

Barriers and bottlenecks to school attendance: An update

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In 2008, about 11.7 percent of Filipino children aged 5–15 years, corresponding to 2.9 million children, were out of school.¹ This figure dropped to 5.2 percent in 2012, according to David and Albert (2015). Such decline is consistent with the global data, which suggest that the number of out-of-school children (OOSC) across the world fell steadily in the decade following 2000 (UNESCO 2017). This progress, however, has stopped in recent years (UNESCO 2017).

This *Policy Note* describes the profile of OOSC in the Philippines and discusses other education indicators sourced from recent data of the Department of Education (DepED) and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). It also discusses policy issues the government needs to address to ensure that no child is left behind in schooling.

Profile of OOSC

As of 2017, the incidence of OOSC aged 5–15 years stood at 5.3 percent, with the rate higher for boys (6.7%)

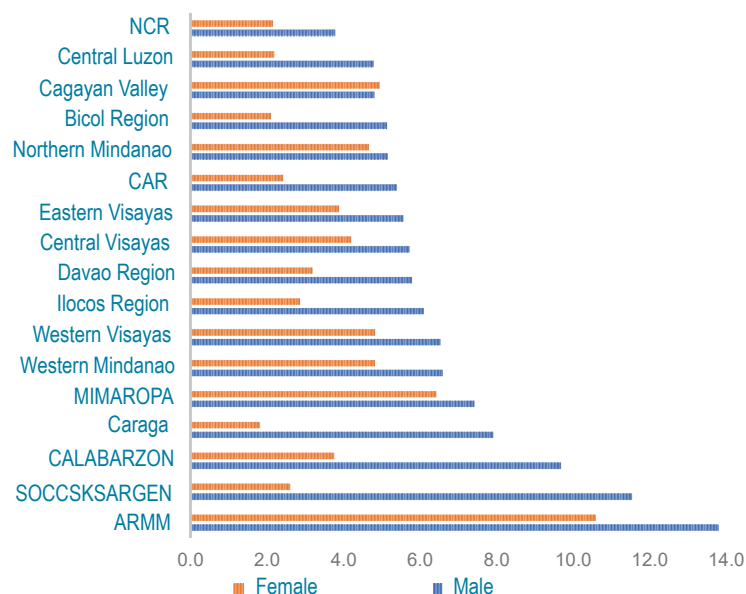
than for girls (3.8%) (PSA 2017). Across regions, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) posted the highest OOSC rate for both boys (13.8%) and girls (10.6%). However, in the case of both SOCCSKSARGEN and Caraga regions, the OOSC rate for boys was alarmingly four times greater than that for girls. Meanwhile, only the Cagayan Valley region registered a higher OOSC rate for girls than for boys (Figure 1).

Among Filipino children aged five years, around 189,000 did not attend school in 2017. While this is already lower than 776,000 posted in 2008, it remained higher than 177,000 in 2014. Still, the OOSC rate was higher in the primary school level, or the 6–11 age group, where roughly 571,000 were out of school, slightly higher than in 2014 when it was 420,000 but way lower than 1.27 million registered in 2008.

At the lower secondary school age (12–15 years old), the number of OOSC declined in 2017 at 475,000, down from 980,000 in 2008 and 660,000 in 2014. This represents an OOSC rate of 5.6 percent for that level, its lowest since 2008. Nonetheless, the upper secondary school age (16–17 years old) posted a higher percentage at 17.4 percent, corresponding to 768,000 children.

¹ Out-of-school children do not only include those children not in school but also primary-school-age children and older who are either in preprimary or nonformal education (DepED et al. 2012).

Figure 1. Incidence (%) of out-of-school children aged 5–15 years, by region and sex: Philippines, 2017



NCR = National Capital Region; CAR = Cordillera Administrative Region; MIMAROPA = Mindoro (Occidental and Oriental), Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan; CALABARZON = Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon; SOCCSKSARGEN = South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City; ARMM = Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
Source: Authors' calculations based on *Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) 2017* (PSA 2017)

School attendance remains largely an economic issue (Figure 2). For instance, 3 in every 5 (58.7%) OOSC aged 5–15 years in 2017 belonged to families in the bottom 25 percent of the per-capita income distribution. Moreover, two-thirds (65.0%) of these OOSC were boys, some portion of which may be caused by the need to augment the family income. Given that boys can work for income earlier in their lives, mostly as informally employed laborers, they are pulled out of school at younger ages than girls when the family is poor. This disparity between boys and girls, in favor of girls, has persisted since 2008.

In 2017, an estimated 22.6 million children aged 5–15 years attended school. Of this figure, 366,000 were 6- to 15-year-old children still in preprimary school level, thus considered OOSC. Meanwhile, 516,000 primary-school-age and 1.2 million secondary-school-age children were already overaged for their grades by at least two years. Nonetheless, this was a considerable

reduction from 2008 with 5.3 million overaged 7–15 year-old children, 3.2 million of whom belonged to primary-school-age and 2.1 million to secondary-school-age children.

Teachers interviewed for this study attested that children overaged for their grade level were at a high risk of eventually dropping out of school. Usually, they are overaged because they had already stopped attending at some point, or they did not pass the grade level and were held back from promotion. When children are older than their cohorts, they lose interest and motivation because they are embarrassed and at risk of being bullied and of developing attitude issues as they progress to the higher grades.

Basic education performance indicators

The basic education sector is enormous. In school year (SY) 2017–2018 alone, 15.7 million kindergarten and primary school pupils were enrolled in 51,104 elementary, 7.8 million in 14,520 junior high, and 2.6 million in 11,085 senior high schools. While 3 in every 4 (76.1 %) elementary schools were public, the share of private institutions increased in junior and senior high schools, hitting as much as 41.1 percent and 41.6 percent, respectively. Still, the number of public secondary schools grew by 40 percent from SY 2010–2011 to 2016–2017.

From SY 2013–2014 to 2014–2015, DepED (n.d.) noted a decline in the gross enrollment rate (GER)² for both primary and secondary school levels and an increase in net enrollment rate (NER)³ in secondary school levels from 2014 to 2015 (Table 1). It also observed a higher

² GER is the ratio of total enrollment in a given education level to the population, which according to national regulations should be enrolled at this level.

³ NER is the ratio of the enrollment in the school-age range in a given education level to the total population of that age range, with school-age population for the primary and secondary levels being 6–11 years old and 12–15 years old, respectively.

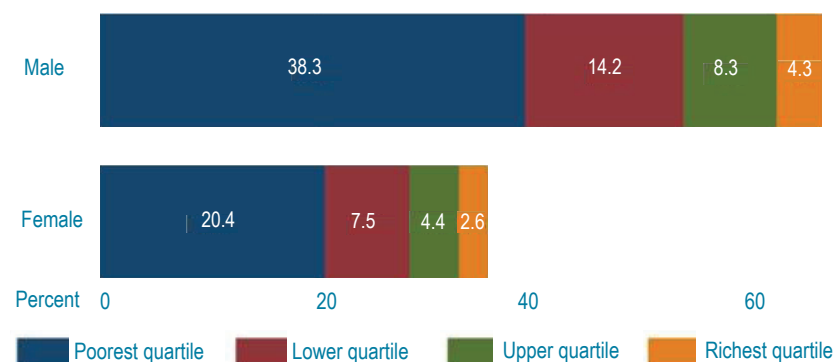
dropout rate⁴ in the secondary school level. While such rate declined in both levels, the drop was faster in the primary school level. Fluctuation in the cohort survival rate (CSR)⁵ was also spotted in both levels, increasing in 2014 but decreasing in 2015.

Disaggregation of these performance indicators suggests that while school participation was near equal between girls and boys in the primary school level, deep disparities remained in the secondary school level. GER, NER, and CSR were higher for girls than boys in the older grades, shown as well in the larger proportion of boys dropping out in the secondary school level.

Pupil-to-teacher ratio (PTR) is the only available measure that can proxy for classroom quality of instruction.⁶ At the primary school level, it was highest in ARMM, CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), and the National Capital Region (NCR) for both SY 2016–2017 and 2017–2018. On the other hand, Eastern Visayas and Cagayan Valley regions had the lowest primary PTR for same period.

At the secondary school level, ARMM, Davao, and CALABARZON regions posted the highest PTR in SY 2016–2017. On the other hand, Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Cagayan, and Ilocos were the regions that had the least secondary PTR that same period. The following school year, it was CALABARZON, NCR, and

Figure 2. Distribution of out-of-school children by sex and per-capita income quartile: Philippines, 2017



Source: Authors' calculations based on APIS 2017 (PSA 2017)

Central Luzon that had the highest PTR. Meanwhile, CAR, ARMM, Caraga registered the lowest PTR at the secondary school level for SY 2017–2018.

Reasons children are not in school

According to PSA (2008, 2014, 2016), the most common reason among primary-school-age OOSC for leaving school was their “lack of personal interest”, followed closely by illness and disability and by the high cost of education (Table 2). Note that the OOSC rate for primary-school-age children was already quite low, thus the remaining OOSC were very much the “last-mile” children, that is, the small percentage of children that are still not in school after the vast majority of OOSC has been addressed. These last-mile children may have acute difficulties and challenges keeping them from participating in formal education at their level.

At the secondary school level, this study would not characterize the OOSC as last-mile groups because the prevalence rates and dropout rates remained high. Among those aged 12–15 years and not in school, over half (53%) reported that their reason was lack of personal interest, followed by 21 percent saying it was cost of education. These top two reasons have remained unchanged since 2008.

Lack of personal interest has a gender dimension, with a bigger share of boys more likely to lack interest in

⁴ The dropout rate is the proportion of students who leave school during the year as well as those who complete the grade/year level but fail to enroll in the next grade/year level the following school year to the total number of students enrolled during the previous school year.

⁵ CSR is the proportion of enrollees at the beginning grade or year to the number of students who reach the final grade or year at the end of the required number of years of study.

⁶ High PTR indicates crowded schools or classrooms or teachers are insufficient to achieve a reasonable class size. When class sizes are large (e.g., over 50 for high school, over 40 for elementary), it is more difficult for students to listen to lectures, more difficult for teachers to retain the attention of students, and it limits the ability of teachers to conduct more highly engaged class activities to augment learning.

Table 1. Basic education performance indicators at primary and secondary school levels, school years 2013–2014, 2014–2015, and 2015–2016

Level	2013–2014				2014–2015				2015–2016			
	GER	NER	Dropout rate	CSR	GER	NER	Dropout Rate	CSR	GER	NER	Dropout Rate	CSR
Primary	111.20	93.80	4.85	87.28	109.29	92.57	3.26	91.03	106.31	91.05	2.69	89.59
Secondary	84.29	64.90	7.58	83.67	84.07	63.23	6.90	86.34	83.67	68.15	6.62	80.48

GER = gross enrollment rate; NER = net enrollment rate; CSR = cohort survival rate
Source: Enhanced Basic Education Information System (DepED, n.d.)

schooling. The “lack of interest” reason deserves further unpacking given the high rate of occurrence and the vague nature of the response option in the survey.

Through an econometric analysis, or using a logistic regression, of nonparticipation, assuming all other explanatory variables are constant, this study also found the following:

- Children who came from wealthier families were less likely to be OOSC. For primary-school-age children, every 1-percent change in per-capita expenditure was associated with a 0.42-percent decrease in the odds for not attending school. The association was more pronounced for secondary-school-age children, for whom the decrease in odds for not attending school is 0.74 percent.
- Compared to 6-year-old children, children aged 7–11 years were less likely to be OOSC. Moreover, children in the 13–15 year-old age range were also more likely to be OOSC than 12-year-old children.
- Every unit increase in PTR was associated with an increase in the odds of nonattendance in school by 6 percent in primary-school-age children and 3 percent among lower secondary-school-age children. Boys were at a higher risk of being OOSC. Among primary-school-age children, girls were 1.9 times more likely to be in school than their boy counterparts. Among lower secondary-school-age children, this figure can even be as high as 2.2 times.
- Compared to children with mothers who have attained at most primary level of education, children with mothers who have attained more education tended to be less prone to being OOSC.

- For every extra sibling in a family, each child had 1.2 times more risk of being OOSC, whether in primary or lower secondary school.
- Children from families with older household heads were more at risk of being OOSC.
- Primary-school-age children who were part of families whose household head was male were less at risk of being OOSC. Meanwhile, the opposite was true for lower secondary-school-age children.

These results are very similar to those presented in the Philippine country study on *All Children in School by 2015* of DepED, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, and United Nations Children’s Fund, which indicated that while the overall numbers have declined, not much else has changed in terms of the basic predictors of OOSC status (DepED et al. 2012).

Policy issues

Previous updates on the challenges of OOSC reported that the nature of OOSC is changing because some of the bottlenecks identified in previous studies have been addressed, such as child labor addressed by Alternative Delivery Modes (ADMs) and the Alternative Learning System (ALS), late school entry by mandatory kindergarten, and economic issues by the conditional cash transfer program, among others (DepED et al. 2012; David and Albert 2015). However, the demand- and supply-side barriers and bottlenecks to school participation persist, especially for those in the secondary school level.

Given that a large proportion of OOSC were reported to lack interest in schooling, it is important to examine

Table 2. Reasons (in %) for primary and secondary-school-age children not attending school: 2008, 2014, and 2017

Reasons for Not Attending School	Primary-School-Age Children								
	2008			2014			2017		
	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
Lack of personal interest	35.2	27.0	31.7	38.2	30.5	36.0	31.4	27.8	30.2
High cost of education	11.0	12.2	11.5	15.3	11.2	14.1	13.7	6.4	11.4
Too young to go to school	24.6	35.3	29.2	9.5	14.6	11.0	6.9	18.3	10.5
Illness/Disability	10.1	8.7	9.5	33.7	37.1	34.7	27.0	32.5	28.8
Lack of nearby schools	7.4	7.5	7.5	2.1	2.1	2.1	14.0	0.0	9.6
Employment	0.1	0.2	0.1	--	--	--	0.0	2.6	0.8
Other reasons (including school records, marriage, housekeeping)	11.6	9.2	10.5	1.2	4.5	2.1	1.4	1.2	1.3

Reasons for Not Attending School	Secondary-School-Age Children								
	2008			2014			2017		
	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
Lack of personal interest	54.7	33.9	47.2	51.2	29	44.1	60.6	41.8	53.2
High cost of education	21.9	30.3	24.9	25.2	38.3	29.4	22.4	18.9	21.0
Too young to go to school									
Illness/Disability	5	8.2	6.1	10.4	16.7	12.4	7.8	9.8	8.6
Lack of nearby schools	3.3	5.6	4.1	0.6	2.7	1.3	4.6	4.7	4.6
Employment	9.2	7.8	8.7	6	1.9	4.7	3.4	12.5	7.0
Other reasons (including school records, marriage, housekeeping)	5.9	14.2	8.9	6.6	11.3	8.1	1.2	12.4	5.6

Source: Authors' calculations based on APIS 2008, 2014, and 2016 (PSA 2008, 2014, 2016)

more deeply what actually causes them to lose interest in schooling and identify strategies for addressing these attitudes. Furthermore, while both ADMs and ALS may have been effective at keeping children in school according to teachers and principals interviewed for this study, DepED will still need to have a formal evaluation of the quality of learning in ADMs and ALS to obtain insights on areas for process and outcome improvement as well as to identify and replicate best practices.

Economic and gender issues, as well as education of the mother, are major factors that shape school participation in the country. While the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program appears to have improved the schooling of children among poor families (Orbeta and Paqueo 2016), the cash transfers seemed not sufficient in addressing

opportunity costs of schooling, especially as children age and as cost of living increases. The DepED may also consider reviewing previous suggestions for addressing gender disparities in participation and performance of children. Possible supply-side interventions include policies on hiring more male teachers, subject to review, and diversifying teaching strategies to include activities that may reduce the learning deficit between sexes. Demand-side interventions include regular parent-teacher dialogues on unintended consequences of different expectations of boys and girls, as well as differentiating Pantawid grants for girls and boys to account for differing opportunity costs for schooling. Programs also need to be developed for retooling parents, not only to help them see their complementary role in the education of their children but also to help

the students, especially those from lower incomes, find better opportunities for career development.

On the side of DepED, there appears a growing problem of overworked teachers. When teachers are overburdened with nonteaching responsibilities and large class sizes, they are especially challenged in their task to keep students engaged and give individualized attention or differentiated teaching. There are also perverse incentives for teachers to allow students promotion to the next level, even if the student has not gained basic skills and competencies.

Public policy interventions must balance the objectives of raising levels of school participation and keeping children in school and ensuring that learning outcomes are met so that graduates are equipped with the fundamental critical thinking skills and ability to learn. These capacities will be necessary for future jobs, especially in the wake of emerging vast changes in the labor market brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (WEF 2015; Albert et al. 2018; WB 2018). The basic education system, together with families and all education stakeholders, is tasked to ensure that learners are prepared for their roles and responsibilities as citizens and leaders of tomorrow. 📖

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