SUSTAINABILITY OF UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO QUALITY TERTIARY EDUCATION ACT
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Having the lens of an educator, I was astounded and grateful at the same time when I heard of the news of Senator Ralph Recto filing the then-bill sponsored by Senator Bam Aquino. It was a huge and a significant step for the Philippines to finally bestow education the value it deserves. In fact, the news had me reminisce the days when my family and I had to struggle just to send me and my two other siblings to college all at the same time. Those were really hard times and to think that the following generation will be saved from these hardships made me think that our country’s future will be bright. The year 2017 marked a history and a milestone in our nation for this was the year our President Rodrigo Roa Duterte signed the bill into a law. I realized my votes were not futile at all. Thus, there is no question as to whether this Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education is sustainable. Any matter that our government will prioritize will be sustainable as long as there is the intention.

2020 has been a rough year since the birth of the COVID-19 in the country. Many agencies, departments, private and public sectors had faced economic crisis in micro and macro scale. Commission Higher Education (CHED), for one, was alarmed to be affected by the directives due to the pandemic. In April 2020, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) released a directive on temporarily withholding the release of funds for some programs. Because of this, State universities and colleges (SUCs) may have the tendency to collect tuition fees if the circumstances require it. Apparently, the crisis had affected all the sectors especially the education sector. Reportedly, 35 percent of the programmed funding under the 2020 national budget would not be released. If this would materialize, CHEd will not be able to fully reimburse the tuition and miscellaneous fees of SUCs and not be able to release the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) money for 2020. Though it will not affect the implementation the law, this would constraint the SUCs in paying contractual workers and continue the programs that are being implemented this year. Being resilient as the situation pushes us to be, the education sector particularly the HEIs were able to get through this threat and was able to proceed with their operations.
On a positive note, the implementation of Republic Act 1093 or Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education was safeguarded in 2021 budget. Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has allocated P44.2 billion – a large bulk from the 50.9 billion of the department’s 2021 budget. Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has allocated P44.2 billion of its 2021 budget for the implementation of Republic Act 1093 or Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education. This sum is higher than the 2019 budget. Year by year after the birth of the law, the number of Filipinos who aspire to elevate their quality of living through pursuing their tertiary education is increasing. In 2018, 1.18 million students benefitted from this law and the year 2019 has listed 1.3 million beneficiaries. Evidently, the implementation of the law is significantly increasing despite the different problems, issues and concerns the nation is continuously facing. This is just a strong evidence that the Philippines values education, regardless of level, despite any circumstances that may befall us. Universal access to education is and must be sustainable for it contributes largely to national development. This premise has been proven in today’s situation more than ever. If only the Philippines has produced more medical personnel and intellectuals in the past years then our situation in the face of pandemic could not have been worse. We could have been more prepared. With all these evidences put forwards, Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act has been proven sustainable and our country aims to move forward with it. After all, education cannot be delayed.

Reference: