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EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEPED'S SPECIAL PROGRAM IN THE ARTS FOR QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION IN COTABATO DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study investigated the implementation of the Department of Education's Special Program in the Arts (SPA) and its influence on quality basic education in Cotabato Division for School Year 2025–2026. A descriptive-correlational design was employed, surveying 250 SPA students from five public secondary schools using a validated Likert-scale questionnaire. Results showed that specially designed instruction (WM=4.38) and speech therapy (WM=4.22) were highly provided, while occupational therapy (WM=4.14), physical therapy (WM=4.07), assistive technology (WM=4.20), and counseling (WM=3.90) were moderately provided. Arts integration—self-expression (WM=4.01), cultural heritage (WM=3.94), and creativity (WM=3.74)—was rated Artistic. Formal education (WM=4.22) was highly provided, with informal and non-formal education moderately provided. Indicators of quality basic education, including facilities, feeding programs, and new personnel positions, were rated Improved. Correlation and regression analyses confirmed significant relationships between SPA components and quality education, with assistive technology showing the strongest influence. Persistent gaps in therapy, counseling, and creative arts delivery highlight areas for targeted intervention.

KEYWORDS: *Special Program in the Arts, Quality Basic Education, DepEd, Cotabato Division, Descriptive-Correlational, Arts Education, Educational Facilities*

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd), through Memorandum No. 135, Series of 2001, launched the pilot implementation of the Special Program in the Arts (SPA) in 17 public secondary schools nationwide. This initiative aimed to nurture and develop the artistic talents and potential of students by integrating a specialized arts curriculum into the educational system, fostering a deeper appreciation of culture and the arts among learners (DepEd Memorandum No. 423, 2022). The SPA remains a part of the Philippine Education System under Programs for the Gifted and Talented under the Implementing Guidelines for the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013.

The program provides specially designed instruction and related services—including speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, assistive technology, and counseling—to meet the unique needs of artistically inclined students. It also promotes arts in the curriculum through creativity, self-expression, and cultural heritage across six specializations: music, visual arts, theater arts, creative writing, media arts, and dance. Despite its noble mandate, limited research examines how SPA implementation specifically correlates with and influences the quality of basic education, especially in regional contexts like Cotabato Division (Pangandaman et al., 2023). This study addressed that gap by quantitatively examining these relationships.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

A descriptive-correlational design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was employed to assess the extent of SPA provision, arts in the curriculum, and educational programs, and to determine their relationships with and influence on quality basic education indicators.

Participants

A total of 250 SPA students from five public secondary schools in Cotabato Division—Tulunan National High School, M'lang National High School, Matalam High School, Kabacan National High School, and Carmen National High School—participated through random sampling. Additionally, 25 SPA teacher-specialists served as key informants for the qualitative phase.

Research Instrument

A validated self-made questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale assessed: (1) SPA Provision (specially designed instruction, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical

therapy, assistive technology, counseling; scale: 1=Least Provided to 5=Highly Provided); (2) Arts in the Curriculum (creativity, self-expression, cultural heritage; scale: 1=Least Artistic to 5=Highly Artistic); (3) Educational Programs (formal, informal, non-formal; scale: 1=Least Provided to 5=Highly Provided); and (4) Quality Basic Education (basic education facilities, school-based feeding program, new school personnel positions; scale: 1=Least Improved to 5=Highly Improved).

Statistical Analysis

Weighted means described the levels of all variables. Spearman Rho correlation determined the significance and direction of relationships between SPA independent variables and quality basic education outcomes. Multiple linear regression identified the significant predictors and proportion of variance explained in each quality education outcome.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of Special Programs in the Arts Provided

Specially designed instruction was rated Highly Provided (WM=4.38), indicating consistently individualized instruction aligned with both academic and artistic goals, supported by differentiated strategies such as visual aids and performance-based tasks. Speech therapy was also Highly Provided (WM=4.22), emphasizing articulation, fluency, and voice quality development. Assistive technology (WM=4.20), occupational therapy (WM=4.14), and physical therapy (WM=4.07) were all rated Provided, while counseling received the lowest rating (WM=3.90), though still at the Provided level.

Table 1. Level of Special Programs in the Arts Provided.

SPA Provision Dimension	Weighted Mean	Description
Specially Designed Instruction	4.38	Highly Provided
Therapy (Speech)	4.22	Highly Provided
Assistive Technology	4.20	Provided
Occupational Therapy	4.14	Provided
Physical Therapy	4.07	Provided
Counseling	3.90	Provided

Extent of Arts in the Curriculum and Educational Programs

Self-expression (WM=4.01), cultural heritage (WM=3.94), and the value of creativity (WM=3.74) were all rated Artistic, confirming meaningful engagement in arts learning that

promotes cultural identity, emotional intelligence, and creative exploration. Formal education was Highly Provided (WM=4.22), consistent with Ozturk's (2008) recognition of teacher-specialists as critical curriculum drivers. Informal (WM=4.17) and non-formal (WM=4.15) education were rated Provided, reflecting learner-centered and flexible learning approaches outside traditional classrooms.

Level of Improving Quality Basic Education

Basic education facilities (WM=4.07), the school-based feeding program (WM=4.01), and new school personnel positions (WM=4.07) were all rated Improved. These findings confirm meaningful institutional investment in the enabling conditions for student learning, including physical infrastructure, nutritional support, and staffing.

Relationship between SPA and Quality Basic Education

Spearman Rho analysis revealed significant positive relationships between selected SPA dimensions and quality basic education indicators. Assistive technology showed the strongest correlations: with new school personnel positions ($r=0.726$, $p=0.000$), the school-based feeding program ($r=0.519$, $p=0.000$), and basic education facilities ($r=0.239$, $p=0.000$). Counseling was significantly related to the school-based feeding program ($r=0.455$, $p=0.000$) and new school personnel positions ($r=0.350$, $p=0.000$). Speech therapy correlated significantly with both the feeding program ($r=0.419$, $p=0.000$) and new personnel positions ($r=0.432$, $p=0.000$).

Table 2. Spearman Rho: SPA and Quality Basic Education.

SPA Dimension	Facilities (r)	Feeding Program (r)	Personnel Positions (r)
Specially Designed Instruction	-0.160* (0.011)	-0.206** (0.001)	ns (0.076)
Therapy (Speech)	ns (0.708)	0.419** (0.000)	0.432** (0.000)
Occupational	ns (0.472)	ns (0.137)	0.425** (0.000)
Physical	-0.143* (0.024)	0.331** (0.000)	ns (0.195)
Assistive Technology	0.239** (0.000)	0.519** (0.000)	0.726** (0.000)
Counseling	ns (0.818)	0.455** (0.000)	0.350** (0.000)

** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.05$; ns=not significant

Influence of SPA, Arts in the Curriculum, and Educational Programs

Multiple regression confirmed significant collective influence on all quality education outcomes. SPA dimensions explained 16.8% of variance in basic education facilities ($F=8.194$, $p=0.000$), 42.5% in the school-based feeding program ($F=30.110$, $p=0.000$), and 57.5% in new school personnel positions ($F=55.003$, $p=0.000$). Arts in the curriculum explained 19.5% of facilities variance, 31.4% of feeding program variance, and 25.8% of personnel positions variance. Educational programs explained 41.9% of facilities variance, 31.4% of feeding program variance, and 27.7% of personnel positions variance—all highly significant. These findings support the conclusion that effective SPA delivery, arts-integrated curriculum, and educational programs are meaningfully linked to quality basic education improvement in Cotabato Division.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Special Program in the Arts in Cotabato Division is generally implemented at a Provided to Highly Provided level, with specially designed instruction and formal education as its strongest components. Quality basic education indicators have improved across all three dimensions. Significant and substantial correlations and predictive influences exist between SPA provision, arts in the curriculum, educational programs, and quality basic education outcomes—with assistive technology and new school personnel positions showing the strongest systemic linkages. However, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling remain below their full program potential and warrant targeted policy attention. These findings reject the null hypotheses and confirm that SPA implementation significantly influences quality basic education, underscoring the need for strengthened facilities, increased personnel, and sustained support programs to optimize program delivery and ensure balanced educational development in Cotabato Division.

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