needs of the pupils in the country, nevertheless there should be functional antidote in the local level. As to *access*, schools are quite good in completion, participation, and gross enrolment rates. In fact, these indices were maintained at more than 80 percent in 5 years although each one of them demonstrated a dwindling mode. Graduation rate is regrettably low. Both cohort survival and drop-out rates are also low. They were largely decreasing indicative that schools in town are not efficient.

The SEF expenditures are directly related to each performance indicator. Most likely, the enduring effort of the local government unit to increase its support through annual appropriations combined with sound planning and transparent utilization would produce highly performing schools. The late processing of documents related to SEF utilization resulting to delay of budget release are parts of effective educational planning. Thus, in the planning stage, LSB must properly involve all stakeholders so that sectoral concerns will be considered, allocation for each priority can be viewed in many perspectives, and that collective and rational decision can be suitably made.

With the foregoing findings and conclusions of the study, it is then recommended that:

1. On local support to basic education via SEF, the Local School Board should exercise full accountability and transparency, thus, ensure that proper consultation with stakeholders is carried out particularly in planning. Transparency issue and misallocation per priority can be avoided when this scheme is truly practiced.
2. The DepEd representative to the LSB should establish close coordination with the LGU counterpart so that equal or proper treatment of documents will be ensured during transactions with concerned offices.
3. The unfavorable graduation rate must be improved by all means. Therefore, it is endorsed that elementary teachers may devise strategies at classroom level to motivate pupils to love school and learning, to value education, and to strive to graduate despite many challenges they are facing when studying.
4. To enhance efficiency, school officials are encouraged to continue exerting more efforts such as strengthening the Drop-Out Reduction Program (DORP) or designing other effective intervention mechanisms to improve cohort survival rate and reduce drop-out rate among elementary pupils. As found out, no amount of local support via SEF can stop the proportion of pupils leaving the schools.

5. Considering the fact that local support on mandated priorities are related to basic education performance, hence it is proposed that efficient collection of real property taxes will be advocated by the LGU to possibly increase the fund. Likewise, the local government in its own initiative could look for other sources of fund to augment the multifarious needs of elementary schools, which in reality, cannot be fully provided by DepEd.
6. Further studies may be carried out on the following: some LGU advocacies toward the efficient collection of Special Education Fund; effectiveness of common drop-out reduction programs of DepEd; potential sources of LGU fund for textbook assistance to public schools; and determinants of low cohort survival and graduation rates.

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