

An Analysis of Access to Quality Basic Education in the Philippines Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine educational system drastically changed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drastic changes and effects manifested throughout the entire system, particularly in the year 2020. The basic educational system, for that matter, has been limited in its movements due to the overwhelming effects of the pandemic. The importance of education, alongside the pursuit for the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has been compromised due to unprecedented circumstances that resulted to inconsistencies in terms of policies, programs, and other mandates given by the state in ensuring the access of Filipino children to universal quality education. This paper analyzes the implementation of the Department of Education's (DepEd's) Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) as a response to the need to provide quality education amid the pandemic. Using purposive sampling,

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semi-structured interviews were conducted among public and private school teachers. The effects of the BE- LCP, its contradictions, and the implications of the praxis on the country's educational system during the pandemic were also scrutinized by revisiting Pierre Bourdieu and Paulo Freire's point of view on how the school and education can be utilized in transforming and reproducing social classes. Core concepts in Renato Constantino's *The Miseducation of the Filipino* and *The Anti- Social Filipino* were likewise used to develop a framework that aims to address struggles faced by the Philippine education system amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: quality education, COVID-19, blended learning, teachers, learners

ESTANISLAO

An Analysis of Access to Quality Basic Education in the Philippines Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic

Education is often one of the most prioritized sector in nation-building and development. It provides jobs, opportunities, advancements, and equalizes the citizens. It is often viewed as a form of investment where one would be educated and later on support the country in the form of formal employment. Without education, every society cannot thrive towards greatness, progress, and prosperity. It closes the gap between different social strata as it aims to equalize everyone. Through education, one can gain mastery. When a person wants to become a great artist, it is an educational process of absorbing and scrutinizing information and techniques just to get the right stroke of a paint brush. When an individual wants to comprehend something, one should know how to know first. Then, one can comprehend. After that, one can analyze, explain, synthesize, evaluate, and create something out of it. As Greene (2014, p. 95) puts it, "You should value learning above anything else."

As an example, here is Person A - a wealthy entrepreneur who goes with the mantra, "Ako ay madiskarte¹" to justify business ventures and capital gains without attaining much higher education. Person A worked hard to become a successful entrepreneur by selling food around the city. Then, here is Person B - a young professional who came from humble beginnings. As a student, Person B applied for different scholarships to support their studies. Now that Person B is a young professional, he/she strives to gain more education by enrolling in graduate school. Applying Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of authenticity, one cannot declare which is right and wrong in this scenario because their individual decisions give authenticity to their being. But, if one of them has amalgamated their social status into their own self, they have committed bad faith (Burton, 2012).

Given this scenario, people tend to debate on whether we value diskarte over education. This dichotomization of different paths is dangerous because of several considerations. Education is a right. Education gives freedom and capabilities; thus, it is empowering. On the other hand, education can serve as a manifestation of legitimacy of the dominant class in which schooling and examination can be integrated into the wider gaps in social strata. This mindset, however, points many to the path that many have spent

at least 14-16 years of studying just to realize that they were molded to become a piece of grandiose machinery; particularly by participating in the workplace and enabling labor power (Bourdieu, as cited in Riley, 2017).

The above-mentioned perspectives raise some questions regarding the current situation of the Philippine educational system. How can collective actions make education truly equalizing? What are the true aims of education? Why is it difficult to make basic education accessible for everyone? How did the Philippine basic educational system adapt to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Philippine educational system is composed of basic education (Kindergarten to Grade 12), tertiary education, technical-vocational education, and alternative learning system (ALS). This paper focuses only on basic education, due to the far-reaching effects of policies introduced during the pandemic on learners, teachers, non-teaching staff, and even education administrators.

The Government's Early Response to COVID-19

On March 16, 2020, based on the Resolution no. 12 of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) (Department of Health, 2020a), President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) throughout the island of Luzon. This caused people around the country to buy basic commodities and adjust necessary travel schedule because of the following: 1) all means of transportation were cancelled during this time and; 2) major corporate, academic, and business establishments will be closed during the implementation of ECQ; which means that there is a need for the government to provide aid to millions of jobless Filipinos, which was recorded at 17.7% or 7.3 million in April 2020 (Mapa, 2020). Thus, many of these companies implement a no-work-no-pay policy (Lopez, 2020). The implementation varied from the Enhanced Community Quarantine down to Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) and General Community Quarantine (GCQ).

Consequently, upon the recommendation of IATF on March 9, 2020 (Department of Health, 2020b), the Department of Education (DepEd) suspended classes from March 10 to 14. Subsequently, DepEd adhered to the Administrative Order no. 15 released by the Department of Health (DOH) on April 2020 providing minimum health protocols in order to mitigate risks related to COVID-19 (Department of Health, 2020c).

Access to Education amid the Pandemic

Due to these government undertakings, the fourth quarter formative and summative assessments usually conducted by basic educational institutions had to be done virtually (Mateo, 2020b). Commencement exercises and graduation ceremonies were one virtually and some schools decided to deliver the diplomas of their student candidates directly to their houses. The DepEd, in partnership with Microsoft Philippines, had launched #Hello2020Graduates program, a virtual setup powered by Microsoft 365, which was launched on all regions nationwide (Microsoft Philippines Communications Team, 2020). As of September 9, 2020, data from the Department of Education showed that around 748 out of 14,435 or at least 5.6 percent of private basic educational institutions (BEIs) had suspended their operations due to the pandemic. As a result, these suspension of operations greatly affected at least 3,233 teachers who lost their jobs and around 40,345 learners in primary and secondary levels (Mateo, 2020a) were temporarily unable to access basic education.

In June 2020, the DepEd initiated the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE- LCP) as a measure to shift the physical classes to online, modular, and blended learning modalities. This framework provided a means to deliver universal quality education amid the pandemic due to COVID-19, and also “responds to the directives of the Secretary [Leonor Briones] and provides guidance to the department, while also finding ways for learning to continue (Department of Education, 2020, p. 10). The BE-LCP also provided means and ways to conduct online, modular, and blended learning frameworks based on the recommendations of the DOH’s Administrative

Order no.15 series of 2020. This framework also specified that the modality of the teaching-learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic will be through online and blended (online with modular) learning. This consideration was informed by findings of a study on delivering quality education remotely conducted by the DepEd's Information and Communications Technology Services (DepEd-ICTS). Some of these findings include:

- Internet accessibility is one of the prevailing challenges in implementing online learning, which can be resolved by providing digital materials and devices into the learners.
- Another challenge is that teachers were needed to be trained in the use of virtual platforms for online learning modality due to a number of them who have little to none knowledge about ICT. As a response, the DepEd conducted at least two online training program in 2020 with at least 17,000 on the said matter.
- For early grade levels, parental guidance is highly advised together with the use of technology. Parent orientation on guided learning will be a separate dilemma and their preparedness in doing so is still in question.
- Vocational tracks and other classes that require practical skills demonstrations and live sessions in Senior high school (SHS) may be difficult to teach and not viable for home-based and remote learning modalities, even with the use of technology.
- Cloud Servers (e.g. Google Drive, OneDrive) have been utilized by the DepEd to ensure and integrate technological advancements that can be used in providing quality education. (Department of Education, 2020, p. 25).

ESTANISLAO
 An Analysis of Access to Quality Basic Education in the Philippines Amid the Covid-19
 Pandemic

To address the challenges surfaced by DepEd-ICTS, DepEd conducted online surveys throughout the country from April to May 2020 to determine the perception of its stakeholders regarding distance learning. Respondents included 789,690 teachers, parents, and school personnel. Nearly half (46%) percent were open to the possibility of delivering education via television, radio, and other means remotely (Table 1).

Table 1. Openness to Having Lessons and Class Activities Online or Through TV/ Radio (2020)

Agreement with having class activities online/television/radio			
	Yes	No	Others
Learners (n=126,403)	35	62	3
(Parent/Guardian (n=248,110)	59	37	4
School Personnel (n=415,177)	41	55	4
Total (N=789,690)	46	50	4

Source: Department of Education (2020).

As data show, the survey conducted by the DepEd on the modality of delivering distance and remote learning can be interpreted in a contextual manner due to the implementation of the ECQ, many stakeholders were basing their decision to the results of this survey in preparing the mode of instruction and provision of quality education. Thus, the distance learning modality was a new and unexplored procedure for the DepEd in proceeding with the continuity of learning at the onset of the pandemic.

Table 2. Willingness to Come to School with Social Distancing Willingness to come to school with physical distancing

	Yes	No
Learners (n=126,403)	61	39
Parent/Guardian (n=248,110)	58	42
School Personnel (n=415,177)	66	34
Total (N=789,690)	62	38

Source: Department of Education (2020).

Surprisingly, as shown in Table 2, many school personnel, parents, and students are willing to report physically to schools, with a strict observance of social distancing. The data implies that many are willing to report physically despite the emerging health risk due to COVID-19, which could also indicate that the majority of learners, parents, and even personnel are not yet used to other modes of learning such as blended, hybrid, modular, and distance learning. On the other hand, this would entail a macro level approach on the part of the DepEd, together with the different regional offices, division offices, and district schools to be able to accordingly proceed with a systematic, congruent, and quality education amid the pandemic.

Table 3. Teacher Respondents by Key Stage

	Kinder to Gr. 3	Gr. 4 to Gr. 6	Multigrade	Junior High School	Senior High School	Total (N)
No. of Respondents (n)	237,190	218,647	17,975	249,221	64,033	787,066
Percentage	30	28	2	32	8	100

Source: Department of Education.

Consequently, as data show in Table 3, active public school teachers were also counted separately from the learners, parents, and school personnel, with the majority of them were teaching in Junior High School (JHS) at 32%, followed by Kinder to Grade 3 (K-3) teachers at 30%, Grades 4 to 6 teachers at 28%, Senior High School (SHS) teachers at 8%, and multigrade teachers at 2%.

In relation to Figure 3, as data in Table 4 show, more than 10% of teachers have no computers at home, and over half have either no internet connection at home, or have no reliable internet in their areas. These numbers support the call for the provision of internet allowance made by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), which was granted by the DepEd (Layson, 2020).

This dilemma has been passed to either the different local government units (LGUs) or private sector players who are willing to help teachers to gain access to internet connection and acquire the necessary gadgets to deliver quality distance learning instruction. Conversely, this same dilemma became an opportunity for LGUs to practice decentralized governance. For example, the Pasig City government has provided tablets for all Pasig students, and laptops for all Pasig teachers. They have distributed at least PHP 1.3 billion worth of laptops and tablets in total; they have also partnered with Thames International, a business school, to train teachers for online and blended learning (Marquez, 2020).

Table 4. Teachers' Ownership of Computer and Internet Connectivity at Home

<i>Teacher's Computer Ownership at Home</i>		
	Number	Percentage
No. of teachers with computer (laptop/desktop) at home (n)	687,911	87
No. of Teachers with no computer (laptop/desktop) at home (n)	99,155	13

Teacher's Internet Connectivity at Home		
	Number	Percentage
No. of teachers with laptop/ desktop and Wi-Fi at home (n)	336,252	49
No. of teachers with laptop/ desktop at home but no internet connection (n)	280,531	41
No. of teachers with laptop/ desktop at home but no internet signal available in the area (n)	71,128	10
Total (N)	687,911	100

Source: Department of Education (2020).

Additionally, even while modular learning modalities were made available to address issues related to access to online learning, public school teachers also struggled to prepare modules for their students (Hernando-Malipot, 2020d). This was in part due to the lack of preparedness of the agency in terms of training the teachers to write the said modules accordingly, and other factors as well such as the volumous administrative works that has been passed down to teachers, teaching load appropriation, among others (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2020).

On the side of the learners, many students have resorted to launching the #PisoParasaLaptop², a personal initiative campaign of students on social media to help them in preparing for online learning (Diño, 2020). Unfortunately, those who cannot avail any gadgets and stable internet connection were left with the choice of answering self-learning modules (SLMs), which does not guarantee authentic mastery of the content and subject matter because many incidents were reported that at times parents, instead of the learners, answered the SLMs (Delizo, 2020). Thus, these adjustments have been proven to be tough, considering that there are different factors to be considered to conduct successful online learning.

Moreover, there is a need to consider if the current residence of the learner is conducive to learning. In *Principles of Teaching*, a conducive learning environment is essential which means that the physical setup and surroundings of the learner should make the learning process better (Augustine, 2015). For instance, a student needs to set up an adequate learning space to be able to participate in online classes. Aside from the standard books and learning materials, a gadget (laptop, desktop, or smart phone), internet connectivity, earphones, and a study table have become essentials for a student nowadays. Aside from this, the student needs to have a suitable environment to be able to focus; meaning, there are no/little distractions, unnecessary noises, and there is proper ventilation. But in reality, majority of the learners in the Philippines only live in closed spaces which can greatly hinder their focus and concentration in having and maintaining a conducive online learning environment. Only those who are in the middle class and upper class can afford to have a perfect description of a conducive learning environment which is a manifestation of social class reproduction in further dichotomizing the true intent of education that further widens the gap between social classes, due to the availability of variety of choices in participating in an online class.

Many can relate to the situation wherein whenever a teacher or a student will conduct an online class, they will immediately inform their parents, siblings, and close relatives to stay quiet for some time for them to focus on the class itself. Dr. Randy Dellosa, a psychiatrist, attested that study-from-home and work-from-home setup could add stress levels for both the teacher/worker and student/learner. Dellosa likewise pointed out that there is no distinction between work, school, and home because people are only inside the home every time. The tendency to immediately attend to tasks which should have otherwise been done at home or school lessens opportunities to treat the home as a space to rest and relax in (cited in Malig, 2020).

As early as May 2020, DepEd announced the opening of the academic year for basic education on August 24, 2020 (cited in Cabico, 2020). In June 2020, however, President Rodrigo Duterte expressed doubts about the DepEd's preparedness to initiate distance and remote learning (cited in Magsambol,

2020). In response to this, DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones proposed that the start of classes to be moved on October 5, 2020 to have more time for the holistic preparation by the institution in ensuring that quality education can be accessed by majority of learners during the pandemic (Santos, 2020). Briones (cited in Santos, 2020) mentioned that private educational institutions may already start their classes and can go ahead without waiting for the October 2020 start of the school year set by the government.

Education, Mental Health, and Safe Online Engagement

Mental health concerns remain among the pressing concerns faced by the Department of Education since classes began again on October 5, 2020. In relation to mental health and psychosocial well-being of students and staff, under the Brigada Eskwela program, regional offices and schools division offices were tasked to implement psychological first aid (PFA), based on the recommendation of UNESCO and UNICEF (Department of Education, 2020).

Additionally, DepEd conducts weekly psychosocial support sessions for its students and teachers. DepEd has early on recognized that natural calamities could affect the eagerness of learners and teachers to push for learning. The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges related to mental health; thus the DepEd continued to tap national organizations for psychologists and counselors to help them implement psychosocial support sessions (Hernando- Malipot, 2020b).

The concern with regards to this is that how are they going to implement this program? Also, will the sessions provided be implemented with quality? How many teachers and students are willing to participate in these sessions? Will there be concrete steps and recommendations to help the teachers and students in relation to these? These are some of the questions that should be raised when providing psychosocial services to teachers and students. Secretary Briones, recognizing that mental health is a big challenge to students and teachers amid the COVID-19 pandemic, sought the opportunity to strengthen DepEd's collaboration with the Psychological

ESTANISLAO

An Analysis of Access to Quality Basic Education in the Philippines Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic

Association of the Philippines (PAP) in implementing psychological and mental health support services to teachers and students (Aguilar, 2020). This was likewise in response to reports around the world regarding the rise of suicide rates related to COVID-19 (Kennard, 2020). In fact, in 2019, Rep. Rida Robles cited a 2017 report of the World Health Organization which claimed that there are about eight in every 100,000 Filipinos who commit suicide—six males and two females, ages 15-29 years old, which may indicate that males tend to hide their feelings and emotional struggles more than females. One can link this to patriarchy and the mentality that men are stronger than women (Kennard, 2020). This is a separate indication that the younger population, particularly ages 15-24 years olds must be provided with adequate psychological support as they experience extreme distress and other trigger warnings; added up by the situation brought about by the pandemic. This claim was strengthened by the recent record from the Philippine Statistics Authority that at least 4,420 deaths were done via suicide and self-harm (CNN Philippines, 2020) with high concentration at the National Capital Region (NCR) (Visco, 2021).

Another concern that the DepEd, as well as other stakeholders must be aware of are the long-term effects of prolonged exposure of children to online activities. UNICEF has conducted a Philippine Kids Online (PKO) study (UNICEF, 2021) to determine the risks and negative effects of exposure to cyberspace among children aged 9-17 years old. A key finding of the study is that on average, children use the internet for 116 minutes. Likewise, children tend to use 'internet' and 'social media' interchangeably, which may indicate lack of knowledge regarding digital literacy and netiquette (internet etiquette). Lastly, internet use poses potential risks such as access to inappropriate contents, communicating with strangers online, and the inadequacy of the skills that children learn while engaging online.

The study recommends the formulation of a national information and communication technology policy for education; revision of the K to 12 curriculum to include digital citizenship, online safety, and netiquette among children; strict monitoring for Pisonet³ cafés for the safety of children; and lastly, training educators on how to identify signs of online abuse, cyber-bullying, and other forms of online harassment that can be done to children.

Moreover, different civil society organizations (CSOs) and professional, academic, and civic organizations (PACOs) should conduct studies and external services to help teachers and students deal with mental health issues and internet safety concerns that they are currently experiencing. It is also important for learners and teachers to communicate their concerns and seek help with regards to these matters because mental health is essential for all. Aside from conducting various studies to cater and determine the accuracy of data, the country should proactively address mental health issues to improve the state of the Human Development Index (HDI) education factor in the Philippines, as well as to achieve the goal of accessing universal quality education for all.

Data from the DepEd and UNICEF are essential for further analyzing the implementation of the BE-LCP as an emergency remote teaching (ERT) guide during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Education may refer to findings of UNICEF's PKO study (UNICEF, 2021) in improving the implementation of the BE-LCP in the Philippines as it is the ERT framework used by the majority of basic educational institutions (BEIs).

Academic Freeze and Selected Experiences on Education during the Pandemic

In line with rising concerns on mental health, some groups and sectors have provided recommendations to the Department of Education. As early as July 2020, youth groups, particularly the Samahan ng Progresibong Kabataan (SPARK) have demanding an academic freeze due to the circumstances of millions of Filipinos brought by the COVID-19 pandemic such as the difficulty in accessibility to a stable Wi-Fi connection, conducive learning, and lack of protection to the teachers and academic employees who might get infected by the virus as they continue to work. The group likewise lobbied that teaching and non-teaching staff continue to be compensated even while an academic freeze was in place (Hallare, 2020).

In response, DepEd ignored the call for an academic freeze due to their claim that the majority of the parents and students in the basic education support the idea of beginning classes on October 5, 2020. Further, DepEd spokesperson Nepomuceno Malaluan said that it was a “populist position that is not popular because we have the support of 24 million students and their parents” (Hernando-Malipot, 2020c).

Given this scenario, some concerns need to be considered regarding this matter. First, how is the DepEd going to compensate administrative staff, tenured professors, part-time lecturers, teachers, and academic personnel? Moreover, in private basic education institutions (BEIs) the majority of private schools in the Philippines only generate income to be used as salaries of their teachers and staff by means of continuing their operations. With the implementation of the academic freeze, their jobs will be at risk. Given the scenario that DepEd targeted at least 80% of the 2019 enrollment rate and got at least 86.31% of the entire enrollment with around 23,987,944 in public schools nationwide and approximately 1,923,179 students in private schools (Hernando- Malipot, 2020c).

This is a reasonable quantity, but there is a risk that the universal access to quality education will be compromised in relation to the responses and the challenges faced by all parties involved. Given the above mentioned conditions of the majority of the students, one cannot ensure that quality education can be delivered. Not all learners in the Philippines have equal access to quality education. For example, the Movement for Safe, Equitable, Quality and Relevant Education (SEQuRE) conducted a survey from June 25 to July 2, 2021 covering 1,278 teachers; 1,299 Grades 4 to 12 students; and 3,172 parents in the National Capital Region (NCR) alone. They found that 86.7% of students under modular learning; 66% of students under online learning; and 74% under blended learning expressed that they have learned less compared to the usual face-to-face classes (Bernardo, 2021; De Guzman, 2021). While the teachers are doing their job, some of them are using their own money and resources just to provide modules for their students.

Based on the “Emergency Remote Teaching Experiences” survey conducted by the National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP), out of 28,859 teacher-respondents from Kindergarten to Senior High School, only 10% said that they did not use their own resources in printing SLMs (cited in Dela Peña, 2021; Daquiaoag, 2021).

A Theoretical Framework for Emancipatory, Inclusive, Equitable, and Accessible Education during the Pandemic

Pierre Bourdieu (cited in Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Riley, 2017; Gillespie, 2019) introduced the concept of habitus. In his book, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977, cited in Gillespie, 2019), Bourdieu provided an outline for the formation of this concept, particularly in studying class theory. Bourdieu defines habitus as, “a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class” (p. 86, cited in Gillespie, 2019). In a sense, habitus describes any form of entity, whether it is presupposed or analyzed which are common and shared by a group of people, particularly a social class. Bourdieu described the educational system which he based on an analysis of France’s educational system as a product of habitus; thus applying and appropriating it to all similar encounters, the reproduction of social class and its misrecognition; one that is generational and systematic habitus. Explaining this juxtaposition, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 155) explicitly wrote:

In short, if one fails to take as one’s explanatory principle the system of relations between the structure of class relations and the school system, one is condemned to the ideological options which subtend the seemingly most neutral scientific choices. Thus, some writers reduce educational inequalities to social inequalities, ignoring the specific form they take in the logic of the educational system, while others tend to treat the School as an empire within an empire, whether like the docimologists.

Meanwhile, Althusser (1970; 2014, pp. 235-36) noted that:

But besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to 'speak proper French', to 'handle' the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to 'order them about' properly, i.e. (ideally) to 'speak to them' in the right way, etc.

Here, Althusser emphasized the role of education in instilling neutral behavior towards the students. As a social institution, the school is expected by the State to teach conformity and subservience to the members of the State; together with the processes of transference of social classes based on habitus to produce educational capital. In return, this structured reproduction of ideology will continue to produce neutral and subservient citizens whose loyalty is only seen through the emancipation of the ruling class. This notion of the neutrality of the educational system was pioneered by the nationalist historian Renato Constantino (1966; 1970). Constantino (1970, p. 38) pointed out that the Philippine educational system, instead of giving birth to the emancipation of ideas and discourse, has sought to satisfy the demands of the neoliberal economic conditions brought up by the intensity of globalization and the status quo. Constantino (1970) likewise observed that, "Accordingly, education develops certain skills in each individual not for the needs of the country but in order to give him higher earning power and hence the opportunity to consume more" (p.38). This idea still resonates in the 21st century wherein the main goal of the majority is solely based on the individualistic freedom and consumerism that further entangles them to false consciousness. To quote Freire (1970, p. 43):

The pedagogy of the oppressed, animated by authentic, humanist (not humanitarian) generosity, presents itself as a pedagogy of humankind. Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization. This is why, as we affirmed earlier, the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors. It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education.

In return, stakeholders need to change the system in order for them to integrate and self-actualize. Thus, Freire's statement, once realized, can be a factor for both the teachers and students to gain freedom from servitude. Once they have attained this core value of development (Todaro & Smith, 2011), alienation can be dismantled and an education that is liberating and awakening can be fully implemented. Hence, with the prevalence of these circumstances that the country's current educational system is facing, the praxis of education and its expected outcomes are continuously urging itself to become neutral, despite all of the socioeconomic and socio-political challenges faced by the teachers, administrators in the different regions, non-teaching staff, and most importantly, learners.

For Bourdieu (1990), achieving quality education entails the dismantling of social reproduction of classes through education, wherein forms of oppression and exclusivity are emphasized. This process can expose the lapses in the division of classes in the educational system, and how institutions are implementing them systematically.

On the other hand, Freire (1970) proposed that the structures in connection with the system of education tend to further oppress the oppressed due to the hegemonic tendencies and aims of these structures to begin with; such as the reproduction of labor power, neutrality of educational strategies,

limiting the syllabus and curriculum to future employment prospects, and the lack of acquisition of the individual and structural consciousness. He posited that quality education can be achieved by dismantling the oppressive system dominating most of the current models of the educational systems which aim to produce more oppressed people due to the dominance of the hegemonic systems created by the oppressors through the use of education.

Lastly, Constantino (1970) argued that education should be emancipatory; it should focus not only on enabling individuals to consume and to create profit based on their hedonistic desires, but to realize the socio-economic and socio-political realities that both directly and indirectly affect them, which will enable them to become critical of the dominant structures and make them better. Constantino (1970) reasoned that through emancipatory education, the country can achieve quality education because it confronts real problems of our society, enabling more people to become citizens who will critique and solve these problems in the long run.

The approaches to education, as well as its different critiques, can be used to further improve the state of educational system in the Philippines as illustrated in Figure 1.

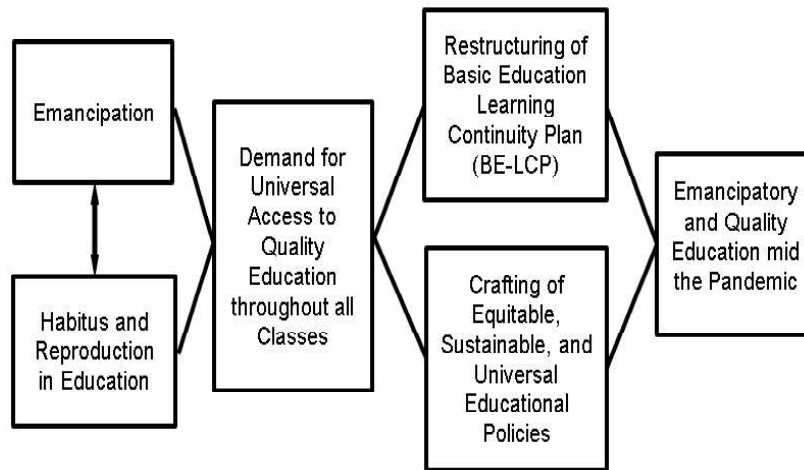


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Philippine Educational System amid the Pandemic

In this framework, emancipation, habitus, and reproduction in education are used as tools to further understand and trace any concerns and issues in connection with the Philippine educational system, particularly basic education. These tools can be used hand-in-hand to analyse the current status of the said system in which institutions are involved and the beneficiaries. This discernment will provide more demand for concerned parties to a universal access to quality education that will encompass different social classes. These demands will enable the macro-level (e.g. the DepEd and other education institutions) to restructure emergency remote education (ERE) framework, specifically the BE-LCP, while at the same time allow them to craft other equitable, sustainable, and universal educational policies that address the needs of both teachers and students. Hence, when these expectations are met, the educational system amid COVID-19 in the Philippines will become more emancipatory, inclusive, equitable, and accessible for the majority of its participants and beneficiaries.

Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions on the Implementation of the BE-LCP

A group semi-structured interview among three teachers (both employed in private schools and in the DepEd) was conducted regarding the implementation of the BE-LCP. The interview was conducted upon the approval of the participants for them to discuss and share their opinions and experiences regarding BE-LCP and their respective institution's approaches in delivering quality education during the onset of the pandemic. Purposive sampling was used [through referral] in choosing the participants. It was conducted via Google Meet and was recorded. Participants were briefed on the anonymity of their identities and responses.

In the interview, I asked three questions in relation to their experiences namely: 1) As a teacher, how did you adjust to the implementation of BE-LCP, shifting from physical to modular and online learning? 2) What factors did you consider in your preparations for implementing modular and online learning? What issues and concerns have you seen in the adjustment

ESTANISLAO

An Analysis of Access to Quality Basic Education in the Philippines Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic

of the Philippine educational system? 3) If you will rate the Philippine educational system during the pandemic, on the scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest, what will you give and why?

On the first question, they expressed that it was a rough time because they were adjusting not just on the personal level. Also, their respective offices conducted a series of webinars and in-service trainings (INSET) to prepare them in implementing blended and distance learning; such as preparation of modules and module writing, screen time considerations, viable applications for online learning, and making sure that they were equipped in transitioning to online class. Another adjustment that they made was to extend consideration for the students in spite of the pandemic because all students were experiencing different struggles with regards to adjusting to the new mode of the learning process. Aside from that, not all students have stable internet connection and technological competencies. Their answers support the notion of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Freire (1970) regarding the eminent gap in social classes for both teachers and students based on their approach in preparing for learning delivery modalities (LDMs) throughout the school year 2020-2021. The concerned institutions that will implement this also sought the pandemic education response as a mere option, but not an obligation because it only maximized the use of available resources to deliver remote education (Bozkurt et al., 2020, cited in Cahapay & Rotas, 2020).

On the second question, the research participants expressed a wide range of issues faced by the public school system. These issues include teachers' increased risks of exposure to COVID-19 because of the need to physically deliver modules; difficulties in internet connectivity both for teachers and learners; and the seemingly widening gap in exhibiting most essential learning competencies (MELCs) among learners. The research participants likewise observed how the learning modules lacked content and substance that would have ideally supported the MELCs. Further, they witnessed systemic gaps in the implementation of the BE- LCP, with some regional and schools division offices (ROs and SDOs) unable to implement standard modalities of delivering quality education.

In relation to this, as Freire (1970) pointed out, structures in connection with education and pedagogical approaches have hegemonic tendencies that hinder the emancipation of both teachers and students in addressing their needs acquire quality mode of teaching and learning. In this scenario, the institutions concerned (regional offices, schools division offices, the central offices, etc.) have failed to provide a unifying stance and approach on addressing the provision of education to students due to institutional dilemmas. On the other hand, a research participant from the private school system expressed similar challenges, albeit they were conducting their classes virtually. Classes that were conducted were safer compared to the experiences of public school teachers who had to cater to parents who had to physically receive modules and other learning materials. One issue mentioned by a research participant was the challenge of psychological and mental health support among their students since many of his students have expressed challenges in these areas. As a response, their institution created a support group consisting of the class advisers and the guidance counselor as a venue for providing consultations with the students.

On the third question, the research participants were asked to rate the Philippine educational system. Two out of three of them gave 7 out of 10. One research participant explained that he believes that DepEd is trying its best to deliver and provide quality education despite the ongoing pandemic which hinders many operations of the school system. He shared how teachers sometimes felt overwhelmed, because of the multitude of tasks that they are faced with and the lack of guidance on how to execute these tasks properly. He suggested a realignment in terms of providing quality education that considers the realities that teachers and learners face. Another interviewee explained that different types of long-term support must be provided to teachers and students for them to be able to continue to participate in distance and blended learning. Additionally, an interviewee emphasized as they perceived as wrong prioritization of different offices in conducting trainings and webinars that are best if to be applied immediately by teachers and staff (i.e. the crafting of modules that needs to be extremely verified and checked for appropriateness of content, copyright, and recognition of intellectual properties, *inter alia*).

These responses suggest the need for the BE-LCP to be restructured to tailor fit the needs of both teachers and students which can be seen in the conceptual framework provided based on the theories of Bourdieu (1990), Freire (1970), and Constantino (1970). Moreover, the educational system, through its misaligned priorities (i.e., bombarding teachers with administrative work, conducting mental health webinars instead of creating school-based psychological support systems, lack of quality control and evaluation on SLMs, inter alia), have hindered emancipation that will address the demand for long-term policies to be crafted by the DepEd beyond emergency remote education (ERE).

The concerns raised by the research participants are valid, considering that they experienced the aforementioned adjustments regarding the implementation of the BE-LCP amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from that, it resulted in numerous half-baked programs (one being mentioned above) that only initiated a reactive response in delivering education during the pandemic. Also, the PKO study conducted by UNICEF (2021) before the pandemic can be helpful in providing the DepEd with a coherent framework which will allow a multi-sectoral and multi-faceted approach to integrate and sustain the attainment of quality basic education in the Philippines.

Overall, the responses of the participants provided an opportunity in the analysis of the Philippine educational system on a praxis-level, based on the unified theories of Bourdieu (1990), Freire (1970), and Constantino in properly executing emancipation and habitus in giving a critique and opportunities to solve the contemporary issues faced by the basic education in the Philippines.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Bourdieu (1990), Freire (1970), and Constantino's (1970) premises are resonating to the status quo of the Philippine educational system, as well as the goals of the State to inculcate universal quality education in the country. The status quo which was brought up by the COVID- 19 pandemic had

hindered the institution to emancipate new praxis in providing quality education due to the different circumstances that have occurred in relation to the transition of the Philippine educational system, particularly the basic education sub-sector, to the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP). The universal access to quality education, as standardized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the SDG framework must be considered by the government and all concerned state agencies. Likewise, the contention provided by Constantino (1966) regarding the use of the national language vis-à-vis the colonial mentality of the Filipino people in using the English language in basic educational institutions (BEIs) can be re-examined in improving the mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTB- MLE). Conversely, the OECD-PISA 2018 assessment on status of the Philippines in reading comprehension, numeral literacy, and scientific reasoning competencies as the 79th out of 79 participant countries can be further strengthened (Arcilla, 2019; Elicay, 2019). Given these circumstances, the country's eagerness to deliver quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic has been hindered by the pre-existing issues that some institutions have tried to put under the carpet which become problematic in the process (e.g. 2018 PISA results, plan to revise the K to 12 curriculum, ASEAN integration, among other things).

Moreover, the situation of the country's educational system can be further understood by revisiting the reproduction of social class, misrecognition in education, ideological state apparatus (ISA), and the nationalist perspective on the emancipation of authentic and solidified Philippine education. This type of education focuses on the integration of the masses, not just the production of graduates to be exploited, alienated, and driven into false consciousness (Althusser, 1970; 2014) but the development of self-actualized citizens who are free from servitude (Todaro & Smith, 2011), who will critically think, with the help of all education stakeholders.

Moreover, with the advancement of technology and widening cyberspace engagement of all participants under this system, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Provide safeguards to students, with the help of parents, guardians, and communities in navigating the online sphere (Cahapay & Rotas, 2020; UNICEF, 2021);
2. Coordinate with different public and private institutions in ensuring that students and teachers alike can have stable access to strong internet connection and online resource materials (UNICER, 2021);
3. Lessen the administrative tasks given to teachers for them to be able to focus on teaching, the improvement of pedagogical approach whether it is distance, online, or physical learning, and to be able to participate in knowledge generation by conducting research (David et al., 2019; Yeban, 2021);
4. Remove the rigidity of K to 12 curriculum by enabling schools to integrate them into thematic and contextual education; focusing on the real-life applications of lessons, particularly in relation to the current pandemic;
5. Encourage local, communal, down to barangay level education partnerships that will allow the stakeholders to maximize the learning process amid the pandemic with the help of parents and other learning partners (Yeban, 2021);
6. Include digital citizenship and digital literacy in the curriculum with the supporting data on age restriction and online safety of students (UNICEF, 2021); and
7. Strengthen the micro and macro level approach of the Department of Education in terms of improving the quality of delivering the BE-LCP and its long-term implementation by prioritizing the tools and praxis management systems based on the level of applicability.

Hence, emancipation can commence once these conditions are realized with the opportunity for the DepEd to further realign the current framework provided by the BE-LCP to a long-term plan that will provide sustainability to the educational system, regardless of the current conditions surrounding its implementation.

Furthermore, there are numerous opportunities to improve the Philippine educational system. Universal access to quality education is pivotal for the emancipation and inclusive development of all Filipinos. For this reason, existing programs and policies, such as the BE- LCP shall be examined for a systemic and structural approach that will benefit the teachers, learners, administrative staff, personnel, and other stakeholders both in public and private education. The pandemic has provided opportunities for the necessary adjustments, growth, and development. Once realigned, a whole-of-nations approach can be realized that will provide security for the future state of the Philippine basic educational system.

This paper acknowledges its limitations and further encourages the conduct of research to examine the current setup of the Philippine educational system amid the pandemic.

ENDNOTES

¹ This is a Filipino term that refers to a person who has a characteristic of being street smart.

² This was a campaign that became prevalent during the onset of the pandemic, as the students were preparing to shift to online and modular learning modalities. It refers to the solicitation of students aiming to buy new laptops that will be used for their participation in the said learning modalities.

³ *Pisonet* are local desktop rental kiosks that can be operated by paying at least 1 PHP coin which can be dropped in a coin slot. Each coin drop is equivalent to five (5) minutes of computer time (Royandoyan, 2022). It refers to the *Pisonet* are local computer rental kiosks that can be operated after by paying at least a 1 Pesoone peso coin was dropped on the coin slot of the computer unit for every five minutes of internet use.

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