

Philippines: The Role of
Language and Education in Globalization

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ABSTRACT

International education has never been discussed in-depth by many citizens of the Philippines. International education refers to a study abroad program or an approach to prepare students to function in a global society. Perhaps, the focus of discussion is more on primary, secondary, and tertiary education. In any level of education, language has a vital role in the curriculum.

It is also imperative to understand the history of Philippine education. The Philippines was colonized by the Spaniards for more than three centuries. Free public school system was established during the first decade of American rule. The country underwent changes and these foreign influences have contributed to the schools' policies and curriculum. My intent is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the education system in the Philippines. Major problems in education such as quality of education, students' output will also be discussed.

Introduction and Context

The Philippines is composed of 55 ethnic groups, speaking 171 languages and dialects across the 7,100 islands in the archipelago. Filipino and English are considered official languages, with English as the medium of instruction (ESCAP, 2000). Individuals who made it to college and acquired a degree are looking forward to work not only for a local company but also for international company. Due to globalization, individual perspectives have changed and as well the schools' mission. The advent of globalization is compounding the already complicated problem of nation-building in the Philippines. One reason is that globalization has not produced the same benefits for all ethnic and interest groups in Philippine society. If globalization has intensified socioeconomic divisions and conflicts, this is due to the inability of the Philippine state to implement policies preparing the country for global competitiveness (Banlaoi, n.d.).

Higher education institutions are forced to produce professionals for an internationalized economy. There is a need to consider factors related to the readiness to participate and compete in a more globalized higher education environment, such as the different indicators of quality and efficiency of Philippine higher education.

Mestenhauser (1998) defines international education as a mega-goal that drives other educational goals, as a scattering of international programs and projects, and as a simple addition of international content courses already in existence. The different modalities of international education such as student mobility, faculty exchange and development, research collaboration, internationalizing curricula – foreign language study and building international perspectives, and international networks are current practices in various parts of the world.

Providing higher education to enable a very diverse range of individuals to acquire more sophisticated levels of knowledge and skills are needed to be competitive in local and global

environment. The viability of the various models of higher education in the Philippine context is confined with four main themes: efficiency, quality, equity in access, and external context. The following factors are essential in understanding the models of international education because it would help the system be more attuned and responsive to the pressures and opportunities afforded by globalization:

1. The proliferation of public institutions requires substantial increases in public subsidies for higher education at the expense of basic education.
2. Public funds available for higher education are scarce.
3. Most of the new public institutions are actually formerly secondary institutions were upgraded to tertiary institutions tend to provide poor quality of education.
4. The public institutions also offer the same program as the private institutions. However, the tuition and fees are much cheaper in public institutions than private institutions.
5. Graduate education in the Philippines is also not large enough to meet the internal needs of the higher educational system for qualified faculty.
6. Problems relate to the geographic location of the institutions, admission requirements of higher education, cost of education, and limited financial assistance.
7. Absence of a credit market, inadequate information about higher education options and returns, and governance of higher education.

The onset of international education in the Philippines and the assessment of higher education are necessary in order to examine the models being utilized in the country. At the economic level, globalization affects employment; therefore, one of the primary goals of education is preparation for work. The modalities of international higher education will determine the

strengths or weaknesses of Philippine international education. What preparations do Philippine colleges and universities and higher education have in responding to these models of international education?

The Philippines as a developing country is facing a challenge in dealing with international education. The rise of globalization gives positive and negative effects in any field such as education. Each nation would like to be up-to-date with the trend. What are the international factors within the higher educational system?

International education is the process by which education becomes more broadly applicable to students from all diverse backgrounds and countries (Ebuchi, 1989). If the country has enough number of international schools, the question to be considered is the quality of instruction provided to the students. Institutions that aspire to participate in some form of international education will have to reckon with international standards of quality and efficiency. Strategic partnerships can be forged between Philippine and foreign institutions to improve the quality of the curricular programs, the qualifications of the faculty members, the nature of the quality assurance systems, and the standards of the educational resources like libraries, laboratories, and other learning materials.

In a global society, language and culture are congruent with each other. It is a crucial part of learning process. Cooper (1989) noted that:

“language is the fundamental institution of society, not only because it is the first human institution experienced by the individual, but also because all other institutions are built upon its regulatory patterns... To plan language is to plan society” (p. 182).

English is used as medium of instruction in the Philippines. Teachers assert that its use in the classroom is important in helping foreign students engage better in the learning process.

Learning English is one of the common trends where individuals prefer to study abroad either due to affordability and/or quality. Since English is also an official language in the Philippines, citizens from neighbor countries like Korea go to the Philippines to study English. It is costly to study in their home country; therefore, they opt to study somewhere else. International schools have English programs which serve as bridge programs before the non-English foreign student joins the regular programs.

Topical Issue in Depth

In the discussion of development and education, nations are much concerned about their own development issues but not necessarily so concerned about the region as a whole. This is where the second major issue emerges, which is globalization. Policymakers see that the actions of one country have an impact on those of its neighbors and create a tension between local and global needs. Related to these issues is focused on educational access and equity. The increasing demand for education, driven by the forces of development and globalization calls for educational planners and policymakers to make difficult decisions about who gets educated at what levels (Hawkins, 2007).

When the Philippines acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, the country demonstrated its determination to face the challenges of globalization. The Philippines bravely entered the WTO to prepare itself for global competitiveness. Despite its great optimism on joining the WTO, the Philippines is still lagging behind its Southeast Asian neighbors in terms of economic performance (Banlaoi, n.d).

Scott (1999) stated that:

“internalization reflects a world-order dominated by nation states. As a result, it has been deeply influenced by the retreat from Empire and the persistence of neo-colonialism, and by the geo-politics of Great Power rivalry (notably the Cold War). In the context of internalization, the inequalities between rich North and

poor South remain prominent whether the intention is on strategic relationships. And higher education is not an exception. The recruitment of international students, staff exchanges and partnerships between universities in different countries are all conditioned to a significant extent by this geo-political context.”

Through internalization, both school and individual would benefit. Schools will improve their vision and curriculum that is geared to globalization and academic goals for the students. And student will be given an opportunity to increase their awareness of world cultures and global perspectives.

A head count of private schools listed in the Department of Education online database as those which have the word “international” affixed to its name totals 118 out of 7,750 of elementary and secondary education schools, mostly focused in urban areas and majority of which are located in the National Capital Region (NCR). This number excludes one region out of the 13 regions of the country. The main government agencies that manage the Philippine education system are:

- Department of Education (DepEd), which is the principal government agency responsible for education and manpower;
- Commission on Higher Education (CHED), is independent and separate from the DepED and responsible for formulating and implementing policies, plans and programmes for the development and efficient operation of the system of higher education in the country;
- Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) aims to encourage the full participation of and mobilize the industry, labor, local government units and technical-vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in the skills development of the country’s human resources.

These government agencies are formed to provide for a broad education that will assist each individual in society to attain his/her potential as a human being and to acquire the essential

educational foundation in order to participate in the basic functions of society. In general, there are key issues that affect that Philippine education, namely: gender distribution, quality, affordability, budget, and mismatch. In gender distribution, female students have very high representation in all three levels. At the elementary level, male and female students are almost equally represented. But female enrollment exceeds that of the male at the secondary and tertiary levels. Males have higher rates of failures, drop-outs, and repetition in both elementary and secondary levels. In rural areas, men are expected to do work while women are allowed to pursue education.

There was a decline in the quality of the Philippine education, especially at the elementary and secondary levels. The results of the standard tests like the NCEE for college students were way below the target mean score. These standard tests aim to measure the student's ability to perform in a higher level. The cause of this undesirable result could be a student factor, poor quality of teaching, and/or insufficient materials for test preparation. There is also disparity in educational achievements across social groups. For example, the socioeconomically disadvantaged students have higher drop-out rates, especially in the elementary level. Most of the freshmen students at the tertiary level come from relatively well-off families.

The Philippine Constitution has mandated the government to allocate the highest proportion of its budget to education. However, Philippines still has one of the lowest budget allocations to education among the ASEAN countries. Common problems are lack of teachers, furniture, and teaching materials – too little resources for too many students. The issue on mismatch has become a major problem at the tertiary level and it is also the cause of the existence of a large group of educated unemployed or underemployed.

The Diversity Pedagogy Theory (DPT) of Rosa Sheets (2005) is based on the principle that culture and cognition are important aspects in the teaching-learning process; thereby asserting that cultural competency is imperative in effective teaching in a class consisting of students from more than one country. It is composed of eight dimensions, namely: diversity, identity, social interactions, culturally-safe classroom context, language, culturally-inclusive content, instruction, and assessment. The context of the present theory on international education, such as the Diversity Pedagogy Theory (DPT) by exposing the unique dynamics in developing countries where students are from more economically affluent nations and the real role of the use of English language in facilitating cultural understanding. In similar vein to Sheets, Freire takes education as a form of cultural action. He promoted a problem-posing method where teachers and students learn through dialogue and results in acts of cognition. The emergence of these challenges highlights the effect of contextual factors in the pedagogy of international education. There is a need to explore the field of international education through multidisciplinary lenses and by seeking to understand how the tenets of international education are conceptualized and translated in different countries, particularly in non-western developing countries, such as those in Asia. Most researches in international education in developing countries are policy driven and leaning towards activist-orientation (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). This means, rarely is international education in developing countries viewed from its own indigenous conditions, unencumbered by the tendencies towards political and anti-west or east hegemonic views. In developing countries, where weak and impoverished democratic regimes have not yet been able to extend the basic benefits of mass public education on an equitable basis, structural adjustment policies have been imposed as part of globalization of development options (Morrow & Torres, 2000).

In a highly competitive field, most of the Philippine higher education system will have much difficulty participating in the global higher education environment due to the factors mentioned earlier – weaknesses in efficiency, quality, equity in access, and external context. Elite institutions that have clearly defined areas of strength could find good opportunities to participate and benefit from the new environment of international higher education. Hence, the implementation of various models and activities is a vital part of the system.

Comparative Analysis

Robert Arnove's (2007) concept of comparative education illustrated that there are three dimensions of comparative and international education, namely: scientific, pragmatic, and international. One major goal of comparative education which contributed to theory building is the formulation of generalizable propositions about the workings of school systems and their interactions with their surrounding economies, policies, cultures, and social order. Hence, the role of science is not only to establish the relationships between existing variables but also to determine the extent which they exist. One of the crucial questions is: what is more important in determining academic achievement, school-related characteristics or the socioeconomic background of the student? As societies industrialize and social class formation solidifies, the socioeconomic status becomes increasingly important in determining access to high levels of an education system, most prestigious schools, and better jobs.

The reason for studying other societies' education systems is to discover what can be learned that will contribute to improved policy and practice at home. The processes involved in the study and transfer of educational practices among countries are called lending and borrowing. For example, academics from the United States studied the higher education systems of other European countries like Prussia, as a basis for establishing research-oriented graduate schools

(John Hopkins University being the first institution). This is the role of systematic accumulation of knowledge or guiding principles and theory which is focus to the pragmatic thrust of the discipline. The global dimension is contributing to international understanding and peace that will become a more important feature of comparative education. (Arnove, 2007).

The United States as a pluralistic, multicultural, and democratic society have public schools that reflect its great social diversity and democratic political foundations. Policymakers, politicians, and business leaders have made concerted efforts since 1980s to define schools as a medium that promotes economic competitiveness in a global marketplace (Jester, 2006). The American society shifted from a structurally pluralistic society to a culturally pluralistic one. The difference between the two kinds of pluralism is in the political arrangement of their culturally heterogeneous parts. Within structural pluralism the socially subordinate cultural person or group unilaterally accommodates the dominant cultural group on the latter's terms (Kochman, 1998).

One of the five models of anthropologist Margaret Gibson (1976) in her multicultural proposal is the education for cultural pluralism model. According to her, advocates believe that controlling cultural pluralism will increase their political power. They seek to preserve heterogeneity and egalitarian pluralism and reject and resent the political dominance of North Euro-Americans. The results of the movement for cultural preservation were seen in universities and colleges with programs in Native American Studies, Black Studies, and Hispanic Studies. However, the model has two problems. First, a program for achieving internationalization with this model would require a teaching faculty drawn from the nations or cultures under study. Second, it tends to emphasize differences which can actually increase stereotyping (Dobbert, 1998).

In order to understand schools and schooling, it is necessary to recognize the broader sociocultural context of the society in which they are situated. The three features of the United States' sociocultural context are (1) diverse demographics; (2) settler society; and (3) democratic society. The Census Bureau's racial and ethnic categories fail to capture the vast cultural diversity that exists within the United States. For example, "Asian" includes people with origins from many Asian countries, including such countries as China, Japan, Korea, and India. Each of these Asian groups living in America signifies unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001).

In contemporary schooling in the U.S., the assumptions and practices reflective of a settler society emerged. Indeed, the ideologies and practices related to settler society are reflected in the nation's broader social and schooling contexts where stakeholders attempt to educate a diverse student population. However, educational researchers have found that in many schools with Native American students, educators continue to implement a Eurocentric curriculum that is culturally irrelevant and in effect, promotes an assimilation agenda. On the other hand, democracy and capitalism are commonly promoted as interrelated, symbiotic paradigms in which democracy cannot exist without the capitalist free market or vice versa. Democracy in the U.S. has divergent meanings that often create conflicting expectations for social institutions and individual citizens (Jester, 2006).

The curriculum policies in the Philippines are set forth by the Department of Education (DepEd) through various orders, circulars, memoranda, and bulletins. They are aligned with national priorities and contribute to the achievement of development goals. In 1999, the policy direction was for decongesting the curriculum which led to the formulation of the Basic Education Curriculum for the elementary level and the Restructured Basic Education Curriculum

for the secondary level. The learning areas in both levels was reduced to five – Filipino, English, science, mathematics, and Makabayan, focusing on those that facilitate lifelong learning skills.

The 2002 Basic Education Curriculum is a restructuring and not a major change of the elementary and secondary curricula. Makabayan is a learning area that serves as a practice environment for holistic learning to develop a healthy personal and national self-identity (UNESCO-IBE, 2011).

The approach to curriculum design in the Philippines is based on content topic and competency. The Department of Education (DepEd) prescribes competencies for the subject areas in all grade/year levels. While curriculum implementation guidelines are issued at the national level, the actual implementation is left to teachers. They determine the resources to be used, teaching and assessment strategies, and other processes. Furthermore, the schools have the option to modify the national curriculum (e.g. content, sequence and teaching strategies) in order to ensure that the curriculum responds to local concerns.

The inequity in access to quality higher education in the Philippines will be intensified if issues addressed are not resolved. The student from high-income families with widest range of higher education options will have a wider range of options available, if and when various forms of open market transnational education programs start operating more fully in the Philippines. On the other hand, there is very limited option for majority of students from low and middle-income families. The lowest quality institutions will continue to cater to the lowest income groups offering inexpensive degree programs with extremely poor quality.

In comparison, the schooling in the United States is through democratic and market-based approaches. Standards-based education is an example of market-based approach where it requires establishing high academic expectations and holding stakeholders accountable for their

actions. While multicultural education is for improving the educational experience of all children in the diverse and democratic society. The schooling in the Philippines is based on formal and non-formal education. Formal education is a sequential progression of academic schooling at three levels, namely: elementary, secondary, and tertiary education, which is similar to the U.S. schooling. Non-formal education includes the acquisition of knowledge even outside school premises, is aimed at attaining specific learning objectives for particular clientele, especially the out-of-school youth or adult illiterates who cannot avail of formal education. One main difference is the study of religion and other regional language. Religion is taught both in private and public elementary and secondary levels. Aside from learning the official languages, English and Filipino, students are required to learn the regional language or dialect.

As for lending and borrowing, the Philippine education is patterned by the American system where English is the medium of instruction. The Philippine literature in English that was vastly influenced by American forces appealed the Filipinos and instilled in them the ideals of universality, practicality, and democracy. Then, in 1901, Philippine public education was institutionalized. Similarly, the United States has undergone phases of borrowing and lending like in 1970's, the country has been fascinated with the so-called Japanese education miracle – the high levels of achievement of Japanese students in mathematics and sciences. This fascination has led to increase the number of days of schooling across the United States. Today, hundreds of U.S. educators are involved in the process of lending, sometimes transplanting educational policies and practices to other countries (Arnone, 2007). Whether both systems have strengths and weakness, it is up to the school administrators and educators to decide which one to adapt.

Reflection: Social Justice

In the field of education, social justice is another key issue to be pondered. Is this being practice in all levels of education? In our everyday life in school, each of us might have experienced social justice directly or indirectly. How do we define social justice? The Center for Economic and Social Justice Organization (CESJ.Org) defines social justice as:

Social justice encompasses economic justice. Social justice is the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. In turn, social institutions, when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in our associations with others. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development.

To me, social justice is a fair and just principles exercised in any institutions that could either be manifested explicitly or implicitly by any member of the society. Equality, equity, and access are included in the mainstream of social justice.

I have observed social justice in the U.S.; most people are aware and recognized the role it plays in the society. People particularly the students know their rights and they are prepared to voice out their feelings about this. While the popular public (and academic) mythology of U.S. educational reform tends to define the United States as a decentralized system governed by local school districts and state governments, but not when the governing is examined at the discursive level of pedagogy and policy (Popkewitz, 2000). One of the major rationales for developing rigorous academic standards is that it will promote educational equity for students from marginalized, disadvantaged backgrounds. Darling-Hammond (1997) explained that standards, when aligned with appropriate assessments can be used to identify and address inequalities in access to learning opportunities (Jester, 2006).

On the other hand, the proliferation of international education in the Philippines is becoming a current trend. Philippines is a highly diverse society and considered as one of the largest English-speaking country in the world. However, it cannot be denied that the existing disparity to quality education in the Philippines remains a big issue. Going to a public school does not mean everything is free. Private and public schools required their students to wear a uniform. For families living within the poverty line could not afford to pay their child's uniform. The government cannot offer a decent future for students living in the poor areas where the illiteracy rate keeps getting higher.

In conclusion, poverty is an example of social justice issue that leads to various problems. Unfortunately, this problem is also conspicuous in the field of education. If there is no solution, students will continue to suffer particularly the disadvantaged ones. It will serve as an obstacle to student's academic progress and ambition.

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