

# Stating the Obvious: The State of the Philippine Education Sector



**A**TTEMPTS TO closely look into the current state of the education sector in the Philippines would yield nothing new. For the past two to three decades, the education sector has been beleaguered with the same problems. If anything, only the statistics changed – for worse. But the issues remain the same: lack of instructional materials, underpaid but overworked teachers, lack of facilities, and in some instances, absence of schools in far flung areas.

These can be traced partly to the inadequate national budget allotment for the sector. The present state of the Philippine educational sector is a result of the same problems which have piled to gargantuan and seemingly insurmountable proportions due to the inaction on the part of the government to seriously address these issues.

This is surprising because as a society, the Filipino people put much premium on education as their means to better their lives. Education is generally viewed as the great equalizer of opportunities.

It is surprising further because the present administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo hyped the “diploma sa bawat dingding ng pamilyang Pilipino” dictum.

## June Tales of Woes

June of every year invariably highlights the continuing woes of the education sector. It is the time of year when the entire Filipino people



are bombarded with tales and accounts of the various education related problems that students, teachers, and parents have to contend with. It is also the time of year that the government shifts its focus to momentarily address these gaps in the system.

An estimated public elementary and high school enrolment of 20,093,585 for school year 2006-2007 has be accommodated by an educational system which based on Department of Education (DepEd) estimates, will need 10,549 new classrooms, 1.22 million desks, 67.03 million textbooks and additional 12,131 teachers to effectively address the current regrettable gaps in the sector.

Classroom shortage was pegged by then DepEd acting secretary Fe Hidalgo at 6,823 based on a 45:1 pupil to classroom ration. The figure might not appear to be a cause of concern. However, the 45:1 pupil to classroom ratio is the highest in Asia compared to the 20-30:1 ratio being used by Indonesia, Thailand and others. Also, the 45:1 ratio used by DepEd was good for planning purposes and does not depict the reality that most schools in the country have to contend with 60-100:1 pupil to classroom ratio in some extreme cases. Classroom size is an extremely important factor in the learning quality of pupils as this sets the backdrop against which pupil-teacher interaction is based.

Another serious problem which is seemingly embedded in our educational system is the lack of textbooks in most of the public schools in the country. A pupil would ideally need five textbooks for all his/her subjects in school. However, the DepEd estimated a shortage of 67.03 M textbooks and this shortage is mostly felt in far-flung areas in the country. This is not to say that in the urban areas, there is a 1:1 textbook-to-pupil ratio. In some barangays in North Cotabato, teachers expressed that textbook shortage is so acute that at times, only the teacher has a copy of a textbook which she has to manually copy in a manila paper so she could show it to her pupils.

For a country which produces some 35,238 eligible teachers annually, the lack of teachers means that there is a problem in the profession in particular and the education sector in general. The paltry salary that public school teachers receive versus the high

demand for teachers in other countries forced our teachers to work abroad, specifically the United States, China, Japan and Middle East countries. Of these teacher importing countries, the US tops the list of destinations by taking in 61.3% of the total numbers of teachers deployed abroad. This trend is expected to continue given the recent announcement of the US that it needs 20,000 teachers annually. And this certainly does not help given the shortage of teachers in the country.

Even as there is an admitted lack of qualified teachers, there is also the problem of the competencies of some of those in the present teaching force as they are not trained to handle the subjects they are teaching. DepEd statistics illustrates this: of those teaching General Science, only 42% are Science majors; in Biology, only 44% are Biology majors; in Chemistry, only 34% are Chemistry majors; and in Physics, only 27% Physics majors. This means that the remainder have other specialties other than the subjects they are teaching.

## Reflections of the Problems

The effects of these compounded problems besetting the Philippine education system are ultimately felt by the pupils. What suffers at the end are the quality of learning which they derive against a backdrop of lack of crucial facilities like classrooms and textbooks, and lack of personnel and the wanting quality of the existing teaching force.

Presently, only six out of 1,000 Grade 6 pupils are prepared to enter high school. Meanwhile, only 2 out of every 100 fourth year students are prepared to enter college. Translated, of the 1.4 million Grade Six pupils, only 0.64% are prepared for High School, while only 2.1% of graduating high school students are fit to enter college as borne out of the 2004 High School Readiness Test and the National Achievement Tests.

These negative effects of the compounded problems have again been illustrated last March. The National Achievement Test for school year 2005-2006 showed a trend of disturbing results where Grade 6 pupils posted a passing average of 54.66% while 4<sup>th</sup> year high



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school students posted a lower average of 44.33%

But how do we expect 8 pupils sharing a textbook, holding classes in makeshift venues including playgrounds, and 100 people sharing a room meant for 45 to be able to effectively absorb the lessons being taught by overworked and underpaid teachers, some of whom are forced to handle subjects which are not part of their training?

## Government Priorities and Magic Wand Remedies

Government priorities are reflected in the annual budget that the Congress prepares and approves. It should therefore not come as a surprise that the abovementioned issues have piled up to its present gargantuan proportions because even if the government line is that the education sector got the lion's share in the re-enacted 2005 National budget, figures would show that debt servicing still remains at the top of the heap (32.3%) followed by education (13.9%) and defense (5.0%).

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Arguably, of all the social services, the education sector has the highest budget allocation. However it must be noted that for the last five years, the national budget for education has been declining. In contrast, the budget for debt servicing and defense have markedly increased during the said period.

For a country which is supposedly not waging a war, the increase in budget for defense is mind-boggling. On the other side of the scale, for a country which views education as the best equalizer in terms of opportunities, a decrease in its budget speaks a lot about the investment the government is putting into it.

**TABLE 1:** Selected National Government Expenditures  
(in Percent to Total National Budget) 2001-2006

| YEAR                    | 2001  | 2002  | 2003  | 2004  | 2005  | 2006p |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Debt Service (Interest) | 25.9% | 25.0% | 28.4% | 30.1% | 34.1% | 32.3% |
| Education               | 17.4% | 16.9% | 16.0% | 14.9% | 14.7% | 13.9% |
| Defense                 | 4.7%  | 5.2%  | 5.0%  | 4.9%  | 4.8%  | 5.0%  |

Source: BESF various years as cited in Ibon Facts and Figures. Vol 28 No 21.  
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For the year 2006, the DepEd originally requested for P133B in order to address some of its perennial problems. However, because of the failure of Congress to approve the 2006 National budget, the department has to operate on a re-enacted budget of P112B. This is way below the budget needed to effectively meet the demands of the enrollees for school year 2006-2007.

It has been estimated that for the public school system of the country to be rehabilitated and to be able to provide for quality and accessibility, it would need an additional P102B each year for the next nine years, on top of the P112B annual budget.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has also put in place stop-gap measures to address some of the problems of the educational system particularly the shortage in classrooms. She instituted the "double shifting method" as a response to the overwhelming lack of classrooms and ballooning pupil-to-classroom ratio. In this scheme, classrooms will be used twice a day by two classes, effectively cutting into half the classes to accommodate more pupils. This according to her lowered the classroom to pupil ratio from 1:100 to 1:50.

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This magic solution to the problem of student overpopulation addressed the statistics but not the real issue. This cut the instruction time and teacher-student interaction to half. Furthermore, this scheme made it necessary for classes to start as early as 6:00 a.m., which is hardly the best instruction and learning strategy.

On the tertiary level, the government has continuously decreased its subsidies for state-run colleges and universities which are supposed to ensure access to low-cost quality education. State colleges and universities have to resort to income-generating schemes including increasing their tuition fees. This in turn defeats the purpose, as these schools can no longer offer affordable and quality education.

## Education as a Luxury, Not a Right

That education is a human right is embodied in various international instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Philippines, as a State Party to these instruments, is duty-bound to provide free, quality, and accessible education to all.

In the Philippines, this is reflected in the 1987 Constitution which orders the State “to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to take appropriate steps to make education accessible to all.” (Art XIV Sec 1).

Moreover, Republic Act 9155 (Framework for Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001) states that *“it is the policy of the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality basic education and to make such education accessible to all by providing all Filipino children a free and compulsory education in the elementary level and free education in the high school level. Such education shall also include alternative learning systems for out-of-school youth and adult learners. It shall be the goal of basic education to provide them with the skills, knowledge and values they need to become caring, self-reliant, productive and patriotic citizens.”*

But given the present dismal situation of the Philippine education system and the government’s priorities and stop-gap measures to improve it, it certainly looks like “free, quality and accessible education for all” is at best compromised and even neglected.

Based on its budget priorities, debt servicing and not education gets the highest annual budget allocation even as our Constitution clearly states that education should be given the highest budget.

The intertwined accumulated problems which now beset the education sector as a result of the continuous renegeing of the government on its obligation to the education sector like lack of personnel, facilities, textbooks and classrooms definitely compromises the quality of the education that the public education system in the country is providing its students.

We cannot expect quality education from overcrowded classroom, reduced time of classes, lack if not absence of textbooks, teachers



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handling subjects which they do not have mastery over.

More so, we cannot expect quality, accessible education if the cost of education is beyond the reach of an ordinary Filipino family due to lack of government subsidy.

So more and more elementary graduates are not ready to enter high school. More and more high school graduates are not ready to enter college. More and more youth are not able to go to college at all.

So blame them! After all, in the Philippines, education is not a part of their rights. It is a luxury.

If there are no diplomas in the walls of every Filipino family, don't blame the government because it is paying its debts to free the future generation from the clutches of indebtedness.

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