TEACHER'S PERCEIVED LEVEL OF COMPETENCE IN CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH

Reyes, Margarito Jr. S.; Acuña, Raulita A.

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Teachers' Perceived Level of Competence In Conducting Action Research

Reyes, Margarito Jr. S.; Acuña, Raulita A.
[1]Head Teacher III; [2]Secondary School Teacher III
Department of Education, Division of Isabela City
[1]margarito.reyes001@deped.gov.ph; [2]raulita.acuna@deped.gov.ph
[1]09162956277; [2]09955709180

Abstract

This study aimed to explore and investigate the teachers' perceived level of competence in conducting Action Research (AR). It also examined whether such self-perceived levels significantly differed when they are grouped according to their demographic profiles. Descriptive quantitative, non-experimental research design was used in the study. In selecting the respondents of the study, total enumeration was employed. In collecting the data, an adapted survey questionnaire was used. Quantitative analyses on the data were done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results showed that the teachers' perceived level of competence in terms of Problem Identification, Appropriate Use of Data Collection Tool, Data Gathering, Interpretation, Action and Reflection, Technology Application and Research Ethics is Average, Average, Low, Low and High, respectively. Furthermore, competency gaps were evident among the teachers when they were grouped according to their Educational Qualifications and Attendance in Training/s. On the other hand, no competency gap existed among the teachers when they were grouped according to their Length of Service. These reveal that there are specific components of conducting AR that teachers need to focus and master. Moreover, enrolling on graduate studies and attending training/s related to AR may contribute in increasing the teachers' level of competence in conducting AR.

Keywords: *Action research; Competence; Teacher-led research*

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Introduction

A plethora of studies (e.g., Cortes and Reyes 2021, 151-164; Cortes 2019, 1-19; Ulla, Barrera and Acompanado 2017, 52-64) have supported and promoted the significant contributions of conducting Action Research in the realm of education. With this, teacher-led action research became one of the important indicators and, at the same time, the basis of educational reforms. These studies have also underscored some reasons why there is a need for teachers to conduct action research, these are as follows: professionalize instruction, boost tired faculty members' motivation and effectiveness, satisfy the requirements and expectations of a student body that is becoming more diverse, and achieve success with "standards-based" reforms.

The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has mandated teachers and administrators to "undertake national educational research and studies," which can be included in the fundamental reforms and policy inputs that are required (Chapter 1, Section 7(5) of RA 9155) so as to assist them in adjusting instruction to the needs of their students and the environments in which they are situated. In addition, to sustain the standard goal of quality education, DepEd Order No. 39 s. 2016 reiterates the adaptation of the Basic Education Research Agenda which pinpoints areas of study that could address urgent issues in Philippine Basic Education by bridging important knowledge gaps.

Nevertheless, despite the efforts exerted by the Department of Education and other educational organizations to promote the design and conduct of teacher-led action research, still a limited number of public-school teachers have enthusiastically involved themselves (Ulla, Barrera and Acompanado 2017, 53). A range of reasons have been stressed that inhibited these teachers from conducting Action Research. Firstly, teachers find it difficult to identify and systematically define a research problem which subsequently troubles them in designing and implementing research methodologies (Burns 2010, 45). Secondly, several studies pointed out that teachers in the basic education program poorly distinguish themselves as proficient in some areas of doing action research, including problem identification, data collection, analysis, and presentation, integration of technology, and ethical considerations in Action Research or at the very least, advanced (Cortes 2019, 14). Finally, the teachers have very limited professional skills and understanding in designing and conducting research; thus, most if not all, of them are not driven to engage in research endeavors (Cortes and Reyes 2021, 151-164) Altogether, these grounds come down into a teacher's limited understanding, competence, skill and technical support received in designing and conducting Action Research. However, these findings may not hold true in the setting of the largest school in Isabela City Division.

Hence, with the literature gap presented, the purpose of this study is to examine and ascertain the teachers' perceived proficiency in carrying out action research. In addition, it also considers if their demographics profiles affect their self-perceived level of competence in conducting action research. The findings of this study provide a basis for policymakers and administrators to make informed decisions regarding its campaign to improve the present status of action research in the division.

It is in this context that the researcher saw it fit to come up with a documentation of the MDL phenomenon through the lived experiences of teachers who for two school years have been battling with the intricacies of modular distance learning.

Literature Review

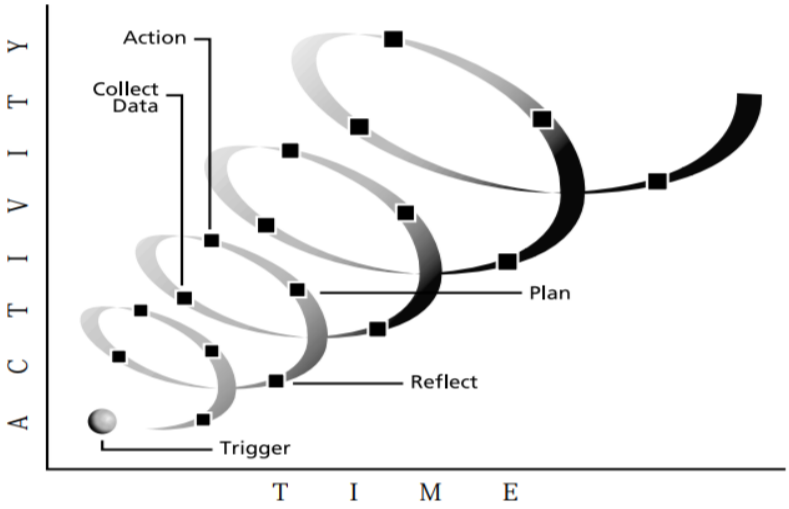
Theoretical Foundations of Action Research. Cortes (2019, 2) said that the practice of action research is informed by paradigms or approaches which have varying

perspectives on the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is utilized. These paradigms are explicitly identified by some authors (e.g. Ernest, 1994) which is eventually turned as major classifications of action research such emperical, practical and critical theory. But it also shows the development of action research over time, pointing to a conceptual shift from a traditional to a practitioner-centered approach that improves practice and generates contextualized, practical theory with the same cyclic process (King and Lonnquist 1992, 1).

Generally speaking, the action research process consists of the following steps: planning, carrying out the action, observing the results, and reflecting on them. (Alberta's Teacher Association 2000). It offers a spiral of cycles where the researcher considers every phase of the investigation. Every reflective phase deepens the researcher's comprehension of the problems and provides information about them. All things considered, the most important aspect of doing action research is reflection.

The idea that the action research process is a sequence of acts driven by reflection is exemplified in Figure 1 below (Alberta's Teacher Association 2000).

Figure 1: Model of Action Research Processes



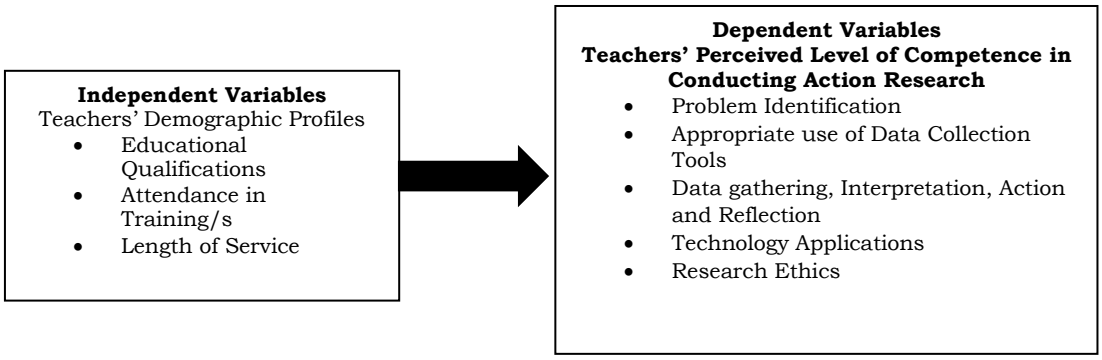
Challenges in Conducting Action Research in the Philippines. Despite the efforts toward improving the design and conduct of Action Research culture in the Philippines, several reports have surfaced and reported a plethora of challenges of experienced by Filipino teachers in conducting Action Research. First, a study of public school teachers' experiences in Mindanao revealed that they had demanding teaching and service loads, little financial support from the school, and a dearth of professional development opportunities. These teachers have also recounted that they have very unstable and limited access to internet services and reference materials for research (Ulla 2018, 804). Second, research in Agusan del Norte in Mindanao revealed that teachers were inhibited from designing Acton Research due to prolonged teacher positions, teaching more than the appropriate number of hours, demands for overtime, and lack of Action Research training. The educators added that they are fully occupied by their individual and professional undertakings and do not consider Action Research as a part of their job description. Thus, their level of engagement to conduct research is very poor. They have also underscored that their deficiency of training programs on research methods signifies their inadequate understanding of Action Research. Lastly, these educators described how little financial support, inspiration, or acknowledgment they received for their studies (Ulla, Barrera and Acompanado 2017, 52-64). The

majority of teachers in the province's basic education institutions did not consider themselves to be experts or at least advanced in the following research components: problem identification, data gathering, analysis, and presentation, technology integration, and ethics integration in AR, according to an assessment of teachers' needs on AR competences in Surigao del Sur, Mindanao (Cortes 2019, 1-19).

Furthermore, three factual explorations of demands and difficulties faced by educators in Action Research were documented in the Northern part of the Philippines. First, a desirable result was confirmed during the evaluation of educators' perceptions of their own expertise and comprehension of basic concepts of Action Research in public elementary schools in Batangas. But, a suggestion for wide-ranging training workshops-based capacity-building programs was still underscored (Anzaldo and Cudiamat 2019, 15-22). Second, comparable results about the difficulties faced by teachers at Agusan del Norte, a Catholic Higher Educational Institution (HEI) in the northern Philippines, were identified. The educators believed that conducting Action Research was an extra workload and a problem in their professional responsibilities. Additionally, they stated that they are time-constrained and inexperienced of the research methodology accompanied by their writing anxiety. Specifically, their unfamiliarity relates to challenges in conducting literature searches, gathering data, and disseminating research findings. (Tindowen, Guzman and Macanang 2019, 1788). Lastly, some Action Research components are moderately difficult for basic education science and math instructors in public schools, according to a study, suggesting areas for professional development. These included preparing the study report, conducting a literature search, organizing data, and using statistics. The teachers have conveyed that their instructional responsibilities exceed the designated quantity of workloads. They are essentially exhausted by it, which frees up some time and energy for research (Morales *et al.* 2016, 473).

Conceptual Framework of the Study. Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study. It clearly reflects the different variables involved in the study and how it relates to one another. Specifically, it shows and identifies the independent and dependent variables being studied.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study



Research Questions

This study was designed to investigate the Teachers' Perceived Level of Competence in Conducting Action Research. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perceived teachers' level of competence in conducting action research in terms of:
   1.1 Problem Identification;
   1.2 Appropriate Use of Data Collection Tools;
   1.3 Data gathering, Interpretation, Action and Reflection;
   1.4 Technology Applications; and
   1.5 Research Ethics?
2. Is there a significant difference in the teachers' perceived level of competence in conducting action research when they are grouped according to:
   2.1 Educational Qualification;
   2.2 Attendance in Training; and
   2.3 Length of Service?

Scope and Limitation

The primary source of data was limited to the teachers' responses to the adapted questionnaire used in the study.

The study was conducted at the largest secondary school of Isabela City Division, School Year 2020-2021. All junior high school teachers were involved in the study. Teachers who are teaching senior high school are excluded in this study. In addition, Junior High School Teachers who have withdrawn their participation, thus, failing to accomplish the survey questionnaire, were also excluded in the study.

The generalizability of the result of the study was limited only to the teachers of Basilan National High School and of those in the Schools Division of Isabela City which has similar school setting with the said research environment, thus, these results may not be true to teachers of other schools division.

Method

Research Design

The study is a quantitative research, and it utilizes descriptive design because it describes individuals, events, or conditions as they naturally occur (Siedleck 2020, 8-12). This design is appropriate since the study documented the teachers' perceived level of competence in conducting action research.

Research Participants

In this study, total enumeration was employed to examine the level of competency in conducting AR of junior high school teachers with their particular demographic profile. However, considering some aspects of research ethics, the teachers who failed to complete the survey questionnaires were not required to participate in the study. Table 1.1 to 1.3 show the distribution of the respondents of the study according their demographic profiles.

Table 1.1: Distribution of the Respondents of the Study According to Educational Qualifications

DEPARTMENT	n	EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
		Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctor's Degree
FILIPINO	24	19	5	0
ENGLISH	25	17	6	2
MATHEMATICS	26	20	5	1

SCIENCE	31	22	8	1
AP	21	12	8	1
ESP	12	10	2	0
TLE	21	17	4	0
MAPEH	18	14	3	1
N	**178**	**131**	**41**	**6**

Table 1.2: Distribution of the Respondents of the Study According to Length of Service

DEPARTMENT	n	Length of Service				
		1 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 15 years	16 to 20 years	21 years above
FILIPINO	24	9	9	2	0	4
ENGLISH	25	10	6	4	2	3
MATHEMATICS	26	15	4	4	0	3
SCIENCE	31	11	8	4	1	7
AP	21	5	6	4	0	6
ESP	12	8	3	1	0	0
TLE	21	14	3	1	1	2
MAPEH	18	8	3	2	2	3
N	**178**	**80**	**42**	**22**	**6**	**28**

Table 1.3: Distribution of the Respondents of the Study According to Attendance to Training/s

DEPARTMENT	n	Attendance to Training/s	
		YES	NO
FILIPINO	24	9	15
ENGLISH	25	12	13
MATHEMATICS	26	12	14
SCIENCE	31	13	18
AP	21	12	9
ESP	12	3	9
TLE	21	8	13
MAPEH	18	8	10
N	**178**	**77**	**101**

Research Instrument

The adapted instrument from the study of Cortes (2019, 1-19), consisted of the demographic profile of respondents and questions related to the listed action research competencies. It is in a form of 66-item survey questionnaire employing Likert scale measuring the respondents' competence across the five identified factors. It has undergone experts' validation and its test of internal consistency yields a Cronbach's alpha of .993 which showed that the reliability of the said instrument is very acceptable.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the questionnaire was administered, permission from the school division superintendent was sought then forwarded to the principal of the school. Appropriate and proper communication protocols were observed. The researchers oriented the respondents on the purpose of the study and assured them that their anonymity would be kept for the purpose of confidentiality. Aside from the assent forms given, completion of the questionnaire by the respondents vouched for their voluntary participation in the study. All data gathered, most especially that personal information, was kept with utmost confidentiality and was utilized for research purposes only.

Data Analysis

Data from the survey questionnaire were carefully organized, examined, and analyzed using quantitative analysis, specifically descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive statistics, specifically Mean and Standard Deviation were employed to determine the teachers' perceived level of competence in conducting action research. On the other hand, inferential statistics, specifically, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there exists a significant difference on the teachers' perceived level of competence when they are grouped according to their Educational Qualifications and Length of Service. After this, an independent sample t-test was used to determine if there exists a significant difference in the teachers' perceived level of competence when they are grouped according to their Attendance to any Training related to conducting research.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' Perceived Level of Competence in Conducting Action Research. The teachers' perceived level of competence in conducting action research was determined using descriptive statistics and with the scale and adjectival rating to qualitatively describe its specific level. Specifically, group means and standard deviations per component within and between groups were computed to establish the teachers' perceived level of competence. Table 2 presents the rating scale used for the adjectival description for interpretation purposes.

Table 2: Adjectival Description of Teachers' Group Mean Scores on Each Component of AR

Rating	Interpretation
4.50 – 5.00	Very High
3.50 – 4.49	High
2.50 - 3.49	Average
1.50 – 2.49	Low
1.00 – 1.49	Very Low

The analysis conducted to determine the precise level of competency of teachers in performing action research in relation to each indicated component is shown in Table 3. It demonstrates that the teachers thought they were competent at problem identification to an average *(M = 2.90; SD = 0.58)*. This indicates that educators thought they could reasonably distil a broad issue into a manageable, compelling, meaningful,

and authentic study question. Additionally, this illustrates how these educators felt they had a good understanding of how to organise the planning of a potential intervention as a way to address the identified issue. This is a positive sign that teachers can still conceptualize an issue or develop a research question that will work, even in the face of highly complicated educational issues. Scholars confirm that educators who can formulate a strong research question are adept at evaluating current teaching-learning phenomena, thinking critically about them, and generating ideas with other educators (Latif, Sari, and Riyadi 2017, 833-841; Cortes 2019, 3). This conclusion, however, is at odds with Caingcoy's (2020,1) study, which found that the majority of public school teachers felt it was very difficult to identify concerns and problems that needed to be looked at through action research.

Table 3: Teachers' Perceived Level of Competence in Conducting AR

Components	N	Mean	SD	Adjectival Description
1. Problem Identification	178	2.90	0.58	**Average**
2. Appropriate Use of Data Collection Tool	178	2.79	0.66	**Average**
3. Data Gathering, Interpretation, Action and Reflection	178	2.47	0.87	**Low**
4. Technology Application	178	2.49	0.58	**Low**
5. Research Ethics	178	3.77	0.77	**High**

The instructors felt that their level of competency was likewise average when it came to the appropriate use of the data collection tool *(M = 2.79, SD = 0.66)*. This reveals that educators believed they were at least somewhat knowledgeable about the fundamental types of research tools and their suitability based on their advantages, disadvantages, and the type of information to be gathered in relation to the study topics. Furthermore, this indicates that educators believed they could employ straightforward yet cautious combinations of several research instrument types to gather the required data and give them the particular information that has to be examined and addressed. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Mejia and Salcedo (2020, 28), which shown that high school teachers possess a competent level of understanding when it comes to methods for methodically gathering and analyzing data. It is implied that the majority of teachers are already familiar with the principles of data collection techniques and the equipment required to gather them.

In terms of **Data Gathering, Interpretation, Action and Reflection**, teachers' perceived level of competence is ***Low*** (M = 2.47, SD = 0.87). This reveals that they find it difficult to decide on what would be the most appropriate research designs and methodologies to be adopted in conducting their AR. They lack the knowledge on how to substantially evaluate and make sense of the information gathered through the use of qualitative and quantitative analysis, They encompass, but are not restricted to, the subsequent: thematic analysis (qualitative research), statistical treatment and analysis (quantitative research), and statistical tools appropriate for a certain statistical problem. Moreover, these teachers also find it challenging to explicitly express their actions and

reflections to the possible intervention they have conducted or they are to conduct. There were studies with similar findings that high school teachers need to be oriented on the plethora of data gathering methods and techniques, including the different appropriate data analysis procedures so that they may come up with a more comprehensive interpretation of the data at hand (Cortes 2019, 13 and Morales, et al. 2016, 464). However, this contradicts with the findings of Mejia & Salcedo (2020, 28) stressing out that secondary teachers' proficiency in data gathering and analyzing and drawing of conclusions are ***Very Adequate***.

In the same vein, teachers perceived that their level of competence in terms of **Technology Application** is ***Low*** (M = 2.49, SD = 0.58). This means that they have limited knowledge on how to utilize the technologies available, including digital technologies, in searching for relevant literatures, data analysis methods and techniques, presentation of results and performing bibliographical entries in manuscripts. The study of Morales, et al. (2016, 5) has provided significant insight in this finding, underscoring that knowledge of the use of technology in the conduct of AR is one of the major constraints among teacher-researcher. Caingcoy (2020, 4) has also expressed the same findings that teachers find it highly difficult to use technology in writing a comprehensive literature, analyzing both quantitative and qualitative, statistical analyses and unifying and writing the research findings.

Finally, in terms of considering **Research Ethics** in the conduct of research, teachers' level of competence is found out to be ***High*** (M = 3.77, SD = 0.77). This shows that teachers are already acquainted with the necessary research ethics and protocols needed to be considered before, during and after the AR. Moreover, it reveals that teachers have a substantial understanding on what to exactly do to avoid ethical issues and problems during their conduct of AR. This also implies that teachers are fully aware on the "dos and don'ts" inasmuch as sensitive issues of AR are concerned. This finding is in opposite to the result of the probe of Cortes (2019, 13), exposing that teachers usually puts less emphasis on the research ethics needed to be observed in conducting AR. They have also stressed that teachers show partial incompetence on recognizing important research protocols to be followed in conducting AR.

Difference on the Teachers' Perceived Level of Competence in Conducting Action Research (AR). To determine the difference on the teachers' perceived level of competence in conducting AR in terms of the different identified variables, inferential statistics were employed, specifically Independent Sample t-test and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Table 4 displays the difference on the teachers' perceived level of competence in conducting AR when the respondents are grouped according to their Educational Qualification. It reveals that among the different components understudy, only components **Technology Application**, F(2, 175) = 3.41, p-value = 0.4, and **Research Ethics** , F(2, 175) = 3.68, p-value = 0.3 showed a p-value which is less than α = .05. This means that there exists a significant difference on the group means of the respondents under components **Technology Application** and **Research Ethics** when they are grouped according to Educational Qualifications. This implies that there exists a competency gap among teachers under Bachelors' Degree, Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree.

Table 4: Difference on Teachers' Perceived Level of Competence in Conducting AR when Grouped According to Educational Qualification

Components	Educational Qualifications	N	Mean	SD	F	df	p-value

1. Problem Identification	Bachelor's Degree	131	2.87$_a$	0.58	**1.93**	**2, 175**	**.15**
	Master's Degree	41	2.92$_a$	0.58			
	Doctoral Degree	6	3.34$_a$	0.54			
2. Appropriate Use of Data Collection Tool	Bachelor's Degree	131	2.75$_a$	0.63	**2.29**	**2, 175**	**.10**
	Master's Degree	41	2.85$_a$	0.71			
	Doctoral Degree	6	3.31$_a$	0.80			
3. Data Gathering, Interpretation, Action and Reflection	Bachelor's Degree	131	2.47$_a$	0.89	**2.94**	**2, 175**	**.06**
	Master's Degree	41	2.42$_a$	0.80			
	Doctoral Degree	6	3.33$_a$	0.75			
4. Technology Application	Bachelor's Degree	131	2.46$_a$	0.52	**3.41**	**2, 175**	**.04**
	Master's Degree	41	2.69$_b$	0.71			
	Doctoral Degree	6	2.83$_b$	0.80			
5. Research Ethics	Bachelor's Degree	131	3.70$_a$	0.71	**3.68**	**2, 175**	**.03**
	Master's Degree	41	3.89$_b$	0.66			
	Doctoral Degree	6	4.39$_b$	0.74			

Note: Means with different subscripts within the column of each component are significantly different at p≤0.5 based on post hoc analysis using Scheffe.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In light of the conduct and findings of this study, the following recommendations were made. First, competency-enhancement trainings and Teacher Professional Development (TPD) on action research must be conducted specifically on the identified components on which the teachers' perceived level of competency is LOW. Second, trainings and other Professional Development Programs to be conducted must not be episodic instead it must be continuous undertakings with more knowledgeable individuals continually facilitating and providing technical assistance to teachers in the course of their conduct of AR. Third, teachers must enroll themselves in advanced education such as but not limited to short courses and graduate studies to further equip themselves with the necessary competencies in conducting action research. And lastly, this study may be improved by collecting and integrating qualitative data from the respondents to support the results of the quantitative data analysis. Furthermore, extending the scope of the study to other schools both elementary and secondary may give a clearer picture of the actual competence of the teachers inasmuch as conducting research is concerned.

Dissemination and Advocacy Plans

The results and findings of this research will be published and presented on any available research congress and forums and its proceedings in the division, region and

national level as permitted. This will also be discussed during school-based LAC Session to inform teachers of their perceived level of competence in conducting AR and try to solicit feedbacks which could then be used as basis for another research.

Furthermore, the findings of this research will serve as baseline information of further researches, policy making and professional development programs related to the conduct and implementation of Action Research in the school and division in general.

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Financial Report

This section approximates the funds utilized in the actual conduct of this research work.

MATERIALS	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL
Bond Papers	4 reams	₱ 240.00	₱ 960.00
Printing cost/ink	2 sets	₱ 485.00	₱ 970.00
Book Binding	3 copies	₱ 120.00	₱ 360.00
Internet Connectivity			₱ 2, 000.00
Incidental Expenses			₱ 1, 000.00
Total:			₱ 5, 290.00