ARE FILIPINOS REALLY READY FOR K-12?

by:

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“We need to add two years to our basic education. Those who can afford to pay up to fourteen years of schooling before university. Thus, their children are getting into the best universities and the best jobs after graduation. I want at least 12 years for our public school children to give them an even chance at succeeding.”

– Former President Benigno S. Aquino III

This is part of Former President Benigno "NoyNoy" Aquino III's Educational Reform Program. The P-Noy Administration firmly believes that adding more years to Basic Education in the Philippines could help solve the problem of unemployment, keep up with global standards, and help Filipino students to have more time to choose the career that best suit their skills. But, are Filipinos really ready for it?

The enhanced K-12 Education Plan is said to add one more year on both primary and secondary levels excluding kindergarten. The program started in school year 2012-2013 for Grade 1 and First Year high school students with the target of full implementation by School Year 2018-2019. K-12 has been met with criticism from youth and student groups, teachers, parents and the academic community. The Department of Education (DepEd), for its part, appears determined to enact the program with its proposed budget catering mostly to preparing the grounds for its eventual implementation. Critics, however, counteract that the education crisis needs to be addressed more fundamentally and adding more school years would only worsen our condition.

As a teacher, I am completely aware of the government’s desire (through the DepEd) to uplift the quality of education here in the Philippines. Each year, the need for highly competitive graduates continues to grow as the demand for high paying jobs spread across the globe. Whilst this K-12 education program may help us realize that, there are other concerns in the education sector that need more immediate response and attention of the government. These concerns have been there since time immemorial and have not been entirely addressed even with the changing of regime. Some of these problems are the lack of highly qualified teachers,
insufficient classrooms, and poor teaching facilities. Extending the number of years in school will not directly affect nor influence the quality of education because it would only mean adding more budget for more teachers, classrooms, etc. After all, we’re aiming for quality and not quantity, right? I believe we should get to the bottom of it rather than introducing something new, which might only lead to more problems. If we have enough resources, why not invest it on empowering the teachers, adding more classrooms, reducing the massive number of students in a class, and improving the facilities that we have especially in the public schools.

Simply put, regardless of whichever “model” we want to implement, what the youth and country really need is the improvement and establishment of an education system that will provide the needs of the Filipino youth and the society in general. Unless the government seriously addresses the unnecessary public spending, high costs of schooling, the prevalence of a colonial curriculum, lack of transparency and accountability amid widespread corruption ‘within’ various sectors, all efforts will remain in vain. Let’s face it, adding two more years does not equal to quality education. It just adds more burdens not only to the students but to the parents as well.

And neither 10 nor 12 years would make much of difference at all.

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