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Different pedagogies, equivalent results: a comparison of language skills and school attitude between Waldorf school students and public school students in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Waldorf education is globalising and has been introduced as an alternative educational approach in numerous countries, including the Philippines. This raises questions about its added value and quality? This research compares the educational outcomes of two schools – a Waldorf school and a public school – in a rural community in Central Philippines. Spelling abilities and attitude towards school of Grade 6 and Grade 8 students were evaluated and compared. In the end, results of both schools could be considered equivalent, but, due to its different pedagogy, Waldorf education still adds value, by providing for diversity and choice within the Philippine educational landscape.

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Introduction

Due to globalisation processes the educational landscape in many countries diversifies. Often it is stressed that globalisation processes in education lead to homogenisation (Spring 2015, 7–13), due to the globalisation of educational trends and policies, enhanced by international institutions, actors, and evaluation programmes. While this is certainly the case, heterogenisation takes place at the same time, caused by, among other things, the globalisation of alternative educational approaches, resulting in more diverse national educational landscapes and more choice for parents and students to opt for. This study, which was situated in the Philippines, provides for an interesting contextualised example of the impact that diverse educational approaches can have on school performance, comparing Philippine public education with a more recently introduced alternative educational approach in the Philippines, Waldorf education.

Waldorf schools in the Philippines aim to be a meaningful alternative to Philippine public schools. Waldorf educators believe in fostering positive social change by stimulating personal development, including creativity, independence, and social responsibility (Rawson 2019; 2021; Stehlik 2018; 2019). In response, critics have stated that these abstract ideals are difficult to measure. Moreover, critical scholars in other countries – including the Netherlands and the UK (e.g. Bus and Kruizenga 1986; Cunningham and Carroll 2011; Steenbergen 2009) – have noted that Waldorf education has scored below par when it comes to educational outcomes that are measurable, such as literacy achievements. No such comparative research has yet been concluded in the

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Philippines. This article evaluates the quality of Philippine Waldorf education, based on measurable educational outcomes, compared to Philippine public education. The following question is central:

> How do important educational outcomes – English spelling competence and school attitude – of Philippine Waldorf students differ from those of Philippine public school students?

To find out, this article zooms in on one rural community in Iloilo Province, in Central Philippines, where a Waldorf school and a public school were compared. The two schools are a stone's throw from each other, but differ in many ways, including the pedagogical approach, educational culture, and student population. Based on questionnaires, interviews, and language tests in Grades 6 and 8, the differences in school outcomes and school attitudes are examined.

Waldorf education in the Philippines

Waldorf education has its origins in Germany in the early twentieth century (Stehlik 2019). Since the early 2000s it has been globalising to the global south, especially to Asian countries (Boland 2015; Stehlik 2018). At the centre of Waldorf's pedagogy is a specific notion of personal development (Rawson 2019; van Schie 2021). Specific developmental stages of students are deemed important and therefore subjects should be offered at the appropriate time, i.e. when a child has reached a particular developmental stage (Avison and Rawson 2014, 22–28). Young children, for example, are not expected to engage with academic and abstract tasks to the same degree as older children. For that reason, reading and writing instruction begins later than in public schools. Also typical for Waldorf pedagogy is a balanced approach in which 'thinking, feeling, and willing' activities are combined and alternated (Rawson 2021). The specific theory of development, as well as the pedagogical approach, are drawn from insights from a spiritual philosophy called anthroposophy.

Waldorf schools have only recently become part of the Philippine educational landscape. To date, seven schools have been established in the country (van Schie 2020). The choice for Waldorf education in the Philippines – often by highly educated critical middle class parents – is partly based on critique and aversion to the mainstream national school system. Therefore, the Waldorf approach is sometimes presented by proponents as almost the opposite of mainstream public schools. Critique to the public school approach includes its presumed one-sidedly orientation towards cognition and rote learning (instead of experience-based learning and a balance between activities of 'head, heart, and hands'), its presumed performance-pressure and strong focus on results and grades (presumably causing unnecessary stress and school dropout), its presumed lack of creativity and arts in the curriculum, and its presumed limited attention for social and individual development (and focus on a balanced ratio between personal freedom and social and environmental responsibility).

The quality of education in the Philippines

Nationally, the Department of Education determines quality standards that must be met by Philippine schools and provides for standardised tests to evaluate whether these levels are met. Private schools and home-schoolers are allowed to deviate from the standard curriculum as long as they abide regulations and laws and meet the standards of the mandated National Achievement Tests (NATs). NATs, which measure both students' competency and quality of schools, have to be completed in Grades 6, 10, and 12.

Additionally, the quality of educational outcomes in the Philippines is evaluated internationally through participation in PISA and TIMSS. International education evaluations such as PISA and TIMSS are part of globalisation efforts within education, and meet an implicit desire for comparability of educational systems and outcomes. Available reviews show relatively low scores for Philippine students and, consequently, have led to criticism of the Philippine educational system (Trinidad 2020; WB 2020). The low quality of Philippine education is often attributed to weak state institutions, deficient policy implementation, and a lack of coherence between educational

reforms (Maca and Morris 2012, 476). In comparison to other educational systems in the region, the Philippine educational system is largely decentralised and privatised (Maca and Morris 2012; Termes, Edwards, and Verger 2020; Yamauchi 2005) and various interest groups, such as the Catholic Church, commercial enterprises, and international institutions, have played relatively important roles in education (Maca and Morris 2012, 473; Termes, Edwards, and Verger 2020).

In the 2018 PISA report, the Philippines scored lowest of all participating countries in reading and second lowest in mathematics (Schleicher 2019). The poor quality of the system had previously been demonstrated in international reviews such as the TIMSS, conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (WB 2020, iii). The PISA report also reveals a great inequality between different types of schools and students (Trinidad 2020). Specifically, rural schools score much lower than urban schools; public schools score lower than private schools; and students of low socioeconomic status score lower than those of high socioeconomic status (Trinidad 2020, 1). These outcomes demonstrate that inequality and poverty, which are deeply rooted in Philippine society (McDoom et al. 2019; UNESCO 2015), correspond to an inequality of opportunity in education (McDoom et al. 2019, 926).

Quality standards for Philippine public schools and Waldorf schools

For Philippine public schools, the most important quality standards are those set by the Department of Education. For Philippine Waldorf schools, an additional set of quality standards is at play, namely, standards formulated in an international Waldorf network. In countries without a national Waldorf Schools' association, such as the Philippines, the quality of schools is usually evaluated by the Pedagogical Section of the Goetheanum, the international headquarters of the General Anthroposophical Society, in Dornach, Switzerland. The Pedagogical Section recruits senior teachers from Waldorf schools to be international mentors, who monitor whether schools successfully follow Waldorf guidelines, including a conventional Waldorf curriculum. These mentors provide for training and advice in the schools they visit, and identify points for improvement.

Inherent to the international Waldorf discourse, which is reproduced through the Goetheanum's mentor system, is a specific attitude towards testing. Due to a pedagogical focus on broad personal development, there is often a reticence towards abundant cognitive testing (Rawson 2005, 27). Traditional cognitive tests may be used, but they are supplemented with a range of formal and informal methods of student evaluation, some of which, such as written reports and child studies, may be typical for Waldorf schools (Rawson 2005, 28). Written reports, which often substitute grades, provide students and parents with feedback on how students perform in class. This includes feedback on cognitive progress, but also on motivation for learning, social roles within the group, personal struggles, etc. It may even include poems, stories, or images, which somehow are indicative of a student's progress and development at a certain point in time. A child study is an intensive anthroposophical study on the personal development of a particular student by a group of teachers.

For the current research, we observed that the National Achievement Tests (NATs) played an important role in the public school. Lists of high-achieving students were kept and framed in the classroom, and the best-scoring students were rewarded for their good test results. Overall, the school's test results were displayed in the teachers' lounge. While the NATs are external quality standards imposed on the school, there seemed to be no real friction between these external standards and the school's own internal measures. The Department of Education's guidelines were followed closely, with detailed objectives for each subject. The curriculum had been worked out in detail by the Department, down to the teaching level, and largely prepared students for the NATs. The results from the NATs are supposed to show whether the school had succeeded in achieving the intended educational goals.

In the Waldorf school, by contrast, the National Achievement Tests (NATs) were not considered important. Moreover, it was unclear whether the NAT standards were actually met, since NATs were not conducted at the time of the current study. The school had done NATs in the past, but was currently exempt from the testing. The exemption was welcomed as congruent with a common

critical view in Waldorf schools on testing and examinations. Thus, despite a potential tension between the NATs and Waldorf guidelines, this tension was hardly felt in practice, simply because NATs were not administered. Instead, peer evaluation within an international Waldorf network, as well as international quality guidelines for Waldorf schools, were appreciated and applied. Several international Waldorf mentors, as representatives of an international Waldorf community, were involved in the school's quality assessments and development. Although the quality standards used are not less external than the NATs, these standards were not experienced as bothersome, because of the school's strong wish to function as a Waldorf school. Rather, they were viewed as necessary and welcome help in achieving this goal.

The language issue in the Philippine educational system

The Philippine educational system is confronted with an important language issue, viz., multilingualism. The Philippines is a multilingual nation with more than a hundred languages (Jorolan-Quintero 2018, 761; McDoom et al. 2019, 927; Young 2002, 221). Two languages are recognised as official national languages: English and Filipino. Filipino, or Tagalog, is mentioned in the constitution as the first national language and functions as an important symbol of Filipino national unity. English, introduced under American rule (1898–1945), is the second national language and has always been the most important language in education. It is the main language of government, business, academia, media, and literature, and is associated with wider communication and international relationships (Jorolan-Quintero 2018, 761; Young 2002, 221). Despite their status as national languages, Filipino and English play marginal roles in the daily lives of many Filipinos, especially in rural areas, where people rather speak their own local languages (Young 2002, 221), such as Hiligaynon in Iloilo Province, the location of the current study.

The lingual diversity of the Philippine archipelago is reflected in the educational system, making language use in schools a complex and delicate issue. In most schools, there are at least three languages that play a major role: English, Filipino, and a third, local language. Since 2012, a mother tongue-based multilingual education policy (MTB-MLE) has been in place, which mandates schools to provide education in the vernacular of the school setting, in line with the many studies that have shown that 'learners tend to learn more when lessons are taught in a language they are familiar with' (Jorolan-Quintero 2018, 761), such as the famous longitudinal study of Aguilar in Iloilo (cited in Bernardo 2004, 19). The mother tongue is used as the prime language of instruction until Grade 3 (Jorolan-Quintero 2018, 773). Pupils are mandated to learn the alphabet in kindergarten and must be able to read and write in their mother tongue in Grade 1. From Grade 1, lessons in English and Filipino are also introduced and students are expected to become orally fluent in these languages by the end of that grade. From Grade 4, formally, English and Filipino remain the only official languages of instruction. From that moment, subjects are divided into English-instructed and Filipino-instructed subjects (Jorolan-Quintero 2018, 773). Mathematics and science, for example, are taught in English, whereas *araling panlipunan* (social studies), which includes national history and geography, is taught in Filipino. In practice, however, the vernacular often continues to play an important role. This language is spoken in the corridors of the school, in the school yard, in the teacher's lounge, and often also in the classroom. Contrary to public schools, many private schools choose for an English-only policy. The idea is that English-language proficiency is more decisive for future professional success than other languages (Jorolan-Quintero 2018, 773–774).

National trends are also witnessed in the two schools of this study: English is the main language of instruction in the private Waldorf school for almost all subjects. Hiligaynon continues to be the main language in the school yard and within art and sports classes, but in theoretical lessons students are supposed to talk English, at least to their teachers. In the public school, Hiligaynon is the main language in and outside the classroom. In most classes, at least a part of the instruction is given in Hiligaynon, in order to achieve better comprehension of the lesson concepts. This happens even in classes where English or Filipino are the prescribed language of instruction.

Literacy education in Philippine public schools and Waldorf schools

The way language education is designed in the two school differs significantly, in line with their different pedagogical and didactical approaches. In the public school, the alphabet is already presented in kindergarten and pupils start to read and write at the age of 4 to 5. By the age of 6, pupils are supposed to be able to read and write, in line with the policy goal to make 'every student a reader and a writer by grade 1' (Jorolan-Quintero 2018, 762). The Waldorf students, in line with Waldorf guidelines (Avison and Rawson 2014, 60), start later. Typically, the names of letters, as well as the uppercase alphabet, are introduced, playfully, in Grade 1. In Grade 2, children learn the sounds as well as the lowercase alphabet (Cunningham and Carroll 2011, 486–487), and when they are about seven the Waldorf students are able to read and write. In terms of the national curriculum, this is one to two years later than public school students (Cunningham and Carroll 2011, 475).

The Waldorf approach has earned both praise and criticism in relation to literacy education. Praise for the Waldorf pedagogical approach (e.g. Burnett 2007) includes the lively way in which sound and form are brought together, the use of images in relation to letters, and the provided 'experience of wholeness' (Burnett 2007, 325), in which the learning of letters is embedded in a broad range of artistic lesson activities, including listening to stories, clapping, singing, reciting poems, movement, and games (Burnett 2007, 327–328). It also seems to correspond with international studies stressing the importance of 'emergent literacy' (Larson and Marsh 2005). Critical studies, on the other hand, such as those by Bus and Kruizenga (1986) and Steenbergen (2009) in the Netherlands, report lower reading and spelling outcomes for Waldorf schools than for public schools. These studies have contributed to an image of Waldorf education as academically underperforming, not least because higher learning results could be expected given the relatively high socioeconomic status and educational level of the parents – an extensive body of literature links these features to school success (i.e. Davis-Kean 2005; Stevenson and Baker 1987; White 1982).

Current study

In the current study, we examine whether – and how – we can compare the educational outcomes of a Philippine Waldorf school and a nearby public school. This is a complicated undertaking, not least because of the different quality standards and quality perceptions in both schools. In practice, the quality standards set by the Department of Education, which stress the cognitive achievements of students, are mainly used in the public school, whereas international Waldorf standards, focused on broad personal development, are applied in the Waldorf school.

Before we start comparing, we must first define what we mean by educational outcomes and understand how they relate to quality perceptions. Conceptually, we distinguish two categories of educational outcomes: 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes. Both relate to a different kind of quality perception. 'Hard' outcomes imply a quality perception based on cognitive achievements. In the current study, we focus on students' English spelling competence, which is considered an important predictor of educational success (Kerstjens and Nery 2000). Moreover, 'hard' outcomes could contribute to: the confirmation or rejection of the assumption that exists about Waldorf education, based on the evaluation of some scholars, that the pedagogical approach leads to academic underachievement; the confirmation or rejection of the assumption about poorly performing Philippine public education, based on international reviews, especially in rural areas, due to a shortage of means and the implementation of a complex language policy. For the current study, and based on the evaluations we referred to earlier, we hypothesise that English spelling achievements are better in the Waldorf school than in the public school.

'Soft' outcomes, on the other hand, allow for a broader perception of educational quality, including aspects of social and personal development. In the current study, these 'soft' outcomes were evaluated by measuring students' school attitude, i.e. being either positive or negative about school and learning. By looking at 'soft' outcomes, we can also evaluate the quality aims put forward by

Waldorf educators, which focus on broad personal development, including creativity, self-development, and self-awareness. We expect that in a school where these aims and ideals are presented as important, students' school attitudes must be more positive than in a school where this is not the case (cf. Dahlin 2007; Dahlin 2010; Steenbergen 2009).

Materials and methods

Participants

This study was carried out among students and staff in two neighbouring schools – one Waldorf school and one public school – in the same rural community in Iloilo Province, in Central Philippines. It must be said that contact between the two schools was minimal. Most students and staff only vaguely knew teachers and students at the other school.

Students

Despite the schools being in the same village, the student populations at both schools differed significantly, mainly because the Waldorf school attracts students from a wider catchment area than the public school. In total, 99 students in Grades 6 and 8 participated, 44 students from the Waldorf school and 55 students from the public school. For the sake of comparability, students of the same age and grade were selected in both schools (see information on students in Table 1).

We have tried to combine the socioeconomic status indicators presented in Table 1 to develop a scale for socioeconomic status (SES). We wanted to combine information on distance to school, means of transport, and parents' professions. The idea was that, on average, students who live further away from school come by car or bus, and have parents with 'high' professions, have higher socioeconomic status than students who live closer to school, come by foot or tricycle, and have

Table 1. Characteristics of student participants.

School	Grade	*N*	#♀/♂	$\bar{x}$ age (+SD)[a]	Distance to school[b]	Means of transport[c]	'High'/ 'low' professions father/ mother[d]	
Waldorf school	6	22	♀ = 13 ♂ = 9	11.7 (.53)	Close: 28% Far: 72%	Foot: 14% Tricycle: 27% Bus: 18% Car: 36%	Father Mother	Low: 9% High: 41% Low: 0% High: 41%
	8	22	♀ = 11 ♂ = 11	14.2 (.49)	Close: 41% Far: 59%	Foot: 9% Tricycle: 27% Bus: 32% Car: 32%	Father Mother	Low: 14% High: 41% Low: 5% High: 64%
Public school	6	30	♀ = 16 ♂ = 14	11.5 (.96)	Close: 100% Far: 0%	Foot: 42% Tricycle: 50% Bus: 0% Car: 8%	Father Mother	Low: 71% High: 0% Low: 4% High: 4%
	8	25	♀ = 14 ♂ = 11	13.7 (.61)	Close: 100% Far: 0%	Foot: 38% Tricycle: 58% Bus: 0% Car: 0%	Father Mother	Low: 76% High: 0% Low: 0% High: 4%

[a]Ages were filled out in full years; they are only expressed in decimals to calculate the means.
[b]Close ≤ 5kilometres (this includes local community of the school and surrounding rural communities, as well the two closest towns), Far > 5 kilometres (this includes other surrounding towns and Iloilo City).
[c]Short distances are covered by foot or tricycle. These means of transport are also the cheapest. Longer distances are covered by car or bus. Bus means 'private school bus'. This bus is managed by parents of the Waldorf school. A fifth category, the jeepney, was excluded from the above table, since very few students used it. The jeepney is a cheap option for longer distances and is comparable to 'public transport'.
[d]We used the *Philippine Standard Occupational Classification*, based on the ILO's *International Standard Classification of Occupations*, to classify professions. We merged categories to create two main categories, 'high professions' and 'low professions'. Some professions could not be classified, such as OFW (Oversea Filipino Worker), housewife, and businessman/woman, and were therefore left out of the statistics.

parents with 'low' professions. However, although Spearman's correlations between these variables were in the expected direction (range .058 – .720), we did not succeed in combining all scores or selections of scores into a single SES score. As an alternative, we explored the possible value of each of these as covariates in the main analyses.

Staff

The school directors were also interviewed: one director from the Waldorf school and two from the public school. In accordance with its pedagogical approach, the Waldorf school makes no distinction between elementary school and high school whereas the public school distinguishes these as two separate sections, each with its own director. In addition to the directors, the Grade 6 and Grade 8 class teachers at both schools were interviewed, in order to provide background information. All the class teachers were women. On average, the age of teachers at the Waldorf school was lower than at the public school.

Materials

Contextual information

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with class teachers and school managers were done in order to provide background/contextual information to the findings. General information about the lesson programme, the respective classes, and the students was exemplified. The first author spent time in the classes. Classroom observations were checked and discussed, and information relating to the study's topics, such as the application of quality standards and testing, was exchanged in order to discern how teachers keep track of their students' development. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by a topic list. These same topics were also discussed with the school directors but with a focus on policy matters.

English spelling

Students were assessed using the Schonell Graded Word Spelling Test (Schonell and Goodacre 1971). This is a well-validated, highly reliable standardised test to evaluate general spelling ability (Devonshire and Fluck 2010, 367). It is meant for 5 to 15 years old students and consists of word lists featuring sets of 20 words, which increase in difficulty. We used both students' raw scores (the number of correctly written words) and calculated students' spelling age using the following formula: (number of correctly spelled words: 10) + 5. In the research setting in the Philippines, we chose to read all 100 words aloud and had the students write them all down. Based on the collected data, we found a high reliability estimated by Cronbach's alpha (.97).

We also conducted a validation study. Students were invited to write a short essay in English in which they described a day in school. Irrespective of spelling errors, we counted the number of words and the number of characters used. We used these two totals to calculate the average word length for each student. We then calculated Pearson PM correlations between the number of correctly written words on the Schonell test, on the one hand, and the number of words in the essay and the average word length, on the other hand. In terms of the number of words the correlation amounted to .51 and for word length to .32. This shows that students' spelling scores are indicative of the quality of students' broader writing skills in English.

School attitudes

We developed our own school attitude scale inspired by other scales, like, for instance, a Dutch school climate list (Smits and Vorst 1990). Available scales tended to be long. Our scale contained 14 items. Students evaluated 14 propositions using a five-point rating scale running from 'Yes very much' to 'No, not at all'. An additional option was for students to tick 'I don't know'. A sample item is 'I like school'. Based on the collected data, we could then construct a seven-item scale. Items that did not contribute to the scale were either negatively keyed or led to a relatively high portion of

participants ticking the 'I don't know' box. Recoding the negatively keyed items did not improve the scale. For the seven items we found a satisfactory reliability estimated with Cronbach's Alpha (.72).

Procedure

The first author conducted the interviews with each of the three school directors, as well as with the four class teachers. Interviews were recorded and processed into interview reports, which were later categorised and analysed. The interviews were conducted in school during school hours and lasted, on average, an hour. The questionnaires on student background and students' school attitude were filled out by students in all participating classes, during school hours. Students were instructed and supervised by the main researcher and a trained research assistant. For the spelling test, the recitation of the words was done by the class teachers of the respective classes. Neither the principal researcher nor the research assistant were Filipino. The idea was that their teacher's voice would be familiar to the students and would also do justice to the pronunciation of Filipino English.

Data analysis

This study includes both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data from the interviews with school directors and class teachers were transcribed and processed into interview reports. The interview reports were read closely and relevant information was integrated into the already presented text. The student data were mainly quantitative data. These were entered in SPSS statistics 27 and analysed using Analyses of Variance and Crosstabs with Chi^2-tests.

Results

English spelling

The results of the Schonell Graded Word Spelling Test by grade and school are shown in Table 2.

We compared the spelling scores between grades and schools with an analysis of variance. This resulted in an overall difference between schools/classes ($F(3,97) = 23.695$, $p < .001$). The test results show a notable difference between the two schools, namely, a significant higher mean of test scores, as well as corresponding spelling ages, for the Waldorf school students compared to the public school students. Including each of the earlier presented SES indicators as covariate in the analyses did not change the results.

Using Bonferroni tests we also compared each class with each of the other classes. We saw that Grade 6 of the Waldorf school scored about the same as Grade 8 of the public school. Grade 6 of the Waldorf school had lower scores than Grade 8 of the Waldorf school but higher scores than Grade 6 of the public school. Grade 8 of the Waldorf school did better than all other classes. Grade 6 of the public school achieved lower testing results than all other classes. And Grade 8 of the public school scored better than Grade 6 of the public school, but worse than Grade 8 of the Waldorf school.

Table 2. Schonell scores by school/grade.

Variable	Schools and grades	*N*	Mean	Standard deviation
Schonell scores	Waldorf School, Grade 6	22	55.32	21.24
	Waldorf School, Grade 8	22	78.86	10.72
	Public School, Grade 6	29	39.03	17.76
	Public School, Grade 8	25	59.92	15.72
Spelling ages (in decimals)	Waldorf School, Grade 6	22	10.54	2.19
	Waldorf School, Grade 8	22	12.89	1.07
	Public School, Grade 6	29	8.90	1.78
	Public School, Grade 8	25	10.99	1.57

For spelling ages, we found common differences between classes/schools. In addition, we compared the average spelling ages with average actual ages. We used available American norms to calculate students' spelling ages. When compared to these American norms, students in Grade 6 of the Waldorf school lagged 1.2 years behind in spelling proficiency; students of Grade 8 of the Waldorf school lagged 1.3 years; students of Grade 6 of the public school lagged 2.6 years; and students of Grade 8 of the public school lagged 2.7 years behind.

The test results reveal a notable similarity between both schools. That is to say, in both schools the mean spelling age between Grades 6 and 8 had risen about two years, which is what we would expect to find when comparing the two grade levels.

School attitude

Table 3 presents the mean school attitude scores by school/grade. An analysis of variance showed a statistically significant difference between schools and grades ($F(3,86) = 4.846$, $p < .005$). After conducting Bonferroni tests, only the contrast between Grade 6 of the public school and Grade 8 of the same school appeared to be significant, i.e. students of Grade 6 of the public school had better school attitudes than the Grade 8 students. The other possible differences between means were non-significant, meaning that no differences were found between the two schools, or between Grade 6 of the Waldorf school and Grade 8 of the Waldorf school.

Earlier we commented that seven of the original 14 items did not contribute to the quality of the current scale. We nevertheless examined three of these more closely: 'Classmates sometimes bully'; 'School feels like an obligation'; and 'Teachers are interested in me'. Students who experience bullying in school generally do not enjoy going to school (Gini 2008). Feeling that school is an obligation is usually indicative of less school pleasure. The final item is of interest because Waldorf pedagogy intends to stress personal development, and, as a result, it would be logical that students experience their teachers as being interested in them. Table 4 presents the ratings per item by school and grade and, in addition, presents whether the distribution of actual ratings differ from chance, using a Chi^2-test.

Table 4 shows that both schools and all classes experience problems with bullying, but that Grade 8 of the Waldorf school is doing better in this respect than the other classes. Grade 6 of the public school is also rather positive in that almost half the students report that classmates do not bully. Students of Grade 8 of the Waldorf school also rated 'School feels like an obligation' relatively positively insofar as they evaluate that they experience school less like an obligation than students from other classes. Students from both schools experience school as an obligation, but students from the public school, particularly students in Grade 8, feel this much more than students from the Waldorf school. The third statement is, in a sense, exceptional, because of the relatively high percentage of students reporting that they do not know whether their teachers are interested in them. Grade 6 of the public school is most positive about their teachers showing interest, whereas Grade 8 of the public school rated their teachers most negatively in this regard. In Grade 8 of the Waldorf school a high percentage of students reported not knowing whether their teachers were interested in them.

Discussion

The research question that this study set out to answer is:

Table 3. School attitude scores by school/grade.

Schools and grades	*N*	Mean	Standard deviation
Waldorf School, Grade 6	19	1.67	0.60
Waldorf School, Grade 8	19	1.77	0.56
Public School, Grade 6	27	1.43	0.32
Public School, Grade 8	22	1.99	0.60

Table 4. Student ratings by school/class of three school attitude related statements.

	Rating	Waldorf, grade 6	Waldorf, grade 8	Public, grade 6	Public, grade 8	Chi^2 (df), p
# students		22	20	27	25	
Classmates sometimes bully.	Yes, very much	9.5%	0.0%	11.1%	4.0%	32.558
	Yes	47.6%	18.2%	33.3%	52.0%	(15)
	Neutral	23.8%	27.3%	7.4%	16.0%	$p < .01$
	No	4.8%	18.2%	44.4%	12.0%	
	No, not at all	4.8%	22.7%	3.7%	16.0%	
	Don't know	9.5%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	
School feels like an obligation.	Yes, very much	27.3%	5.0%	11.1%	4.0%	43.095
	Yes	36.4%	20.0%	74.1%	84.0%	(15)
	Neutral	18.2%	30.0%	11.1%	0.0%	p
	No	9.1%	10.0%	3.7%	8.0%	< .0001
	No, not at all	9.1%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
	Don't know	0.0%	15.0%	0.0%	4.0%	
Teachers are interested in me.	Yes, very much	4.5%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	36.333
	Yes	13.6%	23.8%	40.7%	12.5%	(15)
	Neutral	45.5%	9.5%	29.6%	37.5%	$p < .01$
	No	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	
	No, not at all	4.5%	4.8%	0.0%	20.8%	
	Don't know	22.7%	61.9%	18.5%	25.0%	

How do important educational outcomes – English spelling competence and school attitudes – of Philippine Waldorf students differ from those of Philippine public school students?

The answer gives us the opportunity to reflect on our hypothesis that Waldorf education succeeds in attaining relatively high English spelling outcomes compared to public school students, and that Waldorf school students will report better attitudes towards school and learning than students from the public school.

Comparison of educational outcomes

We have seen that – in practice – different quality standards are significant in both schools. In the public school, the National Achievement Tests (NATs) and guidelines set by the Department of Education are leading standards, whereas in the Waldorf school internationally formulated Waldorf guidelines seem to be the prime quality standards. Because both schools have their own standards and monitor and control these in different ways, a comparison of educational outcomes or educational quality is not self-evident. Since there was no data, such as NAT outcomes, available at the time of our study, we had to find an alternative way to compare school outcomes. The difficulty of objectively measuring and comparing the quality of school outcomes lies, on the one hand, in the fact that a difficult choice had to be made about which indicators are deemed most important with regard to the quality of education (Biesta 2010) and, on the other hand, in finding an adequate method for measuring those indicators. In this study, the choice was made to compare English spelling proficiency as a competence that is basic to many academic skills taught in schools in the Philippines. We used the Schonell Graded Word Spelling Test. In addition, we constructed a school attitudes scale using a set of statements related to either positive or negative views towards school and learning.

English spelling

On the one hand, the test scores clearly show higher scores for Waldorf school students. On the other hand, both schools show an equally fast progress of about two years between Grade 6 and Grade 8. The relatively high test scores for Waldorf students could be considered a high-quality educational outcome, as well as a confirmation of our hypothesis. At the public school, students are, on average, almost two years behind the average spelling age of students at the Waldorf school.

Such a conclusion, however, would be too simple and premature. Although we did not succeed in constructing a single valid SES score and the individual SES indicators chosen did not contribute to the statistical explanation of the differences between the schools, it is clear from the presented information that students between the schools differ with respect to home background and living circumstances. We also observed and described important differences in the way schools deal with the language policy in their respective multilingual contexts. Moreover, such a conclusion would not take into account an important similarity that can be observed in the test results, viz. both schools succeed in improving students' spelling competence from Grade 6 to Grade 8 at a largely similar rate.

In short, the above presented findings are not sufficient to conclude that the educational outcomes of Waldorf education are of a higher quality than those of public education, although they may eventually help students from the Waldorf school to be more successful at higher levels of secondary and tertiary education than students from the public school. The findings also do not substantiate an argument against the evaluation of Waldorf education as an academically underachieving type of education, as has been suggested by some scholars in educational debates in other countries (see the introduction). A similar evaluation seems premature for the Philippine context. The current study also found no confirmation for the idea posited that public education in rural areas performs poorly.

School attitude

Students at both schools show an overall positive attitude towards school and learning. We found no significant differences between the schools. We must therefore reject the hypothesis that Waldorf students would score better than public school students in this area. In an attempt to find possible explanations for this unexpected finding we examined specific items more closely. Waldorf schools seem to score somewhat better on some points, such as the smaller number of students who are bullied or the extent to which school feels like an obligation to students. In other areas, however, there is a lack of clarity. Why do so many students say they do not know if their teacher is interested in them, for example?

Limitations of the study

Most important limitation that is likely to have an impact on educational outcomes were the different student populations at both schools (as already mentioned), with a more diverse selection of students at the Waldorf school, where a majority of students come from outside the local community and probably have a higher SES status (see *participants*).

Other factors that could have influenced the data, especially in relation to the Schonell test results, included the fact that it is likely that more students at the Waldorf school came from a home situation where English was stimulated, that the teachers at the Waldorf school generally seemed to have a better proficiency in English, and, finally, that we noticed some tension within both schools to perform well at this test. In relation to the latter, we heard for example that the students had practiced spelling in the weeks prior to the test, since they knew a spelling assessment was coming up. It is difficult to determine the influence of this on the results. They did not know which test would be used, so they were not able to practice the exact test and it should also be noted that spelling is a usual part of the study programme.

Suggestions for future research

Future research should consider the above-mentioned limitations of this research and could focus more specifically on the influence of background variables, such as socioeconomic status and level of education of the parents, on the actual performance, attraction, and design of Waldorf education

in the Philippines. This would obviously require a larger sample of participating students. Furthermore, future research could include comparisons with other private schools in the Philippines, which probably share more similarities with Waldorf education than public education in the Philippines does, e.g. the central focus on personal development or the use of English as major language of instruction. Future research could also aim to replicate a study like this one in other countries, providing – more contextualised examples of how pedagogical approaches – such as the Waldorf educational approach – could impact school performance and how socioeconomic factors are at play at the same time.

Conclusion

The Waldorf school in Iloilo succeeds in attaining relatively high English spelling outcomes compared to public school students, but its students do not report better attitudes towards school and learning than their public school peers. Although our data confirm higher test scores for spelling skills for Waldorf students, we cannot prove that this is due to an effective pedagogical approach, because we cannot exclude that the findings were the result of the children's home situation and the complex multilingual situation that schools have to deal with in the Philippines. Equally, there is not enough evidence to prove that Waldorf students are happier, more self-confident, or even more motivated to learn. Consequently, we also cannot judge the quality of Waldorf education in comparison to Philippine public education on the basis of this so-called soft educational outcome.

Following this study, we are more conscious than before of the information we are still missing in order to draw firm conclusions on the findings and their explanation or attributions. That said, based on what we know, we can at least say that Waldorf education is not a bad choice for children, either cognitively or with respect to school attitudes. What remains, however, is an obvious and serious substantive difference between the approaches of Waldorf and public schools; not necessarily better or worse, but different. The real asset of Waldorf education is its distinctive pedagogical approach, which is, in a sense, hard to measure and subjective. Waldorf education has an alternative pedagogical view based on specific philosophical and spiritual foundations (rooted in anthroposophy) and a broad focus on learning (by head, heart, and hands, and with a focus on personal development). In this way, Waldorf education certainly adds value to the Philippine educational landscape – as it probably does in many other countries where it has been introduced as globalising phenomenon – since it contributes to the diversity of this landscape – and provides an alternative option in terms of school choice for parents and students.

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