

# **Music Education in the Philippines: Examining the Transition to the K to 12 Curriculum**

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## **Abstract**

In 2011, the Philippines shifted from a 10-year basic education curriculum to a 13-year enhanced basic education curriculum called the K to 12 curriculum. Mandatory kindergarten, mother tongue-based multilingual education, and 2-year senior high school education were introduced in this curriculum reform. Key changes introduced by the reforms included the introduction of music as a regular subject starting at Grade 1 and continuing until Grade 10, and the introduction of the senior high school arts and design track, which is a preparation track for future careers or higher music education endeavors. The current research presents the structure and current situation of formal music education in the K to 12 curriculum in comparison with the basic education curriculum of 2002 in terms of time in the classroom and curricula structure, mode of language instruction, and content.

## **1. Introduction**

Music Education in the Philippines can be observed in three different settings: in the community as an intercultural tradition, in a school classroom as a curricular component of basic education and in a university as a prerequisite for future professional music career (Borromeo *n.d.*). Formal school music education in the Philippines had its early beginnings when the Spanish colonizers brought western music to the islands during the 1500s. Together with church missionaries and music teachers, proper music training, such as solfeggio, vocalization, and composition, was taught in schools established by the church (Del Valle *n.d.*). Over the past decades, Philippine music education had experienced relative changes regarding curriculum contents and structure. This paper will discuss the structure of the current basic education curriculum and its changes in relation to music as an independent subject in the Philippines. The first section of the paper discusses the reformations of the curricula from the previous Basic Education Curriculum up to the present, K to 12 Curriculum. The second section focuses on the Philippine's formal music education system inside the present curriculum. The conclusion section attempts to recapitulate points and issues raised in the music education system of the reformed curriculum.

## **2. Outline of historical transition**

### **2.1 BEC 2002 – SEC 2010 – K to 12 2012**

Based on the comparative research on the education structure and contents in four Southeast Asian countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and the Philippines), the Philippines has been left behind in terms of structure and components of the basic education curriculum in comparison to its neighboring countries (SEAMEO 2012a). The research findings pointed out the short term of 10 school years prerequisite for tertiary education affects its graduates on their social capabilities and economic contribution to the country (p.110).

Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) was introduced in 2002, a restructured curriculum of the New Elementary

School Curriculum 1983 (NESC) and National Secondary Education Curriculum 1989 (NSEC), focusing on the development of language literacy and fluency and scientific-numerical competency. These learning goals are guided by the philosophical ideals of the curriculum which is to develop the students to become *Makabayan* (patriotic), *Makatao* (mindful of humanity), *Makakalikasan* (respect of nature) and *Makadiyos* (godly). The previous subjects in the curricula NESC and NSEC were restructured into five learning areas Filipino, English, Science, Mathematics, and MAKABAYAN. MAKABAYAN<sup>1</sup> is an experiential laboratory of life and environment studies that develop the social awareness of students and promotes self-reliance and patriotism.

In 2010, Secondary Education Curriculum (SEC) was introduced following an Understanding by Design (UbD) framework set into three stages: Results/Desired outcome, Assessment, and Learning/ Instructional plan. This secondary education curriculum focuses on developing the student’s readiness and passion for work and lifelong learning. SEC also provides a special curriculum program (Department of Education Order No.76, s.2010) that caters positively inclined students in the aesthetic fields of learning. The specialized curriculum program introduced in this curriculum will be discussed in the music education section of the paper.

K to 12 Curriculum was implemented with the goal of decongesting the subjects of the previous curriculum and change the previous curricula’s learning areas. Learning areas within the K to 12 curriculum Grades 1- 10 are reformatted into Language, Arts and Humanities, Science and Mathematics, and Technology and Livelihood Education. Subjects under MAKABAYAN (Social Studies, Values Education, MAPEH, and Technology and Livelihood Education) are now separate subjects. In the secondary education structure, the education years had been extended with the introduction of the senior high school that serves as a pathway for higher education and preparation for employment. K to 12 uses a spiral progression approach of learning focusing on the holistic development of the learner. Figure 1 shows the transition of the previous curriculum with their curriculum framework.

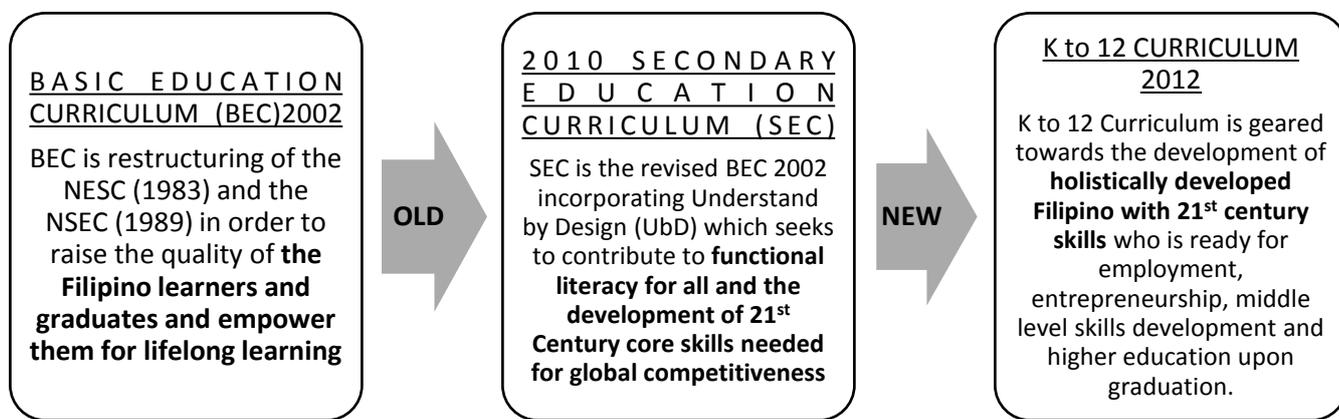


Figure 1. Comparison of the Old Curriculum to the K to 12 Curriculum

source: SEAMEO (2012b), p.11

## 2.2 K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum

Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, commonly known as K to 12 Curriculum, is a reformed basic education curriculum which aims to provide every student an opportunity to receive a quality education that is globally competitive based on pedagogical curriculum and international standards. The basic education curriculum format starts with the mandatory universal kindergarten, as a prerequisite for entering elementary, six years of primary education followed by six years of secondary level, junior high school, and senior high school (Republic Act No. 10533). K to 12 Curriculum started its transitional phase in the 2011-2012 school year which aims to decongest

the previous curriculum using a spiral progression approach allowing mastery of learning competency in line with the principles of inclusive education, learning development, and teaching and learning assessment. The curriculum also aims to equip the students with 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as Information, Media, and Technology Skills, Learning and Innovation Skills, Effective Communication Skills, and Life and Career Skills.

### **2.3 K – 6 – 4 – 2 Basic Education Format**

K to 12 Curriculum reformatted the previous basic education cycle of ten years by increasing it into thirteen years, with the inclusion of the compulsory kindergarten. The previous curriculum format of six-year elementary and four-year high school was changed into one-year kindergarten, starting at age five, six-year elementary education followed by four-year junior high school and two-year senior high school. In comparison with the previous curriculum, the present curriculum school years for primary level remains the same while the former four-year high school has been extended by two more years and is divided into junior and senior high school programs. This addition of two years is the highlight of the curriculum introducing the senior high school level created with the purpose of preparing the students for higher education or employment. Finishing senior high school grants certificate of competency, recognized by companies and stakeholders, enabling them to enter the working forces upon graduation.

### **2.4 Significant Changes in the K to 12 Curriculum**

#### **2.4.1 Early Childhood Education and MTB-MLE**

K to 12 also incorporates Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education, which uses regional or native language as a mode of instruction from Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3. Starting from Grade 3, students gradually transition to Filipino and English languages as the mode of teaching instruction. Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), a formal or non-formal education program in the K to 12 Curriculum centering on the first language (L1) of the learner, which they best understand, was introduced as the medium of instruction in the classroom. Under the MTB-MLE, classes begin their education using L1 and focus on developing a strong foundation before incorporating additional languages, Filipino and English. Besides the Mother tongue language as a separate language subject, other subjects such as Mathematics, Science, MAPEH, Social Studies, Values education, English and Filipino uses the mother tongue as the primary mode of instruction for teaching. As of the school year 2018-2019, there are sixteen local languages currently being used in this program.

#### **2.4.2 Senior high school**

Grade 11 and 12 are the new programs introduced in the K to 12 Curriculum. These years, commonly known as the senior high school program, started in 2016 which introduced core subject curriculum and tracks (electives) designed to aid students in developing their interest and skills before entering college and serves as career pathway preparation for employment (SEAMEO 2012b, p.47). In addition to the core subjects, students choose one from the following four tracks namely, Academic Track, Sports Track, Arts and Design Track, and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track. Incorporated within these tracks are strands, which are subject specializations, that allows the students to understand the main concepts behind the chosen track. The senior high school is a relatively new program with the first batch of graduates of the two-year senior high school program recently entered collegiate education in August 2018.

#### **2.4.3 Assessment in the K to 12**

Assessment in this new curriculum refers to the process of measuring the students' progress in the attainment of learning standards and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. The National Assessment Test (NAT) of BEC, taken during Grade 6 and high school year 2, had been changed into National Assessments. These set of assessments aims is to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of education service, monitor the Philippine education system while also providing information for the future instructional decision, measure the students' aptitude and career interest, and

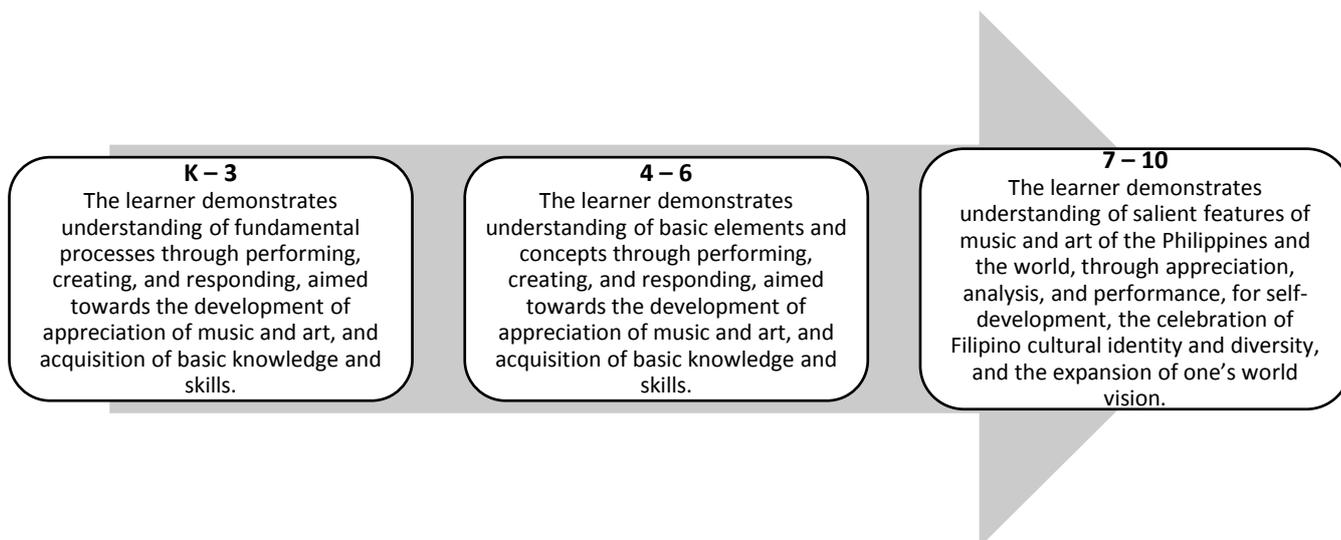
assess prior learning for placement, accreditation, and equivalency. Administered at the end of Grade 3, Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment aims to determine if the students are meeting the learning standards in the early years. Exit Assessments are administered in Grade 6, Grades 10, and Grade 12 that determines if learners are meeting the learning standards in the curriculum.<sup>ii</sup> Career assessment, on the other hand, is administered to understand the learners' professional interest for career guidance before entering higher education.<sup>iii</sup> Out-of-school youth and adults may take the Accreditation and Equivalency Assessment for certification of completion of elementary and secondary education. Lastly, the Grade Level Placement Assessment is available for learners in exceptional circumstances to determine grade level in the formal system (Department of Education Order No. 55, s.2016b).

### **3. Music education in transition**

#### **3.1 Music curriculum of K to 12**

The design of the music curricula is student-centered, performance-based and uses the spiral progression approach (Department of Education 2016a). According to Department of Education (2012a: Order No.31 s.2012), “*The overall design of Grades 1 to 10 curriculum follows the spiral approach across subjects by building on the same concepts developed in increasing complexity and sophistication starting from grade school.*” (Enclosure No.1, p.1). Spiral progression approach helps students to achieve gradual mastery of the core and general principle of learning from the early years while gradually proceeding into complex concepts as years progresses. In music, this ensures the students of a good foundation of the basic principle of music theory as concepts and fundamental music processes are revisited while incorporating complex ideas in the succeeding years.<sup>iv</sup>

There are three key stages of standards in the Music curriculum. These are the lower primary level (Kindergarten to Grade 3), upper primary level (Grades 4 to Grade 6), and the junior high school (Grades 7 to 10) as shown in figure 2. Fundamentals process and basic theory of music are mostly taught at the primary level while historical and regional music concepts incorporated with music appreciation are the main points of learning at the secondary level. The lower primary level student is initially exposed to music through listening and observing, creating and performing. This process enables the learner to be familiar with the basic concepts of music as well as understand the vital processes in music. The formal introduction of the core elements of music starts at the upper primary level. In this stage, learners rediscover the elements of music more complexly while musical awareness is developed through this stage. The learner recognizes the basic concepts through the processes of performing, listening and creating while developing music appreciation and awareness skills. Learners in Grades 7 to 10 are introduced to regional and historical learning of music. In this stage, extensive musical appreciation of multicultural music awareness: Philippine music, Asian and Western music.



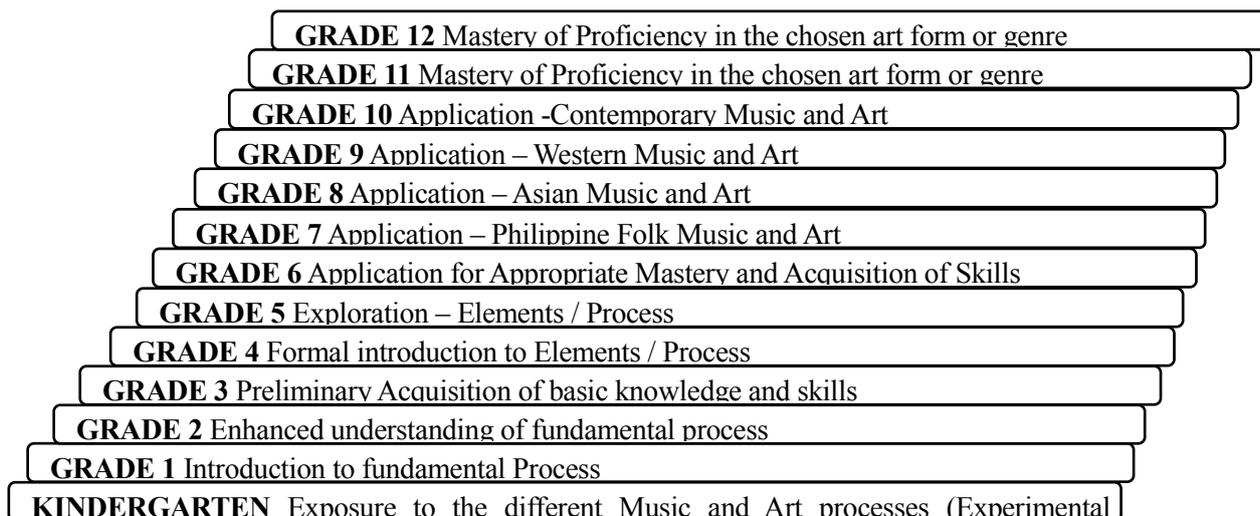
**Figure 2. Key Stage Standards in the Music Curriculum**

source: Department of Education (2016a) *K to 12 Music Curriculum Guide (Grade 1 to Grade 10)*, p.7

Elements and fundamentals of music are introduced during the elementary years. Teaching is divided into four quarters of the school year. The first quarter focuses on rhythms, second quarter on melody and forms; third quarter talks about forms, timbre, and dynamics while the last quarter focuses on the topics on tempo, texture, and harmony, the latter introduced in Grades 5 and 6. During the secondary level, having expected to master the basic concepts of music, the students are focused to music appreciation and application. Grade 7 students are presented to the cultural music of Philippine music. This topic enhances the learner's knowledge of the richness of the Philippine music in cultural context helping the students to appreciate the aesthetic of Filipino music and comprehend the Filipino cultural identity and diversity through regional and ethnic music discussions.

In Grade 8, students understand the musical characteristic of neighboring Asian countries as well as its cultural and traditional musical performances. The roots of classical music, Western music, is introduced in Grade 9. The broad topic of the history of western music is introduced periodically starting from the Medieval period, the Renaissance period followed by Baroque to Classical up to the Romantic period focusing on the characteristic features of each genre. Grade 10 follows the historical-based conceptual learning of the previous grade level with the topic of 20<sup>th</sup>-century music of the modern world and also focuses on the modern Filipino artist. The contemporary composers and their styles are featured in this grade level. The last quarter of the music subject in grade 10 highlights the traditional Filipino composers and their music which promotes Filipino music awareness and cultural identity.

In summary of the musical contents of music curricula in Grades 1 to 10, Grades 1 to 6 provides students the theoretical aspect of music while advancing to the historical and cultural appreciation during the Grades 7 to 10 as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Contents of Music and Arts per Grade Level**

source: Department of Education (2016) *K to 12 Music Curriculum Guide (Grade 1 to Grade 10)*, p.5

### 3.2 Comparison between previous and present Music Curricula

In relation with music education, one of the significant changes of K to 12 Curriculum from the previous curricula is that Music subject is taught starting at Grade 1. During the Basic Education Curriculum of 2002, music subject was only integrated into another subject, Sibika at Kultura (Civics and Culture)<sup>v</sup>. Music subject is introduced only during the upper primary level, starting at Grade 4, together with the Arts, Physical Education, and Health as one core subject called MAPEH. Meanwhile in the secondary level, music subject remains unchanged in terms of minutes of instruction per week. However, the structure and contents of the curriculum were modified in the K to 12 Curriculum using the spiral progression approach in both elementary and secondary music curricula. Table 1 shows an increase in time allotment of the subject from the BEC to the K to 12 Curriculum at the primary level. Note that the 200 minutes per week allotted for the learning area depicts that of the core subject MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) and is to be distributed into the four subjects.<sup>vi</sup> 2002 BEC music subject in Grades 1-3 had been missing and only being integrated to other subject compared to the current K to 12 Curriculum, which starts the music subject in Grade 1. The additional three years of music class in the primary level evidently shows that K to 12 Curriculum stresses out that importance of Music subject in the elementary curriculum. This results in additional classroom time in music subject, which is considered essential in building the learners foundation in music rudiments. This fundamental change provides learner enough time to understand the basic concepts and processes involved in music understanding and music making.

**Table 1. Comparison of the Music Old Curricula to the K to 12 Curriculum**

	<b>Learning Areas</b>	<b>2002 BEC</b>	<b>K to 12 Curriculum 2012</b>
<b>Lower Primary level Grades 1-3</b>	Music, Arts, Physical Education, Health	Integrated into other subjects	200 minutes per week
<b>Upper Primary level Grades 4-6</b>	Music, Arts, Physical Education, Health	200 minutes per week	200 minutes per week
<b>Secondary Level Grades 7-10</b>	Music, Arts, Physical Education, Health	240 minutes per week	240 minutes per week

source: SEAMEO (2012b, pp.24, 33)

### **3.3 Music education in senior high school**

Arts and Design Track is the affiliated track for senior high school students who intend to pursue performative and visual and design arts. This track allows the learner to discover and train skills in designing, visual media and literary arts. In music program, the track offers rudimentary conservatory subjects designed for instrumentalist, vocalist and conductor aspiring learner. This program includes sight reading and ear training, and performance of either of the following: Woodwind, Piano, Guitar, Brass, Percussion, Piano, Traditional instrument, Vocal, and conducting. In addition to music relate subjects, this Arts and Design Track also includes track subject course that introduces the principles music and practical 3application of the performing arts skills in the local and global market while contributing to the creation of a national identity using his/her knowledge and skills as an artist (Senior High School Curriculum Guides DepEd 2017).

### **3.4 Other music program of the curriculum**

Special Program in the Arts (SPA) is a national program offered for secondary students in junior high school to students with potentials and talents in the fields of Music, Visual Arts, Theater Arts, Media Arts, Creative Writing, and Dance. SPA started in 2001 with seventeen selected pilot schools in the regional area and soon was adopted by other national high schools as implemented by the Department of Education (Department of Education 2012b: Order No.46 s.2012). The Special Program in the Arts (Music) is offered through Grades 7 to 10 as an additional elective subject and focuses on advanced training in music theory and ensemble and music playing. Special Program in the Arts in Music offers talented and skilled students of music interest to develop their skills and musical techniques further. The selection process of the students of the program involves performance and written examinations.

While this special program is an additional elective for selected students, it offers continuation of the theoretical and rudimentary knowledge of music from the primary years and equips the learner as an engaged artist in the field of music. Grounded with performance-based, learning like the regular music subject, Special Program in the Arts (Music) aims the learner to demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of the basic language of the creative arts, focusing on music as an integrated language of the personal, group, and cultural expression (SPA Music Curriculum, Department of Education 2014).

## **4. Music Education in the K to 12**

It is worth noticing that during the previous curricula, music as a subject has lost its place in the elementary curriculum only being included as a subject in Grade 4. This insufficient time allotment on music subject can be considered as a significant reason for a poor mastery of the musical foundation skills and knowledge during the elementary school period. With the reformation of the curricula, music as a separate subject had been given priority through structural and content improvements. The lengthening of time allocation for music subject, as shown by its introduction in the early Grade 1, has demonstrated the importance of music as part of the core subjects in basic education. The transition of learning concepts from one-grade level to another is seamless as per written in the curriculum and should provide learning efficiency and mastery for the learner's part. Furthermore, as discussed earlier MTB-MLE section of the paper, the new curriculum uses the native language as mode instruction in the early childhood learning of music in the lower primary education. This additions in classroom time and language of the mode of instruction provides the students with more opportunity of experiencing music making and listening in music education learning. According to Benson (2004), *'Mother tongue-based bilingual education increases both access to skills and quality of basic education by facilitating classroom interaction and integration of prior knowledge and experiences in new learning.'* Kalinde and Vermeulen (2016) also added that in early childhood music education, incorporation of mother tongue language shows positive benefits in students' development in general music education. These show that the use of native language in music teaching and

learning encourages the student to participate in the learning process of music and become literate of the topic using familiar language. The core music process in lower primary education involves experimental learning through imitation, creating and responding with the use of movements. Native language usage will help students express and understand the basics and develop a core understanding of the processes involved. Also, using mother-tongue in early music education resonates the values of the curriculum philosophy which is to nurture and refine the learners' artistic and cultural literacy and heritage while it instills the learner's own cultural identity.

#### **4.1 Junior and Senior high school Music education**

It is stated in the music curriculum that the secondary level music curriculum is geared towards the appreciation of Philippine and world music and culture. The junior high school curriculum shows the importance it has given to learn and understand different tradition and culture of one's and foreign music. However, it may be challenging to relate the content standards of each lesson to the performance standards as it is too much for both the learner and teacher. Labrador (2016) explained that there is an insufficiency of mastery of Philippine and Asian music of music graduates in higher education. Because higher education in music focuses mainly on western music, Philippine and Asian music is not much a priority in the music universities, which are important topics in Grades 7 and 8. Labrador disclaimed that it is different in the case of education graduates (MAPEH graduates) for they focus on the four subjects; Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health.<sup>vii</sup> Also, the discontinuation of musical theories and fundamentals in junior high school may hinder the growth and development of learners' music processes through-out junior high. The lack of exposure to performing and music process may be considered a factor in the development of learning standards in music. The senior high school, Arts and Design curriculum shows progress in the performance-based aspect of the curriculum. The learner focuses on application and understanding of the manner of the other fields of art. Arts and Design track shows generality to art as an aesthetic course and the preparatory subject and rudiments for higher music education seems to be missing in the senior high school curriculum. Although senior high school program is relatively new and in the processing of development, K to 12 still provides a special program to students who are individually talented in an artistic field through the Special Program in the Arts.

#### **4.2 Summary**

Following several reformations from Basic Education Curriculum of 2002 to Secondary Education Curriculum of 2010, K to 12 Curriculum had adapted to the global basic education cycle with the thirteen-year basic education term. Within this reformation are changes and inclusion of new learning areas focusing on the holistic development of the student and equipping them with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. In music education, the music subject had been given more classroom time with its introduction as a subject starting at Grade 1. The use of mother tongue language as a mode of instruction in the early years is also a significant change in the curriculum that may contribute to the learning development of a student. The senior high school Arts and Design track is still a developing track that aims to provide the aesthetic aspect of learning of the student that will prepare them for future arts education.

While significant reforms in music education are included, music education in the K to 12 Curriculum itself is still in the process of improving and adapting to these recent changes. Some factors that lead to a conducive learning environment like music teacher quality and development, infrastructure and availability of musical instruments and learning materials are possible concerns. The relationship between junior high school music education and senior high school music education in terms of its effect and trends to students needs further research in order to grasp the flow of the music education system of the new curriculum with these standards. Also, the specialized curriculum in music may also play an essential role in the music education system of the Philippines considering its curricula is based on the general music curriculum guide and therefore, a careful investigation to these matters is highly recommended. The current curriculum is still being tested and with the

help of the assessment present in the curriculum, provision and necessary improvement shall be considered. The music education curriculum of the Philippines deserves continuous research follow up for growth and further improvement of the system.

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### Notes

- i MAKABAYAN is consist of competencies such as Civics and Culture, Music, Arts, Physical Education, Health, Home Economics, and Social Studies.
- ii Grade 12 students exit examination is called Basic Education Exit Assessment and is a mandatory examination to determine the learners' learning progress and attainment of learning standards and also serves as information for future curriculum improvement and policy review and formulation. Grade 12 students also take the National Assessment Test selected randomly by school by implementation by DepEd (see Department of Education Order No. 68, s. 2018).
- iii This refers to the National Career Assessment Examination or NCAE.
- iv Music process in the music curriculum involves listening, reading, imitating (re-creating), performing, responding, creating, performing (including movement), evaluating, analyzing critically, and applying (transference).
- v Sibika at Kultura (Civics and Culture) is a non-core subject in the BEC that centers on social studies, government, and culture.
- vi Music subject in the secondary level in the K to 12 Curriculum is also under the core subject MAPEH.
- vii MAPEH graduates are Bachelor of Education graduates majoring in the fields of Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health.