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Analysis of the Factors Affecting Absenteeism and Tardiness among Elementary Learners in Coastal Communities

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Abstract

Absenteeism and tardiness greatly affect the student's academic performance. These are among the major requirements in evaluating the scholastic achievement of learners, hence every educational institution worldwide is really concerned with monitoring the said matters. Various studies were made to find out the reasons for acquiring a great number of nonappearances and lateness in classes. However, reasons for absenteeism and tardiness by pupils who live in coastal areas are far more complicated in nature. This study focused on exploring the reasons for chronic absenteeism and tardiness of the pupils in a public elementary school in one of the coastal towns in the Philippines. The said public elementary school is located in the barrio proper, however, some of the pupils were residing in the different islets or sitios within the coastal areas of the town. There are about 150 pupils coming from coastal sitios and they are from different grade levels. Unfortunately, only a few could attend classes regularly, thus being absent or late seem to be a normal case. This research is a "descriptive development Study" that explains situations and other phenomena over the periods covering the study. It uses Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews, questionnaires, and documents for data gathering with probability stratified sampling procedure. Participants were pupils ($n=130$), parents ($n=130$), locals, and coastal leaders ($n=10$), with the principal and teachers ($n=8$) of the school involved. The results of the needs analyses yielded key problems encountered by the residents which were related to transportation, education, health, lighting system, and emergency case. During interviews, the participants perceived pupils' absenteeism as a leading education-related problem that could be attributed to their families' inability to sustain transportation expenses and due to various environmental, socio-economic, and personal factors.

Keywords: absenteeism, truancy, tardiness, coastal communities

Introduction

Attending classes regularly and coming on time are two important and ideal activities for every student. Both punctuality and regular attendance are critical indicators in evaluating student performance. These are also important concerns in every school's plan of operation and good governance. Punctuality and regular attendance are utilized in improving the product of learning by every individual learner and the whole educational institution also (Torres,2018).

Meanwhile, Absenteeism and tardiness are the opposite terms used for punctuality and regular attendance and as well as truancy. In a definition given by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), absenteeism implies the failure of a student to attend classes in school due to any reason. On the other hand, truancy means unexcused absenteeism, i.e. absenteeism without a valid reason such as illness (UNICEF, 2016).

Tardiness is another important concern in the student's performance. As stated in a study on tardiness (Prezi, 2018), Nakpodia and Dafinghor (2011), defined tardiness as the "situation where an individual arrives after the proper, scheduled or usual time (Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 5th ed. 1995). Also, Breeze et al, (2010) describe lateness as synonymous with "tardiness" and indicate being slow to act or slow to respond, thus not meeting proper or usual timing. Another definition was given by Weade (2004) and defined tardiness as "being late for any measurable length of time past the stated or scheduled start time for work or school".

Absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness are indeed critical concerns for every educational institution worldwide. A UN report stated factors affecting students' class performance, such as absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness are among the basic ones. However, absenteeism is in turn due to various causes. Moreover, prior to establishing a definition of dropout and out-of-school- children (OOSC), the concept of truancy needs to be defined as distinct from absenteeism.

Proper analysis of absenteeism is important to address appropriately the issue of poor class performance among pupils acquiring poor attendance. Many countries all over the world are having problems with absenteeism but absenteeism itself is rooted in varying conditions. The Philippines for example, being a coastal country is experiencing issues with pupils' absenteeism affecting their class performance. Student learning is a basic concern in most countries like the Philippines which signifies education to alleviate poverty. For them, good class performance is vital, thus problems with absenteeism are fundamental.

To correlate with this, understanding the importance of education in the development of a child has always been given emphasis as all the elements affecting it like attendance. Various studies have shown that a student's attendance acquired in his basic education plays a crucial role to achieve success in the future. However, desirable class attendance is often not achieved because of absenteeism and tardiness. Failure to obtain consistency in attendance at the early stage of education leads to dire consequences. As argued by Lehr, Sinclair, and Christenson (2009), "students who are at risk of dropping out of school can be identified retrospectively as early as a third grade on the basis of attendance patterns, academic performance, and behavior" (p. 279).

Moreover, absenteeism and school tardiness offer undesirable impressions on the learning process. Arriving late and being absent from class habitually gives disadvantages to students and teachers. By becoming late or being absent from class, the students already miss numerous amounts of information and knowledge that they are supposed to acquire. Kamla-Raj quoted in his article in 2011, absenteeism affects the abilities of students which can be in decreasing grades, and as a result of this, the students may fail and must repeat the same year level (Naila Khalid, 2017). Likewise, one study showed that being absent for three days in a month strongly correlates with poor performance (Philippine Basic Education Blog, 2013). Thus, looking at these, we can further assume possibilities when the pupils attend classes at least two to three days a week just like what is happening to the pupils in the coastal sites in this town in the Philippines.

Literature Review

UNICEF on Absenteeism and Tardiness: An estimated 61 million children of primary-school age, 60 million young adolescents of lower-secondary school age, and 142 million of upper-secondary age are out of school, based on the latest figures as of 2016. The children who are not enrolled in school are often those from the most socially marginalized communities, including children with disabilities, children from ethnic-minority communities, children excluded because of gender barriers, and children living in extreme poverty. All these children have the right to education and are currently being deprived of that right (UNICEF 2016). However, students who are not attending school or are not able to go to classes are categorized. It distinguishes between children who are out of school and children who are at risk of dropping out. The term 'exclusion' has a slightly different meaning depending on the population concerned: children who are out of school are excluded from education, while children who are at risk of dropping out may be excluded within education because they may face discriminatory practices or attitudes within the school (UNICEF 2016). Those who fall under the dimension of children who are at risk of dropping out are caused by unwanted practices such as chronic absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness. Studies have revealed that several factors contribute to chronic absenteeism. These factors can be personal as in psychological/emotional. For

example, it can be because of family situations, physiological such as health issues, socio/economic, and other issues like environmental and natural phenomena. At the same time, we know that many students experience tremendous adversity in their lives—including poverty, health challenges, community violence, and difficult family circumstances—that make it difficult for them to take advantage of the opportunity to learn at school. Students who are chronically absent, meaning they miss at least 15 days of school in a year—are at serious risk of falling behind in school. Yet, for too long, this crisis in our nation's public elementary and secondary schools has not been fully understood. Over 7 million students missed 15 or more days of school in 2015-16. That's 16 percent of the student population or about 1 in every 6 students missed three weeks or more of school in 2015-2016. That translates to more than 100 million school days lost (USA ED-CRDC, 2016).

Absenteeism in Philippine Education: In the Philippines, based on the 2008 data from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), out of 100 grade one pupils, only 66 finished grade six. Only 58 of the 66 go on to enroll in first-year high school and only 43 finish high school. Of the 43, only 23 enroll in college, and 14 of the 23 finish college (Muzones and De Jesus, 2009). The Philippines also has 1.46 million huge out-of-school population, and the number has hardly improved between 2000 and 2011. "The Philippines is still in the top ten countries with the highest out-of-school population. By contrast, Indonesia managed to reduce its out-of-school population by 84 percent between 2000 and 2011," UNESCO said (Diola, 2014). Various studies relayed that drop-outs started from acquiring habitual absenteeism and tardiness. For example, about 20% of the Grade X - Class in a National High School in Kidapawan City are always late in attending the flag ceremony as well as in attending their subsequent classes caused of different reasons. This problem had accumulated from a tolerable to a habitual state and it has a significant impact on their performance at school (Farren 2016). Another study has shown frequent daily absences of Grade V students in an elementary school in Zapote, Las Pinas of the National Capital Region due to several factors (Murcia, 2015). Similar studies were made in various educational institutions all over the country and other parallel research is expected to be done to address the issue of absenteeism.

Chronic Absenteeism in Philippine Coastal Communities: Chronic absenteeism is widespread. It is very significant to note that absenteeism is not the cause of failure but instead it is the effect or consequence of some primary elements that resulted in the absenteeism of the pupils. Research suggests the reasons for chronic absenteeism are as varied as the challenges our students and families face including poor health, limited transportation, and a lack of safety which can be particularly acute in disadvantaged communities and areas of poverty (USA ED-CRDC, 2016). The quality of learning and the number of learners also depend on geography (philstar.com 2014). Also, other communities, family-related factors, and even environmental issues affect students' absenteeism. These issues are experienced by students in the coastal communities in the Philippines. The big challenge is that coastal areas are isolated, with little or no transport links, long commutes, and few employment opportunities for partners and families. There was little belief in the value of education in families affected by unemployment (theguardian.com 2015). Various studies have shown that pupils living in very remote areas such as in coastal communities, especially those wherein the only means of transportation are by a Banca (boat) are acquiring numerous absences due to their location aside from other factors. An example is a coastal village in Bulacan where tardiness and absenteeism are normal for elementary school pupils who must wade through floods or take a Banca ride to and from school (Estrope, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2018). These resulted in failing classes or school drop-out.

Institutions Crossing the Bridge: At a micro level, families can experience the negative consequences of the habitual absences incurred by their children. Such consequences become more serious specifically for disadvantaged families since their failure to ensure that their children would advance in their studies indicates a continuous cycle of poverty and unemployment (Murcia, 2015). At a macro level, society also fails if it could not provide opportunities for school-age children to drop out from or not attend school. It is for this reason that the three important institutions in the community must find a way of eradicating or even at least lessening the practice of absenteeism among students, especially in primary education. These are the family, the school, and the community itself headed by the government as the facilitating body of the process. Such a process of eradicating chronic absenteeism can start by finding the possible factors causing absenteeism and, in the end, is to point out and identify the prime cause of the said problem. Drawing policies on school intervention regarding absenteeism requires guiding information on where to draw the line (Philippine Basic Education Blog, 2013). "Education is a shared responsibility between us all – governments, schools, teachers, parents, and private sectors. Accountability for these

responsibilities defines the way teachers teach, students learn, and governments act. It must be designed with care and with the principles of equity, inclusion, and quality in mind” (Irina Bokova UNESCO, 2016).

Research Problem

The problem of the study is finding out and analyzing the reasons or factors that cause school absenteeism and tardiness among pupils in coastal communities.

Significance of the Study

Maintaining the regular class attendance of students in basic or primary education is a universal requirement. Likewise, understanding the context and causes of absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness, especially those acquired by learners or pupils living in the coastal areas is truly essential. Thus, this study will possibly serve as a way of addressing the issue of absenteeism in coastal communities like the islet- sitios of a coastal town in Bulacan, one of the major provinces in the Philippines.

Purpose of the Study

This research is intended primarily to find out and analyze the reasons or factors that cause school absenteeism and tardiness among pupils in coastal communities, to generate viable approaches that may address the problem of absenteeism and tardiness. This study may serve also as a basis for intervention for other similar situations. Likewise, the researcher envisioned to make a study on a learning module specially designed for pupils in the coastal communities who are experiencing cases discussed in this study and an activity that may help parents to be learned also so that they can assist their children to make up for their losses because of absenteeism.

Methods

Research Design and Procedure: This research is a “descriptive development Study” in design. The design is used to describe and explain the nature of situations and other phenomena that occur during the periods covering the study. It is also longitudinal in nature and classified as a trend study because it may involve years of continuous studies looking at the subject to acquire needed factual information.

There are two parts to the procedure: (1) establishing the problem and; (2) analyzing the problem. Furthermore, facilitating the study is done using the following strategies. (1) Focus group discussion and in-depth-interview (FGD/IDI) with the pupils of a public elementary school (PES), residents and/or parents of pupils in the coastal *sitios* of C and B and other concerned/authorized people of the coastal Barangay TB; (2) in-depth interview with the district supervisor, principal and FGD with teachers and other concerned people in the education sector; (3) communication with officials or person-in-charge of the concerned agency of the Municipality of the Coastal town BB through phones or face-to-face engagement; (4) gathering of important records or documents of Grades 1 to 6 pupils such as list of officially enrolled pupils, school attendance, record of school performance/participation and others; (5) integration of all collected data including result of the previous study to acquire a stronger basis for creating a concept of solution to the problem; (6) analysis and design for potential intervention using the collected data and result of previous studies as basis; (7) introduction and endorsement of a specific and most potential form of intervention for the problem.

Sampling Procedure and Participants: The study uses a probability-stratified sampling procedure where representatives from different groups are drawn to gather desired information from each level. The study areas included the involved PES and the two major *sitios* of Barangay TB. These *sitios* were Sitio C and Sitio B. Ocular and informal interviews were also conducted at other *sitios* like Sitio P, D, and K, but the study was focused on sitio C and B. This is because most of the pupils enrolled in PES were residents of the said *sitios*. The respondents included Grades 1 to 6 pupils of involved PES ($M=130$) who are residents of the coastal communities ($M=130$), residents and/or parents of the pupils, barangay officials, and sitio leaders($M=10$), officials of the DepEd District office of the coastal town of BB like the district supervisor and the school’s principal and teachers ($M=8$).

Instrument used: Questionnaires and semi-structured survey forms were disseminated to the respondents/informants. The questionnaire consists of questions that are associated with the study. Data gathered from the questionnaires will serve as a basic source for acquiring significant information for the study.

Data Collection: This descriptive developmental study utilized focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interview (IDI), survey interview, and analysis of relevant documents (e.g., student records on attendance and class performance). A needs assessment conducted during a parallel study on the coastal *sitios* of Taliptip was also considered as a basis and additional data for this study. FGDs and interviews were made during visits to the coastal *sitios* of C and B. Interviews served as the primary means of data collection as it provides a lens on the participants’ views and beliefs and allowed for prompting and follow-up elaboration (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Each group is composed of 8 to 10 residents who are mostly parents of pupils studying in said school. For the survey interview, semi-structured survey forms were administered to residents of the coastal areas to allow flexibility and the chance of extending the elaboration of information given by the informants. The dissemination of the survey forms was made possible with the help of volunteer students at a state university in Bulacan. Meanwhile, participants in the in-depth- interviews were also volunteers except for some who were authorized to undergo interviews since they were community leaders holding a specific area or field connected to the research topic. Most of the interviews and FGDs lasted for 30 to 60 minutes. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Consent forms were obtained from the participants who voluntarily participated in the study.

Data Processing and Treatment: Responses of the participants were recorded by taking notes extensively by the interviewer, although the audio recording was also used in some instances. After the interviews with the target groups of participants, the notes were then reviewed and summarized together in the form of tables and descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis Framework

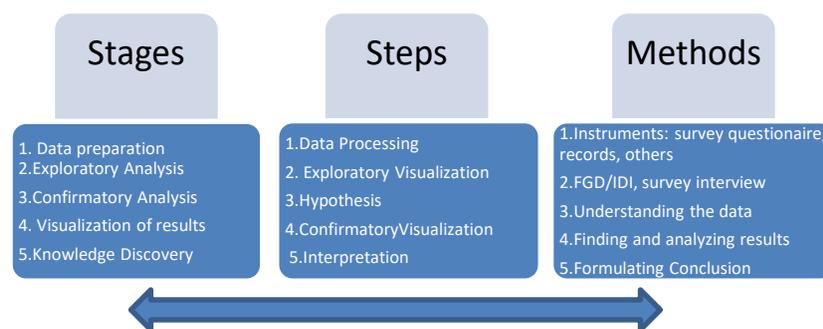


Fig.1: Data analysis framework. The figure shows the data analysis framework suggested in the study. The arrow indicates the interconnectedness of the three boxes of actions. The five stages are presented to the left and the steps for each stage are indicated by boxes. The specific methodology applied in the present study is shown to the right.

Results and Discussion

Absenteeism and Tardiness among Pupils in the Coastal Communities

Absenteeism is one of the major issues in any educational institution, especially in remote areas like coastal communities in a coastal town. In a coastal village here, tardiness and absenteeism are normal for elementary school pupils who have to wade through floods or take a Banca ride to and from school. “Often, only 50 percent of pupils come to school on Thursday and Friday,” the school principal, said (Estrope, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2018). Below is the Attendance Record of the involved public elementary school (PES) in coastal town BB that is experiencing problems with absenteeism (See Tables 1 & 2). Records show that for three consecutive school years (S.Y. 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017), the problem of student absenteeism still exists and is chronic. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing ten percent or more of the academic year for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences, suspensions, and time missed due to changing schools. Based on a 180-day school year, that means a student would miss about 18 days per year (attendance works 2017). In the case of the mentioned PES, Table 1 showed that less than 50% of the total number of pupils from the coastal communities could attend regular classes in the PES from school years 2014-2017. Table 2, on the other hand, showed that only 58% of the total number of school days were attended and the remaining 42% of them were missed by the coastal pupils (Data Source: PES, DepEd BB District Schools).

Table 1: Attendance record of grade 1 to grade 6 pupils of involved public elementary school (PES) living in coastal sitios (Source: PES, DepED BB District Schools)

School Year	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Number of Students	115	120	130
Regular Attendees	35	45	55
% Attendance	(30%)	(37%)	(42%)

Table 2: Total number of school days attended by most pupils of involved public elementary school (PES) living in coastal sitios (Source:PES, DepED BB District Schools)

	Total Number of School Days	Percentage
Total number of school days for each year	204	100 %
Total number of school days attended	120	58 %
REMARKS:	Students in the coastal normally attended classes at least 3 days a week; some went to school at least 2 days a week and others 1 day a week.	

Absenteeism and possible effects on the Pupils from Coastal Communities

According to Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, and Kirk, teachers identified the effects of absenteeism on children as academic under-achievement; difficulty in making friends which could lead to boredom and loss of confidence; prolonged absence can have deleterious effects for the child in later life; students who are absent from school are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school early (Murcia, 2015).

Meanwhile, education by various groups is still believed to be an escalator to raise one's social status. Because of that education has a strategic position to break the path between poverty and ignorance. But this does not happen to coastal communities, remote on Gili Re. Where the number of children dropping out of school is very high. Most of the final education of Gili Re coastal children only reaches primary school (SD) and not a few drop out of school at the junior secondary level. The contributing factors are the lack of educational facilities, the economic conditions of Parents, and the views of parents and children on the importance of education (N. Sholen 2021).

Factors affecting absenteeism and tardiness

The record given by the PES resulted to the aspiration of finding the factors of such absenteeism. Accordingly, half of the 130 students of a Public Elementary School (PES) here do not attend classes at the end of each week because they have to take a banca ride to school for P25, and another ride back home for another P25, which costs that many parents feel are exorbitant. These students come from coastal Sitio B, C, D, WC, BL, Q, P, and PK (Estrope, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2018). This study was directly linked to the assessment of needs and problems in the coastal areas of Bgy TBB. As shown in Table 4, the needs assessment conducted in Sitio B and Sitio C in 2013 and 2015 revealed several problems related to transportation, education, health, lighting system, and emergency case. Residents from Sitio C and Sitio B, which included primarily the parents of the pupils of the PES, are most of the informants. Some informants were the youth who are also students in higher or are workers or employed outside the coastal areas of Bgy. TBB.

Table 4: Assessment of needs and problems at Sitio C and Sitio B for the years 2013 and 2015

		2013		2015	
		Sitio B Adult: 130 Respondents: 75	Sitio C Adult:123 Respondents: 75	Sitio C Adult:120 Respondents: 75	Sitio B Adult: 135 Respondents: 75
	Needs	Effects	Needs	Effects	
1.	Transportation	Difficulty to go to school and workplace outside the coast resulted to acquiring a great number of absences	Transportation	Difficulty to go school and workplace outside the coast resulted to acquiring a great number of absences	
2.	Education	Poor class performance, others are forced to stop; few are able to graduate	Education	Poor class performance, others are forced to stop, Few are able to graduate	
3.	Health	Cannot go to hospital or clinic at once	Health	Cannot go to hospital or clinic at once	
4.	Lighting system	No lighting system, difficulty to perform activities at night	Emergency case	Difficulty to address emergency cases	
5.	Emergency case	Lighting system	Lighting system	No lighting system, difficulty to perform activities at night	

Based on the results of the two needs assessment, education was regarded as a major problem among the residents in the coastal areas. Results of the FGDs and IDIs raised the same issues. The continuity of the research work was made possible with the initiative of the principal of the PED and the district supervisor of DepEd because of their concern about the possible consequence of chronic absenteeism and tardiness among the pupils living in the coastal areas of Bgy. TBB. However, such absenteeism, whether truancy, authorized or not authorized, could be regarded as the product of other possible factors like climatic and family-related concerns. Such analysis was based on the results of FGDs and IDIs and previous needs assessments. Ocular and informal interviews through FGD/IDI were also done on sitio C and B. This is because most of the pupils enrolled in PES reside in the said *sitios*. The respondents included Grades 1 to 6 pupils ($M=130$) from coastal communities and their parents ($M=130$). Selected barangay officials and sitio leaders of Sitio C and Sitio B ($M=10$) participated including the DepEd BB district supervisor and the PES principal and teachers ($M=8$). The result is shown below:

Table 5: Ranking on the causes of absenteeism and tardiness among grade 1 to 6 pupils of PES living in Coastal Sitios ($M=130$)

Note: Ranking 1-7 (1- Highest; 7-Lowest)

Causes of Absenteeism	Responses			
	SitioCapol and Sitio Bunutan			Taliptip
	Parents	Pupils	Sitio Leaders/Bgy Officials	Elementary School Principal/Teachers
a. Physical Factor	3	3	3	3
b. Transportation	1	1	1	1
c. Health	5	5	5	5
d. Personal Attitude	4	4	4	4
e. Teacher-Related Factors	6	6	6	6
f. Classroom atmosphere	7	7	7	7
g. Home-Related Factors	2	2	2	2

Table 5 shows the summary of the responses of the participants and key informants as regards the causes of absenteeism and tardiness. As reflected in the responses, absenteeism and tardiness were primarily due to the inability to sustain transportation expenses because of the lack of financial capability and also due to the geographical condition of the area. Other reasons cited by the participants were the danger that they might encounter during the travel to the school. The pupils perceived that such a perennial problem had greatly affected not only their class performance but also their families because of their failure to finish their studies. This may mean a continuity of poverty and unemployment. This was also perceived to pose a negative outcome on the part of the school due to the inability of the students to graduate as well as to the community since this may indicate increased unemployment and poverty.



Fig.2 Physical Condition of Sitio C



Fig.3 Physical Condition Sitio B



Fig. 4 Means of Transportation



Fig. 5 Other Activities



Fig. 6 Kind of Work (Fishing/Fishpond)



Fig. 7 Pupils in the coastal sitio

Conclusion

Considering the objectives of this study intended to be addressed such as to understand the nature of absenteeism and tardiness acquired by the pupils and determine the factors that cause absenteeism and tardiness it finally came up with the following outcomes. Addressing the nature of absenteeism acquired by the pupils, this study found out that the pupils are acquiring chronic absenteeism which means missing a defined number usually about 10 percent or about 15-18 of the standard number of school days. Students who are chronically absent are not only at serious risk of falling behind in school but also become susceptible to a slew of other harmful consequences. Moreover, the factors causing absenteeism and tardiness are environmental, socio-economic, and even personal conditions that brought various problems to the coastal *sitios* of Bgy. TBB. However, the irony of this was absenteeism acquired by the pupils in the said public elementary school who are residents of the coastal *sitios* were said to be normal, accepted, and authorized by the parents, the community, and even the school.

An important aspect of this study is to look into the impacts of absenteeism and tardiness on the class performance of the learners and to find ways to address them (Inquirer, 2018).

Recommendations

The problem of absenteeism and tardiness in school by the pupils living in the coastal areas is not only a problem of the school nor the individual students but of the community itself and the local government. Thus, collaboration with the full cooperation of the three sectors- the educational sector, the members of the coastal community, and the local government is a requirement. Designing a special program that will address the problem of absenteeism and tardiness among the pupils due to the identified factors, particularly on their geographical location should be initiated and implemented the soonest the possible.

The Department of Education is also recommended to create a special program that will address problems experienced by learners in remote areas like coastal communities. It is also recommended to collaborate with other sectors who are willing to help in the intervention of absenteeism and tardiness among pupils in coastal areas that arise from more complicated causes like natural calamities. It is also suggested to design other learning tools, materials, or technology that can be utilized to continue regular class instruction for the pupils living in the coastal communities in case normal absenteeism cannot be avoided due to uncontrolled factors like long-term natural calamities, events, or phenomena.

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Glory to God!

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Abbreviations

- BB**..... coastal town in the province of Bulacan (Philippines) where the coastal barangay and the islets are located

- Bgy.** means barangay, a term used in the Philippines which also means “*barrio*”

- Bgy. TBB**..... Coastal barangay in Bulacan where the coastal sitios are islets are situated and where the public elementary school is also found

- PES** public elementary school in Bgy. TBB where the pupils in coastal sitios or islets are living

- DepED**..... Department of Education, the government agency for education

- Sitio B** one of the major islets sitio in the coastal barangay of TBB where majority of coastal pupils are residing

- Sitio C** also, a major islet sitio in the coastal barangay of TBB where majority of coastal pupils are residing

- Sitio B, C, D, WC, BL, Q, P, and PK** other islet sitios in Bgy. TBB where other pupils in the PES are living