

The Leaning Tower of PISA: A Critique to the Institutionalized Concept of Assessment

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Abstract

This paper conducts a comprehensive critique of the educational system in the Philippines, with a specific focus on its performance in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The study endeavors to unveil the underlying causes that have led to the persistent challenges facing Philippine education, which have remained unresolved over the years and have significantly influenced the outcomes of the 2018 PISA. Furthermore, this research delves into the institutionalized framework of assessment within the Philippine education system, highlighting its inherent issues and drawbacks. Comparative analysis is also conducted to shed light on how other nations have successfully improved their international rankings in education. In summary, this study offers a thorough examination of the Philippine educational landscape, emphasizing its connection to the 2018 PISA results, while also exploring potential avenues for reform based on successful strategies adopted by other countries.

Keywords: PISA, Philippine Educational System, Department of Education

INTRODUCTION

The institutionalized values of schools are qualified ones. School initiates young people into a world where everything can be measured, including their imaginations, and indeed, the man himself.

Last year, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released the results of the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Conducted every three years since 2000, PISA is one of the most famous student assessments worldwide, and certainly among the most influential in terms of research and policy. Primarily PISA “measures 15-year-olds’ ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.”

Filipino students participated in PISA for the first time. It was the first chance for our students to be compared with their global peers using this renowned benchmark. Unfortunately, such dismal, among 79 participating countries or

economies, the Philippines ranked dead last in reading, and we ranked second last in both mathematics and science.

Considering its symbolical reputation as the yardstick for the quality of education in the world, PISA continues to be the barometer of every nation's educational system. Currently, China becomes the powerhouse of quality education according to the test. The image of superiority in education becomes the poster boy of China's intellectual prowess. In the current age of globalization, the top country in the said assessment will serve as the touchstone of quality education. It is no wonder that western countries especially the imperial United States of America, feel insecure about China as the next powerhouse of education.

However, despite the congruency of the result due to its rapid progress for the past three years, China's education resources still need to be better balanced nationwide. In the article of Wang Yiqing in China Daily, he wrote:

But we should also be aware that the PISA result doesn't reflect the whole picture of China's basic education because the students being tested are all from developed regions in China that have high education standards. The quality of education varies in China among various regions. In some less-developed remote regions, basic education lags far behind that of the major cities. Quality and balanced education is a cause that we should make unremitting efforts for.¹

What the writer tries to elucidate is that there is still room for improvement particularly in some remote areas. Wang Yiqing puts it aptly:

Meanwhile, we should also notice that the 2018 PISA result reflects some of the problems and difficulties Chinese students face, such as the heavy schoolwork level and less satisfaction compared with students from other countries. In the future, we should make up for the loopholes in compulsory education to improve the overall level of China's basic education.²

As China pushes the Marxist ideology³ that all is equally based on one's needs and abilities, then it is a politically correct act that addressing the overall

1 "Education system still has problems despite improved PISA performance" accessed on December 28, 2019. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201912/06/WS5de9936da310cf3e3557c489.html>

2 Ibid.

3 Kang, Liu. "Subjectivity, Marxism, and Culture Theory in China." *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 114-40. Accessed January 8, 2020. doi:10.2307/466221.

level of China's rudimentary education can improve the overall performance not just by selected provinces but all schools in their nation.

The Myth of Packaging Values

The result of PISA 2018 turns into a wake-up call for the Filipino educators and education sector to review the practices in the Philippine Education. Netizens⁴ began to remark that our educational system must duplicate China since it gains the top spot in PISA 2018. The swift development of their basic education system is evident and must be the top priority of the Duterte Administration. Since, we think that duplicating the Chinese educational system will help us to catapult our country into countries with high scores in PISA, allow me to borrow the term of Ivan Illich in his magnum opus book *Deschooling Society*⁵ "Myth of Packaging Values." In his book, he emphasizes that school sells curriculum – a bundle of goods made according to the same process and having the structure as other merchandise.⁶ In this sense, I am emphasizing that the sheer function of PISA is to market the best schools which will lead to marketable graduates. It serves as the modern staple to which its bundle of planned meanings—the values of consumerism. Understandably, a student coming from a country with a badge of topnotch in PISA result will bear the tag of marketable values leading to the consumer-oriented student. Being consumer-oriented, one must conform to the standards of the market. As a result, they are made to feel guilty if they do not behave according to the predictions and morals of the consumer. Thus, resulting in meritocracy⁷ believing that getting grades and certificates will place them in the job category, they have been led to expect. In recent years there have been considerable studies that show students commit suicide due to poor grades. Data from the 2015 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) showed⁸ that

4 The term netizen is a portmanteau of the words Internet and citizen, as in a "citizen of the net" or "net citizen." It describes a person actively involved in online communities or the Internet in general

5 Illich, Ivan. 1983. *Deschooling society*. New York: Harper Colophon. 19-20.

6 Ibid.

7 Meritocracy is a political system in which political power are vested in individual people on the basis of talent, effort, and achievement, rather than wealth or social class. See, Michael Young (1958). *The rise of the meritocracy*. p. 11. OCLC 3943639.

8 "Making the Connection: Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors and Academic Grades" accessed on December 28, 2019. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/DASHfactsheetSuicidal.pdf

students with higher academic grades are less likely to consider or attempt suicide compared to students with lower grades.

Moreover, in an article published at www.Pulse.ng titled “3 reasons students commit suicide over poor grades,⁹” Bayo Wahab traced the causes of suicide for the following reasons: 1. Parental Pressure 2. Peer Pressure/ Expectations 3. Disillusionment all these points boils down to depression and anxiety.¹⁰ These glaring effects have been proved by A. Sörberg Wallin et al. (2018) to which they conclude that:

Poor academic performance in compulsory school, at age 15, was a robust predictor of suicide attempt past young adulthood and seemed to account for the association between lower childhood IQ and suicide attempts.¹¹

The pressure of grades and ranking has reached our soil. One student found hanging inside the living room with the asbestos rope tied to a wooden beam¹² According to relatives, a possible reason for the suicide was his poor grades in school.¹³ Due to this alarming incident that happened to their learners, the Department of Education acknowledged that there is a need to intensify capacity-building activities both for learners and teachers alike on issues of mental health, positive discipline and skills in psychological first-aid and psychosocial interventions.¹⁴ This suggests that chasing for the ranking and quality at the expense of students who were destined for the marketable values leads to a catastrophic blunder. Educators encourage the students to adapt to the present structure of education, which promises employment after graduation. This so-called packaging values that dovetailed to the demands of the market have been

9 “3 reasons students commit suicide over poor grades” accessed on December 28,2019. <https://www.pulse.ng/communities/student/pulse-list-3-reasons-students-commit-suicide-over-poor-grades/x3ejyx7>

10 Ibid.

11 Sörberg Wallin, A, Zeebari, Z, Lager, A, Gunnell, D, Allebeck, P, Falkstedt, D. Suicide attempt predicted by academic performance and childhood IQ: a cohort study of 26 000 children. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 10.1111/acps.12817, (2018)

12 “DepEd grieves death of student suicide victim” accessed on December 28,2019. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1065686>

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

predetermined by the OECD. As an economic organization, OECD is naturally biased in favor of the economic role of public schools. Preparing young men and women for gainful employment is not the only and not even the primary goal of public education; instead, it is preparing students for participation in democratic self-government, moral action and a life of personal development, growth and wellbeing. Philippine Education should focus on the observation that learning difficulties rise proportionately with the cost of curriculum. Our curriculum must focus on the totality of human beings rather than the “horse race” essence of PISA global ranking. By this chance, we can come up with our quality of education that is not based on the results of PISA but somewhat, more likely a package of humanity.

PISA Ranking as a Cheap Grace

DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones acknowledges the PISA report where she said: “puts in even sharper focus our need to address quality in basic education¹⁵.” The supposed result is an ultimate litmus test to judge a country school system. Indeed, the report is an eye opener for the country’s educational system. Hence, Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo said poor reading skills of Filipino students were a reality. Furthermore, the country’s participation in the assessment signifies that this administration is unafraid to open the eyes of the Filipino people to the truth for us to ascertain what steps to undertake¹⁶”.

Such dismal on the result prompts the Department of Education to launch its campaign called “*Sulong EduKalidad*”¹⁷,” a rallying call for a national effort for quality primary education. It is guided by a masterplan to install aggressive reform in four key areas: (1) K to 12 curriculum review and updating; (2) Improvement of the learning environment; (3) Teachers’ upskilling and reskilling through a transformed professional development program; and (4) Engagement of stakeholders for support and collaboration. The center of this campaign is the Filipino Learner. The ability of the government to launch the said campaign to improve the quality of education in our country is not new to us. In the past

15 An excerpt from her speech “*Sulong EduKalidad: Addressing the Challenge of Quality in Basic Education*” at Bulwagan ng Karunungan, Department of Education, December 3, 2019.

16 “Philippines’ dismal Pisa scores spark soul-searching over state of education” accessed on December 28, 2019 <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/economics/article/3041033/philippines-dismal-pisa-scores-spark-soul-searching-over-state>

17 Ibid.

years, science and mathematics were particularly a waterloo for every Filipino. Weaknesses in these areas manifest in the poor performance of Philippine high school students in several standardized tests, including the national achievement test (NAT). The DepEd reports that the NAT mean percentage score (MPS) for high school in the school year 2012-2013 was 51.41 percent or 23.59 percentage points away from the target. The MPS in science was 41.35 percent, and 46.83 percent in mathematics. In the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study in 2003¹⁸, the last time the Philippines participated in this assessment, we scored 378 and ranked 34th of 38 countries (HS II math) and 43rd of 46 (HS II science). The quality of math and science education is somewhat better in higher education. The Philippines ranked 67th of 140 countries in quality of math and science education in the 2015-2016¹⁹ Global Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum, and 79th of 138 in the 2016-2017 data.

The glaring statistical data regarding the performance was *prima facie* to push for a total overhaul of the system. However, they wait for an international body to assess the kind of education that we have, and the result is the same for the past years despite the effort to improve the quality of education. The call for the reform before the conclusion of PISA was not an active whipping stick to call for the governments' attention to focus on our educational problem. Thus, resorting to the authority of OECD to which I contextualize Anthony Giddens juggernaut of modernity²⁰. The hegemony of the PISA controls the educational system around the world, dictating the dominance of the nation when it comes to instruction. This prestige will lead to the total control of production, superiority complex, and hyper-competitive society. Thus, what PISA ranking is offering cheap grace²¹.

To contextualize the term cheap grace, what OECD is trying to emphasize is a narrow range of measurable aspects of education, PISA takes attention away from the less measurable or immeasurable educational objectives like

18 See *TIMMS 2003 International Mathematics Result* by Ina V.S. Mullis, Michael O. Martin, Eugenio J. Gonzales, Steven J. Chrostowski.

19 <http://www.competitive.org.ph/rankings/wef-globalcompetitivenessreport.php>

20 Anthony Giddens has described the modern world as a juggernaut, that is, as an engine of enormous power which can be directed to some extent, but which also threatens to run out of control. The juggernaut is a runaway world with great increases over prior systems in the pace, scope, and profoundness of change.

21 The term "cheap grace" can be traced back to a book written by German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, called *The Cost of Discipleship*, published in 1937. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.

physical, moral, civic, and artistic development, thereby, dangerously narrowing our collective imagination regarding what education is and ought to be about. Unlike the United Nations (UN) organizations such as UNESCO or UNICEF that have explicit and legitimate mandates to improve education and the lives of children around the world, OECD has no such order. Nor are there, at present, mechanisms of active democratic participation in its education decision-making process. This perverse fetish to the world ranking endangers students as we keep on embracing the culture of positivism that: towering above the rest is the best way to acknowledge our educational ascendancy. In the long run, the future impediment of this so-called “cheap grace” is that students will have a hard time to decide for themselves. Students who submit to the standard of others for the measure of their personal growth soon apply the same ruler for themselves. For teachers, they no longer have to be put in their place, but put themselves into their assigned slots, squeeze themselves into the niche which they have been taught to seek, and, in the very process, put their fellows into their places, until everybody and everything fits. Thus, following the soft authoritarian power where students and teachers enter the system that everything can be measured, including their imaginations and, indeed, himself. What the OECD advocate is consumer index is the basis of fulfillment.

The Thorny Path to Ranking: Challenges to Quality Education

DepEd has since made available the complete results of the 2018 PISA, which includes a breakdown of the scores of the country’s 17 administrative regions that were assessed. Of these, the highest marks are NCR’s, and the lowest is CARAGA’s. “Students residing in urban communities significantly performed better than those from rural communities in all subscales²².” The disparity coming from the data provided led to the following possibilities that serve as a thorny path towards quality education. 1.) educational resources 2.) socioeconomic status of students 3.) blackboard of corruption.

Educational Resources

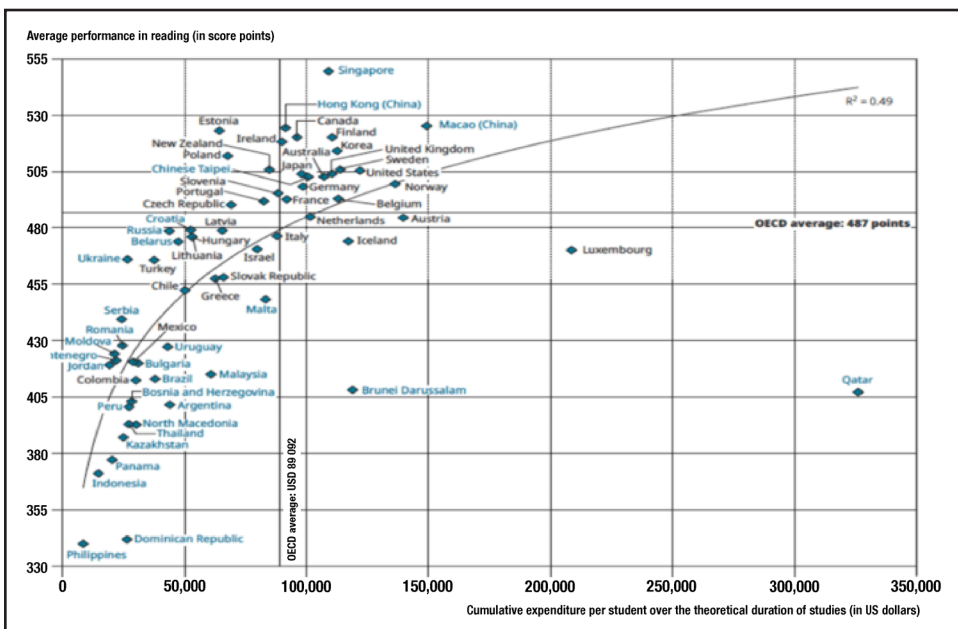
The government is spending enough on education vis-à-vis other countries. Recognizing education as among the priority areas of the Duterte administration, a Cabinet Secretary said that the national government had

22 PISA 2018 National Report of the Philippines accessed on December 28, 2019, <https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PISA-2018-Philippine-National-Report.pdf>

allocated a considerable budget for the implementation of various programs that are seen to improve the quality of education in the country. “Investment in human capital development is essential in socio-economic growth,²³” said Secretary Rolando Joselito Bautista of the Department of Social Welfare and Development during the 2nd Pre-SONA forum at the Waterfront Cebu City Hotel.

Bautista noted the importance of access to quality education to social, personal, and economic development. Figure 1, coming from the full PISA report, seems to corroborate this. Notice the positive correlation between reading scores and education spending. The Philippines unsurprisingly comes out at the bottom end of this plot. On the bright side, this implies every extra peso spent on education could still yield high returns.

Figure 1
Reading performance vs. spending on education.²⁴



23 Education among priority areas of the Duterte administration accessed on December 28, 2019, <https://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/244149/education-among-priority-areas-of-the-duterte-administration-bautista>.

24 PISA 2018, OECD

DepEd's budget for this year stands at P521.35 billion, or about P20 billion more than the 2019 budget of P501.12 billion²⁵. During budget deliberations, DepEd sought congressional approval of additional funds worth P30 billion, higher than the amount the DBM proposed under NEP, which was P518.84 billion at that time. DepEd said then that it would use the extra funds for its computerization program and human resource development, among others. Education already takes the motherlode of the government's budget each year, as provided for by the 1987 Constitution. Ensuring quality goes well beyond money matters. The previous administration touted K-12 as the most significant educational reform in decades. One of its goals was to "Allow every student to receive quality education that is globally competitive based on a pedagogically sound curriculum that is at par with international standards" Clearly, based on PISA 2018, our education system now is still neither "globally competitive" nor "at par with international standards." Which begs to this question, why is this lion share of the budget in every administration did not improve the quality of education?²⁶ The shortage of classrooms for DepEd schools is always an issue. With the implementation of the K-12 program, Benjie Valbuena, national chair of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers-Philippines (ACT-Philippines), estimated the classroom shortage in the country to be 113,995 as of 2017. By June 2017, Education Undersecretary Jesus Mateo announced that 50,000 of the needed 113,000 classrooms had already been completed and are pending for use. The undersecretary stressed the objective of the government to create more classrooms "to meet lower class size, which leads to conducive learning²⁷." Another major setback confronting the Department of Education is the scarcity of science laboratory facilities and equipment. A study conducted by researchers from the Versatile Instrumentation System for Science Education and Research project shows that 23 percent of the public high schools surveyed have no access to a science lab²⁸. In 2014, DepEd

25 2020 BUDGET Where will the money go? Accessed on January 9, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/238933-where-will-money-go-2020-budget>.

26 According to DepEd, some funds will also be used to create additional teaching positions, but to date, there are over 59,026 vacancies within the department. But according to the latest Commission on Audit report also found that at least 4.8% of the education department's 2018 budget was unused, mainly due to unimplemented projects and unfilled permanent positions. See, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/238933-where-will-money-go-2020-budget>.

27 How DepEd plans to address PH classroom shortage. Rappler. Accessed on January 9, 2020. <http://www.rappler.com/nation/172372-deped-address-ph-classroom-shortage>.

28 UP team develops low-cost science lab for public high schools. 2017. Newsbytes Philippines. Accessed on January 9, 2020

reported a shortage of science laboratories in regions III, IV-A, X, XI, and XII, with an average of only one in ten schools having its laboratory²⁹. In the National Capital Region, the ratio improved with three laboratories for every 10 schools; however, the findings showed that the rest of the regions did not have any science laboratories. The confronting ideas, in this case, is, where did the budget go? Urban schools have access to better-quality schooling than their weaker rural counterparts due to better accessibility.

Furthermore, in the analysis of Christian Zamora in 2015, he found out:

The rural educational attainment, however, continues to lag behind that of the urban areas. In fact, in most provinces, education inequality within rural areas contributes the most to their respective overall education inequalities. Rural-urban educational attainment gaps are also more pronounced in provinces with low levels of educational attainment.³⁰

Since education is a crucial factor in poverty alleviation and education inequality could generate welfare losses to society, it is essential to monitor education inequality in the Philippines. The resources provided by the government must close the gap in inequality. Through this, educational quality and poverty alleviation will come to fruition and will hold it like a vice.

Socioeconomic Status of Students

Based on the research journal published in the American Psychological Association (APA), there are numerous research that affirms that socioeconomic status affects the literacy of children. Children from low-SES families are less likely to have experiences that encourage the development of fundamental skills of reading acquisition, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language³¹. Furthermore, poor households have less access to learning materials and experiences, including books, computers, stimulating toys, skill-building

29 Ibid.

30 Zamora, C. M. 2015. Education Inequality and Its Effects on Income Inequality in the Philippines. Unpublished undergraduate thesis, Department of Economics, College of Economics and Management, University of the Philippines Los Baños

31 Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Beaman-Wheldall, R. (2013). Why poor children are more likely to become poor readers: The school years. *Australian Journal of Education*, 57(3), 190–213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944113495500>

lessons, or tutors to create a positive literacy environment³². Low socioeconomic status leads to a deficiency in functional literacy³³. In the Philippines, the government is flexing its financial muscle to combat poverty and promote functional literacy. The National Economic and Development Authority launches its program called “AMBISYON NATIN 2040,” targeting that in 2040, 73 percent of families want their children to be college educated. However, this aspiration may be difficult to attain given the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), which showed Filipino families were most deprived in education. PSA data showed that, of the 13 indicators, educational attainment had the highest incidence of deprivation among families at 59.3 percent in 2016 and 49.4 percent in 2017. This meant 6 out of 10 families in 2016 and 5 out of 10 families in 2017 were deprived of basic education. This also means that 6 out of 10 families in 2016 and 5 out of 10 families in 2017 had at least one family member aged 18 years old and above who did not complete basic education.

The government aims to increase functional literacy for kindergarten to 95 percent, from 74.65 percent, the baseline using 2015 data; elementary, 95 percent from the 91.05-percent baseline; and junior high school, 75.44 percent from the 68.15 percent baseline. To this end, the government aims to increase the proportion of elementary students to 74.39 percent from 63.93 percent, and junior high school, 20 percent from 14.37 percent of performing at moving toward or approximately mastered skills. Moreover, it aims to bring down the proportion of students at low mastery to 10 percent from 14.88 percent for junior high school.

Looking at the data provided, the deprivation on the basic needs leads to a problem in attaining global goals. Despite the annual increase in the budget for primary education, fewer children are enrolling in schools. The reason: poverty. In the report of NEDA in 2018 regarding the socio-economic report, they stated that:

An assessment of the situation points to poverty as the main cause of this lower-than-expected increase. This is further exacerbated by the high cost of schooling-related expenditures. High school students seeking

32 Iruka, I. U., LaForett, D. R., & Odom, E. C. (2017). Examining the validity of the family investment and stress models and relationship to children’s school readiness across five cultural groups. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(3), 359–370. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028290>

33 Functional literacy, according to the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, was more than just being able to read and write. Functional literacy means literacy and numeracy skills combined.

employment to augment family income also contributed to the low increase in enrollment.³⁴

The correlation of socioeconomic status to our ranking in PISA 2018 is crystal clear. It is where the waterloo of students came. The typical formula, in this case, can be explained through the following: low socioeconomic status + low quality of education = lack of formal training. This will result in a deficiency of functional literacy. Understandably, students in the rural area got low scores in reading, mathematics, and sciences. To add to the data given:

Based on the 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS), about nine percent of the estimated 39.2 million Filipinos aged 6 to 24 years old were out-of-school children and youth (OSCY). OSCY refers to family members 6 to 14 years old who are not attending formal school; and family members 15 to 24 years old who are currently out of school, not gainfully employed, and have not finished college or post-secondary courses.³⁵

Such data gave by the PSA only proves the detrimental effects of poverty on education. According to Carmel Castrillo, a Filipino Londoner took much of her secondary and further education in the Philippines. She agrees that money plays a huge part in education:

‘Kids with impoverished parents are so desperate to go to the school that they’re willing to travel far and go through dangerous conditions to get there, like swim under a bridge, or climb onto an open-top school bus that’s already so packed. But some kids can’t afford to make those trips.’ And getting to school is only the first hurdle. ‘You pay for your books, paper, pens – the schools don’t provide that for you – nothing’s free.’³⁶

Although the government spends much of its budget on education, our country still has a long way to go regarding educational quality. Low socioeconomic status is still the hindrance in attaining quality education. If we try to compare the result of countries who are on the top of PISA ranking, we can attribute their success to their economic stability and bending their financial power for their

34 See http://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SER-2017_as-of-June-2018.pdf.

35 “Nine Percent of Filipinos Aged 6 to 24 years are Out of School” accessed on January 9, 2020 <https://psa.gov.ph/content/nine-percent-filipinos-aged-6-24-years-are-out-school-results-2017-annual-poverty-indicators>.

36 “How poverty affects education in the Philippines” accessed on January 9, 2020. <https://www.truevolunteer.org/how-poverty-affects-education-in-the-philippines/>.

education—the source of their human capital. To understand further, in the case of China, that got the top spot in the recent PISA ranking. Chinese administrators chose their students from a group of cities and regions aptly named B-S-J-Z³⁷, after Beijing, a province-level municipality Shanghai, a province-level municipality, Jiangsu, a province on the eastern coast of the country and Zhejiang, an eastern coastal province. Those cities and regions belong to the top 10 with the highest GDP³⁸, which means the higher the GDP, the higher the citizen's social-economic status.

Students who experience poverty have major setbacks over students in rich countries. A poor student can seldom catch up with a rich one. Even if they attend equal schools and begin at the same age, poor students lack most of the educational opportunities. These advantages range from conversation and books at home to vacation travel and different sense of oneself and apply, for the student who enjoys them, both in and out of school. So, the destitute student will generally fall behind so long as he depends on school for advancement or learning. Following the fondness of patronizing colonial ideas particularly PISA ranking, the mere existence of school discourages and disables the poor from taking control of their knowledge. They are dictated by what the state gives them and they cannot refuse because it is obligatory and free. For high schools, they cannot demand quality since they are programmed that poor students deserve what the government can provide. This kind of deception has its roots, the low socioeconomic status which leads to psychological impotence, the inability to fend for themselves.

Blackboard of Corruption

Corruption continues to curb society's progress. Jose Rizal once noted that corruption is considered as the cancer of society. This is not new especially in a 3rd world country where corruption is part of the government. The embodiment of corruption in government is similar to the mark of Cain—an omen. The education sector is not an exception to this kind of upheaval. In the same manner, the Philippines is getting more corrupt under Duterte, dropping 13 notches in the 2018 Corruption Index published recently by Transparency International.³⁹

37 See <http://www.chinabankingnews.com/2019/02/04/guangdong-jiangsu-gdps-both-breach-9-trillion-yuan-in-2018/>.

38 Gross Domestic Product.

39 See <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>.

Education Secretary Leonor Briones has formed an investigating team to look into reported corruption in the agency, involving the bidding of projects and travels abroad by several of its officials. Also, Sen. Sherwin T. Gatchalian, chair of the Senate Committee on Basic Education, is referring to the Commission on Audit (COA) annual audit report that found that DepEd has over P13.898 billion in undocumented expenses incurred in 2018. For one, Gatchalian said DepEd should explain why more than P254 million worth of learning materials for Grade 3 pupils in Araling Panlipunan, Science, and English are riddled with errors despite the agency's supposed three-step review process. The senator also questioned why there are more than three million books and other learning materials supposedly intended for public schools nationwide left unused in dilapidated DepEd warehouses. The Commission on Audit, in its account, said that the remaining learning materials bought from 2014 to 2017 have been idle for so long that it may soon qualify under "Irregular, Unnecessary, Excessive, Extravagant and Unconscionable expenditures." Based on their report, of the 3.4 million idle learning materials, 1.6 million were procured in 2015, 1.2 million in 2016, 440,591 in 2014, and 128,111 in 2017⁴⁰. Davao Region (DepEd 11) said it had received complaints of corruption at its office against erring employees.⁴¹ The reported irregularities led to the dismay of Senator Sonny Angara, in his statement he said:

How do we expect our youth to be prepared for college and to find decent jobs later on in life when they're not getting the best education that they deserve in grade school and high school.⁴²

He further added that the report coming from the Commission on Audit merely showed how poorly the agency was performing to the detriment of Filipino students. Thus, uttered the following words during a senate hearing:

Education always gets the biggest share of the government's funds and rightfully so because this will ensure the country remains competitive with

40 See "DepEd should explain P13.9-B expenses flagged by COA – senator" Accessed on January 9, 2020, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2019/08/09/dep-ed-should-explain-p13-9-b-expenses-flagged-by-coa-senator/>.

41 See "Corruption complaints filed at DepEd 11" accessed on January 9, 2020, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1797856>.

42 See "Angara frustrated over dismal performance of DepEd as per 2018 COA report" Accessed on January 9, 2020, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2019/08/09/angara-frustrated-over-dismal-performance-of-deped-as-per-2018-coa-report/>.

its people as its backbone. So why are we shortchanging our people on this front with such inefficiencies?⁴³

Corruption hampers progress and competencies in our educational system. However, the said dishonesty does not end in malversation of public funds, and it can also be viewed on the lens of meritocracy and credentialism⁴⁴. Numerous teachers get their degrees through diploma mill⁴⁵ schools and use their degree for the sake of promotion. This bogus school which promotes deception of academic learning, reflects how the teacher will demonstrate his mastery of lessons inside the class. Economist Gary Becker introduced the human capital theory, which, in contrast to credentialism, proposes that a person's investment in education and training translates into a higher value of human capital and higher worker productivity, which allows the worker to command higher income and other valued benefits eventually⁴⁶. For the sake of promotion, teachers prefer to take diploma mill schools for an "academic shortcut" rather than painstakingly sacrifice their time and effort in a legit university. Numerous diploma mill schools sprouted like a mushroom to meet the demand of teachers. Following the economic theory of Becker, it is understandable that institutions today prefer teachers with post-graduate degrees to flex their scholastic records. Hence, Michael Spence was right in his signaling theory; he states that since the labor market is characterized by imperfect asymmetric information, education is used as a signal to identify to employers the more able, ambitious, or productive workers.⁴⁷ To be called productive and competent, in Philippine Education, one must have a post-graduate degree. This degree will be a ticket for promotion

43 Ibid.

44 Credentialism", a concept coined by social scientists in the 1970s, is the reduction of qualifications to status conferring pieces of paper. It's an ideology which puts formal educational credentials above other ways of understanding human potential and ability.

45 No universal definition for the term "diploma mill" exists, and some experts count as diploma mills unaccredited schools that require completion of substantial academic work that is nonetheless inferior to work required at traditionally-accredited schools. See ALLEN EZELL & JOHN BEAR, DEGREE MILLS 20-21, 60 (2005).

46 George R. Boyer & Robert S. Smith, The Development of the Neoclassical Tradition in Labor Economics, 54 INDUS. & LAB. REL. REV. 199, 209 (2001).

47 A. Michael Spence, Job Market Signaling, 87 Q. J. OF ECON. 355, 364 (1973); see also McCaffery, supra note 131, at 632-33; Gillian Lester, Careers and Contingency, 51 STAN. L. REV. 73, 132 (1998) ("Rational employers who lack information about the prospective productivity of competing job applicants may use easily identified proxies to sort workers according to predicted quality. Such proxies or 'signals' include educational characteristics, physical appearances, and job history.").

and through it, monetary compensation will follow and administrative positions. It does not matter where you graduate; what matters most is the degree. Thus, for the sake of degree, some are doing what is palpable. Based on the data provided by the Ibon Foundation in 2018⁴⁸, salaries of education workers are being battered by unprecedented rising prices. For a Teacher 1 with a Php20,179 (SG11) salary, it is hard to make both ends meet especially if you have a family. Thus, crossing the river of Rubicon to raise the wage, some preferred fly by night schools. In just six months or less, you already have your diploma. This widespread practice in the Department of Education erodes the quality teachers. This half-baked and easy degree produces incompetent teachers which deter the quality of education. President Rodrigo Duterte's death squads have killed the democratic process in the Philippines, and they have not killed the system that reproduces and perpetuates corruption.

Altar of Requirements and the Birth of New Religion

Excessive paper works are what the teachers clamor in the Department of Education. Teachers do not teach and focus on students' intellectual building. Instead, they focus on numerous workloads that defeat their purpose as a teacher. These perverse innuendos from the institution did not attract the best and the brightest graduates from top universities due to the following reasons: unattractive salary levels and excessive paperwork. Aside from the extreme paper works, teachers were also overwork due to different committees in every school activity, where every month there are set of events and then teachers were also tasked to train their students for competition, thus, delimiting their presence inside the classroom. Also, numerous seminars demarcate teachers teaching and other than that research involvement that uses lots of their time for instruction.

ACT Teachers Representatives Antonio Tinio and France Castro called on the House of Representatives to investigate the matter as they claimed the RPMS has resulted in the loss of benefits and rejection of decent salaries. Urging the house to conduct an inquiry regarding the Results-Based Performance Management System and their call for fair pay and humane working conditions. The said paper works lament Castro to the sacrifices of the DepEd teachers:

teachers are often burdened by the excessive paperwork of the RPMS, which takes away time from caring for themselves and their families.

48 See "Arrest education workers' rapidly eroding incomes, gov't urged" Accessed on January 9, 2020, <https://www.ibon.org/arrest-education-workers-rapidly-eroding-incomes-govt-urged/>.

She added, on top of the regular tasks of checking of students' quizzes, keeping master lists, creating lesson plans and instructional materials, teachers are heavily burdened by the reports they are required to submit under the RPMS, an assessment tool designed to squeeze state workers to perform beyond their capacities.⁴⁹

From being an institution that serves as a haven for students, educational instruction turns out to be an oppressive apparatus for teachers. Several cases of teacher suicides⁵⁰ were reported in the media; some teachers were hospitalized⁵¹. Excessive work was a boot stomp on the face of the institution. Such bulk of workload forced teachers to wear a variety of hats in school—registrar, clerk, librarian, nurse, guidance coordinator, custodian, security guard, and janitor that delineates a public-school teacher. This textbook case of teacher's excessive workloads can be referred to Max Weber's theoretical concept called "the iron cage⁵²." Teachers are forced to comply with the demands of the total institution⁵³ masquerading into trailing for quality education. In a Weberian context, teachers were the prison of the system; they cannot exercise their rights; subjugated in their order. The paradox of school as an egalitarian bridge turns out oppressive to its workers. For Weber, inside the iron cage delimits a person's actions furthermore the social effects of individuals became more based on rationality instead of being based on their values and tradition. This total institution values and iron cage becomes a twin concept to describe the kind of educational institution we have. Some teachers are critical in the system; however, they were shunned by their fellow teachers. As a result, they were red-tagged⁵⁴ by the state not because they

49 See "Lawmakers want probe on DepEd's Results-Based Performance Management System" Accessed on January 9, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/209559-lawmakers-want-investigation-deped-results-performance-management-system>.

50 See <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1773682>.

51 See <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/08/02/deped-urged-to-reduce-teachers-workload/>.

52 In sociology, the iron cage is a concept introduced by Max Weber to describe the increased rationalization inherent in social life, particularly in Western capitalist societies. The "iron cage" thus traps individuals in systems based purely on teleological efficiency, rational calculation and control. See Max Weber, Peter R. Baehr, Gordon C. Wells, *The Protestant ethic and the "spirit" of capitalism and other writings*, Penguin Classics, 2002, ISBN 0-14-043921-8, [2], p.xxiv

53 Total institution is a closed social system in which life is organized by strict norms, rules, and schedules, and what happens within it is determined by a single authority whose will is carried out by staff who enforce the rules. See Goffman, Erving (1961). *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*

54 See <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1070454/red-tagging-teachers-without-basis-is-unfair-tanada>.

are part of the Communist Party of the Philippines – National Democratic Front organ but they speak for the unheard voice of marginalizing teachers who were suffering from this wretched system.

However, despite the flocks of best teachers leaving the system, still, some teachers are hopeful that the order will be fixed in this Duterte era. Still, some teachers continue their blind obedience since they benefit in this system and those are reactionary teachers who continue to obey without questioning and neglecting the disenfranchisement of teacher's rights. The neutrality of educators gave birth to the new religion as Paul Tillich defined religion as "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other matters as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of life."⁵⁵

Passivism becomes the monotheistic religion of teachers who patronize what the system entrenched in their minds. This new religion of blind fanaticism manifested in following what the system provides for them without question⁵⁶. Following bombastic activities without questioning the relationship of activity in shaping the minds of students and complying with the requirements that do not even help to abate the condition of education. Also, following the order of false prophets during evaluations highlighting the design of classrooms rather than pedagogical delivery. There were even reports that observers during evaluation are looking forward to the token on the table and commenting on teaching delivery that is out of their specific discipline. Like an evaluator who got a degree in English and she will observe mathematics class, physical education specialist will observe an elementary lesson in science. This practice promotes ultracrepidarianism⁵⁷. Teachers worship the altar of requirements to devote themselves to their new religion—passivism. No wonder our educational system cannot match the international standards due to tremendous paper works that nix classroom teaching brought by following the orders without questioning leading to veneration without understanding.

55 Gill, Jerry H. "Paul Tillich's Religious Epistemology." *Religious Studies* 3, no. 2 (1968): 477-98. Accessed January 15, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20004696.

56 Parkin, Frank. 1979. *The Marxist Theory of Class: A Bourgeois Critique*. London: Tavistock.

57 one who is presumptuous and offers advice or opinions beyond one's sphere of knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper is a modest attempt to critique the educational system that we have and also our PISA ranking. We can agree to disagree that our educational system is at its best when it comes to quality. However, our colonial mindset still haunts us and always wants an affirmation from the westerners. George Ritzer puts it aptly as the McDonaldization of education⁵⁸ an attempt to full-blown western culture focused on efficiency knowledge transfer in other parts of the world. It does not promote inquiry and creativity. The said statement was attested by a group of educators who boycott the validity of PISA on measuring the quality of education. It was justified further by measuring the learning in quantitative measures and limits to pen and paper tests. Henry Giroux, one of the forerunners of critical pedagogy, said that measuring the ability of students and judging them based on the quantitative measurement as he dubbed as a “culture of positivism” is disrespect on their intellectual capacity. On the other hand, the result of PISA can also help the education sectors to revisit their practices and improve the system. But still, stakeholders and administrators of the Department of Education must first address the root cause of institutional inadequacy. The audacity of complying with the PISA report will end in futility if we give a band-aid solution to the problem. Our country’s besmirchment in the ranking is evident that our government did not address the bridled agent of inequality in terms of power and resources, thus, resulting in corruption. I can say that if we promote a nationalist, scientific, and mass-based education, it will unshackle us from the bondage of westerns influence. What we must do is fix and believe in our system. Filipinos proved their intellectual capacity around the world not just in academics but also on how they used their education to promote human capital. I, therefore, argue that we can achieve quality of education if we decongest the subjects of students, address the classroom class capacity, lessen the teacher’s task, and increase the teacher’s salary and benefits. Lastly, top-performing countries followed the same blueprint: they invested heavily in their students, educators, and schools regardless of socio-economic standing. It is not a surprising fact that spending more money on students and paying educators a living wage leads to better student achievement.

58 McDonaldization is a concept developed by American sociologist George Ritzer which refers to the particular kind of rationalization of production, work, and consumption that rose to prominence in the late twentieth century. The basic idea is that these elements have been adapted based on the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant—efficiency, calculability, predictability and standardization, and control—and that this adaptation has ripple effects throughout all aspects of society. See, Ritzer, George (2009). *The McDonaldization of Society*. Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press. ISBN 0-7619-8812-2.

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