

ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF PHILIPPINE EDUCATION THROUGH THE YEARS

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ABSTRACT

The essay is an attempt to analyze, evaluate and criticize issues affecting the educational system through the years with the end view of recommending possible improvements. The metamorphosis of Philippine education through the years was a gradual process brought about by generations of colonialism and imperialism. From the Spaniards to the Americans, to the Japanese even during the Liberation period up to the EDSA revolution, changes in education did not match the high hopes of the Filipino people. Presently, the Philippine educational system needs to address issues not only of accessibility and quality in providing education for all. Other issues needs to addressed involved the role of education in the national development, the unresponsive curriculum, improper monitoring of programs implemented, globalization of education and even politics in education. For the Philippine education to succeed its ills and problems must be addressed. There is a need for values reorientation of the Filipinos as a key to national development. Teachers' transformation, in terms of their values orientation is necessary. Part of the teachers' transformation must include their upgrading or updating for professional and personal development. Hence, government support and intervention, along this line is very much needed. As these very same ills and problems have been hounding the country for the last several decades, failure to do so will only compound these problems in the coming years.

Keywords: colonialism, imperialism, educational system, globalization

INTRODUCTION

Philippine Education is a product of long history of struggle. Its metamorphosis was a gradual process which was a product of generations of colonialism and imperialism. The Spaniards were for sometimes, successful in making the natives illiterate and uneducated. From the coming of Legazpi in 1570 to 1762, the natives were contented to be vassals of Spain. The Spaniards triumphed in using religion to make the people submissive and unquestioning. The people blindly obeyed their foreign masters with the hope of salvation in the afterlife. The Spanish policy focused on treating the natives as a ward; hence, there is no need for them to be educated. This policy offered no opportunity for the Indios (as what the Spaniards call the Filipinos during that time) to improve their lot in the colonial society.

However, the second phase of Spanish colonization, from 1762 – 1896 was a period of awakening. It marked the start of the realization, the dawn of critical queries and, ultimately, of revolution. The global changes during that time, like the opening of Suez Canal, the French Revolution, the opening of the Philippines to world trade and commerce, among others, provided

opportunity for the ilustrados (the educated class during the Spanish period) to send their children to school, even in Europe.

History tells us that education during the Spanish colonization was selective. It was more of a privilege than a right. Educational opportunities were so limited that learning became the possession of a chosen few. Only the ilustrados, the likes of Jose Rizal, the Luna brothers, the Pardo de Taveras and others, availed of it, even with harsh treatment and discrimination from their Spanish contemporaries. Learning, therefore, became a badge of privilege. There was a wide gap between the ilustrados and the masses. Even if the propaganda movement was spearheaded by them, it was evident that they favored the assimilation of the Philippines with Spain. This was a clear indication that, educated they maybe, they were still captives of Spain. The great masses, the majority of the uneducated, were those who favored the separation of the Philippines from Spain. Aware of their educational handicap, their desire for freedom was, for a while, suppressed, giving the educated ilustrados the privilege of leadership. However, when all else failed, the uneducated masses had no choice but to fight for their freedom.

The Spain's policy neglected the education of the natives, more so the tolerance and growth of native leadership. In fact, it was hostile to every influence coming from the outside world. Although, Spain initiated educational reforms by passing laws on education, these did not appease the restless minds and the burning hearts of the natives. The Philippine revolution against Spain which was sparked by the discovery of the Katipunan in 1896, resulted in the surrender of the last Spanish governor-general Diego de los Rios to the Ilonggo revolutionaries headed by General Martin Delgado on December 25, 1898 in Plaza Alfonso XII, (now Plaza Libertad) in Iloilo City. This event heralded the end of Spanish rule in the Philippines. However, later did the natives realized, that with the Spaniards leaving the Philippines, another master knocked at the door, the Americans.

Education was used by the Americans as one of the most effective means of pacifying the restless natives. Schools were established all over the archipelago. The natives were taught how to read and write by their American teachers. They learned American geography, American history, lives of American heroes, sang the Star Spangled Banner and learned the English language. The Americans was successful in making the natives their "little brown brothers."

The Filipinos regarded education as the most effective vehicle for social mobility. The Americans made education accessible to all, regardless of status in life. This made the Filipinos appreciate the Americans more. Even if literacy rate continued to increase in the first two decades of American occupation, it undeniably favored the elite in society who can afford to finance the university education of their children.

Although, the Americans claimed that education has succeeded in the Philippines because it had somehow transformed, the once ignorant people, into a literate population, imbued in them the values of civic consciousness, had lessened disease and epidemic, it failed to develop the moral and political leadership, the country so desperately needs. Education during the American period brought with it progress, together with its ills and shortcomings. On the one hand, it is undeniable that the establishment of the public school system was beneficial to the Filipinos and to the Philippines. Even if its impact cannot be quantified, it was assumed that higher literacy

rate among the people contributed to the improvement of their standard of living, improvement in public health and employment opportunities that hasten economic growth. It had also awakened in them their political participation. Education was seen as a vehicle for social mobility and attainment of democratic ideals. The success of public education during the American period was an achievement cited by Filipino leaders as proof of their capacity for self-government.

On the other hand, American education was the water that gradually diminished the spark of burning Filipino nationalism. The educational system established by the Americans was not solely for giving the Filipinos the gift of literacy, but more so for their economic and political purposes. This was clearly seen in the Benevolent Assimilation decree of President William McKinley which states, among others “.....to provide the Filipinos the gift of civilization either by assimilation or conquest.” Hence, in spite of the announcement of the Americans that they were in the Philippines because the Filipinos needed them as their guide and protector, the fact remained that the Filipinos were still a conquered nation and that they had to weave their life according to the pattern of American dominance.

American education was a successful instrument of colonization. It gradually disoriented the Filipinos sense of national identity because it introduced them into an entirely new world, strange, yet challenging. The use of English as medium of instruction widens the divide between the elite and the Filipino masses. The Filipinos started to learn not only a new language but an entirely new way of life. They learned everything American, which they believed is the beginning of their education. On second thought, since it was the start of their alienation from their roots, the development of their colonial mentality, it was in reality the start of their mis-education. The Filipinos educated during the American period imbibed a different cultural orientation. They were a people possessing no nationalism in their hearts which will spur them to sacrifice for the welfare of the country. It is pathetic to say that this was the result of the failure of Philippine education.

During the Japanese invasion and introduction of their culture and ultra nationalism in Asia, the Filipinos fought side by side with the Americans. This was a clear indication that American education succeeded in molding the minds and character of the Filipinos to appreciate and repay this gift from their “big white brother.” The Japanese occupation destroyed the public school system by manipulating it for their advantage. School buildings, books and other educational materials were destroyed. There was a breakdown of the social values of the Filipinos. Yet, there was a desire for some to earn education offered by the Japanese established schools.

The period after the war marked a transition of the Philippines, not only in terms of political leadership but also in terms of education. There was massive rebuilding not only of infrastructures, but more so of the values of the Filipinos that was wrecked during the war. This was facilitated by the Americans. There was massive rehabilitation of school buildings and the restoration through the school system, of the values that were practiced during the pre-war society. However, the political instability of the newly independent nation-state affected the schools in putting this objective to reality.

The period after the liberation was marked by rapid economic growth which was matched with the rapid increase in population, urbanization and demand for social services. This scenario triggered the Joint Committee of Congress on Educational reform to report in 1951, that the public school system was in crisis, and the Filipinos must find solutions to this. Further, the committee recommended the full day session and the offering of Grade seven for the primary level, but this were not implemented nor acted into law. It is to be noted that the failure of the government to address this crisis became one of the root causes of the perennial education crises of the succeeding decades.

However, the period from the mid 50's was characterized by rapid economic growth, making education an integral component for this economic development. Paradoxically, one may ask how the educational system that is in crisis can contribute to economic growth. True, there was growth in the economy but problems encountered that were rooted in social conditions, were often blamed on the inadequacies of the educational system. Studies showed that earning a college degree was not a guarantee for a stable job that can provide better income. This motivated the educated Filipinos, especially the middle class to shift their interest in finding better paying jobs abroad. This phenomenon contributed to the exodus of the best educated Filipinos resulting to "brain drain."

The rise of student activism during the 60's was partly fueled by the education crisis. Even with the new ways of producing and transmitting knowledge developed in the different sectors, this was not enough to overrun the inadequacy of public education. Even the fourteen years of martial law, characterized by repression and authoritarian policies, was not successful in restoring the moral objectives of education. After the EDSA people power revolution, the Aquino administration brought a new period in education history. New concepts were introduced such as schools for the people, democratic and relevant education, and education as a right not a privilege, emerged and taken up by the civil society.

Presently, the Philippine educational system is faced by several issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the delivery of education to the most number of the population. One of this is the quality and accessibility of education to its takers. Undeniably, the Philippines government, in spite of its inadequacy of providing some basic services to its people, is doing its best to provide the rudiments of basic schooling to its people for free. Similarly, the 1987 Philippine Constitution provides that public secondary education must be free. This legal mandates resulted to the increase in enrollment of public elementary and secondary schools. Hence, access to public education is now a right of every Filipino child and a responsibility of the parents. However, those who can afford still patronize private institutions for the education of their children because of the issue of quality.

To provide quality education to all students is the most important mission of every educational institution. However, with the multifarious problems facing the public schools, its delivery is hindered. Reality tells us that even if the public school teachers are qualified to teach, the lack of instructional materials, inadequate facilities and lack of training for professional growth hindered them to perform at their best. It is sad to note that with students reaching up to sixty pupils and students in a classroom, the learning environment is distorted. This problem is also true even in

the private schools. Private schools have to exert extra effort to attract a good number of enrollments to insure their survival.

The creation of the Commission on Higher Education in 1994 did not guarantee a marked improvement in the delivery of quality education in the tertiary level. Its mandate is to regulate higher education institutions including State Universities and Colleges, except institutions which are granted Autonomous status. Its function includes the giving of permits to schools in offering programs, the closing of programs which do not meet the requirements and monitoring of all higher education institutions. Sadly, CHED, in spite of all its efforts, failed to regulate the opening of programs. This resulted to a mismatch of the educational system to the needs of the society. Universities and colleges produce graduates who cannot be absorbed by the labor market in the Philippines. These situations bring us to look into the different issues and concerns now facing the Philippine educational system.

PHILIPPINE EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Let us first identify the important issues affecting the Philippine educational system. The first issue is the *role of education in national development*. Several researchers had delved into the different components affecting the educational system, more specifically, whether it can solve the multifarious problems in society. Education has been looked into as the means of alleviating poverty, decreasing criminalities, increasing economic benefits and ultimately uplifting the standard of living of the Filipino masses. With these in mind, the government on its part has been continuously investing so much resource into the education sector. However, with the complexity of educational issues, solutions are far from reality.

Allied with this issue is the preparation of our students from the basic education up to tertiary level. The questions of how well are the schools equipped and able to train the pupils under their care are crucial. It is a sad reality that only seven out of ten pupils who enroll in Grade 1 finish the elementary curriculum, and from the seven who continue to secondary, only 3 are able to complete the curriculum. From these three only one can complete the tertiary education. Based on this scenario, how can we expect our students to help in nation building when they do not have the necessary skills and trainings?

Reality is that, formal education has not achieved what it was supposed to achieve. Our schools right now are in a quandary on how to keep children in school, with the increasing rate of drop outs. The functional literacy of the Filipinos is at its minimum reflecting the sad state of education. There are rampant problems of child labor, where children who are supposed to be in the classroom are working to help augment family income. Unemployment rate is rising every year as more students graduate from colleges and universities, who cannot be accommodated by the labor market. Underemployment is the name of the game since professionals are forced to accept employment far from their areas of specialization and training because they need to work and earn for their families. The gap between the few who are rich and the majority who are poor is becoming wider and bigger. Now what has education got to do with this? If experts claimed that education is an instrument for national development, where does the problem lie?

Another important issue confronting the educational system is *the curriculum that is not responsive to the basic needs of the country*. Let us reflect on the components of the present

curriculum, specifically in the basic education. Our elementary pupils are required to have nine to ten subjects competing for time allocations. More time is allotted for subjects like English, Science and Mathematics with other subjects like health, music, values education, civics integrated into the Makabayan curriculum. Added to this are enrichment subjects like Computer literacy, Ethics among others (especially in the private schools). This reflects the priorities of the government in educating our young people. It is a reality that a grade 1 pupil carries so many books to school (wondering whether all these materials are actually read in the class). This overloaded curriculum results to difficulty in knowledge and skills absorption among our pupils. With this practice how can we expect our young people to develop love of country, patriotism, and other nationalistic traits, when their concepts of these are not properly taught? Worse, many pupils drop out of school before they reach the sixth grade because of poverty, thus increasing their chances of losing the incipient literacy acquired, and therefore, forfeit the privilege of developing patriotic and nationalistic attitudes. This sad state, proliferate the cycle of poverty that the Filipino masses experience.

With the constant change in the basic education curriculum, teachers need to upgrade themselves in order that they can properly implement these changes. Upgrading requires attendance to trainings, seminars, conferences and even enrollment in graduate education. But with the present conditions of the teachers in the public schools only very few can afford this, unless government intervenes and provide upgrading activities for free.

Another issue that is of import is *the constant implementation of programs in education which are not properly monitored*. It is a fact that technocrats in the education department are political appointees, hence they serve at the whims and pleasures of the appointing officer. It is also a fact that every political administration wanted to have their names imprinted in every government program or project. This is very true in the Department of Education, when for instance, a department secretary appointed by a particular president assumes office, he will be implementing programs and projects attuned to the battlecry of that administration. Therefore, the previous programs and projects implemented by the previous administration shall be discontinued, regardless that program or project is workable and effective, because it is not the priority of the present administration, and does not carry their names. Added to that is the non evaluation of programs implemented. A very concrete example is the Bridge program implemented a few years ago. This program screens grade six pupils by subjecting them to testing. Those who were not able to pass were required to repeat grade six as a bridge for their secondary education. As a result, many pupils were required to re enroll in grade 6, adding a year to their elementary education. But, after many complaints and criticisms, this program was discontinued. But what about the losses incurred by the department? The added year in the academic life of the pupils affected? The added financial burden to parents? Who will answer and be accountable for this blunder? Is this just a case of trial and error program implementation? Presumably, the program was not properly studied, but was only implemented to satisfy the egos of the technocrats in the education department.

Anent to these issues are concerns that the education sector have to address. First concern is the so-called *globalization of education*. This concern was a response to the ever changing milieu in the international academic community where students must be globally competitive. Thus, schools must transform their orientation from being parochial to liberal. Programs must be re

aligned to meet international standards. Qualifications of teachers, facilities of the institutions and instructional materials and strategies must conform with international accreditation requirements. But how many of our institutions, are able to meet this requirement? Tertiary institutions continue to produce graduates who do not have the necessary employability skills, not only in terms of the local norms but more so with international standards. Sadly, even if our graduates work abroad they end up working as laborers, domestics and other blue collar workers which do not fit their educational credentials. I believe, that you will agree with me that is this not the concept of globalization we have in mind.

The Department of Education will implement the K-12 program by the next school year. This is in response to the alignment of the basic education curriculum to international standards. The present system of 6 – 4 – 4, according to the education experts lacks the required number of years that our students have to spend in school, from the elementary, secondary up to the tertiary level. Hence, there is a need to add two more years to our basic education so that the students will have more years in developing the necessary employability skills they must have after they graduate from secondary school. But is this really the answer to the present handicap of our educational system? Will adding two years bring more benefits? Or will it just result to more financial implications, not only to the parents but also to the government? This is a concern that has to be addressed before it becomes too late for us to realize the impact it will create in the succeeding years.

The educational system does not receive much budget from the government. This resulted to poor facilities. Schools in the rural areas do not receive much support from the government. School supplies such as books are received by them almost at the end of the year. What use will it give the pupils and students? To add more insult, textbooks contain a lot of errors in spelling and facts presented. This is a clear indication of a government's failure to provide the basic services needed by its people.

The same problem is also experienced by State Universities and College when the government decided to reduce their budget allocation. News reports of students from the University of the Philippines and other State Universities picketing before Congress demanding for the increase of their budget is not a rare scenario. Students took it upon themselves to ventilate school budget concerns for these can redound to increase in their matriculation fees, non- upgrading or updating of school and library facilities, and non hiring of additional faculty members, among others. State run institutions are empowered to generate their income in order that they can manage their finances and not depend so much from government subsidies. It is in this context that school administrators do their best to win favors from politicians, whom they believe can support their school programs and projects. This results to another concern of *too much politics in education*.

Politics in education is an issue that presently pervades educational system in the country. The government, specifically the legislators, is inept in formulating laws that can address the crisis in the educational system. A sad reality that is happening right now is the formulation of policies with the main purpose of making our educational system at par with those in other countries, but there are no concrete guidelines as to how these are to be implemented. Most educational experts are technocrats with no experience in the field. Yes, their programs are good, to say the

least, but because of their lack of experience in actual classroom teaching, they fail to study the application of these programs. One specific example is the Bridge Program that was implemented a few years ago. This program assessed the competency of Grade Six pupils to be promoted to High School. There were grade six pupils who scored below the passing mark that were made to repeat grade six to bridge their admission to high school. Thus, this added another year of elementary schooling. However, after a year of its implementation, the program was stopped. Worst, teachers in the classrooms were not duly informed of the reasons for its non-continuance. This is just one of the many educational programs implemented in the Philippine educational system that were not properly monitored and evaluated. This brings to a conclusion that Filipinos are only good planners but not good implementers and evaluators.

Undeniably, administrators of state run institutions solicit financial support from politicians who can sustain their school projects. There is nothing wrong with this. However, if the support given by politician must be equated by some favors from school officials, this becomes a major concern by everybody. There are cases where principals, supervisors and even superintendent of schools and divisions are appointed because they are recommended by well known senators, congressmen, governors and even mayors. This practice extends even up to the lowest level. Politicians recommend their relatives to be hired as teachers and other school staff. And if the principal has some debt of gratitude to the politician because of the support he is giving to the school, his recommendation cannot be refused. This practice defeats the purpose of screening applicants for teaching positions because even if you are first in the ranking, but you do not have a political back up, you will be the least priority in hiring. Although we cannot totally separate politics in education, it is of great import that objectivity, fairness and justice must be observed. It is very ironic that schemes like these happen in an institution that is expected to teach and inculcate good moral values and virtues among the young people of Philippine society.

As educators, what then can we do to transform the image that the educational system had propagated through the years? As an educator, I believe that total transformation must be implemented in the education sector of the country. When I say transformation of the education sector I refer to the total re orientation of the system which would start from policy transformation. Education policies and programs, including the curriculum must be carefully evaluated and studied whether they are attuned to the needs of the people and the country. Review of the provisions must be done in all levels and participation of the stakeholders must be solicited. Experts must be realistic in coming up with more attainable policies, that will address not only the educational problems but more so contribute to economic growth and development of the country.

I also believe in the values reorientation of the Filipinos as a key to national development. The integration of values education in the curriculum, I believe is still not enough to address this need. Values become more permanent in the minds and hearts of the pupils and students when they are caught, modeled by their mentors, rather than being discussed as abstract concepts in the classrooms. Thus, there is an urgent call for teacher transformation, in terms of their values orientation. I believe that teachers cannot become effective models of good moral values unless they undergo some process of values transformation. It is always wise to say “follow what I say and do,” rather than “follow what I say, do not follow what I do.” It is only when pupils and students concretely observe their teachers consistently practice these good values that they will

be able to replicate these in themselves. These, I believe is easier said than done. But unless we start doing it, we cannot claim tried.

Lastly, I believe that teachers' transformation must include their upgrading or updating for professional and personal development. Even if the salary of the ordinary public school teacher had been standardized to be competitive, with the increasing economic crisis, it will still be not enough to afford them attendance to seminars, trainings and enrollment in graduate education. Hence, government support and intervention, along this line is very much needed. Our teachers are professionals, and I believe their pre-service training had equipped them with the necessary skills to teach. Yet, with the advancement in science and technology, there is a great need for them to acquire competence in the use of these state of the art equipments to enhance their teaching skills. The government must invest on our teachers because it is through them that we train and develop the minds of our future leaders. As they say, show me your schools and I will tell you what society you will have.

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