SHOULD WE RELY ON THE PISA RANKINGS?

by:
Michelle Serenas Nebrija
Teacher III, Balon Elementary School

When it comes to mathematics, science, and reading, Filipino students are among the bottom dwellers – this is according to the recent study of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) popularly known as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The Philippines ranked 78th (math and science), and 79th (reading literacy) out of 79 countries that were evaluated based on the scholastic performance in the mentioned key learning areas of 15-year old students. To see the PISA result is truly devastating and I am particularly concerned on the negative impacts that it could have on Philippine education.

The triennial assessment of OECD is anxiously anticipated by the government and education ministries of many countries, deeply influencing educational practices of those in the lower ranks. They try to apply the same strategies of the upper without actually looking deeper into the root cause of their problem: this is like trying to cure cancer using a medicine intended for diabetes. It will not work because the cure is not designed for the disease.

As I see it, PISA claims that there is a “universal” set of skills and knowledge important to all societies regardless of culture, religion, policies, educational systems, etc. This is quite problematic because countries are diverse – they operate differently from one another and they face different challenges. To overcome these trials would therefore entail specific skills, hence invalidating PISA’s claim that it is possible to quantify the status of education in all countries using a standard test. It is, as if, the OECD is telling us that 15-year old kids across the world are building the same skillset for country-specific life challenges faced by its citizens. Dr. Sjoberg of Oslo University in Norway also
critiqued PISA in one of his publications, claiming that it promotes a monolithic view of education’ as if knowledge is something solid that could be easily measured despite having various horizons.

PISA is also creating a shift into short term solutions for a country to increase its world ranking, completely ignoring the fact that transitioning into a new education practice (e.g. from Basic Education to the K-12 Program) would probably take decades, not a few years, to come into fruition. It would also take time to develop necessary skills for efficient teaching and to advance the quality of instruction provided to students. Besides PISA, Philippines also took part in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) back in 1999 and 2003, but we ended up being third to the last. Since then, we stopped joining such programs until 2018 when it we bravely joined the PISA rankings for the first time.

I hope that the Philippines will not be too anxious with our PISA ranking. We should refrain from implementing far-fetched reforms into our education system, and we must thoroughly calculate our steps. More importantly, we should not rely on PISA to tell us what education is ought to be. This assessment merely focuses on determining if a student is fit for the workforce, which is not the main goal of education. Our focus should be centered on guiding the students in their personal development, and to help them achieve their goals in life through providing them the highest quality of education that they deserve.

References: