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‘Diploma not enough’: Experts affirm lifelong learning skills more crucial

FILIPINO LEARNERS MUST be equipped with 21st-century skills to cope and thrive today. Thus, the Philippine education system must recalibrate its focus on lifelong learning to achieve quality education outcomes and address the learning crisis in the country.

Thus said Maria Cynthia Rose Bautista and Mark Vincent Aranas in their policy note written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) and published by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) titled *“The learning crisis in Philippine education: An overview”*.

“A diploma is too thin an armor to shield Filipino graduates from the impacts of an unprecedented disruptive future. They need 21st-century competencies to thrive in adverse circumstances,” Bautista and Aranas stated.

According to the authors, competencies such as critical thinking, comfort with ambiguity, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration are imperative to survive a complex world of multiple disruptions. They noted that academic institutions should provide a conducive environment for learners to hone character-building qualities like leadership, initiative, adaptability, and grit. They added that it is essential to develop a diverse skillset adaptive to the ever-changing needs of the labor market.

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Editor's Notes

This third-quarter issue of the *Development Research News (DRN)* delves into the learning crisis confronting the Philippines. It unpacks this by discussing the key issues underscored in several policy briefs written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II), a national commission formed to conduct a national assessment and evaluation of the Philippine education sector for which PIDS serves as its research arm. These policy briefs were largely written based on existing studies, which were synthesized to serve the purpose of EDCOM II.

The banner article hammers on improving the quality of education in the country by making lifelong learning the focus of the education system. It calls on shifting to a more learner-focused approach and away from the traditional view that sees students as passive recipients of knowledge. This paradigm shift also entails equipping students with 21st-century competencies and character-building qualities to thrive in the changing times, which are more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. However, these are not enough. It is equally important to address the financial, organizational, technical, human resource, and poverty-related factors affecting learning at different levels of the education system. These factors are elaborated in the succeeding articles.

For instance, the article on early childhood care and education flags the prevalence of malnutrition, which affects children's cognitive development and leads to reduced learning capacities later in life. Another factor hindering early education is the low participation of young children in prekindergarten in public and private schools across all income groups, particularly in Region XI and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Inequities in access to early learning facilities and programs also abound. Lower-income municipalities have the least daycare centers per 10,000 children, with 14 percent of the poor municipalities having none. (Page 24)

The study noted, however, that the Philippines still lags behind in shifting from a traditional to a more learner-focused education system. The authors also contended that significant strides must be established to achieve learning outcomes at all student levels.

Hence, Bautista and Aranas emphasized the urgency to develop a national framework on lifelong learning (LLL) to substantiate the *Philippine Development Plan's* recognition of the value of LLL. They recommended that this framework be drawn from the inputs of various government agencies and civil society groups, bridging coordination gaps and prompting much-needed interventions for the entire education system.

Meanwhile, the authors noted that addressing the learning crisis must not only involve shifting education paradigms and supporting a mindset change. Hence, "tackling head-on financial, organizational, technical, human resource, and poverty- and inequality-related constraints to learning" is of tantamount importance.

According to the PIDS paper, addressing the devastating factors affecting learning is crucial for Filipinos to flourish in the future. These include solving (1) persistent poverty; (2) unequal access to early childhood education, resources, and home support; (3) education budget and infrastructure constraints; (4) critical human resource woes; and (5) snags in viable research and innovative ecosystem developments.

How can the learning crisis be resolved?

According to the authors, buoying up an all-of-society stake in the state of education is crucial to address the learning crisis.

In particular, they emphasized the need to map foundational learning into the context of early childhood education and align curriculum lessons to general and specific learning outcomes. Conversely, they added that teachers must be capacitated with appropriate teaching and educational resources to ensure the proper implementation, feedback, and evidence-based assessment of an intended education program. Bautista and Aranas also recommended equipping instructors with adequate subject matter knowledge and pedagogical competencies relevant to honing learners with 21st-century skills.

Moreover, the authors stressed that unequal access to quality education requires sustainable policies and programs for inclusive education across the country's education framework. They noted that "particular laws, policies, and programs have been enacted or established to address some of these challenges but have yet to be fully implemented."

The authors also maintained the urgency of pushing much-needed reforms across various education sectors and affirming the initiatives of multisectoral groups to address bottlenecks. According to them, "the learning crisis reflects not only

education issues but also the state of the Philippine society.”

Meanwhile, the EDCOM II has identified 28 priority areas for intervention in early childhood education, basic education, higher education, teacher education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), lifelong learning and learning pathways, and education governance and finance, along with specific issues that require unpacking, legislative or executive action, as well as public and private sector initiatives.

Bautista and Aranas noted that the timely constitution of the Commission should serve as an opportunity to optimize “a more nuanced understanding of issues through research and nationwide stakeholder consultations”. They added that the EDCOM II should provide a platform to consolidate interventions, forge partnerships, and buoy up an all-of-society approach to create a better education system for the Philippines.

The current state of PH education

According to the authors, the Philippine education system “treads on thin ice” with the country’s learning poverty, its dismal performance in international education standards, child malnutrition, pandemic-induced learning impacts, and unemployability of graduates, among others.

For instance, data from a World Bank report on global learning poverty in 2022 revealed that 9 in 10 Filipinos could not read and comprehend simple age-appropriate

texts at age 10. “With the longest school closure among 122 countries and highly unequal access to the internet, digital education resources, and home support, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation,” the authors cautioned.

In early childhood education, it was found that stunting remains the most profound challenge to reduce learning gaps among children. Data from a 2021 World Bank study revealed that 1 in 3 under-5 Filipino children is stunted, with the Philippines listed among the top 10 countries with the highest prevalence of malnutrition and stunting.

In basic education, results from the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that only 1 in 5 students achieved a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematical literacies. The country also performed dismally in the 2019 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, ranking last among 58 countries in mathematics and science for Grade 4 students.

Bautista and Aranas observed that these poor results in international assessments depict low proficiency across social class, rural and urban residence, gender, language at home, type of school, and early childhood attendance. They also underscored that the uneven performance of public and private schools, late start of formal schooling, lack of parental support and low models of aspirations, lack of resources, and absence of adequate information and communications technologies contribute to poor learning quality.

In higher education, it was accounted that only 17 percent of the poorest households are enrolled in college compared to 49 percent of their richest counterparts. Bautista and Aranas also argued that the relatively poor performance of graduates in board licensure examinations and very few Philippine institutions ranking among the world’s top universities reflect the country’s underdeveloped research and innovation ecosystem.

Meanwhile, the lack of funding for tuition or allowance persists as a notable challenge to pursuing TVET. The study cited that the country’s gross domestic spending on TVET remains scant despite recent increases in budget allocation. Similarly, it was found that a significant proportion of TVET graduates from community-based training modes are yet to be covered by appropriate training regulations that standardize delivery and enable assessments.

How much is quality education?

A separate PIDS study titled “*We need to invest more in learners, learners, learners!*” by Jose Ramon Albert, Lovelaine Basillote, and Mika Muñoz urged the government to quadruple its education spending to reach the average global reading proficiency.

Analysis from the 2018 PISA suggests that “increasing education spending by as much as four times” is significant to achieve the desired performance in reading comprehension among Filipino learners. The authors also cited that merely doubling the current spending

could only elevate reading proficiency by around 10 percent.

“Although the Philippines has a policy thrust to invest heavily in education, it has been underinvesting in the sector,” the authors said. They also raised that the country’s education budget has never reached 4 percent (2.8% in 2019), trailing behind countries such as Singapore (25.8% in 2018), Brunei Darussalam (4.4% in 2016), and Malaysia (4.2% in 2019).

The study also noted that while the Constitution mandates the State to assign the highest budgetary priority to education, the country’s spending per student ranks the lowest globally at only PHP 21,000 per student in School Year 2020–2021.

Despite the clamor for increased education spending, the authors cautioned the importance of strategizing where budgets are spent. They suggested that the government provide equalization grants for less developed local government units to strategically leverage their net fiscal capacities. Investments in innovative technology solutions such as high-touch, high-tech education were also pushed.

Lastly, the authors urged the Department of Education (DepEd) to scale up good practices in peer mentoring and early reading remediation to cultivate an appreciation for reading. They also encouraged DepEd to build its capacity in utilizing results from data analytics on its various data sources, such as the National Achievement Test, DepEd feeding programs, and Learners Information System, as inputs to policymaking. **MPT**

Increased investments in education, training sought amid learning crisis



Only 1 in 10 Filipino students can read or understand a simple text by age 10, based on a World Bank report.

THE GOVERNMENT MUST invest more in education and training to improve students’ poor learning outcomes and the quality of education in the Philippines.

This was according to a Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) policy note titled “*When students fail to learn: Getting education governance and finance policies right*” by PIDS President Aniceto Orbeta Jr., Visiting Research Fellow Vicente Paqueo, and consultant Mark Vincent Aranas. This paper was written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education, a national commission tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector.

“The Philippines must raise its education and training spending to a much higher level to catch up with the average student learning achievements of the country’s aspirational peers,” the authors said.

They noted that despite recent improvements in education financing, the country’s spending has remained low compared with its more developed peers. This has negatively impacted schooling quality in the Philippines, with students underperforming in learning competencies and education quality remaining deplorably low.

However, the authors stressed that simply increasing resources does not guarantee impact. The government must

also efficiently and effectively use its available resources.

Thus, the policy note recommended optimizing the use of limited resources to help students enroll in schools that meet quality standards, establishing outreach programs to develop children's socioemotional competencies and growth mindset, and improving education providers' accountability and motivation to deliver cost-effective, high-quality education and training.

The authors also suggested shifting the focus from massifying low-quality education to enhancing students' cognitive and noncognitive competencies, adding that there must be an efficient system for government subsidies for children who cannot enroll in better schools.

"The disconnect between the universal access to education goal and its implementation strategy is an oversight issue that requires a stronger policy and an effective and efficient system," the authors said.

"The onus lies in the hands of policymakers and the leadership of different government agencies mandated to ensure and promote quality education for all," they added.

Learning outcomes

Citing a World Bank report, the authors noted that most Filipino students achieved below the minimum national and international standards in basic education. The report emphasized that 9 in 10 students cannot read or understand a simple text by age 10.

Additionally, only 1 in 5 Filipino students attained at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematical literacies, based on the Programme for International Student Assessment results in 2018.

"Students fail to acquire the competencies they are supposed to learn in school because the Philippines has enabled students to complete more years of schooling than expected relative to their income level due to the government's education policy," the authors said.

They linked the poor results on education quality and student learning competencies to a combination of factors.

One factor is the government's education massification policy that focuses on rapidly expanding tuition-free public schools, the lack of efforts to increase education inputs and give oversight mechanisms and incentives to teachers and school workers, and the failure to mobilize and use available resources to ensure children meet the prescribed minimum proficiency standards before being promoted to the next grade or education level.

The authors cited other immediately doable measures, such as strengthening the Department of Education's voucher programs and other types of public-private partnerships.

The government may implement a participatory process in allocating education and training subsidies for public and private education and develop a program with enough budget allocation to help teachers and schools increase the number of students who meet the minimum learning proficiency standards.

In addition, it can establish an education and training innovation fund and an independent assessment and evaluation agency to institute performance accountability indicators and consumer data for students and parents.

Financial sustainability

Based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the country's total education expenditure (as a percentage of the gross domestic product) grew from about 6 percent in the 2000s to 7.9 percent in 2021. However, this increase was small compared to what other countries in the region spent on education.

In the Philippines, households contributed between 50 and 60 percent of the public education financing, while the national government covered more than 90 percent. Meanwhile, 75–80 percent of the budget went to basic education, 15 percent to higher education, and 1–2 percent to technical and vocational education and training.

However, the Philippines still ranks among the countries with the lowest public expenditure per student at the primary and secondary levels. Although spending on higher education has increased, it remains lower than the country's peers in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"The country's weak financial sustainability led to few autonomous and deregulated higher education institutions, reliance on enrollment and tuition, and underutilized high value-adding internally generated income sources," the authors said.

Recent reforms and inputs have also barely helped improve achievement indicators based on the recent National Achievement Test data.

In a discussion paper titled *“If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys? Education spending and schooling quality in the Philippines”*, PIDS Senior Research Fellow Michael Abrigo found a similar trend in Philippine education financing.

He highlighted the robust growth of the country’s education spending per person over the last 25 years, with the private and public sectors spending about equal shares in financing basic education.

“For over 25 years, the Philippines’ cumulative basic education consumption almost trebled, although much of the growth happened more recently,” he said.

Despite this robust growth, the Philippines’ spending level was still behind its peers, contributing to students’ poor performance in international assessments.

The paper emphasized, for instance, that the Philippines spent only about 60–72 percent of Indonesia’s per-student public spending for primary and secondary levels, respectively, from 2005 to 2019. This was despite the Philippines’ per capita income being 84 percent of Indonesia’s.

Thus, the author suggested improving schooling quality by optimizing and translating inputs to outputs.

“A more important and urgent challenge for the government is to identify and scale cost-effective education interventions that better translate resource inputs to desired education outcomes,” Abrigo said.

“Raising education spending per capita may entail more than rallying resources for the education sector but also ensuring that robust economic opportunities are available to improve average household incomes and assisting households to achieve their desired fertility levels,” he added. **EGR**

Early investment in health and nutrition drives lifelong success—PIDS study

INVESTING IN HEALTH and nutrition from conception through early childhood—that critical stage where the brain develops rapidly—makes individuals more inclined to complete school, reach their learning potential, and live productively.

Thus, the government must explore innovative approaches to promote early childhood care and development (ECCD) to pave a brighter future for young children.

In their paper *“Starting strong: Why early childhood care and development matters*



The PIDS study underscores that the years between birth and age 4 are critical for nurturing learners’ futures, highlighting the importance of early childhood education.

in the Philippines”, Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) researchers Valerie Gilbert Ulep, Lyle Daryll Casas, and Suzy Tapanan emphasized prioritizing ECCD to address various aspects of children’s growth, including cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.

The PIDS researchers urged facilitating ECCD programs on critical components such as access to high-quality early education, adequate health care, nutrition, responsive caregiving, and a safe and secure environment to ensure holistic child development. These, in turn, promote long-term socioeconomic growth.

While these interventions look promising for the country, the study noted that the prevalence of child malnutrition remains glaring in the Philippines. Similarly, they stressed the low uptake in early childhood schooling and insufficient data on the quality of early education programs.

Challenges in early child health and nutrition

Without evidence-based interventions to address ECCD constraints, the authors warned that the country might fail to reach its Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Hence, they underscored supporting young children’s well-being and unleashing their full learning potential through the efficient implementation of ECCD programs.

According to the study, major nutritional outcome indicators still have not improved



The PIDS researchers urge the government to address the persistent issues of stunting and wasting among Filipino children, which adversely impact their cognitive, physical, and social development.

significantly. As such, stunting prevalence in the Philippines is among the highest in Southeast Asia at 29 percent. This means that almost 1 in 3 children under 5 is chronically undernourished. Wasting prevalence among children under 5 and 5–10 years also staggered for 30 years.

Moreover, the study cited that nearly half of the poorest Filipino children are stunted compared to 14 percent of their richest counterparts. The authors noted that this 35-percentage point difference between the rates of the poorest and richest children magnifies the country’s problem with stunting.

Although stunting trends in the Philippines decreased over the last three decades,

the study observed that the gradual drop still pales in comparison to the improvements of other comparative countries. For instance, Viet Nam managed a threefold decline in its stunting rates at 5–6 percent annually between 1990 and 2015.

Given these findings, the study stressed addressing the glaring factors of stunting. In particular, the authors advised (1) properly nourishing mothers during pregnancy, (2) prioritizing the child’s first 1,000 days (from conception to 2 years of age), and (3) preventing child illnesses and recurrent infections. Similarly, combatting food insecurity among households is crucial to avert wasting incidences, along with other life-threatening forms of malnutrition.

The authors highlighted the importance of the 3Cs (comprehensive, convergence, continuity) in delivering effective health and nutrition services. These interventions must be provided during children’s critical development period and should come in a single package (comprehensive). Second, multisectoral collaboration must be integrated with program delivery to leverage holistic services other than maternal and child health (convergence). Lastly, the referral process from communities to primary care facilities and hospitals must be seamless and connected (continuity).

Hence, “the genuine implementation of the Universal Health Care Act, in which primary health care is front and center, is pivotal in implementing the 3Cs of health and nutrition services,” the authors said.

Improving access to early education

Meanwhile, the PIDS study highlighted that the years between birth and age 4 are critical for nurturing learners’ futures. Thus, boosting access to early childhood education is important.

According to the authors, early childhood schooling provides opportunities for children under five to “learn how to learn” and establish relationships with parents, friends, and teachers.

However, findings from the 2019 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey cited the low participation of children aged 3 to 4 in prekindergarten (at only around 40 percent)

for both public and private schools across all income groups. Likewise, participation disparity in prekindergarten levels was evident, with a relatively higher turnout in the National Capital Region, Region VII, and Region IV-A but low uptake in Region XI and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

“The low prekindergarten participation in the country may be partly explained by parents’ perception of early childhood education,” the authors revealed. Results from the Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey also showed that 98 percent of parents believed their children aged 4–5 are “still too young to go to school”.

Thus, advocating a mindset change can be a viable option to boost participation rates for early childhood education. The study suggested conducting outreach programs and awareness campaigns to educate parents and caregivers on the importance of ECCD. It also proposed providing support services to working parents, such as parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and childcare options.

Another area for improvement is implementing sustainable policies that promote access to ECCD services. Policymakers and other key players are therefore urged to enact regulations on free preprimary education and expand the reach of quality early learning programs.

Presently, there are 56,400 daycare centers in the country. However, the study

argued that these centers are not equitably distributed, as first-class municipalities still dominate the highest number of daycare centers per 10,000 children aged 3–4. Data from the Department of Social Welfare and Development in 2022 cited that sixth-class municipalities have the least daycare centers per 10,000, with 14 percent of poor municipalities having no daycare centers.

The PIDS study suggested integrating ECCD into existing health and nutrition programs to maximize the use of resources and infrastructure. Other approaches include sustaining capital and human resource investments and exploring public-private partnerships between community-based organizations and local governments to address inequities.

To further widen the reach to early education, the government must “develop ECCD centers that use low-cost, locally sourced materials and train community members to deliver ECCD services”, the study read. Finally, investments in home-based learning programs to strategically develop innovative ECCD programs for young children and their families are recommended.

This policy note was written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education, a national commission tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector. **MPT**

Basic ed attendance and survival rates improving, but quality issues remain—experts

BASIC EDUCATION ATTENDANCE and survival rates have improved considerably over the last three decades, but schooling quality remains an important challenge, according to a paper published by state think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

In a policy note written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education titled “*Basic education: Quality is the ‘now’ frontier*”, PIDS Senior Research Fellow Michael Abrigo and PIDS President Aniceto Orbeta Jr. observed “impressive school participation”, with similar school attendance rates as wealthier nations and almost universal attendance in basic education. However, there is only a slight improvement in the literacy rates among 10–14-year-olds.

According to the PIDS paper, the share of early teens who can read and write simple texts increased from 85 percent in 1994 to 93 percent in 2019. In addition, the proportion of those who can read, write, compute, and comprehend simple texts went from 51 percent in 1994 to 59 percent in 2019.

However, international assessments highlighted the Philippines ranking below its aspirational and neighboring peers, with Filipino students performing poorly in examinations like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which tests 15-year-olds in math,



With proper design, national large-scale student assessments could offer insights into the state of education quality and the effectiveness of interventions, according to the PIDS authors.

science, and reading, and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which measures the performance of Grades 4 and 8 students worldwide. Filipino students ranked at or near the bottom in the 2018 PISA and 2019 TIMSS.

“When adjusted for performance, average schooling in the Philippines translates to only 7–8 years’ worth of schooling or a learning gap of about 6 years,” the authors maintained.

The PIDS study also observed considerable inequality in children’s access to education, highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, during lockdowns, public schools relied on printed modules, while

private schools leaned toward online or blended learning, reflecting varying internet access and devices among different population groups. Children from wealthier households also had better home support due to better-educated parents and guardians.

Why has PH education system been failing?

Abrigo and Orbeta attributed the Philippine education system’s failures to several factors. Firstly, they noted that the focus on reducing school dropout rates in basic education over the past three decades has yielded successes. Still, there has not been a comparable effort to enhance the quality of education. They contended

that while national achievement tests have been conducted, their results have not effectively informed discussions or improved teaching methods and policies.

Moreover, if designed well, national large-scale student assessments could offer insights into the state of education quality and the effectiveness of interventions. However, it was observed that previous achievement tests have lacked the design to make cohort comparisons or impact public discourse and policy.

The Philippines also lags behind its Southeast Asian counterparts in public education investment despite increased education spending per capita since the 1990s. This underinvestment is evident in factors such as classroom-to-student ratios and varied learning environments across regions and schools.

Finally, learning environments also differ materially across schools in the country. While school electrification is widespread, access to the internet is limited, with only about two-thirds of schools having access to the internet. Basic services are also inadequate, with only 45 percent having basic drinking water services, 74 percent with sanitation services, and 61 percent with basic hygiene services.

How can education quality be enhanced?

To enhance education quality without compromising the progress made in democratizing access, the authors suggested a multifaceted approach involving developing locally validated

solutions to learning problems, fostering a culture of evaluation, identifying quality indicators, and disseminating evidence effectively.

Exploring effective levers for enhancing student achievement within the country's unique context is crucial. This requires an examination of inputs in the education production function—school, individual and households, and community factors—using credible local data.

“While international experience may be abundant, these lessons are often context-specific and may not be directly translatable to the Philippines’ peculiarities,” the authors furthered.

Additionally, the authors stressed the importance of fostering a culture of evaluation and learning from education initiatives. This strategy, they said, “entails not just providing resources for education services but also assessing how these are transformed into learning resources, whether they are delivered where needed, and if these produce the desired learning outcomes”.

The PIDS study also called for transparency by widely disseminating the effectiveness of reform initiatives and providing continuous updates based on new evidence. The availability and accessibility of quality-assured data at appropriate levels of disaggregation are fundamental for this purpose, as this enables stakeholders to contribute to building a local evidence base that can guide education policy adjustments and future interventions.

To this end, the authors proposed several evidence-backed investment options that could be considered in the near term.

For instance, remedial programs for struggling students can be developed, inspired by the “teaching at the right level” concept. Such initiatives can enhance student performance by providing tailored interventions based on their learning levels.

Likewise, technology can be leveraged for more student-centered education. Effective technology integration can deliver personalized content, enhance interaction between teachers and learners, and empower learners to control their education.

Strengthening private school participation is another avenue. Programs like the Senior High School Voucher Program have demonstrated the efficiency and diversity of providers. Expanding such initiatives while considering differences in private school quality could effectively address access and quality concerns.

Finally, addressing the implementation challenges of good programs is critical. Instead of immediately scrapping logically sound programs due to challenges, addressing these issues directly is a more rational response.

“By prematurely reversing promising programs due to implementation challenges, the country misses out on valuable opportunities to learn what works and what does not. A more reasonable approach to implementation problems is to address the implementation issues rather than completely reverse them,” the authors maintained. **GGM**

PIDS study suggests SHS grads likely to earn more than JHS peers



SHS graduates are more likely to have medium-skill jobs requiring advanced literacy, numeracy, and interpersonal communication skills, according to the PIDS study.

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (SHS) graduates tend to have higher wages and more chances of employment in middle-skill occupations than junior high school (JHS) completers.

According to a policy note titled “*Senior high school: What do additional years of basic education schooling buy?*” released by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) and written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education, those who finished SHS experience a significant 18.6 percent wage advantage over JHS graduates.

PIDS Senior Research Fellow Michael Abrigo and PIDS President Aniceto Orbeta Jr., authors of the study, attributed these variations to the types of jobs

graduates engage in. In particular, they observed that SHS graduates are less likely (by 13.7-percentage points) to be employed in low-skilled roles involving simple and routine manual tasks and more likely (by 16.2-percentage points) to occupy medium-skill positions requiring advanced literacy, numeracy, and interpersonal communication skills, such as roles in customer service, sales, and skilled trades.

Nonetheless, the researchers found no distinction between senior and junior high graduates regarding their likelihood of being wage workers, entrepreneurs, or unpaid family workers. Similarly, students who finished two more years of high school had similar chances as those who did not attend the last two years of high school

of joining the workforce, being jobless, or encountering underemployment.

These results on the influence of SHS education on students’ job prospects indicate the need to balance the advantages with the extra expenses linked to attending SHS.

“The government had to hire additional teachers, develop new modules, and construct more classrooms to accommodate SHS students. Households have to extend providing pocket money to their children attending SHS. There is also the opportunity cost of time for SHS students who could have already been working had they stopped at JHS but were instead still attending classes,” the authors emphasized.

Meanwhile, Abrigo and Orbeta contended that reverting to the previous K to 10 or a modified K+10+2 system, where only specific college programs require SHS education, could prove advantageous in the medium term when considering overall costs and benefits at a population level. They explained that reduced expenses of providing SHS to fewer students might outweigh the projected increased labor income from those induced to attend SHS. However, they maintained that K to 12 may be a better choice in the long run, as SHS graduates reach a critical mass in their prime age and can contribute more to the workforce.

Finally, according to this PIDS study, SHS education can also lead to significant intergenerational effects. When females are encouraged to pursue SHS, they tend to postpone marriage and childbirth, resulting in healthier children.

What steps can be taken to advance SHS?

Although these supporting pieces of evidence indicate the effectiveness of SHS education, its implementation has not been without flaws. Citing previous studies, the authors highlighted various implementation challenges, including human resource shortage, limited track options, and coordination issues with external partners. Initial research also found that SHS students had little confidence in job

prospects, while employers hesitated to hire them. Moreover, issues related to schooling quality persist in SHS, with students facing difficulties in reading and writing skills despite numerous assessment opportunities throughout the school cycle.

To address these challenges, the authors recommended addressing service delivery gaps by expanding strand offerings, ensuring competent teachers, and strengthening linkages with future pathways through collaboration with employers and mapping competencies. They also emphasized educating the public about the benefits of SHS without overselling it.

“Effectively communicating these potential benefits to parents and caregivers of future

SHS students may dispel folk beliefs that SHS is only a waste of family resources,” the authors stressed.

Likewise, they suggested that the SHS work immersion must be strengthened by aligning taught competencies with work immersion opportunities. They also propose promoting technical-vocational skills certification by providing assessment fee vouchers or making it part of specific academic tracks to clarify SHS-level skills for employers, like bookkeeping for Accountancy, Business, and Management students. However, the authors advised that “care must be given to not oversell SHS, especially as an answer to all ills in the education sector. There is no single cure-all after all.” **GGM**

Access equity and quality challenges in HEIs persist despite reforms

WHILE THERE HAVE been successes in the country’s higher education sector, critical issues remain, including low and uneven quality, underdeveloped research and innovation systems, existing gaps that impede equitable access, weak financial sustainability, and poor labor outcomes.

According to a policy note written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education and released by state think tank Philippine Institute for Development



To make higher education equitable, PIDS researchers advised improving student financing schemes rather than solely relying on universal access to public institutions.

Studies (PIDS) titled *“The quest for quality and equity in the Philippine higher education: Where to from here?”*, the sector struggles to maintain quality standards and ensure equitable access despite financial reforms, as evidenced by output and input indicators.

PIDS authors Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy, Aniceto Orbeta Jr., and Ma. Kristina Ortiz observed that the higher education landscape in the country has experienced substantial growth in the past 30 years, with the number of providers tripling since Academic Year (AY) 2019–2020 and private higher education institutions (HEIs) constituting 88 percent since AY 2009–2010.

The study also noted increasing enrollment rates from AY 2009–2010 to AY 2019–2020, with public HEIs posting higher growth rates (10-year compound annual growth rate of 3.77%) than private HEIs (0.84%). The authors attributed this difference to various factors, including policies favoring public HEIs.

Overall, the authors noted improvements in the country’s tertiary enrollment rates from about 20 percent in the 1970s to around 35 percent in 2021, similar to Viet Nam and middle-income countries. However, despite having lower rates initially, neighboring countries like South Korea, Thailand, and Malaysia surpassed the Philippines over time. For instance, South Korea now boasts close to 100 percent enrollment, while Thailand and Malaysia reached rates of 44 percent (2020) and 43 percent (2021), respectively.

Uneven and low-quality HEIs

The PIDS paper noted the limited global recognition of Philippine HEIs, as only a few universities rank within the world’s top 100. Moreover, data from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) from 2009 to 2018 showed below 40-percent pre-board exam passing rates. Faculty qualifications are also a concern, with less than half holding graduate degrees and fewer than 20 percent possessing a doctorate. Furthermore, accredited programs are only available in less than 30 percent of HEIs.

The study also highlighted the scarcity of Centers of Excellence (COEs) and Centers of Development (CODs), with only 182 HEIs having them (7.61% of total HEIs in AY 2018–2019), according to CHED data. In addition, regional disparities are evident, with the National Capital Region (NCR) and CALABARZON [Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon] having a significant portion of the total COEs and CODs.

Having COEs and CODs, coupled with institutional and program accreditations, signifies HEIs’ commitment to excellence. COEs represent exceptional departments excelling in instruction, research, extension, and qualifications, while CODs show potential for achieving COE status.

Meanwhile, only 12 HEIs have obtained institutional accreditation, based on September 2022 data from the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (PAASCU). Out of these, 5 are located in the NCR. Moreover, accreditation is mainly at Levels II and III, making up 77 percent of all accredited programs. Accreditation

entails evaluating institutions/programs through self and peer assessment, with Level IV signifying the highest accreditation level for meeting quality, operational, and service standards.

Inequitable HEI access

The authors also noted the increase in college enrollment among the poorest students, though their representation remains lower compared to higher-income groups. Additionally, they observed improvement in enrollment from poor households in public HEIs, where the combined share of the bottom three income deciles slightly surpasses that of the top three deciles. In private HEIs, enrollment distribution still heavily favors wealthier students.

Despite the increased accessibility of higher education for poorer households in recent years, the authors contended that making higher education free does not guarantee equitable outcomes. For instance, in the University of the Philippines (UP) System, the admission of students from the poorest group improved by less than 1-percentage point only and increased by 9-percentage points for the richest group between AY 2015–2016 and AY 2022–2023. The passing rate as a percentage of total examinees in UP also decreased by 3.6-percentage points for the poorest and increased by 7.4-percentage points for the richest group.

“The case of UP, an example of a quality SUC with a highly selective admissions policy, illustrates how a free higher education policy may promote access but not necessarily equity. A poor student may want to enter a high-performing public HEI,

but its richer peers are more equipped to do so,” the authors contended.

Weak financial sustainability, underdeveloped innovation system, and poor labor outcomes

The study also pointed to several challenges in maintaining financial sustainability, with only a few autonomous and deregulated HEIs. They also noted the unused seed capital for the Higher Education Development Fund, initiated in 1994 by CHED to finance projects strengthening public and private HEIs. On top of this, they observed declining funding for COEs and CODs and the state universities and colleges’ inability to fully explore revenue-generating partnerships and intellectual property transformation of research outputs.

Another issue raised by the authors is the underdeveloped innovation system, including limited exposure of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates to research culture due to an emphasis on licensure exams, the need to strengthen collaboration between academia and industry, and job mismatch among science and technology (S&T) graduates.

Another challenge is the future employability of college graduates, as most hard-to-fill positions demand analytical skills, particularly prevalent in growing industries like information technology and business process management, health, agribusiness, mining, and utilities. Additionally, about 20 percent of tertiary-educated workers hold jobs with minimal skill demands. Higher education’s training and skills

development are insufficient, as graduates report deficiencies in communication, problem-solving, competence, and trainability. This contributed to a pervasive mismatch, with 65 percent of graduates unable to pursue desired careers due to skill inadequacy.

Improving higher education in PH

To address these concerns, the authors proposed the following: (1) promote complementarity between public and private HEIs, (2) address disparities in quality, (3) improve equity in access through enhanced student financing schemes, (4) enhance the financial sustainability of HEIs, (5) cultivate a research and development culture in Philippine HEIs, (6) address the underdeveloped innovation ecosystem, and (7) promote the overall employability of graduates.

To address the uneven and low quality of education, the rule of closing programs that successively do not produce passers in professional board exams must be enforced. Likewise, permits to offer programs must be issued conditional on satisfying quality standards, and automatic closure procedures must be enforced in cases of noncompliance. Moreover, the government must encourage more HEIs to become COEs and CODs by increasing support for COE/COD development and finding ways to increase HEIs with institutional and Level IV program accreditation.

To address inequitable access in Philippine higher education, stakeholders are encouraged to focus on improved student financing schemes rather than solely relying on universal access to public institutions. Prioritization in granting

targeted educational subsidies and using grants-in-aid to educate children from poor households under the UniFAST [Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education] law proposal could enhance targeted and sustainable interventions.

To bolster HEIs’ financial sustainability, strategies like creating financing instruments for debts, research, and infrastructure and exploring amalgamation initiatives like regional university systems could optimize resource utilization and management practices while enhancing service quality.

Fostering a research and development culture within Philippine HEIs and addressing the underdeveloped innovation ecosystem could be achieved by establishing innovation hubs and coworking spaces in strategic areas to facilitate technology testing and collaboration, along with offering STEM student internships in S&T companies, thereby encouraging research and innovation.

To enhance employability, actions include implementing bridging programs and work-to-school transition initiatives, particularly for underprivileged students, incentivizing collaboration between faculty and industries, enabling faculty members to gain real-world experience through sabbatical leaves, utilizing industry practitioners’ expertise in faculty hiring decisions, focusing on graduate employability rather than just board examination pass rates, and improving the transparency of outcomes through a publicly accessible information system. **GGM**

PIDS study calls for greater promotion of enterprise-based training



A labor market information system for TVET must be developed to collect timely and relevant data that could help identify current in-demand skills and anticipate future skill needs, the authors advised.

THE GOVERNMENT IS advised to promote enterprise-based training (EBT) to make the country's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) more responsive to industry needs.

EBT programs include apprenticeship and dual training systems. Apprenticeship is a training and employment program involving a contract between an apprentice and an employer. In the dual training system, learning occurs alternately in the training center and the company. These training programs provide a mechanism that will ensure the availability of qualified, skilled workers meeting industry requirements.

In a paper written for the Second Congressional Commission on Education

and published by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) titled *“Responding to the changing needs of the labor market: Overview of the country’s TVET”*, authors Ma. Christina Epetia and Ivan Cassidy Villena explained that EBT is the delivery mode most responsive to the industries’ skill requirements because “it tends to be practical, exhibits close linkages with enterprise requirements, and provides means for continuous learning and adaptation to new technologies.”

However, EBT is not attractive enough for the private sector and trainees as it continues to account for a small proportion of TVET enrollment and graduates. Data on the composition of TVET enrollment and graduates by mode of delivery showed

that only 6.8 percent enrolled and 7.4 percent graduated from EBT programs in 2021. In comparison, institution-based training (i.e., those in formal training centers and schools) accounts for 46.2 percent of the total enrollees and 45.5 percent of the total graduates. Community-based training (i.e., those targeting the poor and marginalized groups not served by formal training provisions) also generates a large share, with 38.1 percent for both enrollees and graduates.

“EBT should be promoted given its demand-driven nature, making it the preferred mode of delivery among industries and a solution to the job-skill mismatch in the labor market,”

the authors emphasized. It is likewise crucial to examine the issues surrounding EBT, including how to incentivize firms to participate in such training and how the program should be financed.

Moreover, the authors noted the need for the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to enhance its regulating and testing training modalities to encourage the private sector to participate in TVET programs. TESDA's regulatory functions should be updated to meet the ever-changing technological landscape and labor market. The authors also recommended that TESDA establish a public financial management system and strengthen its quality assurance system.

Another way for TVET programs to keep up with the changing labor market environment is by incorporating 21st-century skills into their curriculum. The study noted that these skills are important for workers to thrive in the current and future economy.

In addition, a labor market information system for TVET must be developed to collect timely and relevant data that could help identify current in-demand skills and anticipate future skill needs. The authors contended that the existing Labor Force Survey of the Philippine Statistics Authority does not fully capture the extent of TVET, as it only includes institution-based but not enterprise- and community-based trainings.

The government should also monitor the training progress of TVET learners, which will help identify skills that are stackable for employment. Doing such could aid

in understanding how TVET learners perceive their employability.

Similarly important in addressing EBT issues is closely monitoring the implementation of community-based training. Although much focus is given to community-based training, as shown by the large proportion of enrollees and graduates under this delivery mode, the training programs are of poorer quality, underresourced, and have limited industry linkages. The authors stressed that the government should equally promote and finance the equity and efficiency objectives of TVET “to uplift the quality of life of the vulnerable and respond to the country’s economic needs for a highly skilled workforce and higher-value production activities”.

One crucial lesson from the pandemic is the need for flexible learning methods to mitigate disruptions in learning and training. Thus, the authors highlighted the government’s role in harnessing digital technologies to develop new approaches to assessing and certifying TVET trainees. It is also important to consider the diverse capacities of intended clients, as limited financial resources, information, and internet access could hinder individuals from participating in online learning. According to the authors, “flexible delivery of TVET will only be successful if both the effective delivery in alternative platforms and the equitable access to learning resources are met.”

TVET trends and growth

The value of TVET for upskilling and retooling is increasingly being recognized by TVET clients, based on a TESDA study.

When asked about their reasons for taking TVET courses, 50.1 percent of TVET graduates cited upgrading/enhancing skills, followed only by employment with 27.6 percent. This indicates that TVET graduates increasingly emphasize skills expansion and not just employment. The authors also observed that the proportion of students who enrolled in TVET for personal use/interest/hobby has grown from only 2 percent in 2012 to as much as 17 percent in 2020.

“Expanding one’s skill set might be a response to a more dynamic labor market where technological innovation and digitalization of work have changed the demand for skills at a faster pace,” they explained.

Moreover, the study noted that the composition of TVET graduates had shifted. The traditional targets of TVET are high school graduates who do not intend to go to college. However, in 2020, nearly a third of TVET graduates were college graduates, followed only by high school graduates, with 28.9 percent.

Data from TESDA also showed that in 2020, the employment rate of TVET graduates was nearly 80 percent, with more than 90 percent employed within their localities. This is a notable development compared to 2013, wherein less than 80 percent of the employed TVET graduates found jobs within their provinces. Based on an online survey conducted by Jobstreet.com Philippines in 2016, 3 out of 4 Filipinos prefer to work in their hometowns due to family, working environment and culture, and work-life balance considerations. **WMA**

Strategize education spending, programs to curb losses from pandemic

SUSTAINING PUBLIC SPENDING on education and establishing strategic education programs will help enhance the younger population's productivity and compensate for the country's losses from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This was based on the findings of a study by state think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) titled "COVID-19-induced human capital shocks, lifetime labor productivity, and inequality". Authored by PIDS Senior Research Fellows Michael Abrigo and Connie Bayudan-Dacuycu and President Aniceto Orbeta Jr., the discussion paper looked into the possible long-term effects of human capital spending shocks induced by the pandemic.

The paper highlighted how households cut back on human capital spending at the onset of the pandemic, which resulted in declines in health-seeking behaviors and school attendance.

In particular, the decline in school attendance had been sharpest among the youngest age groups, as households delayed children's school entry and even pulled children out of school, severely affecting those from poorer households.

"Over the last decade, the Philippines has made several important strides in



There is a need to address the long-term detrimental effects of the pandemic on education and productivity, especially among younger cohorts.

expanding human capital investments through new education and health entitlements," the authors said.

However, they noted that the longstanding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to endanger these gains.

Thus, the study stressed the importance of new and strengthened policies and programs that will address the long-term detrimental effects of the pandemic on productivity and the health and education sectors, which have diverging impacts on the persisting income inequality in the country.

"While the sustained education spending during the early pandemic phase may

yield favorable future economic outcomes, strategic education investments are still needed to improve the productivity of younger cohorts," the authors said.

"The government and public policies play important roles in shaping household behavior and their experience of the pandemic and ensuing the recovery period," they added.

Labor implications

Although continuously investing in education is crucial in recovering the productivity losses from the pandemic, it is equally important to ensure that public investments, especially in higher

education, will result in better outcomes, such as more employment opportunities and better wages.

However, this is not the case for many employed Filipinos. A study published by PIDS found that about 40 percent of people employed in the Philippines are overeducated or have academic credentials beyond what is required by their jobs.

The paper “*Surveying the extent and wage consequences of education-job mismatches in the Philippine labor market*”, authored by Monica Melchor, used Labor Force Survey data from 2006 to 2012. It assesses the extent of overeducation and undereducation and determines the adverse impacts of education-labor mismatches in the country.

The study found that overeducated individuals earn only 5 percent more for each extra year of schooling. Meanwhile, over a quarter are undereducated.

According to Melchor, the prevalence of overeducation in a country shows inefficiencies in the labor market, which may result in lower job satisfaction and wage penalties.

This means that significant educational investments, such as time, financing, and other resources, might not translate into improved employment outcomes or higher wages.

“Workers whose educational attainment exceeds the level needed to perform their



Overeducated Filipinos earn only 5 percent more for each extra year of schooling, the PIDS paper finds.

current jobs suffer a significant wage penalty and diminished job satisfaction relative to their well-matched peers,” Melchor explained.

“Such negative effects are significant in a developing economy context, where education quality is highly variable and low incomes are prevalent,” she added.

The paper also noted concerns about the efficiency of public investment in tertiary schooling amid the considerable funding for educational subsidies and the “evidence that this has failed to translate into improved wage prospects.”

Thus, she emphasized the need for better-targeted higher education support, such as aiming subsidies at lower-income and vulnerable groups.

“Social safety nets and adequate social protection can help mitigate challenges

and the wage penalties that overeducated individuals experience,” Melchor said.

In addition, labor market policies must support employment-skills matching. The government must enhance workers’ access to knowledge or information on job opportunities and address gender disparities in employment, especially as the pandemic largely exacerbated existing inequalities in the labor sector.

“Policies to facilitate job-skills matching can alleviate challenges in the Philippine labor market, such as the continued gender disparities in labor outcomes,” the author said.

“The existence of wage disparities across men and women echo the earlier findings of significant gender disparities in labor and employment outcomes in the Philippines,” she added. **EGR**

Leverage technology to improve learning outcomes, build resilience



Findings showed that public school students relied on printed modules during the pandemic, while private school students leaned on online learning.

THE PHILIPPINES NEEDS to be strategic in using available technology to enable learning even amid crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) President Aniceto Orbeta Jr.

Speaking at a webinar organized by PIDS and the Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), Orbeta discussed the learning situation in School Year (SY) 2020–2021, when the pandemic started and disrupted the delivery of education in the country. With the closure of schools to protect the health of learners and educators, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued the Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) in May 2020

to guide distance learning through printed modules, radio, TV, internet, or a combination of these.

Findings of his study titled “*Basic education during the COVID-19 pandemic: What do enrollment by learning modality and household characteristics tell us?*” showed that most elementary (90%), junior high school (83%), and senior high school (80%) students in public schools rely on printed modules. Meanwhile, elementary (46%), junior high school (36%), and senior high school (44%) students in private schools use online learning. Blended learning, a combination of face-to-face and distance learning, is also popular in private schools. The author attributed this situation to the

unreliable internet connection in the country, which hinders the continuous delivery of online learning and makes blended learning necessary.

Zooming in by region, Orbeta noted that even in areas where internet availability is high, such as in the National Capital Region, the proportion of students in public schools who rely on printed modules is still very high compared to private schools. This result illustrates that the student’s mode of learning is driven not only by internet availability in the area but also by students’ capacity to access the internet at home, which is conducive to online learning.

Based on the 2020 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS), the mean proportion of basic education students with broadband internet access at home is 12 percent. Orbeta underscored that internet access correlates with the presence of broadband infrastructure, income, family size, and either parent having a high school education. Moreover, online learning is highly dependent on the quality of home support or the ability of parents to support their children’s education needs. Results showed that the quality of home support is lower among children in impoverished families.

Orbeta argued that even if public schools are capacitated to provide online learning,

poor students with no internet access at home will still not be reachable. As such, online learning is not the most effective intervention. Moving forward, providing support for printed modules, such as using cell phones to improve the interaction between teachers, parents, and students, is crucial.

“Learning must continue, and we need to be strategic in using technology to enable learning,” Orbeta stressed. There is a need to leverage technology to ensure that learning progresses amid crises and education delivery is enhanced. Considering the near-universal access to cell phones (above 92%), phone-based interventions enable interaction and mentoring to complement printed modules and improve learning outcomes.

Another interesting finding is the low uptake of TV and radio-based learning among students in public and private schools despite the high proportion of households owning TV (above 79%) and radio (35%), based on 2020 APIS data. Hence, there is a need to probe the issues preventing greater use of these broadcast modalities.

mEducation for resilient learning

One of the possible interventions presented at the webinar was mEducation. This mobile phone-based tutoring program aims to improve math skills by delivering math problems via text and providing weekly 20-minute instruction calls tailored to individual learning levels.

It was developed by Youth Impact, a nongovernment organization based in Botswana that promotes evidence-based policy interventions for youth. The program showed promising results in Botswana, where it was initially implemented. To test its impact in the Philippines, the IPA led its pilot test in partnership with DepEd. The IPA is a global nonprofit organization discovering and advancing ways to improve the conditions of people living in poverty, focusing on education, health, and financial inclusion.

IPA Philippines Research Manager Rene Marlon Panti said the program was motivated by the school closures during the pandemic, which disproportionately affected low-income families without access to alternative sources of instruction. It was implemented in Regions IV-B, VI, and IX, with 110 participating schools and 3,395 participating students in Grades 3 and 4. It endeavors to encourage parents and students to study together. It starts with an SMS [short message service] exercise, where the parent receives weekly math exercises via text to practice with their child at home. Afterward, the teacher calls the parent weekly at the agreed tutorial schedule. Subsequently, targeted instruction is conducted, where the teacher and the student discuss for 20 minutes the math operation that matches the student’s level. The exercise ends with the teacher setting a schedule for the next session.

Youth Impact Cofounder and University of Oxford Senior Fellow Noam Angrist reported that after 8 weeks of

3-hour sessions, the program increased the proportion of students who could solve math problems by 3-percentage points for addition, 21-percentage points for subtraction, 23-percentage points for multiplication, and 14-percentage points for division. The program also positively affects children’s well-being, such as enjoying learning and developing perseverance and ambition. Further, estimations showed that mEducation is extremely cost-effective at USD 12 or about PHP 650 per child.

“We need to have approaches that can work when disruptions happen, and we see that this phone-based approach works. It can reach people where they are and provide quality education amid disruptions,” Angrist said, highlighting the importance of emergency responses, targeting instruction around technology, and implementing tutoring programs that are cheap, scalable, and engage parents or guardians.

Moving forward, he advised scaling mEducation in the Philippines as a cheap, effective remote learning modality for remediation, tutoring, numeracy initiatives, and blended learning. One key issue in the country is addressing Filipino students’ low average test scores in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment.

Angrist also looks into testing mEducation in difficult and disrupted settings, such as in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. **WMA**

RESEARCH DIGESTS

PN 2023-19

The Philippine Health Technology Assessment Program: Insights from the Outcome Evaluation

by *John Q. Wong, Stephanie Anne L. Co, Cheyenne Ariana Erika Modina, Krizelle Cleo Fowler, Mary Gil Tarroc, Eunice U. Mallari, Abigail L. Tan, and Carlo Yao*

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Health Technology Assessment (HTA) program was pivotal in providing essential guidance for evidence-based health policy decisions. This *Policy Note* evaluates the effectiveness of current HTA processes and provides recommendations to enhance the program moving forward. It assesses stakeholder perceptions and observations on HTA outcomes and reveals that end users are generally satisfied with HTA's value in agenda setting, policy formulation, and institutional fit with the healthcare system. Results also show that end users are dissatisfied with the HTA team's performance in stakeholder engagement, external communication, increasing the capacity of the HTA, and incorporating diverse perspectives into its recommendations. Hence, this Note highlights the urgency of addressing implementation challenges, such as the lack of evidence for appraisals, the time-sensitive nature of releasing recommendations, external pressures, misconceptions on HTA's role, and inadequate stakeholder consultations. Download the full study at <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/document/pidspn2319.pdf>.

RPS 2023-03

How Social Networks Influence Access and Utilization of Weather and Climate Information: The Case of Upland Farming Communities in the Philippines

by *Aubrey D. Tabuga, Anna Jennifer L. Umlas, Katrina Mae C. Zuluaga, and Sonny N. Domingo*

Social norms and structures are vital factors that shape people's behavior and attitudes. Therefore, analyzing such underlying forces in creating strategies to

influence behavior and activities is useful. Agricultural extension services, such as information dissemination and farmers' training, are some of the interventions that can benefit from such analyses, especially within a context of limited human and financial resources. The lessons learned from analyzing social networks and norms can be used to identify potential local knowledge and information disseminators, thereby aiding the extension services. It also helps in formulating more contextualized approaches to reach the underserved and hard-to-reach areas. Utilizing this approach, this study used the case of a remote upland area in Atok, Benguet, a major vegetable producer. A social network analysis was used to develop insights for designing more effective extension strategies. Findings reveal that interventions like information and education campaigns can be improved by acknowledging the nuances in social relation structures. Download the full publication at <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/document/pidsrp2303.pdf>.

DP 2023-12

Government Interventions in the Domestic Shipping Industry: A Discussion on Market Competition and Maritime Safety

by *Kris A. Francisco*

The domestic shipping industry has a crucial role in the Philippine economy as it supports domestic trade and provides affordable means of interisland transfer. However, the industry is riddled with inefficiencies with interrelated consequences such as high cost of shipping, low quality of services, and increased frequency of maritime accidents. To improve the industry's performance, the government has implemented policy reforms, guidelines, and regulations to induce market competition, encourage investments, and enhance maritime safety. This study discusses the evolution of policies and examines some market indications of progress vis-à-vis the areas of reform. Overall, it finds some positive developments in market competition

resulting from the government's efforts to deregulate the industry. It also observes some indications of increased investments in domestic vessels. However, comparative data show that, on average, the country's shipping vessels remain older and smaller than in other Asian countries. This signifies the need for more intensive strategies to induce modernization of the country's fleet. In terms of maritime safety, a significant difference in maritime safety indicators is yet to be observed despite government efforts to curtail the frequency of maritime accidents. Download the full study at <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/document/pidsdps2312.pdf>.

PN 2023-18

Developing and Sustaining Agroecotourism through a Community-based Approach

by *Jerelyn Bacalso-Medalla*

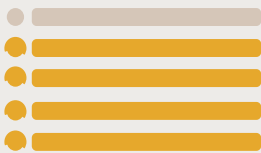
Agroecotourism's success lies in a community-based approach that empowers locals, giving them control over initiatives and strengthening their ties to resources and livelihoods. This fosters sustainable development while preserving traditional practices and biodiversity. This *Policy Note* explores the viability of community-based agroecotourism for an integrated sustainable farming system in Barangay Lantud in Talakag, Bukidnon. Applying the community-based approach, this study provides strategies to address the challenges of establishing a sustainable community-based agroecotourism in the area. It concludes that the community-based agroecotourism approach brings socioeconomic benefits like jobs, income diversification, and entrepreneurship, leading to improved living standards and poverty reduction. It also notes that overcoming obstacles, such as inconsistent regulations and inadequate infrastructure, is vital for agroecotourism's viability, underscoring the need for effective management and stakeholder collaboration. Download the full study at <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/document/pidspn2318.pdf>.

The Philippines' Education Crisis: How Bad Is It and What Can We Do to Solve It?

While the Philippines has high attendance rates at all education levels compared to other countries with similar development levels, education outcomes show the continuous decline of education quality in the country. The pandemic also introduced another set of challenges with the sudden shift to remote learning. One of the many indicators of this

education crisis is the country's poor results in international assessments.

This infographic shows the learning gaps in basic education that require serious attention. It also offers recommendations to address challenges in implementing basic education in the Philippines. **JCS**



4 out of 5 Filipino students may find it difficult to understand, reflect on, or interpret what they read.



54.4% of Filipino students struggle with basic math problems. They must be intensively guided to carry out fundamental math procedures.



Nearly 4 out of 5 can explain patterns in simple data and can carry out scientific procedures with explicit instructions.

Source: PISA 2018 National Report of the Philippines, DepEd (2019)

The average Filipino student has a learning gap of 5.5 years.

Reflects the difference in expected years of schooling and the learning achieved for the years students spend in school

Indicates when a student underperforms in international achievement tests despite finishing similar expected years of schooling

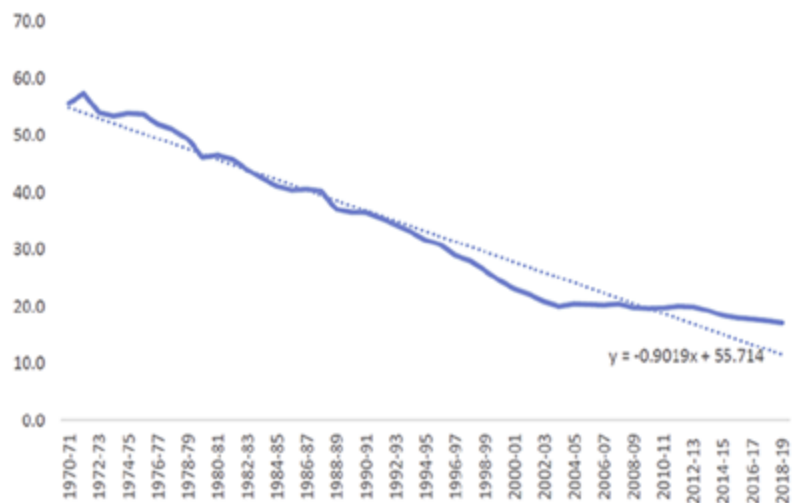
Shows that schooling does not automatically mean quality learning

Sources: Human Capital Index 2020 Update, The World Bank; World Development Indicators, The World Bank



Private schools perform better in international large-scale assessments. However, their share in enrolment is declining.

Share of enrollment of private school in junior high school, S.Y. 1970-71 to SY 2018-19



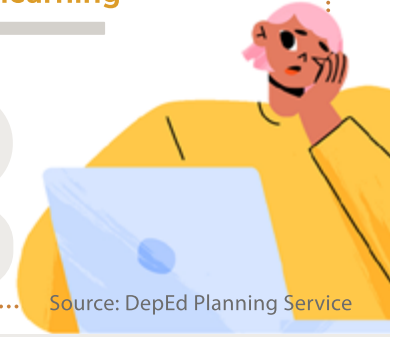
Sources: PSA Philippine Statistical Yearbook, various years

Most popular modes of learning delivery during the pandemic

Across elementary, junior high, and senior high schools

Up to 90% of public schools primarily used **print modules**

Up to 46% of private schools primarily used **online learning**



This shows that, in times of crisis, the digital divide may further widen learning gaps, especially between public and private school students.

Children from poorer households are more likely to have larger learning losses under remote schooling.

Source: DepEd Planning Service

Ways forward in basic education

Analyze large-scale assessment tests further.

The results of the national achievement tests, for instance, must be accompanied by an examination of the broader determinants of schooling and learning outcomes.

Continuously generate, review, and publicly discuss data on the state of learning, just like how data about the economy is treated. This allows people to be informed and critical of the state of education and engage with leaders to inform policies on education.

Create an independent body to oversee the generation and dissemination of key education statistics. Identify clear indicators and study the impact of policy measures aimed at improving the education system. Consistently provide meaningful indicators that will inform and encourage stakeholders to realize better education outcomes.

Invest in education. Our investment in education is not as high as in our neighboring countries. Additional financing can help address resources needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Diversify approaches to pedagogy. Develop remedial programs for students who are lagging. Explore teaching methods that may be more empowering for lagging students so they can progress better in their learning.

Pay attention to early childhood development. Studies show that academic performance and later life success is influenced by a person's health in as early as his/her first years of birth.

This infographic is based on PIDS Discussion Paper Series 2022-23 titled "Philippine Education: Situationer, Challenges, and Ways Forward," written by PIDS President Aniceto C. Orbeta, Jr. and PIDS Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow Vicente B. Paqueo. The full version of this infographic can be downloaded from <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/resource/infographics-policy-issue/policy-issue-at-a-glance-the-philippines-education-crisis-how-bad-is-it-and-what-can-we-do-to-s>, while the full study may be accessed at <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/document/pidsdps2223.pdf>.

**POLICY
ISSUE AT
A GLANCE**

Editor's Notes (continued from page 2)

On the other hand, the article on basic education investigates the causes of poor schooling quality in the country. Results of international education assessments before the COVID-19 pandemic already revealed that Filipino students trail behind their counterparts in other countries, especially in core subjects such as math, science, and reading. In addition to the underinvestment in education, experts attribute this to the failure of policymakers to use the results of national achievement tests to improve education policies, teaching methods, and the education curriculum. Another factor is the inadequacy of learning facilities and the lack of basic drinking, hygiene, and sanitation services in many schools, as well as the required infrastructure such as electricity and internet connectivity.

Meanwhile, while there have been calls to abolish the senior high school (SHS) program, another article in this issue points to a PIDS study showing SHS graduates being more likely to have higher wages and be employed in medium-skills occupations, thus dispelling notions that the SHS program is simply a waste of time and resources. The study also shows the program's significant intergenerational effects and positive outcomes on women in terms of delaying marriage and childbirth, resulting in healthier children.

Maintaining quality standards and ensuring equitable access despite financial reforms are among the burning issues in higher education. The deterioration of education quality can be attributed to the low quality of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country, as reflected by the very small number of Philippine universities included in the world's top 100, the low passing rates in the board examinations, the limited number of faculty members with doctoral degrees, the scarcity of departments within HEIs certified by the Commission on Higher Education as Centers of Excellence and Centers of Development, and the minuscule count of HEIs with institutional accreditation. In terms of access to higher education, while enrollment from poorer households has increased in recent years following the passage of the law on free tuition in state universities and colleges, more students from richer households benefit from it, as seen in the case of the University of the Philippines system.

Meanwhile, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is increasingly gaining ground, with more graduates seeing it as an avenue for upgrading and enhancing their skills to be better prepared for a more dynamic labor market. The gap lies, however, in the scarcity of private-sector-sponsored enterprise-based training, which, given its demand-driven nature, is a potentially effective solution to address job-skill mismatch in the labor market.

This issue also tackles the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector and recommends measures to curb learning losses. One of the articles noted how households cut back on spending for health and education at the onset of the pandemic. Another article tackles how students, especially from low-income families, struggled to keep up with distance learning during the pandemic and largely relied on printed modules given limited access to the internet at home, which is critical for online learning.

Moving forward, further increasing investments in education and training is key, which must be complemented with infrastructure improvements, mechanisms for monitoring and measuring quality, and using data and evidence to inform education policies and reforms. The education sector also stands to gain from leveraging low-cost technologies accessible to low-income households. One example described in this issue is the mEducation project of Innovations for Poverty Action, using text messaging to deliver math exercises to students complemented by a tutorial session led by the teacher. The pilot test done in partnership with the Department of Education already showed promising results, including an increase in the number of students who could solve math problems and have a positive learning attitude. Completing this issue is an infographic story that summarizes the learning gaps in basic education and recommendations to address these. **SVS**

About DRN

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Editor-in-Chief:	Sheila V. Siar
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Writers:	Wenilyn M. Asuncion Maryam P. Tubio Elshamae G. Robles Gizelle G. Manuel
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Infographics:	Janina C. Sarmiento
Circulation and Subscription:	Hazel Anne R. Genizal

Contact us

Research Information Department
Philippine Institute for Development Studies
18/F Three Cyberpod Centris - North Tower
EDSA corner Quezon Avenue, Quezon City

Telephone: (+63-2) 8877-4000
Email: publications@pids.gov.ph
Website: <https://www.pids.gov.ph>

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