

Continuing Challenges in Basic Education

Teaching Juan and Maria to read and write is becoming tough work for today's educators and the government is exploring all options to accomplish its job despite all odds.

First, rapid population growth has led to a lack of classrooms, poorly trained teachers and inadequate teaching materials, including books.

Second, more children are dropping out of school because of poverty and insurgency problems, among other reasons. Statistics show continuous decline in participation, cohort survival and completion rates.

And third, the quality of elementary and high school graduates continues to be problematic as borne by results of various tests conducted by both the government and the private sector.

The government is aware of these challenges, and has embarked on a continuing reform program focused on improving the quality of learning and access to education - either formal or in alternative learning system (ALS).

Meeting challenges head-on

The government's main response to the challenges on its basic education system is embodied in the Philippine Education For All (EFA) 2015 Plan. Approved in 2006, this plan is both a vision and a holistic program of reforms aimed at improving the quality of basic education for every Filipino. This serves as the country's blueprint for basic education.

Competency, textbooks, and teachers expertise

Results of the 2005-2006 National Achievement Test (NAT) confirm that the quality of formal basic education is below the desired level.

Scores of public school Grade 6 pupils in English, Math and Science are 54 percent, 53.66 percent, and 46.77 percent, respectively. The scores of 4th year public school students are worse, with 47.73 percent in English, 47.82 percent in Math, and 37.98 percent in Science.

To address low student competency levels, the Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP), among others. This aims to make every child an effective reader by Grade 3.

Parallel to this is the "no read, no move" policy wherein the best teachers are assigned to the first three Grades and only effective readers get promoted to Grade 4.

To support these programs, adequate textbooks and reading materials for teachers and students and library hubs are to be provided.

In addition, information and communications technology (ICT) – particularly computer-aided instruction, has been adopted in several schools. In 2006, 87 percent of all public high schools was provided with computers, 40 percent of which has Internet connectivity and 15 percent, with local area networks (LAN).

Teaching competencies are being upgraded. This activity aims to eradicate the situation wherein many educators teach subjects they have not majored in, resulting to noneducation of students.



Thus, 7,237 teacher items were created in 2006. This lessened the shortage from 20,874 to 10,517. Also on the same year, teacher trainings were conducted for English, Math and Science. The National English Proficiency Program (NEPP) trained 2,270 while President Arroyo's "pump priming" program trained 17,000 on Math and Science.

Student performance and accessible education

There was a slight increase in enrolment (0.38%) in primary and secondary education in SY 2005-2006. Elementary education showed consistent decline in participation, cohort

School Year	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Participation Rate	94.13%	91.63%	87.08%	84.41%
Cohort Survival Rate	69.97%	60.67%	60.89%	58.36%
Completion Rate	66.95%	59.32%	59.07%	56.76%
Dropout Rate	7.30%	9.93%	9.82%	10.57%

survival and completion rates while dropout rate consistently increased (Table 1).

Similarly, secondary education performance was dismal between SY 2004-2005 and SY 2005-2006 (Table 2). But one may note that there were annual advances from SY 2002-2003, SY 2004-2005, to 2004-2005.

School Year	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Participation Rate	59.19%	60.15%	59.97%	58.20%
Cohort Survival Rate	66%	68.46%	69.89%	59.10%
Completion Rate	59.90%	63.14%	64.77%	54.14%
Dropout Rate	13.03%	11.96%	11.30%	15.81%

Poverty is seen as the primary reason for the poor performances in both elementary and high school. Pupils usually drop out of school for lack of finances to buy school supplies and other needs or to help their parents in the farm and do other work to put food on the table.

To improve the holding power of schools (school participation and retention), the government implemented the Food for School Program (FSP) under the Accelerated Hunger Mitigation Plan (AHMP) through DepEd and its partner agencies. The FSP provides a daily ration of 1 kilo of fortified rice to families through preschool and Grade 1 students.

This program started during the last quarter of 2005 and as of end-2006, it has benefited 111,584 families through the distribution of a total of 25,338 bags of rice.

Aside from poverty, many school age children have trouble having formal education because of unstable peace and order in their areas, including those in Muslim Mindanao and in insurgency-infested areas.

Improving access to poor students

To enable children from poor families have formal education, the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers for Private Education (GASTPE) Program provided financial subsidy to students who could not be absorbed by public schools.

To help decongest public secondary schools, a total of 1,584 private high schools actively participated in GASTPE. Through this program, the government pays the participating private schools to accept students who could not be accommodated by public schools.

The GASTPE program has two modes: the Education Service Contracting Scheme (ESCS) which began in the early 1990s and the Education Vouchers Scheme (EVS) which started only in 2005. As of 2006, the ESCS has benefited a total of 446,202 students while EVS provided 58,143 vouchers.

DepEd also implemented the alternative delivery modes (ADM) to educate economically and socially disadvantaged groups. These include the Distance Education for Public Elementary Schools, the Multi-Grade Program for Open High School, the Project EASE (Easy and Affordable Secondary Education), and the Modified In-School Off-School Approach (MISOSA).

Effective partnerships in education

Sustained and effective partnership with international and local organizations is an essential element to solve the education crisis.

An example is the World Bank-funded National Program Support for Basic Education (NPSBE) implemented in October 2006. This will assist DepEd in financing four reform areas: (a) strengthened school-based management; (b) improved teaching effectiveness; (c) enhance quality and equity through standards, assessment and support; and (d) effective resource mobilization.

There is also the recently-launched Australia-Philippines Development Assistance Strategy 2007-2011 that will help improve basic education especially in the Visayas and Mindanao. The aims of the strategy are to: (a) support basic education reforms; (b) establish learning resource centers; and (c) improve and disseminate teaching and learning materials and training programs.

Among local organizations, the DepEd is collaborating with private sector groups through the continuation of the Adopt-a-School program. Here, these groups, by adopting certain schools, assist in providing operational help in the form of textbooks, physical facilities, teacher training, and other needs.

Looking ahead: Education for All

As reforms under the Philippine EFA are being implemented, the sustainability of such reforms remains a concern. The government must continue to prioritize spending for basic education, alongside the formulation of responsive policy instruments and innovative programs.

The ongoing “Basic Education Survey” shall ensure that no Filipino be left out of basic education – private or public, formal or alternative. Furthermore, a review of the EVS under the GASTPE should be undertaken with the end view of improving the system, particularly the use of vouchers and other mechanisms.

The Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) in high school shall be strengthened to prepare graduates for more productive lives in the case taking up a college education becomes a problem. This would involve upgrading facilities, capability building of teachers and enhancement of the curriculum.

This means harmonizing the TLE program of the DepEd with the Career Pathways program within the framework of the existing Revised Secondary Education Curriculum (RSEC).

To take advantage of technology for education, a project presently being planned is educating through television and satellite broadcasting to reach students in the farthest areas in the country. - John Anthony U. Geronimo

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