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The Limits of Globalization:

Injustice, Inequality and the Progressive Response





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Network of Social Democracy in Asia
Unit 3-E, 112 Maginhawa Street, Barangay Teachers' Village East,
Quezon City, Philippines, 1101

Website: www.socdemasia.com Facebook: facebook.com/SocDemAsia
E-mail: secretariat@socdemasia.com

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By: Justine Balane and Mark Diaz

Screw Global Competitiveness:

A History of Globalization's Effects on the Philippine Education System and How to Get Rid of It

The Philippines' globalization experience is marked by a chronic state of crises drawn over the years. The neglect of social services, the shrinking of local industries, and the resulting civic disempowerment has festered after decades of economic restructuring due to globalization policies that started even before the fall of the Iron Curtain.

The education sector bore the brunt of the consequences of globalization. In the 1960s, the Philippine education system was regarded as one of the most developed in the Asian region with high adult literacy, high participation rates and high cohort completion rates. This has steadily degraded after state policies, complying with globalization agreements, weakened the state's role and investment in human development.

During the 1970s and 80s, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) used their loan programs with attached conditionalities to manipulate the fiscal policies of countries in the Global South. From 1987-1995, the Philippines was in the top 10 country borrowers for education-related projects of these financial institutions. (Global Education Monitoring Report Team 2021). All the administrations from the 70s onwards toed the World Bank's line of molding the education system to the demands of the global market and surrendering the state's role to big businesses as provider of education services.

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Image: www.rappler.com



A negative effect of globalization has been the increasing privatization of the education system in the country. As private schools and universities have crowded out public schools, low-income families have been trapped in a vicious cycle where generation after generation are left out of the education system, spiraling into the poverty trap.

Private higher education institutions numbered to 1,729 all over the country while there are only 133 state and local universities and colleges. (CHED 2021) Higher education costs in private schools are estimated at Php100,000 (US\$1,800) on average. This is alarming in a country where 48% of the population is poor and a family of five earn only Php12,000 (US\$216).

The main culprit of the deregulated nature of the exploitative private sector-run education system can be traced back to the Education Act of 1982, the main framework of education governance which basically neutered the state's power to protect families from rising costs of tuition fees. This was implemented under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. who was reliant on loans from the World Bank which his clan eventually plundered. The policy was a product of a series of education development projects, financed by the World Bank, starting from 1973.

A section of the Act reads: “Each private school shall determine its rate of tuition and other school fees or charges. The rates and charges adopted by schools pursuant to this provision shall be collectible, and their application or use authorized, subject to rules and regulations promulgated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports.”

This gave for-profit educational institutions, owned and managed by the country's tycoons, uncontested power to raise tuition fee rates and impose miscellaneous fees.

Fast forward to 2012, the policy of deregulation of the education system has become a norm. The Philippine government introduced two more years in the secondary education level. To fill in the gap in public schools, one of the country's giant conglomerates Ayala Corporation and transnational corporation Pearson went on a commercial venture to establish Affordable Private Education Center (APEC) schools, a business model which easily raked them a profit of more than US\$125 million in their pilot year (Riep 2015).

Globalization policies have also led to the obsession of the Philippine government to be a competitive global player, often at the expense of addressing domestic woes. The Philippine government wants

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to be seen as a model creditor in the eyes of international financial institutions so they accede to demands of prioritizing debt repayment over financing basic social services such as education.

In 1989, a study published by Oxfam reported that the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) received a Php24 billion (US\$480 million) budget, a meager sum compared to the Php97 billion (US\$1.9 billion) spent on debt servicing. In the same year, the Philippines' economic managers with the guidance of IMF officials, endorsed the 1989 Letter of Intent to the International Monetary Fund, which outlined the policy of giving debt repayments the biggest slice of the pie in the annual budget appropriations. (Ofreneo 1991)

Fast forward to 2022, education financing is still a paltry sum compared to repayments made to global and domestic lenders. According to the 2023 National Expenditure Program (NEP), Php1.6 trillion (US\$32 billion) will be allocated to debt servicing compared to the Php852 billion (US\$17 billion) of the Department of Education. This is while state universities and colleges will suffer a Php10 billion (US\$200 million) budget cut in 2023.

The Commission on Higher Education over the years, because of globalization policies that tied the hands of the state from performing its duties to protect, have been rendered toothless. Sections of the Education Act of 1982 that applied pressure on public schools to generate their own income streams and to open partnerships to the private sector made government agencies mandated to regulate, inutile and ineffective.

A World Bank paper in 1988 recommended for the Philippine government to “rationalize” public higher education institutions by having them compete for financing with private schools. Instead of direct state investment to public colleges and universities, financing will be done through student scholarship programs, limited through means testing, which schools will compete for in attracting more government scholars. Public schools were also encouraged to raise fees so that future profits can finance these subsidy programs.

This same language is evident years later under the government's Roadmap for Public Higher Education Reform of 2011 where programs of state universities and colleges that are deemed inefficient and “tend to crowd out private provision” were shut down (CHED 2011). With the shutdown of these state university programs, financing will go to programs that “respond to industry needs” such as semiconductor and electronics and business process outsourcing.

There is an intensive push coming from Philippine education agencies to align learning outcomes of higher education to the demands of globalization. The Commission on Higher Education on its strategic development plan for 2017-2022 stressed that there is that there is a need for the Philippine education system to upgrade its systems and programs towards achieving global competitiveness (CHED 2017). Consistent with keeping at par with globalization, CHED's 1995-2005 long term development plan also underlines its major objective on striving for world competitiveness to exponentially increase labor and manpower resources. Putting premium on Science and Technology (STEM) has also been one of the key goals of the Commission in its 10-year plan in which it states:

1. Encourage HEIs to improve or enrich higher education curricula and undertake educational innovation or reforms to cope with emerging needs and demands of a newly industrializing country . . . 3. Provide attractive incentive for students to pursue scientific engineering, and technology programmes and other programmes related to the strategic needs of the country.

In 2002, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo sponsored the *Millennium Curriculum* in pursuit of producing a globally competitive labor force. Under the *Millennium Curriculum*, subjects such as Math, Sciences, and English were emphasized putting subjects like Social Sciences and Humanities into the sideline of the Philippine education system. This extreme devotion of the Philippine education system to being globally competitive has only served the needs of transnational economic forces and domestic elites falling short in addressing social and economic problems of poor majorities.

The productivist view of globalization on education has also taken away the main tenets of education for active citizenship. Educational institutions have a key responsibility of molding citizens to engage in political affairs, evaluate programs and projects by the government, and be empowered to participate in nation-building, among others. Since the time globalization policies have permeated Philippine educational policies, the overall curriculum infrastructure has been oriented towards producing mere human capital necessary for the market.

By divorcing education from its role of molding active citizens, the education system has alienated students from the day-to-day realities of their own communities. Instead, they are geared towards

providing cheap or uncompensated labor to capital while in school, in the form of unpaid internships or work-immersion programs. The mandated National Service Training Program (NSTP) which is aimed at enhancing the civic consciousness of young learners is under threat of being replaced by a mandatory militarism course.

The Philippine state also used the education system in distorting what it means to be an active citizen. Under the late dictator Marcos, the education system became a significant tool in facilitating the mainstreaming of migrant labor and in advancing his government's labor export policies. Marcos' labor export policy served as glossy plaster for the dearth of the development of local industries and employment opportunities in the country. In textbooks published under Marcos' New Society and financed by multilateral agencies, active citizenship was equated with participating in the deployment of Filipino workers abroad.

The education system in the Philippines is in dire need of salvation from the failures of globalization. The worsening inequality and the aggravating education crisis in the country are proof that globalization has overstayed its welcome. For us progressives, the vision for our education system must be clear: education should be liberative, it should develop people to become better humans. The education system must break off from its parasitic relationship with transnational corporate elites, who for far too long, exploited the labor of the working class, robbing them of their dignity.

Globalization's harmful influence on our social services deserve a critical questioning. The question then stands: how can we break free from globalization? Student movements in the Philippines have already shown the way of defying a future sold to the highest global bidder.

In 2017, student movements won the campaign for the passage of the Free Tertiary Education Act which mandated for state universities and colleges to eliminate tuition and other fees. This was won despite intense lobbying by the business sector to reject the legislation and opt for a financial scheme that would direct some state funds to for-profit schools instead. The passage of the law was a stark contrast from the Philippine government's decades-long policy of leaving higher education provision to private corporations.

In August of 2022, democratic socialist Akbayan Youth along with the Student Council Alliance of the Philippines (SCAP) released its call for the declaration of an education crisis. This call to declare an education crisis carries the demand of a broad base of student organizations, student

councils, and other youth formations to address the 12-point education agenda:

- Increase education budget and expand budget utilization monitoring
- Urge Schools to Immediately Release Responsive Guidelines for the Safe Reopening of Schools
- Ensure All-inclusive and Accessible Education
- Provide Accessible and Quality Mental Health Services
- Pass the Students' Rights and Welfare (STRAW) Bill
- Protect Safe Spaces and Recognize SOGIE Equality in Schools
- Oppose Historical Distortion and Disinformation
- Provide Adequate Educational Infrastructures and Materials
- Oppose Mandatory ROTC, Uphold Academic Freedom
- Develop Contextualized Curriculum and Effective Pedagogy
- Expand Social Welfare Programs
- Modernize Administration and Bureaucracy

The campaign by the student movement has gained traction, leading to the filing of Resolution 901 in the Philippine Senate which called for the state to respond to the students' wellness needs, craft a plan to address education's multiple crises, and utilize the education budget effectively. There is no greater time for the education system to be reimagined as an accelerator for our humanist political project than now. In a time where authoritarians are taking hold of seats of power, where corporations are polluting our way to mass extinction, a liberative education system is even imperative to wake the working class from stupor. If we are to create a fairer and freer world, a citizenry educated about their latent power, their rights, and a progressive vision will provide the tools to build it. ■

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