

EdCom II Year One Report: Misreading the Philippine education situation

The EdCom II Year One Report entitled "MIS-EDUCATION: The Failed System of Philippine Education" misreads the Philippine education situation. We do not have a crisis in Philippine education. We have a crisis in Philippine public education. Philippine private education is doing fine.

Per the studies of Drs. Vicente Paqueo and Aniceto Orbeta, Filipino private school students performed above par in the PISA 2018 Survey compared to other countries of the same economic level. It is Filipino public school students who have performed abysmally. The Education Sector Team of the Ateneo Economics Department reports that in PISA 2022, the gap in performance between private and public school students widened.

The serious problems cited in the EdCom Report as well as in other reports on education belong exclusively to the public education sector.

Let's take the case of textbooks.

For the public schools, since 2012, only 27 textbooks have been procured for Grade 1 to Grade 10, despite substantial budget allocations. The budget utilization data of the Department of Education (DepEd) show that from 2018 to 2022 alone, a total of P12.6 billion has been allocated to textbooks and other instructional materials, but only P4.5 billion (35.3%) has been obligated and P952 million (7.5%) has been disbursed. Clearly this is a problem in public education, not private education.

The root cause of this problem is best illustrated by Henry Ford who said that Ford car buyers could choose any color they want so long as it is black. This Ford mindset is behind the decision of the DepEd to have a uniform curriculum and uniform textbooks for the 28 million students in our primary schools. To compound the problem, instead of choosing from the innumerable textbooks produced in the Philippines and abroad, which are easily obtained in bookstores as is done in the private schools, the DepEd decided to write its own textbooks and have these textbooks printed by selected printers. This explains



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why only 7.5% of the textbook budget has been disbursed.

A similar problem was faced by the Department of Agriculture (DA). Mandated to provide free agricultural inputs such as fertilizers to farmers, the DA decided, as in the case of Henry Ford, to purchase fertilizers of their choice (fortunately not produce it themselves) and unload the fertilizers on the hapless farmers who had no choice in the matter. The end result has been inferior fertilizer or even "ghost" fertilizers. The DA finally came to its senses. Under a scheme devised by the Universal Storefront Services Corp. (USSC) headed by Ekie Gonzales, farmers are now given vouchers to buy fertilizers of their choice from accredited dealers. Suppliers are then paid one day after receipt of the vouchers. Similarly, school principals can be issued book vouchers to be used to purchase books in accredited book outlets.

Expecting the DepEd to discover and adopt a similar program is a fool's errand. Far better

to devolve our elementary and high schools to the *pamantasans* (colleges run by local government units) who have no problem providing textbooks to their students.

Let's take the case of classroom maintenance and shortages.

Surprisingly, the EdCom Report does not touch on the issue. However, Vice-President and education department secretary Sara Duterte in her Basic Education Report 2023, reported that the DepEd has an inventory of 327,851 school buildings in the country. Out of these school buildings, only 104,536 or 32% are in good condition. Due to various reasons, 21,727 or 7% are set to be condemned (for being unsafe for both teachers and students), 89,252 or 27% require major repairs, and 100,072 or 31% need minor repairs.

In addition to poor maintenance of the existing public school buildings, DepEd Undersecretary Epimaco V. Densing III reported that the department has a shortage of 159,000 classrooms. He asked Congress for a yearly budget of P100 billion for eight years or P800 billion to solve this crisis.

In sharp contrast, private school buildings are well-maintained. Ironically, this is because the DepEd, as the regulator of private schools, demands so. Moreover, they have a surplus of classrooms.

Through school vouchers, students in the overcrowded public classrooms can be moved to better-maintained private schools with excess capacity. Under the school voucher system, the cost of educating these students will be half that in the public schools, with better learning outcomes. Most importantly the government saves P800 billion.

This is an instance when the crisis in public education is solved with the assistance of private education.

Lastly, let's take the case of poor teacher performance.

In 2023, the starting salary of public school teachers is P27,000 per month, while for private school teachers the starting salary ranges from P14,000 to P23,000 per month. Public school teachers must pass the Licensure Exam for Teachers (LET) while private schools require only a bachelor's degree.

And yet, despite being better paid and better qualified, public

school teachers are performing worse than their private school counterparts based on the performance of their students in the PISA surveys. Why? Let us count the ways.

- 1.) They are asked to handle a class size way over the optimum 40 students in a class;
- 2.) They conduct their classes in dilapidated, crowded classrooms;
- 3.) They teach students only 35% of whom have textbooks and have a similar shortage of teaching materials;
- 4.) They must follow a rigid curriculum and teach from uniform textbooks, with very little flexibility;
- 5.) They must comply with a DepEd policy of automatic passing for all students, removing any incentive for the student to learn and for the teacher to teach;
- 6.) They are required to personally teach 30 hours per week while their private school counterparts teach only 12-18 hours per week.
- 7.) They are expected to use the remaining 10 hours per week to handle the 50 non-teaching and administrative tasks assigned to them by their bureaucratic over-

lords, ranging from complying with condescending department orders to feeding the insatiable demand for reports which are never used;

8.) They are valued the least in the DepEd organization. Of the 12 ranks in the DepEd, they rank at the lowest two (Ranks 12 and 11) while their principal is the third lowest (Rank 10). The nine higher ranks are all administrative positions.

9.) Their career prospects are bleak. Per DepEd policy, only 10% of teachers can be master teachers (advance from Rank 12 to Rank 11). A little over 5% can hope to become school principals (advancing from Rank 11 to Rank 10) as there are only 45,000 principal positions against 800,000 teachers.

10.) If they wish higher pay and rank, they must stop teaching and apply to be administrators. Then their career prospects improve to 25% (there are 200,000 administrators against 800,000 teachers) and they can aspire to advance from Ranks 10 to 2 (Undersecretary).

In summary, the reason they cannot perform effectively is that they work in a toxic environment. The chances of de-toxifying this environment ranges from nil to zero. Far better to remove the teachers and their students from this toxic environment and transfer them to the school boards of the local government units. The widespread satisfaction of residents with services rendered by the employees of local government units is proof that they work in a supportive environment.

In closing, we repeat, we do not have a Philippine education crisis. We have a Philippine public education crisis. The key to solving this crisis is to ask why we do not have a Philippine private education crisis. ■

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"Increase and multiply!" God told Adam, the first Man, in Genesis 1:28. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." One rule: "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die" (Genesis 3:3)

"Eat, and you will be like God," the Serpent tempted. Adam and Eve ate the Forbidden Fruit and so they were banished from the fully enlightened ambience of the Garden of Eden, where there was peace and harmony among all creatures in Creation.

In the mortal world, Good and Evil constantly fight to win over Man. Death is unescapable, as a reminder of that end in time, of the struggle to return to harmonious Eternity in Eden. Man's first sin against Man in the temporal world was when Adam's son, Cain, killed his brother Abel. Power "over everything that moves on the earth" became an obsession of Fallen Man. Greed and corruption, killing and stealing were prevalent in the competitive struggle for dominance and survival. God was unhappy with this. He found one just man among the descendants of Seth: Noah.

God said to Noah, "I am going to destroy all flesh because the world is full of violence. Build an ark of gopherwood, with rooms inside, three decks, and a door. Cover it inside and out with pitch." And Noah did exactly as God commanded him (Genesis 6:13-22).

Increase and multiply

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Rain poured for 40 days and the resulting floods stayed for 150 days, destroying all living things except those whom God permitted Noah to bring with him on the ark: Noah and his wife; their three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth and their wives (eight humans); seven pairs each, a male and a female, of all clean animals and birds; one pair each, a male and a female of all unclean animals and birds (Genesis 7:1-5).

"I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done," God promised Noah after the Flood. "Increase and multiply and fill the earth," God said to Noah (Genesis 9:7) as He had said to Adam.

Call the story of Genesis "historical narrative" or even folklore, if one does not believe in "God Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible" or other Supreme Being or Principle who rules over Mankind. Genesis, which starts from the creation of Adam, is a central starting story for the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Even for a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God, or believes that nothing is known



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or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena — basic human intuition and logic gained from empirical experience in living and dying must urge the acceptance that Man by himself cannot control human existence. Natural laws call on the peaceful co-existence of living creatures.

And so the world worries about the growing or declining population, and its burden on economics (competition, gains, and survival) and socio-politics (power and influence, hierarchies and dependencies).

As of Jan. 1, 2024, the world's population was 8,019,876,189, up 75,162,541 (0.95%) from New Year's Day 2023, according to estimates of the US Census Bureau's International Database (IDB) for 227 countries and equivalent areas, plus 15,237 subnational areas. Through January 2024, 4.3 births and 2.0 deaths were expected every second worldwide. (Trending is refined

through the focus year.) Around 108 billion people have ever lived on our planet. This means that today's population size makes up 6.5% of the total number of people ever born (*ourworldindata.org*).

Demographers study birth rates and death rates, which affect the level of natural change (increase or decrease) within a population. Emigration and immigration, quite common in globalization, adjust individual countries' population growth rates. Other factors that affect the change in a population's growth include the impact of urbanization (easier access to medical facilities, medical technology, and medicine), the emancipation of women (women working, fewer or delayed pregnancies), agricultural changes (more food production, shift of labor to industry), and education (health and hygiene, family planning), according to a UK study (*cool-geography.co.uk*).

The population of the Philippines on January 2024 was 119,106,224, 1.47% of the total world population. The Philippines is ranked No. 13 of countries with a population of more than 100 million, with China and India each having more than one billion people. The population grew 1.51% (1,768,856) from last year 2023. This considers a net migration of -69,996 meaning more people have gone out of the country than those who came in. The total fertility rate (TFR) is 2.67 live births per reproductive-age woman, with the TFR steadily declining since 1970, when it was 6.20.

The urban population makes up 47.4% of the total, having grown from 31.5% in 1970 — indicating the movement to the cities and/or urbanization of erstwhile rural areas to serve the economic and social needs of the growing population. The problem with urbanization is the "crowding out" principle, where opportunities and resources are easily taken by the powerful (e.g., the rich), leaving little for the weak (e.g., the poor). The Gini ratio representing the income and wealth inequality in the Philippines per the World Bank is at 40.70 (as at 2021) reflecting a large gap between a country's richest and poorest citizens.

Population growth and distribution has been a critical planning parameter for the country's bid to keep pace with the exciting

rise of the developing ASEAN region that started in the 1970s. Republic Act No. 6365 (Aug. 16, 1971) established the National Population Program and created the Commission on Population (PopCom). However, little — or more like nothing — concrete was accomplished in the policymaking, planning, coordinating, and monitoring of the Population Program until Republic Act No. 10354, The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act or Reproductive Health Law (RH Law), was passed in 2012. It provided universal access to methods on contraception, fertility control, sex education, and maternal care in the Philippines.

There was much controversy and opposition raised by the Catholic clergy on the RH Law, especially on the availability of contraceptives and their distribution to the poor. The use of contraceptives is prohibited by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. But after a three-year appeal raised to the Supreme Court, it was decided that the RH Law was not unconstitutional. Its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) was signed on March 15, 2013.

It has now been 11 years since the RH Law's IRR was passed and meant to weave itself into the lives of Filipinos. Has it been effective in ordering better harmony in society? Controversy still rages, even among the implementers of the Law — modules for sex education in schools have not been standardized; some local government units (LGUs) seem to be still fumbling with family planning services