THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE CHALLENGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

by:
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Did the pandemic really caused the challenges that the Philippine education system faced, or has it only highlighted an existing problem?

By the end of 2019, the coronavirus issue was already brewing, but most people did not expect it to in such a scale that it affected hundreds of countries and took numerous lives. Coronavirus is an infectious disease spread through repertory droplets. The virus mostly attacks the immune system and the respiratory system, showing flu-like symptoms such as; fever, dry cough, sore throat, body pain, fatigue, among other things (www.cdc.gov).

Since the virus is spread through close contact, millions of schools closed around the world to prevent the further escalation of the contagion. Businesses and other establishments that are not considered as essential services and/or goods were also shut down, halting the economy of the affected countries.

In the Philippines, the most ravished sector was the health sector. Since the beginning of lockdown back in March 2020, countless of healthcare professionals and workers have died due to the covid-19. Despite having the longest lockdown in the world (March 2020-Present), the Philippines recorded 1.9 million cases and an estimated 32,000 deaths as of July 2021 with Metro Manila having the largest number of 641K cases and 8,846 deaths (www.worldometers.info).

As devastating as it is, the Healthcare system is not the only casualty in this global pandemic. Another sector which was greatly affected by the coronavirus outbreak is the Educational Sector. Since the classroom settings are very conducive for spreading the disease, given that fifty or so people share an enclosed space for several hours, schools were the first to be shut down to protect both the educational providers and the students.
However, as the school year 2020-2021 approached and passed, the people running the system were forced to accept that despite the pandemic, students need to learn, thus schools need to resume.

The Department of Education (DepEd) chose the Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) route which took effect on August 2020 (www.deped.gov.ph). Although the newer generations are more inclined to the use of modern gadgets and the internet, the Philippines is not quite ready to go fully online based. During the past year, it became apparent that although access to internet and mobile connection is already common, there are still places that are not as privileged. Some areas, especially remote towns and provinces do not have access to stable connections needed for online classes. Through modular approach, the teachers are able to provide materials to students even without internet. Modules are prepared by the school and the teachers and then are distributed to students through their parents. However, with the changes brought about by the pandemic, also came the challenges that the educational system had to confront, issues like the lack of resources and funding as well as the over strained manpower surfaced.

Many attributed these challenges to the pandemic, but is it really? It is not out of the public’s knowledge that even before the coronavirus pandemic the Philippine education system was already lacking in some aspects, the existing facilities are either old and obsolete or in very poor conditions (Miralao, 2004). Numerous studies established that adequate school environment, including sufficient school facilities improve the efficiency of learning as well as the development of students (Bacolod & Tobias, 2006; Ghuman, Behrman, & Gultiano, 2006).

Even though school facilities like classrooms and such lay unused during the pandemic, basic supplies and equipment still needs to be improved to increase the ease of work and reduce work related stress for educational providers. During this trying times, teachers provide their own materials like printers and paper in order to provide modules for their
students. Yes, there are support from the government, but sadly it is still insufficient, especially for schools in the remote places in the country.

The pandemic showed how resilient Filipinos are. It made people take the worse and still come up with something workable. It is not just the Health and Education sector that took the blow, the whole country shuddered from the surface to its very core. Every single one of us are struggling. But we should not let this pandemic be the escape goat that takes the blame for a flawed system that badly needs improvement. The pandemic did not bring all this challenges, it only removed the obscuring vail that dampers the true situation.

References:

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/philippines/
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