

## DepEd's mass promotion: Bane or boon

**Ritche R. Deloria**

Abuyog Community College  
Abuyog, Leyte

**Hazel L. Agner**

Abuyog Community College  
Abuyog, Leyte

**Junielito R. Espanto\***

Abuyog Community College  
Abuyog, Leyte  
Email: junespanto6@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding the Department of Education's (DepEd) mass promotion policy in the Philippines, specifically in public schools in Abuyog, Leyte. The study aims to understand the reasons teachers promote students who have not met academic standards, the challenges they encounter in implementing the policy, and their recommendations for improving its application. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected teachers, each with more than ten years of teaching experience. Thematic analysis revealed that student promotion was influenced by factors such as consistent attendance, economic status, pressure from DepEd memoranda, multiple intelligences, and hereditary learning difficulties. Teachers also cited significant challenges, including increased workload due to remediation, conflict between professional ethics and institutional policy, and pressure to maintain favorable school performance metrics. While some educators viewed mass promotion as necessary during the pandemic, the majority perceived it as detrimental to students' critical thinking and academic achievement. The study concludes that the mass promotion policy should be revisited, with clearer guidelines that prioritize foundational competencies in literacy and numeracy, and greater involvement of parents in supporting learner development.

**Keywords:** Mass promotion, DepEd policy, teacher perceptions, academic achievement

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\* Corresponding author

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## INTRODUCTION

The study titled “DepEd’s Mass Promotion: Bane or Boon” delves into one of the most controversial issues in Philippine basic education—the mass promotion policy instituted by the Department of Education (DepEd). The mass promotion policy, introduced through DepEd Orders No. 73, s. 2012 and No. 8, s. 2015, aims to reduce dropout rates and ensure that no child is left behind academically. Under this framework, students are promoted to the next grade level regardless of whether they have demonstrated mastery of academic competencies. This policy has sparked intense debate among educators, scholars, and stakeholders in the Philippine educational system. According to Rose et al. (1983), the consistent decline in academic performance since the 1960s can be attributed to the relaxation of promotion standards, which prioritized psychosocial well-being over academic rigor. Wynn (2010) emphasized that while retention may temporarily address academic deficits, its long-term impacts—such as poor self-esteem and a higher likelihood of dropping out—often outweigh short-term gains. Similarly, Jackson (1975) and Roderick (1995) pointed out that retention has little to no positive impact on student motivation and can worsen school affiliation and attendance. Globally, mass promotion (or social promotion) has been adopted as a cost-effective and inclusive educational strategy, especially in developing countries like Nigeria and the Philippines (European Scientific Journal, 2015; Iqbal, 2011). Goldman (2007) defined mass promotion as the advancement of students regardless of academic preparedness, while Wiley (1999) explained that this is often done to preserve the student’s psychological and social well-being, despite potential long-term academic setbacks. Social promotion, however, is not without consequences. Thompson (2018) contends that while originally intended to protect students from the stigma of being retained, the practice may ironically lower self-esteem further by promoting unprepared students who struggle in subsequent levels. Studies like those of Cruz et al. (2015) and Gaytos et al. (2019) underscore a weak correlation between mass promotion and academic achievement, warning that overuse of the policy could lead to mediocrity and diminished learning outcomes. Theoretical grounding for this study is supported by Novak and Gowin’s “Learning How to Learn” theory, which emphasizes the role of prior knowledge in the learning process. According to Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian (1978), “the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows.” When students are promoted without acquiring the necessary competencies, the continuity and depth of their learning is compromised. This study also aligns with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) principle, emphasizing equity in education but questioning whether mass promotion genuinely fosters academic equity or masks systemic gaps. Given the limited local research addressing mass promotion's direct impact from the viewpoint of classroom teachers, this study seeks to explore the perceptions, lived experiences, and professional challenges of teachers implementing this policy in selected public elementary schools in Abuyog, Leyte.

### Statement of the problem

The study aims to determine the perception of teacher on DepEd’s mass promotion the elementary learners in the selected Public Elementary School in Abuyog, Leyte.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perceived attitude of teachers on the mass promotion of the elementary pupils?
2. What are the challenges encountered on DepEd’s mass promotion?

3. What recommendations can be given to Department of Education to address issues on mass promotion?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design situated within the interpretative paradigm, which aims to explore social phenomena through the subjective experiences of individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The focus was on capturing detailed and rich descriptions of public school teachers' perceptions, motivations, and challenges related to the Department of Education's mass promotion policy. To provide meaningful insights, five teachers with over ten years of teaching experience were purposively selected from central public elementary schools in Poblacion, Abuyog, Leyte. This purposive sampling technique ensured that participants possessed the relevant expertise and familiarity with the policy under investigation.

Data collection was facilitated through a semi-structured interview guide, carefully designed to elicit comprehensive qualitative data regarding teachers' perceptions, the rationale behind promoting learners, the perceived impacts of the policy, and their recommendations. Interviews were conducted following strict health protocols to safeguard participants during the ongoing pandemic. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process; thus, participants' anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously maintained. Consent letters were obtained prior to data collection, and identifying information was anonymized using codes (e.g., T1, T2) to protect the identities of the respondents.

Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical approach involved a systematic process of familiarization with the data, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and ultimately producing the final report. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These measures were integral to establishing the quality and reliability of the research outcomes, thereby enhancing the overall validity of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data gathered through interview sessions, the teacher participants showed strong cooperation and were confident in sharing their perspectives regarding the Department of Education's (DepEd) mass promotion policy. Their openness allowed the researchers to collect valuable insights and conduct a meaningful interpretation of the data. In-depth responses revealed nine dominant themes that emerged through coded data analysis. These included factors such as student attendance, economic status, DepEd memoranda, multiple intelligences, and hereditary or genetic influences. Teachers also identified other reasons influencing promotion decisions, such as the need to increase enrollment, acknowledgment of the efforts of both students and parents, institutional pressure from DepEd to promote learners, and the use of teacher discretion. The most commonly cited reasons for promoting students to the next grade level were compliance with DepEd memoranda, the desire to increase school enrollment statistics, and the need to maintain or improve school performance. Many participants shared that promotion decisions are often based on compassion, considering students' economic backgrounds, the presence of multiple intelligences, and the active support of families. However, the findings also showed that mass promotion is not simply about advancing students without

learning. Teachers emphasized that even when learners are promoted, they provide remediation to address areas where the learners are not yet competent. This reflects the commitment of educators to uphold the quality of education despite systemic constraints. Some participants voiced concern about mass promotion, stating that it should not be mandatory and must be based on a learner's readiness. According to one teacher, mass promotion was justifiable during the pandemic but should not be normalized in regular academic settings. They stressed that promoting unprepared students undermines both learner development and teacher credibility. Additionally, the respondents emphasized the importance of collaboration between parents and teachers. Parental involvement was seen as essential in monitoring student progress and understanding the potential benefits and drawbacks of mass promotion. Overall, most of the respondents viewed mass promotion as detrimental to the development of learners' critical thinking skills. They agreed that it is generally not beneficial, especially in terms of students' academic performance and long-term growth.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the current policy on mass promotion requires thorough review and clearer guidelines from the Department of Education. There is a pressing need for a more refined and transparent framework that can effectively assist educators in making promotion decisions aligned with both the developmental needs of learners and professional accountability standards. The findings highlight the considerable challenges faced by teachers, who often feel compelled to promote underperforming students to safeguard their own performance ratings and the reputation of their schools. Such pressures may inadvertently lead to decisions that compromise educational quality and standards.

The study also revealed recurring issues, including the promotion of learners who have not yet mastered essential skills, the difficulties these students encounter when adjusting to higher educational levels, and the tendency to hold teachers responsible for the poor outcomes of promoted learners. Compounding these challenges is a lack of shared understanding among parents regarding the policy, which further intensifies the burden on educators. To address these concerns, it is essential to prioritize parental awareness and involvement. Ensuring that parents are well-informed about the policy's objectives, limitations, and its impact on their children's academic development is crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment.

In light of these conclusions, it is recommended that the Department of Education revisit the memorandum guidelines related to mass promotion and conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its effects on both student achievement and teacher performance. Mass promotion should be applied judiciously, reserved for learners who have demonstrated fundamental academic competencies, such as literacy and numeracy. Moreover, teachers should be empowered to exercise their professional judgment in promotion decisions without undue pressure from institutional demands or unrealistic performance metrics. It is equally important to enhance parental understanding through awareness campaigns and school-based orientations, which can clarify how such policies influence children's intellectual growth.

Furthermore, learners who are promoted but still lack certain competencies should be supported through sustained remediation programs designed to help them catch up academically and prevent long-term learning deficits. Aligning promotion practices with learner readiness, teacher autonomy, and active parental engagement can foster an education system that balances quality learning with fairness and accountability.

Regarding the online shopping behavior of public school senior high teachers, the study found that personal demographics generally do not confer significant advantages or disadvantages in their online shopping habits. However, married teachers exhibited more positive behaviors toward online shopping, which may benefit them in their purchasing decisions. Overall, these teachers demonstrate prudence, wisdom, and thoughtful decision-making as they seek out beneficial opportunities and experiences in the online marketplace.

Informed by these findings, it is recommended that public school senior high teachers, regardless of their demographic profile, actively seek to become better informed about the advantages, disadvantages, and innovations related to online shopping. Participation in webinars and consulting reliable sources—both online and offline—can enhance their decision-making capacity. They are also encouraged to critically evaluate product reviews and quality before making purchases. Students should likewise be educated and encouraged to engage responsibly in online shopping, learning to make wise choices while exploring opportunities for online selling or service provision.

Entrepreneurs and business owners are urged to adopt innovative and competitive marketing strategies on online platforms, presenting products and services through convenient and attractive approaches to increase customer awareness and appreciation of online shopping benefits. Government agencies should support collaborative projects that foster marketing innovations, learning opportunities, and investment initiatives—particularly in the academic sector—to educate teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Agencies such as the Department of Trade and Industry, Securities and Exchange Commission, and Bureau of Internal Revenue can play pivotal roles in facilitating a more user-friendly business environment.

Finally, future research is encouraged to explore marketing strategies, platforms, and related topics that could further enhance the economic and personal benefits of the online industry. Such studies would contribute to a friendlier and more effective delivery of products and services, especially for those engaged in the academic profession.

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