Navigating/Negotiating the Lifelong Learning Terrain in the Philippines

Path of Optimism and Caution

Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo

UP CIDS | MONOGRAPH SERIES

The **UP President Edgardo J. Angara (UPPEJA) Fellowship** is a grant for pioneering policy research. It aims to promote high-level policy discussions and research on a wide range of topics that address national development goals and imperatives, such as science and technology, economic development, environment and climate change, good governance, and communications.

The Fellowship was established by the University of the Philippines Board of Regents on September 29, 2008 in honor of the late Senator Edgardo J. Angara, who served as UP President from 1981 to 1987 and concurrent UP Diliman Chancellor from 1982 to 1983.

Angara, also a former Senate President, is known for his contributions to Philippine education, serving as the Chairperson of the First Congressional Commission on Education in 1990, which was credited with a number of pioneering reforms in the education sector, including its "trifocalization" and the Free Higher Education Act.

In addition to his notable contributions as a legislator, Angara's leadership also gave rise to the **UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS)**, which he initiated during his presidency.

Officially established on June 13, 1985, and originally called the University Center for Strategic and Development Studies (UCSDS), CIDS serves as a think tank that leverages the multidisciplinary expertise of UP to address the nation's most pressing challenges. The core objectives of CIDS encompass the development, organization, and management of research on national significance, the promotion of research and study among various university units and individual scholars, the securing of funding from both public and private sources, and the publication and wide dissemination of research outputs and recommendations.

For 2024, the Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program (HERPRP) served as the UP PEJA Fellowship Awards secretariat in partnership with the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II).

From the Executive Director of UP CIDS

It has been a long time in the making, but I am pleased to see the UP PEJA Fellowship finally coming to fruition. After all the forums, meetings, presentations, and threads of communication between and among the PEJA Fellows, UP CIDS' Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program (HERPRP), and the Second Congressional Committee on Education (EDCOM 2), we now have a series of papers that tackle the various facets of Philippine higher education. The series includes the study you're reading.

For much of its history, the UP PEJA Fellowship has been housed in and implemented through the Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS), the University of the Philippines' policy research unit. Over the years, the Fellowship has funded and published the studies of policy scholars, many of them luminaries in their respective fields.

In 2023, after a few years' hiatus, not least because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UP PEJA Fellowship resumed and began looking for a new set of Fellows. This time, however, UP CIDS, through its Higher Education Research program, embarked on a historic partnership with the Second Congressional Committee on Education (EDCOM 2).

Linking directly with the government in administering the UP PEJA Fellowship was a first for UP CIDS. And that this was a partnership with a national-level policy-making body made it even more special.

As I have always maintained, this type of linkage is exactly what UP CIDS, as a policy research unit, must do: embedding research within a framework of stakeholder engagement.

Guided by the policy objectives of EDCOM 2, the PEJA papers not only tackle the complex issues in education, but also show stakeholders – the state, civil society, and the teachers themselves – how we can tackle them. For all our efforts in improving education in the Philippines, what else can and should we do?

Many thanks to the PEJA fellows for their valuable contribution, and to the UP CIDS Higher Education Research Program for shepherding this important undertaking. With collaboration, great things do happen.

Rosalie A. Hall, PhD
Executive Director
UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

From the Convenor of UP CIDS-HERPRP

We at the Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program serve as a convening body that builds partnerships and networks that pursue a shared research agenda and build an evidence basis for policy. Our activities include fellowships for scholars who publish with us and consultancies for junior researchers who wish to begin a career in higher education studies. We maintain databases, conduct events, and publish various manuscripts on higher education.

For 2024, our full attention was devoted to the UP PEJA Fellowship Program, serving as a secretariat for the researchers who studied higher education as it intersected with government and finance, industry and agriculture, regulation and tuition and technical and vocational education, training and lifelong learning, the UP PEJA Program awards grants for pioneering work on a wide range of topics that address national development concerns. This was the very first time that the program focused on a singular topic. This demonstrates the commitment of the University of the Philippines to higher education.

With the support of the UP Foundation, we have assembled what we have been calling the *Avengers* of Philippine education. They are preeminent scholars whose findings and recommendations directly address key policy concerns. Their papers at once draw from empirical data as well as their professional expertise for which they have been identified as a UP PEJA fellow.

Fernando dlC. Paragas, PhD

Convenor
Higher Education Research and Policy Program
UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Letter from the Executive Director of EDCOM II

The **Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II)** is collaborating with scholars across various institutions to provide valuable insights for the development of evidence-based policies that address the unique challenges and opportunities in the Philippine education landscape.

Our commitment to excellence, integrity, and ethical conduct in advancing research and disseminating knowledge, which we share with our research partners, is defined by the following principles:

The Commission is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of academic rigor in the evaluation, review, and dissemination of research publications. Our pledge is to ensure the integrity and quality of the knowledge we contribute to the scholarly community.

The Commission is committed to fostering transparency and data integrity in all aspects of research. This includes transparent communication, disclosure of methodologies and data sources, and providing clear guidelines to authors, reviewers, and the broader academic community.

The Commission promotes ethical research conduct, emphasizing the responsible and respectful treatment of research participants.

The Commission places a strong emphasis on accessibility. We are committed to facilitating the translation of research findings into accessible formats in order to engage the broader public, taking into account ethical and legal considerations. Our goal is to promote public understanding and awareness of scientific advancements.

In adherence to these principles, the members of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) pledge to be stewards of good scholarly research for a better, more inclusive educational system for the Filipino people.

Karol Mark R. Yee, PhD
EDCOM II Executive Director

Declaration of Funding

Declaration of Interest

None

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> *"That time, medyo di pa ako sure kung anong iti-take ko. To play safe, I chose na aralin iyong general academic...noong college lang ako na-introduce sa vocational."*

> Mark, 20 years old, incoming 4th-year Antipolo Institute of Technology, on why he chose the academic track during SHS

Introduction

"Learning to Realize Education's Promise" (World Bank 2018) is the first global report to systematically build on the notion that the world is facing a learning crisis. One of the conclusions is that "the learning crisis is often hidden-but measurement makes it visible" (91). Before that, the "Global Education Monitoring Report 2017" made a case for understanding learning outcomes and assessment. A few years later, the term "learning poverty" was introduced as a concept to "galvanize action" on the learning crisis where learning poverty is used to refer to the inability "to read and understand a short, age-appropriate text by age 10" (World Bank 2022, under "What is learning poverty?). After COVID-19, there were other terms, such as learning loss and learning recovery. For 2022, UNESCO and World Bank reported that the Philippines had a learning poverty rate of 91 percent.

The Philippine government was not pleased to know that 90 percent of ten-year old Filipino children are unable to read and understand simple text. To make matters worse,

the country was second to the last in the ranking of ASEAN countries. Presently, its leaders are prioritizing efforts to address learning poverty and learning recovery. However, does the Philippines, or the world for that matter, have a learning crisis, or should one use the more appropriate term "literacy crisis," given the current focus on reading comprehension by age 10? In the 1990s, governments and educators were already lamenting that children could not read, understand, and write. Learning is both a process and an outcome. Reducing the crisis to an outcome in reading simplifies a complex interplay of individual and group learning processes, and the systemic factors that facilitate it. In the words of one of the key education thinkers in the world today:

> Intelligence that is fragmented, compartmentalized, mechanistic, disjunctive, and reductionistic breaks the complexity of the world into disjointed pieces, splits up problems, separates that which is linked together, and renders unidimensional the multidimensional [...] As Aurelio Peccei and Daisaku Ikado have put it: "the reductionist approach, which consists of relying on a single series of factors to regulate the totality of problems associated with the multiform crisis we are currently in the middle of, is less a solution than the problem itself (Morin and Kern 1999, 128)

It is in this global context that this research has been undertaken. While learning is natural to people the moment they are born, certain institutions tell us that we face a learning crisis, which could be addressed if we measure learning outcomes. This narrative of a "learning crisis and learning poverty" shapes governments' strategies and leads them to follow global institutions' advice. By posing the problem as a global issue that needs to be urgently addressed, such institutions unwittingly prevent the governments and other stakeholders from understanding what are key development and education factors that shape learning and the access of its population throughout their life. One can ask: is this being done at the expense of a collective national reflection on the relationship of schooling, education, and learning as part of decades-long development crises? Learning from cradle to grave allows us to survive and live together as humans. Lifelong learning is intrinsically part of every person's development. When the Philippine government is confronted with the dismal data on learning poverty (and from which the learning crisis is extrapolated), how does it unpack the problem to make sure that learning challenges are not focused on the performance of 10 year old school children but are instead treated in a more holistic way, covering pre-school children until adults (not to forget senior citizens) and to consider all forms of learning - from formal, non-formal and informal.

Since the 1920s, the principle of lifelong learning as a concept that guides education and training has been the object of study, discussion, policy appropriation, and diffusion.

The paper begins with a macro analysis of the global discourses on lifelong learning and proceeds to meso-level examples of countries´ implementation of lifelong learning. It completes the framework with the micro-level stories of individual learners.

The paper is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, Lifelong Learning: A History of Contestation and Resignification, traces the evolution of the concept of lifelong education to lifelong learning, diverging interpretations, and its implications for policies. The second chapter, Operationalizing Lifelong Learning: Lessons from Singapore and South Korea, highlights the two countries' implementation of lifelong learning. Chapter three, Lifelong Learning Policies, Plans, and Programs in the Philippines, describes the actual plans and programs in the country related to lifelong learning, while the fourth chapter, Philippine Qualification Framework as one of the Levers of Lifelong Learning, focuses on the evolving Philippines Qualification Framework, and lessons that could be learned from differing Qualification Frameworks all over the world. The fifth chapter, Understanding Learning Pathways through the Eyes of Learners, details insights from interviews with 13 learners, and presents the Antipolo Institute of Technology (AiTECH) as an exemplary institution that facilitates movement of students across learning pathways. The concluding chapter brings together recommendations from the five chapters.

This research is primarily based on a review and analysis of documents (e.g., research reports, journal articles, and government publications) on lifelong learning at the global, regional, and national levels. As learners are the center of lifelong learning, interviews with 13 learners were conducted to understand the notion of learning pathways. This exploratory portion seeks to demonstrate how learning biographies could be crucial data sources on how individuals navigate the uneven path to learning.

Chapter 1
Lifelong Learning
A History of Contestation and Resignification

> *"....parang naging practical din lang lang ako...after 4 years ka lang magkaka-trabaho samantalang dito after one year lang, more on training, magkaka-trabaho kaagad"*

> Learner from TESDA, on why he chose to go into TVET training over college did not go to college and instead went to TVET training

Learning throughout life is a principle that is valued and practiced in all societies. The purposes of lifelong learning—individual growth, community strength, continuation of culture, and development of humanity—have been handed down from one generation to another and have therefore been taken for granted. Throughout the world, indigenous populations have been teaching us about the critical role their learning systems played in ensuring their survival and its importance in the transfer of knowledge from their ancestors.

Ten years ago, lifelong learning became one of the globally-discussed themes in education and development. For the first time in 2015, lifelong learning was enshrined as an element in one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), namely   SDG 4 which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. Consequently, governments developed policies, plans, strategies, and monitoring and evaluation systems to meet this objective. Given this, it is crucial to revisit the history of lifelong learning to better understand the different contexts that led to this global goal.

In 2000, governments in Europe decided to position lifelong learning at the core of its education and training policy through its Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. The said memorandum defined lifelong learning as "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence" (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p.3). This was an essential approach to the Council of Europe´s Lisbon Strategy, which aimed to turn the European Union (EU) into "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion"

by 2010 (Eurofound 2007, paragraph 1). As indicated in the memorandum, the two equally important objectives of lifelong learning were 1) the promotion of active citizenship, and 2) the promotion of vocational skills to allow full participation in social and economic life, and to adapt to the demands of the new knowledge-based society. For lifelong learning to be realized, the memorandum elucidated six key messages and their corresponding objectives for debate among its Member States:

- Key Message 1: New basic skills for all (Objective: Guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society);

- Key Message 2: More investment in human resources (Objective: Visibly raise levels of investment in human resources to place priority on Europe's most important asset—its people);

- Key Message 3: Innovation in teaching and learning (Objective: Develop effective teaching and learning methods and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning);

- Key Message 4: Valuing learning (Objective: Significantly improve how learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly non-formal and informal learning);

- Key Message 5: Rethinking guidance and counseling (Objective: Ensure that everyone can easily access good quality information and advice about learning opportunities throughout Europe and throughout their lives) and;

- Key Message 6: Bringing learning closer to home (Objective: Provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible, in their communities and supported through ICT-based facilities wherever appropriate).

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning was a landmark policy document that charted the path of the European Council with education and training; the Council's education agenda continued to be reviewed, monitored, evaluated, and adjusted after 2010. It also influenced education and training discourses in other regions of the world. Such detailed treatment of what constitutes lifelong learning starkly contrasts with the notion of lifelong learning deliberated eighty years ago.

Lifelong education (instead of lifelong learning) was first systematically discussed in academic circles in connection to adult education (Centeno 2011). Edward Lindeman,

influenced by his friend John Dewey's work, considered education a lifelong process and argued that adult education must be grounded on a "learner´s living textbook" (Lindeman 1926, 10). Three years later, Basil Yeaxlee´s Lifelong Education (1929) presented the initial effort "to combine the whole of the educational enterprise under a set of guiding principles with each phase or agency (formal, informal and non-formal) enjoying equal esteem" (Cross-Durrant 2001, 32). A British church minister, Yeaxlee did his doctorate thesis on Spiritual Values on Adult Education in 1925, and was also a member of the national committee who produced a comprehensive report on Adult Education in the country in 1919. Given the early work of Lindeman, Yeaxlee, and the scholars that followed, Centeno (2011) points out that "education across the lifespan was initially an educational and pedagogical conception aimed at adults. Lifelong education was gradually developed in the field of adult/ popular education, and thus outside the institutionalized school system" (136).

Through the years, different individuals and the institutions they were associated with promoted related concepts like education permanénte (a French term not directly translated to permanent education), permanent education, and recurring education. As dissatisfaction with the formal education system grew in the 1960s, a wave of protests in Europe were mounted, with students decrying the authoritarian processes of schools, and their inability to address social problems. This provided the context for a more inclusive discourse, transforming lifelong education into a concept that spans across one's lifespan (Medel-Anonuevo, 2006). Paul Lengrand, who used to head the Adult Education Division of the Education Sector of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), presented the report "An Introduction to Lifelong Learning" to UNESCO in 1970. This report prompted the establishment of an expert committee, known as the International Commission on the Development of Education, to conduct an in-depth study on the state of education. Chaired by Edgar Faure, the International Commission on the Development of Education made public their findings through their report "Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow" (1972).

Commonly referred to as the Faure Report, it emphasized the fundamental right and importance of lifelong learning for each individual by highlighting its role in fostering social, economic, political, and cultural development. The report also outlined key principles that underpin lifelong learning:

> Every individual must be able to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society. The lifelong concept covers all aspects of education, embracing everything in it, with the whole being more than the sum of its parts. There is no such thing as a separate "permanent"

part of education which is not lifelong. In other words, lifelong education is not an educational system but the principle in which the over-all organization of a system is founded, and which accordingly underlies the development of each of its component parts

We propose lifelong education as the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries. (International Commission on the Development of Education 1972, 181-182)

A year later, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released "Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning," which focused on how learning could respond to the market's demands, and how individuals could compete with their newly acquired learning (OECD 1973). Given that the publication was work-oriented, this concept of recurrent education was more associated with post-compulsory education and training. This perspective signaled a shift in the discourse on lifelong learning toward a predominantly economic and employability-focused approach. Organizations such as the OECD and later the World Bank championed this market-oriented view, contrasting with UNESCO's broader and more inclusive approach (Medel-Anonuevo 2006).

Other voices joined the discussion, and one of the more well-known works, "No Limits to Learning: Bridging the Human Gap. A Report to the Club of Rome," (1979) envisioned a society where individuals actively engaged in their community's development through critical analysis and learning—a vision closely aligned with the principles outlined in the Faure Report (Medel-Anonuevo 2006).

To understand the 1970s discourse of lifelong learning, it is instructive to review the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE)'s 1975 series of monographs, which aimed to define and implement lifelong education in practice. One of them provides a detailed list of its defining characteristics (refer to Box 1).

BOX 1. WHAT IS LIFELONG EDUCATION? (DAVE ET AL. 1975, 55-56)

a. education does not terminate at the end of formal schooling, but it is a lifelong process;

b. lifelong education is not confined to adult education, but it encompasses and unifies all stages of education—pre-primary, primary, secondary, and so forth, thus it seeks to view education in its totality;

c. lifelong education includes formal education, non-formal education, and informal patterns of education;

d. the community also plays an important role in the system of lifelong education right from the time the child begins to interact with it and continues its educative function both in professional and general areas throughout life;

e. the institutions of education, like schools, universities, and training centers, are of course, important, but only as one of the agencies for lifelong education. They no longer enjoy the monopoly of educating the people and can no longer exist in isolation from other educative agencies in society;

f. lifelong education seeks continuity and articulation along its vertical or longitudinal dimension (vertical articulation);

g. lifelong education also seeks integration at its horizontal and depth dimensions at every stage in life (horizontal integration);

h. contrary to the elitist form of education, lifelong education is universal in character. It represents the democratization of education;

i. lifelong education is characterized by its flexibility and diversity in content, learning tools and techniques, and time of learning;

j. the ultimate goal of lifelong education is to maintain and improve the quality of life; and

k. there are three major prerequisites for lifelong education, namely, opportunity, motivation, and educability.

Discussions around lifelong education failed to gain traction in the 1970s for several reasons. Critics argued that UNESCO's vision was overly idealistic and unattainable. Economic recessions and reductions in public spending during the mid-1970s further hindered the OECD's work-oriented perspective, which failed to expand opportunities for vocational or workplace learning. As a result, lifelong education saw limited attention and debate for many years. It was not until the 1990s that the discourse on lifelong learning re-emerged, shaped by a context vastly different from that of the 1970s.

In the 1990s, the focus shifted from "education" to "learning," marking both a semantic and substantive evolution in the concept. Lifelong education, as envisioned in the Faure Report, emphasized comprehensive goals, such as fostering humane individuals and communities amidst rapid social changes. Conversely, the dominant interpretation of lifelong learning in the 1990s, particularly in Europe, was centered on workforce retraining and skill development to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market. This approach, often summarized by the slogan "learning to earn," reflected an increasingly individualistic orientation. While lifelong learning emphasized personal agency and self-direction, it also aligned with efforts by welfare states to shift responsibility for economic opportunities away from institutional structures toward individuals. The economic crises and high unemployment rates of the era further fueled this transition.

For countries in the Global South, the shift from lifelong education to lifelong learning posed significant challenges. Faced with large populations lacking access to education, governments focused on increasing enrollment rather than addressing diverse learning needs. Centralized education systems and traditionally teacher-centered practices made adapting to more flexible, learner-directed approaches particularly difficult. Meanwhile, the global educational agenda shifted with the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA), which prioritized universal access to basic education. This led to a perceived divide: lifelong learning became a focus for countries in the Global North, while EFA dominated in the Global South.

In 1996, UNESCO reignited the conversation on lifelong learning with the publication of Learning: The Treasure Within (commonly known as the Delors Report). This report acknowledged the economic significance of lifelong learning while advocating for its broader societal role. However, tensions remained between the market-driven and holistic approaches to lifelong learning, highlighting ongoing challenges in balancing individual and structural responsibilities in education:

> A key to the twenty-first century, learning throughout life will be essential for adapting to the evolving requirements of the labor market and for better mastery of the changing timeframes and rhythms of individual existence (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century 1996, 100)

At the same time, it expanded upon the holistic vision of its predecessor, the Faure Report, by introducing three additional pillars alongside Faure's learning to be, to do, to know, and living together.

**BOX 2. ROLE OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY
ACCORDING TO THE DELORS REPORT**

Emanating from the rapidly changing globalized economic, social, political, and cultural milieu, this latest interpretation of lifelong learning sought to bring together the multiple reasons for the demand for learning on the eve of the 21st century and argues:

■ "... rethink and update the concept of lifelong learning to reconcile three forces: competition, which provides incentives; cooperation, which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites ..." (18)

■ "... not only must it adapt to changes like work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole beings - their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and ability to act." (21)

Written in the wake of the 1990 Jomtien World Conference, the Delors Report acknowledged the Education for All (EFA) discourse and clarified its connection to lifelong learning. While affirming the importance of addressing the basic learning needs of every individual—children, youth, and adults alike—it also issued a cautionary note that:

> any tendency to view basic education as a kind of emergency educational package for poor people and for poor countries, in our view, be an error. The broad definition of the function of basic education is not only applicable to all societies but should lead to a review of educational practices and policies at the initial level in all countries. What the world community endorsed at Jomtien was the universal provision of an education worthy of all, an education that provides both a solid basis for future learning and the essential skills for living a constructive life within society. The fact that much education, in both industrialized and developing countries, falls far short of that standard does not suggest that we should settle for less, but rather we should strive for more (119-120)

Advocating for a broad and inclusive interpretation of the EFA agenda, the Delors Report highlights that:

> Formal education systems tend to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other types of learning, but it is vital now to conceive education in a more encompassing fashion. Such a vision should inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation both to contents and to its methods (97).

The discourse on lifelong learning gained greater traction in the 1990s, particularly within the EU, due to its ability to blend economic and humanistic perspectives. In contrast, the EFA agenda, which prioritized universal primary education, made the concept of lifelong learning seem less aligned with the realities of many countries in the Global South. Despite the enriched framework provided by the four pillars of the Delors Report, the focus on primary education in these countries limited the coherence and adoption of lifelong learning policies.

In Europe, the groundwork for lifelong learning had already been established even before the Delors Report, with the publication of key documents such as the 1991 Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community, the 1991 Memorandum on Open Distance Learning in the European Community, and the 1995 European Commission White Paper Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society. These texts laid the foundation for a comprehensive strategy to integrate lifelong learning into the region's development goals. By 2000, the EU's Lisbon Strategy set a target for the region to become the most competitive knowledge-based society globally by 2010, emphasizing lifelong learning as a cornerstone. Although this vision was largely articulated in economic terms, it also emphasized personal development and the empowerment of individuals to exercise their rights as citizens. This broad and inclusive interpretation made it easier for EU member states, regardless of their governments' political leanings, to incorporate lifelong learning into their education and training policies.

However, this was not the case for other regions. Apart from exceptions like China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, South Africa, and Namibia, lifelong learning as a central policy discourse did not gain comparable attention outside Europe. One reason for this was the dominance of the EFA agenda, particularly its emphasis on universal primary education, which led many countries to overlook the broader and more integrated nature of lifelong learning. Another challenge was the variety of terms associated with lifelong learning—such as recurrent education, permanent education, continuing education, and adult education—which made it difficult to determine which nations had fully embraced its principles.

Furthermore, while the vision of lifelong learning resonated with many countries globally, its implementation often lacked coherence. In many cases, only select aspects of lifelong learning were adopted, leading to fragmented approaches rather than the comprehensive application of its principles (Medel-Anonuevo, 2006). This inconsistency highlights the varying levels of commitment to and understanding of lifelong learning across regions.

Ultimately, the inherent complexity and multifaceted nature of lifelong learning make it difficult to address both conceptually and practically—a challenge that was recognized even in the early stages of the discourse:

> "… it is often difficult to conceptualize lifelong education in its entirety on account of its comprehensiveness and multiple modalities." (Dave 1976, 35)

From a more political and ideological perspective, the two competing lifelong learning models are the neo-liberal, human capital-oriented model (argued to be more dominant and powerful) and the humanistic and holistic model (associated with UNESCO). Critics have pointed out that the European Commission's policies on lifelong learning resonate with the first and are aligned with OECD and World Bank imperatives focused on economic objectives and global market competitiveness. Rubenson (2006) presents a nuanced analysis by describing three generations of lifelong learning policy: the first generation came from a model of the seventies aimed at fostering a better society and enhancing quality of life while empowering individuals to both adapt to and shape change (Lengrand, 1972; Dave, 1976). Promoted particularly by UNESCO, this concept emphasized personal development, encouraging individuals to actively "create themselves" rather than passively "be created." The second generation, which was more defined in the eighties, "was framed within a politico-economic imperative that emphasized the importance of science and technology, as well as highly-developed human capital" (Rubenson 2006, 329). Rubenson argues that while the first generation viewed education as a means to empower individuals to adapt to and influence change, the second generation framed learning as a tool for individuals to conform to a society shaped without their participation. Meanwhile, the third generation advocated a 'softened' economistic version which emerged from a critique of the second generation with its neglect for social issues. This means this third generation goes beyond the human capital approach and integrates social cohesion and civic participation issues.

After almost a hundred years of systematic discourse on lifelong learning, it is evident that the concept has evolved, largely shaped by the social, economic, and political contexts. Since the seventies, the term has been contested. It has been assigned diverse meanings depending on its ideological slant, and in the end, it has resulted in the resignification of the term fifty years later. With the endorsement of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning by the European Council in 2000 and its systematic operationalization in the region, lifelong learning was guaranteed a captive audience in many parts of the world. Given the European Union´s political and ideological powers, it is unsurprising that the more dominant model being followed in many countries is the economistic rationale for lifelong learning.

This seems to be the case in the Philippines, as two papers that have systematically described lifelong learning frameworks in the country (Macaranas 2007; Vea 2021) have focused on jobs and skills. Macaranas cites the ILO definition of lifelong learning (LLL) as "learning activities undertaken throughout life for the development of competencies and qualifications" and therefore relates more to the labour issues of ILO. Meanwhile, Vea focused on the kind of skills needed given the fast-changing technology. Since both authors address the need for continuing education and training for upskilling and reskilling, their frameworks are limited to employment generation. Moreover, this is not consistent with the definition of lifelong learning provided in the 2019 Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Philippines Qualification Framework (PQF) Act, which defines lifelong learning as "all learning activities, whether formal, non-formal, or informal, undertaken throughout life that improve knowledge, know-how, skills, competencies, and/or qualifications for personal, social, and/or professional reasons."

Conclusion

A general understanding of the importance and benefits of learning throughout life must be distinguished from a more structured framework aimed at shaping education and training systems to respond to social, cultural, and economic transformations.

First introduced as a policy discourse five decades ago, lifelong learning has, like any other significant concept, been subject to debate and diverse interpretations. Over time, it has been redefined and adapted in various ways by different stakeholders, reflecting a range of priorities and perspectives.

The European Council's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning of 2000 paved the way for adopting lifelong learning as a "master concept" for the European Union's (EU) educational policies. As several dimensions of the concept were operationalized with the appropriate technical and financial resources, the EU could demonstrate the power of such a concept. Other governments watched as policies were put in place and tools were developed. Due to the EU's convening and influencing power, the economistic perspective of lifelong learning became the dominant discourse in many parts of the world. While the SDG4—which was agreed upon by all governments in 2015—has provided a broader interpretation through its ten targets, the notion of lifelong learning as a master concept for educational policies is not thoroughly appreciated; the targets and their indicators are packaged as different stand-alone elements that are not readily understood to be interconnected to a comprehensive and holistic perspective on education.

In the case of the Philippines, there are still differences in the definition of lifelong learning among government agencies and, consequently, their implementation of its basic

principles. As official documents set the tone for what constitutes lifelong learning, the government needs to define lifelong learning consistently. It is therefore recommended that sector-wide discussions be organized where agencies' definitions and practices are shared, compared, and juxtaposed with the broader purposes and other features of lifelong learning. One could also relate this to the Filipino terms associated with learning, and how they are embedded in the culture of different ethnic groups in the country. A good anchor for the discussion is the country's performance on SDG4. These small measures could broaden our understanding of the purposes of lifelong learning and, consequently, improve our frameworks to be more inclusive.

Chapter 2
Operationalizing Lifelong Learning
Lessons from Singapore and South Korea

"Kakagraduate ko lang ng college and kakatapos ko lang ng review para sa license, nagtake po ako ng training on English proficiency para ma-improve iyong chances ko sa paghahanap ng trabaho."

Learner, on why he is taking English proficiency for customer service training in TESDA

Lifelong Learning Vision: The Case of Singapore

In 1997, Singapore's Ministry of Education announced its vision of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" (TSLN). This vision elucidates a nation of thinking, committed citizens, and an education system that can adapt to the 21st century. According to then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, TSLN "is a vision for a total learning environment, including students, teachers, parents, workers, companies, community organizations, and government" (Goh 1997, as cited in Yek and Penney 2011, 6-7).

> Thinking Schools will be learning organizations in every sense, constantly challenging assumptions and seeking better ways of doing things through participation, creativity, and innovation. Thinking Schools will be the cradle of thinking students as well as thinking adults. This spirit of learning should accompany our students throughout their lives, even after they have graduated from the system.
>
> A Learning Nation envisions a national culture and social environment that promotes lifelong learning in our people. The capacity of Singaporeans to continually learn, both for professional development and for personal enrichment, will determine our collective success as a society and nation (Ministry of Education (Singapore) n.d., under "Our Vision").

To achieve this vision, the Ministry of Education reviewed its curriculum and assessment system, which covered student learning styles, teacher pedagogy, and approaches to assessment.

Learning as a national culture was promoted so that Singaporeans could "embark on a continuous learning journey for professional development and personal enrichment" (Norruddin 2018, under "Learning nation"). The role of teachers was redefined to ensure that schools became learning organizations, and schools were granted greater autonomy so that teachers and principals could develop more creative and effective teaching methods.

Education policies were launched to support the TSLN. Four areas were included in school policies: infrastructure of the education system, curricula and assessment, training and development, and school environments. School programs were also introduced to nurture niche areas of excellence and distinctive learning models. For example, the School Excellence Model (SEM), implemented in 2000, focused on leadership, staff management, and strategic planning.

The "Teach Less, Learn More" (TLLM) initiative was launched in 2005 to improve the quality of teaching and enhance student learning. A year later, the General Certification on Education A level subject, Knowledge and Inquiry, was introduced to teach critical thinking skills and nurture values required to thrive in a globalized, innovation-driven future.

At the same time, measures were put in place to continuously retrain Singaporeans so each person could engage in learning and self-improvement. Mechanisms like the Skills Development Fund and Lifelong Learning Endowment Fund were created to enable such training.

The vision also reinforced pre-existing initiatives that support a total learning environment, such as the Masterplan for Information Technology (IT), which provided the blueprint for using IT-rich learning and teaching in schools.

How successful has TSLN been? Ten years after its introduction, a dissertation examined how the critical thinking policy thrust has been implemented. According to Ab Kadir (2009), several "interrelated systemic and contextual factors which are predisposed by underlying 'technocratic and instrumental rationalities' that govern Singaporean education, remain major barriers to the realization of TSLN's critical thinking thrust" (i). He identified significant gaps and limitations in teachers' understanding of critical thinking, noting that its integration into their teaching practices remains minimal and underdeveloped.

His interview with students revealed that factors like high-stakes examination perpetuate didactic pedagogies and rote learning. Ab Kadir concludes that,

> To effect deep change and realize the core aspiration of "thinking learners", there must not only be restructuring; reculturing also needs to occur across and beyond the educational system. Importantly, such changes need to be primarily informed by the reconceptualization of teachers—from mere "technicians" to "transformative intellectuals"—and teachers' work—from "technical work" to "intellectual work." It is also vital that teachers entrusted with developing "thinking learners" under TSLN teach curricula and work in school contexts that explicitly encourage, value, and reward critical thinking (i-ii),

A workshop report composed of presentations from six experts reviewing 20 years of implementation of TSLN admits that change is still ongoing, given the massive reform that it entailed (The HEAD Foundation 2018). In the same report, Kennedy (2018) points out that this is not just a "tinkering" of the system but instead involves "mind shifts" or paradigm changes. Gopinathan (2018) argues that many old pedagogical approaches have been replaced, but the traditional routines have not been wholly erased:

> Extensive research data from NIE's Office of Education Research shows that teachers' attempts to navigate between the reform's objectives—which they say they share— and the realities of a competitive system in which examination success is still highly regarded puts a ceiling on the amount of innovative pedagogy that a teacher and a school can embrace. It would appear that a "hybrid pedagogy" is what exists now, and the desired pedagogic transformation is still a work in progress (26).

Based on a ten-year study on TSLN, Kwek (2018) identified a lingering mismatch between the vision and reality of decades of traditional values on education and learning. Nevertheless, Kwek provides some thoughts on possible directions:

> [...] schools and teachers must have more autonomy, capacities, resources, and time to design authentic learning tasks for their own students, including enhanced abilities for curriculum and assessment design.

> There is also a need to understand student learning not just from within the classrooms and individual subject domains but outside the classroom—in co-curricular activities, school-based applied learning, and lifelong learning programmes, and even outside of schools where forms of informal learning occur at

> home, among peers, and in communities. This will allow for a deeper understanding of the impact of schooling and education (56-57).

Lifelong Learning Policy/Law: The Case of South Korea

In 2009, the Republic of Korea (ROK) enacted the Lifelong Education Act. Under Article 1, "lifelong education" covers "all types of systematic educational activities other than regular school curriculums, including supplementary education to upgrade educational attainment, literacy education for adults, occupational education for ability enhancement, humanities, and liberal education, culture and art education, and citizen participation education."

This legislation mandates the Ministry of Education to formulate a comprehensive plan for promoting lifelong education every five years. The national plan outlines medium- and long-term policy goals, as well as the overarching strategies for advancing lifelong education initiatives. Five plans have been developed since 2009, creating the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) and 17 local Lifelong Education Institutions.

**BOX 3. LIFELONG EDUCATION PROMOTION PLAN
(MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (KOREA) 2023)**

	FIRST (2002-2006)	SECOND (2008-2012)	THIRD (2013-2017)	FOURTH (2018-2022)	FIFTH (2023-2027)
Vision	Enjoyment of learning, joy of sharing, the realization of acknowledgeable learning society	Enjoyment of learning, cultivating tomorrow, the actualization of co-living lifelong learning society	The realization of people's happiness through creative lifelong learning in the era of the Homo Hundred	The realization of a sustainable lifelong learning society in which individuals and society grow together	Opportunity for anyone to leap anew, a lifelong learning society that everyone enjoys
Key Points	Region, social integration, adult education, building infrastructure	Creative learners, social integration	Higher education institutions, online, social integration, region	Anyone, jobs, locally based	Sustainability, opportunity, connection

The Act also provides for the establishment of a Lifelong Education Promotion Committee. According to the OECD (2020):

> This committee is chaired by the Minister of Education, who invites a range of vice ministers from different ministries, such as the Vice Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, the Vice Minister for Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs, the Vice Minister of Environment, and the Vice Minister of Labour. Lifelong learning experts from academia are also members of the committee (86).

The NILE was established as part of the governance of lifelong learning. Among its tasks are 1) the development and implementation of national lifelong education policies and 2) the provision of support to the Ministry of Education in drafting lifelong learning strategies and programs. In addition, NILE develops and manages the Lifelong Learning Educators program. This training program imparts knowledge on the governance of lifelong learning while enhancing the managerial skills of professionals in the field (OECD 2020). NILE also organizes a central national lifelong learning advocacy event: the Lifelong Learning EXPO/ learning festival. Every two years, cities vie for the opportunity to host the Expo, with NILE determining the winning city. The Expo serves as a platform for cities, regions, and educational institutions to highlight their accomplishments in promoting lifelong learning (OECD 2020).

Another governance mechanism provided in the Act is the establishment of a Lifelong Learning Promotion Centre in each of South Korea's 17 provinces. Funded by the provincial governments, the Centre develops lifelong learning programs, offers courses, and conducts research on lifelong learning in their province. This is part of the comprehensive governance structure for lifelong learning, which emphasizes local planning and implementation.

While South Korea's lifelong education can be classified into six areas (i.e., supplementary schooling, adult literacy education, vocational education, liberal arts/culture/arts education, and civic participation education), they are divided into two pillars (the civic/life enrichment and the employment-related skills) and governed by two different Ministries. The first pillar is under the Ministry of Education, and covers courses that are not immediately relevant for employment but cater to citizens' personal development and enjoyment. These include activities such as calligraphy, languages, baking, and handicrafts. People participate in these programs as they have been deprived of such learning opportunities when they were younger, primarily due to the country's economic difficulties in the sixties. The Lifelong Education Act serves as the legal basis of this pillar. In contrast, the second pillar is under the Ministry of Employment and Labour, and is governed by labor laws. The courses are provided by polytechnic universities that focus on employment-related skills.

Since the introduction of the self-study degree system in 1990, the government has consistently worked to promote lifelong education by implementing various supportive measures, including the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS) and the Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-Education System (BDES). To enhance accessibility, the government introduced flexible systems like the Accounts for Lifelong Learning (ALL) in 2006. In 2018, the Lifelong Education Voucher System was established to assist individuals from low-income and vulnerable backgrounds, ensuring they can continue their education without interruption. Figures 1 and 2 show the coverage and outcomes of the Academic Credit Bank System.

FIGURE 1. YEARLY ENROLLMENT OF ACBS (1998-2021)
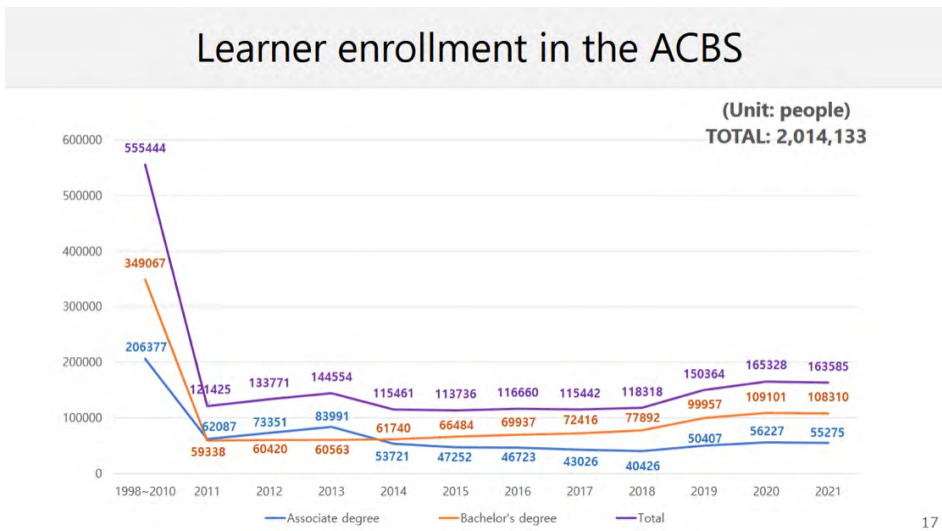
FIGURE 2. ACBS RECIPIENTS ACCORDING TO AGE (2021)
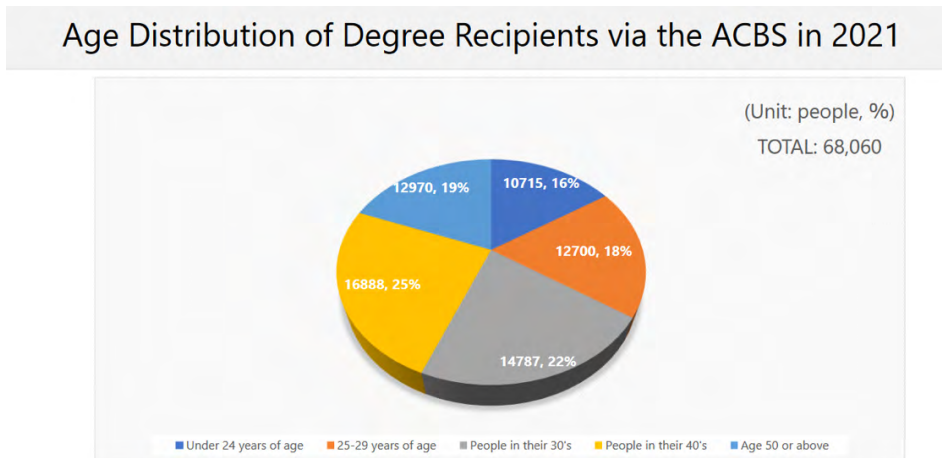
Source: Ministry of Education and National Institute for Lifelong Education (2022). 2021 White Paper on Lifelong Education, p.171

To promote lifelong education, the Bachelor´s Degree Examination for Self-Education System (BDES) provides learners with a detailed pathway towards attaining a bachelor's degree (as detailed in Figure 3). Figure 4 shows how many learners have received their degrees through the BDES modality since 1992.

FIGURE 3. LEARNING PATHWAY FOR BDES
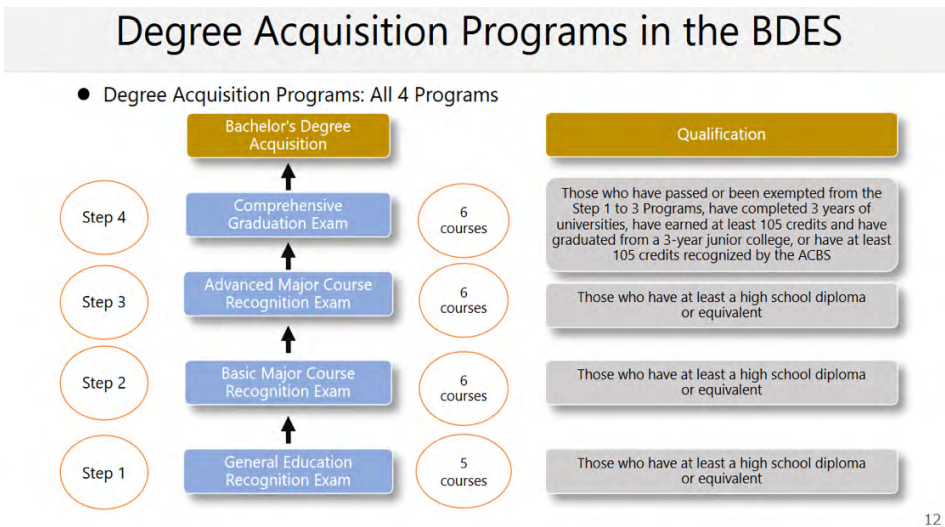
FIGURE 4. DEGREE RECIPIENTS OF BDES (1992-2021)
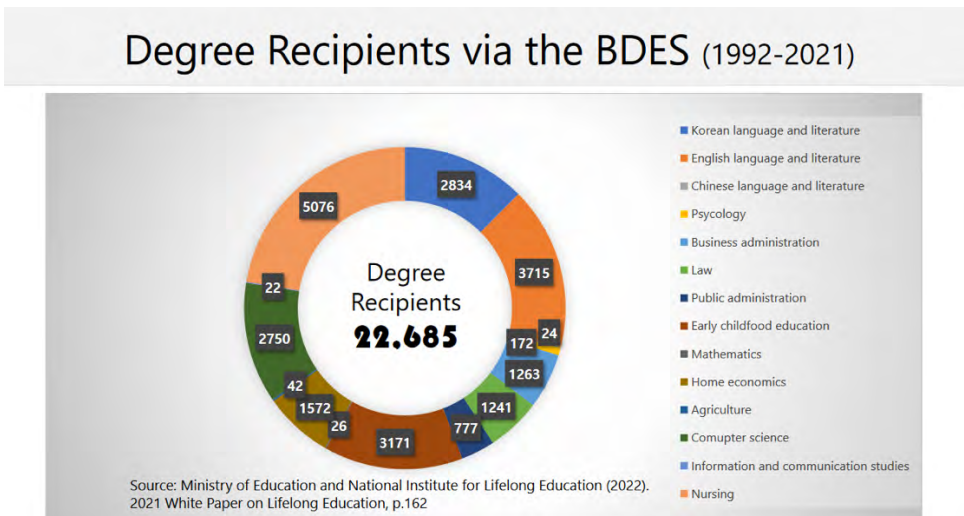
Continuous training to improve workers' vocational skills under the second pillar is funded by employment insurance; Employers and employees contribute to the insurance

fund, with employers contributing between 0.9 percent and 1.5 percent (depending on the company size) and employees contributing 0.65 percent of their wages. As noted by the OECD (2020):

> The employment-relevant lifelong learning system is supported through the Tomorrow Learning Card, which represents an individual lifelong learning voucher worth up to KRW 2 million (Korean won) (about EUR 1,500) per year, and up to KRW 3 million (about EUR 2 200) for three years. Every employee covered by employment insurance, as well as unemployed persons, employees whose contract will end soon, or temporary workers, can apply for the Tomorrow Learning Card (88).

While the Republic of South Korea has made significant progress in lifelong learning, with participation rates steadily rising from 26.4 percent of the population engaging in some form of lifelong learning program in 2008 to 35.8 percent in 2017., one of the main challenges is the vast difference in participation depending on income and educational background. Even as the Act provides funding, there are gaps in investment for lifelong education within local governments.

Given the differences in participation, the Fourth National Plan has emphasized lifelong learning for every citizen by:

> Guaranteeing the right to lifelong learning for employees and promoting the training of adult educators and lifelong learning instructors.

> Expanding educational opportunities to all citizens who wish to develop their literacy skills; and

> Promoting practical lifelong learning opportunities for the underprivileged and disabled through a voucher scheme that reduces costs to learners (UNESCO 2023, under "Main targets and measures").

Conclusion

The cases of Singapore and South Korea demonstrate how each country has operationalized the principles of Lifelong Learning comprehensively. Singapore has developed the Thinking Schools and Learning Nations as its vision for Lifelong Learning. Meanwhile, South Korea has enacted its Lifelong Education Act, which provides a legal basis for many

of the reforms it has undertaken since 2009. Moreover, in the case of South Korea, there has been a Lifelong Education Plan every five years since 2002. Each case has its merit and needs to be understood in the context of each country's development plan, as well as the state of its education system. In both countries, the laws were matched with appropriate funding and a straightforward implementation structure.

There are pending bills on Lifelong Learning in the Philippine Senate and Congress. As a first step, it is recommended that the Philippine draft bills be benchmarked vis-à-vis these two countries regarding their main features and accomplishments. Among the important areas to consider are: a well-articulated vision for lifelong learning, the development of 5 year plans, and a monitoring and evaluation system which will provide accurate and updated data any time. There is no systematic evaluation of these two countries' examples; hence, definite evidence could not be presented on the impact of these policies. Instead, some datasets have been given to help us understand what has been accomplished. It also points to the importance of establishing an evaluation and assessment system for future bills enacted in the Philippines.

Chapter 3
Lifelong Learning Policies, Plans, and Programs in the Philippines

"Based on my observation, tumataas talaga ang qualification sa mga companies. Pati na rin for promotion."

Learner from TESDA, on why he is considering pursuing a master's degree

According to Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines, "The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all." Furthermore, Section 4 provides that the State must "encourage non-formal, informal and Indigenous learning systems, as well as self-learning, independent, and out of school study programs particularly those that respond to community needs". Lastly, Section 5 mandates the government to "provide adult citizens, the disabled and out of school youth with training in civics, vocational efficiency, and other skills."

These provisions demonstrate that the 1987 Philippine Constitution promotes a human rights-based perspective on education, and advocates for learning throughout life with different modalities. While lifelong learning is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, the principles of lifelong learning are upheld. As such, the Constitution should be considered a critical legal framework for conceptualizing, developing, and allocating resources for a lifelong learning law or policy.

While the Philippines has no existing explicit policy on lifelong learning compared to some of its ASEAN neighbors, it should be able to develop a law on lifelong learning that is responsive to the needs of stakeholders, and appropriate to the Philippine education and training context. Since there are draft laws on lifelong learning in both the Senate and Congress, it would be instructive to look at how lifelong learning is referred to in the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plans (PDP). This will demonstrate how the notion of lifelong learning in government has evolved through the years.

The first appearance of lifelong learning in a PDP was in the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan of 2004-2010:

■ In a world where knowledge has become a crucial element for nations to prosper and compete, primacy is placed on quality and accessible lifelong learning, from early childhood development to primary, secondary, and tertiary learning (195).

■ Mathematics, Science, and English are foundation subjects for lifelong learning. These subjects are the tools for the individual's capacity to systematically analyze and share ideas and knowledge necessary for further self-development and work (203).

■ Earning a diploma does not automatically land a graduate a job. While around 300,000 students graduate with college degrees annually, there is no guarantee that they will find jobs for which they have been trained. A dynamic post-basic education and training program such as the ladderized education system may provide the avenue for continuous improvement (lifelong learning) without hampering students' academic growth, especially TVET graduates. The ladderized system will allow graduates of TVIs to pursue higher educational courses offered in colleges and universities without having to lose credit for what they have already earned or completed (224).

■ EO No. 358, issued by the President on September 15, 2004, provides the mechanism to bridge the gap between TVET education and higher education. The EO mandates TESDA and CHED to develop and implement a unified national qualifications framework in consultation with concerned sectors. This would establish a ladderized system, allowing easier transition and progression between TVET and higher education. The framework shall encompass various unified qualification and articulation mechanisms, including the following: National System of Credit Transfer, Post-TVET Bridging Programs, System of Enhanced Equivalency, Adoption of Ladderized Curricula/ Programs, Modularized Program Approach, Competency-Based Programs, Network of Dual-Sector Colleges or Universities and Accreditation of Prior Learning, among others.

According to the EO, the following activities will be implemented to institutionalize the ladderized system:

    a. "Adopt the broad framework of the Philippine National Qualifications Framework that would establish equivalency pathways and access ramps for easier access and progression between TVET and higher education;

    b. Determine/define the appropriate descriptors for TVET and higher education;

    c. Develop curricular and evaluation systems;

    d. Accelerate the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning;

    e. Develop equivalency system; and

    f. Establish the Polytechnic System" (212)

■ Articulation of learning and widening mobility among non formal basic education, TVET, and college. A system that would promote the upward academic and social mobility of both the formal education and the Alternative Learning System clientele across basic education, TVET, and higher education levels through an open learning system shall be developed. Mobility shall be facilitated through the interface between higher education programs and TVET courses and interconnecting DepEd's Accreditation and Equivalency Program with the ETEEAP, which links TESDA certification and testing with that of CHED" (220)

It is clear that for 2004-2010, where basic education, TVET, and higher education are mentioned, particular areas of lifelong learning were being prioritized.

This is in contrast to the Philippine National Development Plan of 2011-2016, which emphasized the need to:

> Make education and training truly inclusive and expand opportunities for lifelong learning through (a) better and broader provision of basic educational inputs, especially in traditionally lagging areas by using ADMs in formal education and ALS for out-of-school youth and adults; (b) maximal learning opportunities for mentally challenged individuals (e.g., autistic, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and so on) by providing special instructional services and facilities;(c) improved and safe school buildings and facilities, to ensure accessibility of PWDs and consider disaster risks; and (d) strengthened Madrasah, education of IPs, and other vulnerable groups (259).

It also refers to its accomplishments in alternative learning systems, TVET, and higher education.

There was a steady increase in the number of learners served by the DepEd and various alternative learning system (ALS) providers. From 2005 to 2009, 631,914 and 418,108 enrollees were recorded under the DepEd-delivered and DepEd-procured A programs. However, only 74 percent of these enrollees completed the DepEd-delivered and 72 percent of the DepEd-procured ALS programs"(229).

Another major accomplishment in the subsector is the institutionalization of the ladderized system between TVET and higher education through EO priority disciplines (information technology, hotel and restaurant management and tourism, engineering, health, education, maritime, agriculture, and criminology) (231-232).

As well as its challenges,

Despite its vast potential, the ALS has yet to maximize the full potential of nonschool-based learning schemes in universalizing functional literacy (231).

The Plan also refers to the Enterprise-based Education and Training Bill, which seeks to incorporate the apprenticeship chapter of the Labor Code of the Philippines and "integrate all enterprise-based training programs, including on-the-job training, apprenticeship, dual training system, and similar training modalities, under one set of coherent policies, and structure to implement and expand opportunities and venues for work-relevant education and training" (272).

It also mentions the institutionalization of the LEP, which seeks "to develop and implement a unified national qualifications framework that establishes equivalency pathways and access ramps for a ladderized system that allows easier transitions and progression between TVET and higher education" (272)

The next Philippine National Development Plan 2017-2022 is the first medium-term plan based on the 0-10 point Socioeconomic Agenda. It aligns with AmBisyon Natin 2040, which outlines the Filipino people's collective vision for a MATATAG, MAGINHAWA, AT PANATAG NA BUHAY PARA SA LAHAT. The plan also takes into account the country's international obligations, including the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Lifelong learning opportunities will be made available to all. Government will invest in soft and hard infrastructure for basic education to make the facilities more accessible and the curriculum more relevant. Quality of higher and technical education will be improved so that they produce competent and highly nimble individuals and workforce (4-7).

In this plan, reference to lifelong learning is not confined to education but also reaches the labor sector in terms of enhancing labor capacities.

> Invest in human capital development based on the transformation of jobs, facilities, processes, and future skills needs.
>
> Strengthen industry-academe linkages to help meet labor market needs and reduce future job-skills mismatches. This will also increase opportunities for lifelong learning (9-8).

It is important to note that lifelong learning is mentioned for the first time in the PDP's Strategic Framework.

- … aims to reduce inequalities in human development outcomes. In particular, it aims to improve nutrition and health for all, ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all, and increase the income-earning ability of Filipinos (10-10).

- To ensure lifelong learning opportunities, the PDP seeks to achieve quality, accessible, relevant, and liberating basic education for all and improve the quality of higher and technical education and research for equity and global competitiveness (10-13).

It is consequently referred to as Sector Outcome B: Lifelong learning opportunities for all ensured where:

- Lifelong learning will be pursued to attain both personal and national goals. Filipinos will be equipped with 21st-century skills to engage in meaningful and rewarding careers in today's changing world of work. Lifelong learning will also contribute to the development and growth of agriculture, industry, and services in the country. To yield greater equity in human development outcomes, education will be made accessible to vulnerable groups and those not reached by formal education (10-17).

- Strengthen inclusion programs. Improving the mechanisms for mapping, profiling, and tracking of learners and school-aged children will ensure that learners with special needs, indigenous peoples, and out-of-school children and youth are provided with the appropriate educational interventions. Intensifying and expanding the ALS will enable those not reached by the formal system to

> complete basic education or acquire lifelong learning. Education inputs should also focus on areas with poor education performance – targeting the needs of hard-to-reach and vulnerable learners (such as street children, indigenous peoples, PWDs, children-in-conflict with the law [CICL], and children in conflict areas) (10-18).

For the first time in the PDP, a definition of lifelong learning is provided: "all learning activities undertaken throughout life for the development of competencies and qualifications. Adult learning and education, technical-vocational education or training, and literacy are all significant components of the lifelong learning process" (370).

Comparing this definition to that found in the 2019 Implementing Rules and Regulations of the PQF Act, one can conclude that while there are similar elements, there are still differences. As these documents set the tone for what constitutes lifelong learning, the government must arrive at a consistent definition, especially in such key documents.

Finally, this PDP definition is accompanied by core indicators and targets to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. PLAN TARGETS TO ENSURE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL (CORE INDICATORS), AS TAKEN FROM THE 2017-2022 PDP

INDICATORS	BASELINE (2015)	END OF PLAN TARGET
Mean Years of Schooling	8.9 (2014)	11.3
Functional Literacy Rate	90.3 (2013)	
Net Enrolment Rate		
Kindergarten	74.65	95.00
Elementary	91.05	95.00
Junior High School	68.15	75.44
Completion Rate		
Elementary	83.43	90.00
Junior High School	73.97	78.48
Proportion of students performing at Moving towards mastery, closely approximating mastery and mastered increased		
Elementary	63.93	74.39
Junior High School	14.37	20.00
Proportion of students at low mastery reduced from 14% to 10%		
Junior High School	14.88	10.00

INDICATORS	BASELINE (2015)	END OF PLAN TARGET
Percentage of students awarded scholarships, grants, and other financial assistance (%)	5	10
Percentage of tertiary graduates in science, engineering, manufacturing and construction	26	40
Percentage of ETEEAP graduates	50	60
Increased government expenditure for higher education research, development, and innovation	0.17% of GDP	0.5% of GDP
Increased number of patents, licenses, and royalties issued to HEIs	231	500
Increased number of researchers and scientists	841	2,600
Number of curricula and programs developed / revised based on multi-disciplinal platforms that foster 21st century competencies	72	100
Increased number of HEIs engaged in local and global partnerships and collaborations	44	100
Increased number of graduate education graduates (MA/PhD) engaged in original research of creative work	6,500	10,000
Increased number of innovation hubs established within HEIs	81	150
Certification rate of TVET graduates	91.3 (2016)	

This Philippine Development Plan comprehensively covers lifelong learning except for adult education. It refers to the different levels of education and mentions the principle of inclusion, an essential element in lifelong learning policy.

The present Philippines Development Plan 2023-2028 references lifelong learning throughout the different chapters. To start with, there is Subchapter 2.2, with the header "Improve Education and Lifelong Learning."

> ■ By 2028, Filipinos are envisioned to be smart and innovative with learning poverty substantially addressed. Filipino learners have access to high-quality lifelong learning opportunities that develop adequate competencies and character qualities that will allow them to thrive in society and the world of work. Transformative lifelong learning opportunities shall be instrumental in developing and protecting the capabilities of families to ensure that all Filipinos are able to realize their full potential to keep pace with the envisioned socioeconomic transformation (31).

> ■ Toward the ultimate goal of ensuring transformative lifelong learning for all, several areas must be addressed not only by the government but, more importantly, with the support of the private sector and other stakeholders (46).

The subchapter also includes a strategy framework to improve Education and Lifelong Learning (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. STRATEGY FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING AS TAKEN FROM THE 2023-2028 PDP
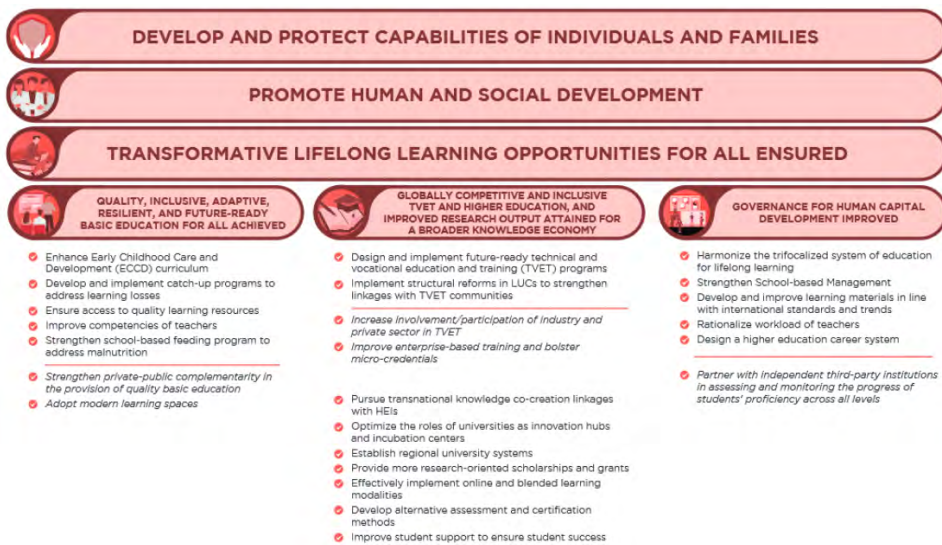
> Also important for ensuring lifelong learning opportunities are key legislations improving education infrastructure (See Chapter 12), reviving the Mandatory Reserve Officers Training Corps and/or integrating disaster risk response and management training in the curriculum of students (See Chapter 13), promoting upskilling and reskilling of the labor force (See Chapter 4), and advancing research and development and innovation (See Chapter 8) (53-54).

This framework is accompanied by a results matrix covering many areas of lifelong learning (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. RESULTS MATRIX: ENSURE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL, AS TAKEN FROM THE 2023-2028 PD

INDICATOR	BASELINE (2021)	ANNUAL PLAN TARGETS						MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY/ INTER-AGENCY BODY
		2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028		
Subchapter 2.2 Improved Education and Lifelong Learning									
1. Learning poverty rate (%)	90.9 (2019)	Decreasing						International Large-Scale Assessment Results, World Bank Report	Department of Education (DepEd)
2. Proportion of learners achieving at least "Proficient" in the National Achievement Test (NAT) (%)								NAT Results, Learner Information System, Enhanced Basic Education Information System	Department of Education (DepEd)
2.1 Reading									
Grade 3	56.0 (2018)	63.4	66.2	68.90	71.7	74.40	77.2		
Grade 6	17.7 (2018)	32.9	40.2	47.6	54.9	62.2	69.5		
Grade 10	36.4 (2018)	43.2	49.2	55.2	61.2	67.2	73.2		
Grade 12	24.0 (2018)	34.0	39.0	44.0	49.0	54.0	59.0		
2.2 Mathematics									
Grade 3	27.1 (2018)	36.0	42.0	48.0	54.0	60.0	66.0		
Grade 6	17.6 (2018)	31.4	38.4	45.4	52.4	59.4	66.4		
Grade 10	13.1 (2018)	30.4	38.4	46.3	54.1	61.8	69.6		
Grade 12	2.8 (2018)	18.0	23.0	28.0	33.0	38.0	43.0		

INDICATOR	BASELINE (2021)	ANNUAL PLAN TARGETS						MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY/INTER-AGENCY BODY
		2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028		
3. Participation Rate of 0–4.11 Years Old in Early Learning Programs (%)	16.0 (2018) *2018 has the highest encoding rate by local government units (LGUs); succeeding years have lower submission rates	23.0	28.0	33.0	43.0	53.0	63.0	Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Information System, National Child Development Center Enrollment Tracking and Information System, National ECCD Monitoring Evaluation and Accountability System (will be fully utilized during the second term of the Philippine Development Plan)	ECCD Council
4. Licensure examination passing rate									
4.1 Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) (%)								LET results	Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Professional Regulation Commission (PRC)
4.1.1 Elementary	52.36	54	56	58	60	62	64		
4.1.2 Secondary	51.13	53	55	57	59	61	63		
4.2 Licensure examination across all disciplines (%)								Licensure examination results	CHED, PRC
4.2.1 Overall takers	38.8 (2019)	40	42	44	46	48	50		
4.2.2 First-time takers	57 (2019)								
5. Global competitiveness of Philippine higher education institutions (HEI)									
5.1 The number of HEIs in reputable international rankings increased	21	22	24	25	27	28	30	Quacquarelli Symonds Asia rankings, Times Higher Education, World University Rankings, Impact Ranking, or other ranking systems identified by CHED	CHED
6. Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Certification Rate (%)	92	92	92.5	93	93.5	94	94.5	TESDA Management Information System	TESDA

Compared to the PDP 2017-2022 core indicators, the present PDP has more detailed indicators for Basic Education, reflecting the need to address the inferior performance of basic education students in international tests. While these two sets of indicators should be considered a good starting point for tracking lifelong learning, it is crucial to point out that the same set of indicators is essential to track progress in lifelong learning consistently.

Another change in the present PDP is the mainstreaming of lifelong learning in other sectors, as shown in the articulation of a strategy framework in Chapter 4 on Increasing Income-earning Ability.

FIGURE 6. STRATEGY FRAMEWORK TO INCREASE INCOME EARNING ABILITY, AS TAKEN FROM THE 2023-2028 PDP

This strategy framework mentions policy for lifelong learning. It is essential to consider the economistic/training slant of this policy.

> Lifelong learning enables all citizens to adapt to social and technological changes. With present vulnerabilities and uncertainties of the future, lifelong learning programs need to be informed of emerging trends, flexible yet connected, certifiable to standards, and industry related (109).

Interestingly, this section refers to actions taken on the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF), stating:

The life-long learning and skills ecosystem hinges on operationalizing the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF). Therefore, the government will strengthen the PQF National Coordinating Committee and its governance structure, establish the PQF Secretariat, enable budgetary support mechanisms for institutionalized activities, implement pilot projects, develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and make necessary revisions to the PQF (109).

Also found in this section is a set of plans related to studies and governance on lifelong learning.

The national government shall also conduct studies to measure qualification progression contributions to income-earning ability.

The government shall sustain efforts to develop a master plan for institutionalizing lifelong learning beyond formal education.

It shall encourage local government units (LGU) to plan and integrate lifelong learning programs to transform their jurisdictions into learning communities.

One important aspect of this initiative is that by institutionalizing governance mechanisms and awareness campaigns that advance lifelong learning initiatives, LGUs can promote inclusive learning in the workplace and foster a culture of learning among its constituents (109).

Finally, a reference to industry involvement in lifelong learning is mentioned.

Strengthen collaboration with industry boards and industry associations in TVET: Achieving lifelong learning and skills development objectives across industries can be facilitated by industry boards and industry associations. This can encourage more industry involvement in providing high-quality TVET and shaping globally-oriented human resources (110).

Since one of the purposes of this research is to make recommendations to EDCOM 2, it is essential to review the Legislative Agenda (see Figure 7) mentioned for the section on increasing income-earning ability. This provides an idea of the proposed bills' perspective on lifelong learning.

FIGURE 7. LEGISLATIVE AGENDA TO INCREASE INCOME - EARNING ABILITY, AS TAKEN FROM THE 2023-2028 PDP

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA	RATIONALE/KEY FEATURES	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY
Revised National Apprenticeship Program; Enterprise-Based Education and Training to Employment Act	Harmonize the existing enterprise-based training (EBT) modalities and expand the provision of training programs being implemented within companies which can be a mix of workplace training and classroom-based learning. Institute further reforms on the apprenticeship program to make them more attractive to both the enterprises and the prospective apprentices, promoting skills acquisition and youth employment.	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)
Jobs Creation Strategy Bill	Create an Inter-Agency Council for Jobs and Investments co-headed by the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and TESDA, with representatives from employers' organizations and labor groups; and establish working groups that will focus on developing employment recovery and job creation in specific industries and emerging sectors, such as but not limited, to construction, tourism, agriculture, information technology and business process management, and manufacturing.	DOLE
Lifelong Learning Development Bill	Develop a Lifelong Learning Development Framework through the Philippine Qualifications Framework–National Coordinating Council (PQF–NCC). The PQF–NCC shall determine and set standards for developing action components and desirable success measures for promoting lifelong learning in cities, municipalities, and educational institutions.	DOLE
Enterprise Productivity Act (Amendments to Productivity Incentives Act)	Fortify the intentions of the "Productivity Incentive Act of 1990" by promoting inclusive and sustainable work productivity programs. The Act aims to reinforce labor productivity by: (a) establishing a Productivity Incentives Committee; (b) adopting productivity incentive programs; (c) granting productivity incentives to employees; and (d) providing a tax incentive to business establishments for granting incentives to employees.	DOLE

After examining the four Philippine Development Plans since 2005, the next step is to review what are considered to be the three "lifelong learning" programs of the three agencies tasked with education and training, namely the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Below is a partial listing of the programs of the three agencies. Other government agencies are also involved in lifelong learning, but these will not be tackled due to the limitations of this study.

The Department of Education offers the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as its lead non-formal education initiative. The ALS is an alternative learning system that complements traditional formal education. It is specifically designed to meet the educational needs of out-of-school children in exceptional situations and adults, providing them with opportunities to enhance their knowledge, values, life skills, and preparedness for higher education, employment, or self-employment.

According to DepEd,

> The ALS Program uses a contextualized non-formal curriculum that is substantially aligned with the K to 12 Curriculum for Basic Education. However, it is not a mirror image of the formal school curriculum. It is aligned but not identical. The curriculum takes into account the prior learning of its learners and reflects the indicators of

functional literacy into six interrelated learning strands (DepEd n.d.-a, under "The ALS K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum).

The Department offers two ALS programs: the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program. The BLP aims to eradicate "illiteracy among OSYA, and in extreme cases, school-aged children, by developing the basic literacy skills of reading, writing, and numeracy" (DepEd n.d.-b, under "Basic Literacy Program"). On the other hand, the A&E Program is meant to provide

> an alternative pathway of learning for OSYA students who have basic literacy skills but have not completed the K to 12 basic education mandated by the Philippine Constitution. Through this, school dropouts are able to complete elementary and high school education outside the formal school system (DepEd, n.d.-b, under "Accreditation and Equivalency Program").

In 2022, the Department of Education reported four million out-of-school youth and adults enrolled in ALS from 2016-2021. According to a UNICEF Policy Brief (2021):

> The ALS program had 840,521 participants, an increase from 641,584 in 2017 (DepEd 2017; DepEd 2018). However, there are about 5 to 6 million prospective ALS learners across the country (Yamauchi et al. 2016), which means that the program only attracts about 15 percent of its target population. Moreover, about 20 to 40 percent of ALS learners fail to complete the program (Igarashi 2018)" (1).

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Lifelong Learning Program is the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation (ETEEAP). This educational assessment program at the tertiary level acknowledges, accredits, and grants equivalencies for the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values acquired by individuals through relevant work experience. Professionals with five or more years of work experience can use their knowledge, achievements, and skills gained in the workplace to earn academic credits, which can then be accumulated towards a college degree. Established by Executive Order 330 in 1996, the program is administered by CHED through qualified and deputized universities and colleges.

Due to limited data on the program (see table 3), evaluating its progress and impact is challenging. A Senate Bill is currently pending to institutionalize the ETEEAP, seeking to elevate its foundation from an Executive Order to a formal Act.

TABLE 3. DATA ON ETEEAP GRADUATES

1999 – 2000	13
2000 – 2001	39
2001 – 2002	270
2002 – 2003	7,620
2003 – 2004	404
2004 – 2005	501
2005 – 2006	656
2006 – 2007	1,012
2007 – 2008	892
2008 – 2009	1,814
2009 – 2010	919
Total	**7,240**

Meanwhile, there are a number of higher education institutions (e.g., Ateneo de Manila and La Salle) that have opened Schools/Centers of Lifelong Learning offering short-term courses or certificates. Given that this is relatively recent development, it is necessary to review and monitor such programs to better understand the assumptions and operationalization of lifelong learning. It might also be the case that since lifelong learning has crept into policy discourses, this is also encouraging higher education institutions to market their courses as such.

Another possible case of "marketing" is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) US Philippines Partnership for Skills, Innovation, and Lifelong Learning (UPSKILL) which was launched in early 2024 with a fund of 1.6 billion pesos. This five-year program aims to "help Philippine higher education become more globally competitive by strengthening innovation, workforce development, and entrepreneurship in colleges and universities" (Domingo 2024, paragraph 1)

The last subsector to be discussed is that of TVET. The Technical Skills and Development Authority (TESDA) launched the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan (NTESDP) 2023-2028, a comprehensive roadmap to empower the Filipino workforce with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the rapidly evolving global economy. It is based on the vision of "A Globally Recognized Philippine TVET as a Catalyst for Education and Lifelong Learning, Workforce, and Socio-Economic Transformation", with area-based demand-driven TVET as its central strategy. According to the NTESDP,

> With the goal of promoting a culture of lifelong learning for Filipinos and seek recognition for Technical Vocational Education and Training TVET) as a catalyst for education, workforce, and socio-economic transformation, the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan (NTESDP) 2023-2028 was formulated by TESDA in collaboration with its stakeholders in the industry, academe, government, labor, learners, and other groups.
>
> The NTESDP aims to transform the quality and responsiveness of Philippine TVET, making it more inclusive and accessible to all Filipinos seeking personal growth and career or entrepreneurial advancement. Inclusive access to skilling, reskilling, and upskilling of learners, workers, and citizens to make them future-ready may have a profound impact on several key areas:
>
> ■ Educational Approach: We can expect a shift in how education is viewed and delivered, with a stronger emphasis on practical skills and lifelong learning.
>
> ■ Workforce Value and Agility: The value placed on skilled workers will increase, along with the need for adaptability in the workplace.
>
> ■ Social and Economic Wellbeing: Ultimately, these changes will improve the social and economic well-being of Filipinos, leading to personal and economic growth (ii)

No comprehensive, comparable dataset exists on any of the above education and training programs. Hence, a review and assessment of their contribution to lifelong learning is difficult, especially vis-à-vis how they can provide pathways for learners to transition from one modality to another.

A proxy dataset on higher and technical education indicators from the updated PDP 2011-2016 (see Table 4) gives us an idea of progress in CHED and TESDA, although it does not explicitly refer to lifelong learning, as it has been done on the PDPs 2017-2022 and 2023-2028.

TABLE 4. HIGHER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION INDICATORS IN THE RESULTS MATRIX OF THE UPDATED PHILIPPINE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011-2016

INDICATORS	BASELINE		ANNUAL PDP TARGETS			ACCOM-PLISHMENT	
	YEAR	VALUE	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015
Certification rate in TVET increased (in %)	2010	82.9	86.5	87	87.5	91.3	91.1
TVET graduates increased	2010	1,344,371	1,464,000	1,610,510	1,771,560	1,785,679	2,129,758
Higher education graduates increased	2010	498,418	567,531	584,474	601,505	632,076	692,602
Proportion of HEI faculty with MA increased (in %)	2010	38.87	55	60	65	40.81	40.34
Proportion of HEI faculty with PhD increased (in %)	2010	11.09	20	25	30	12.54	12.62
HEIs with accredited programs increased (in %)	2010	19.89	24	25	26	25.38	26.63
National passing percentage (across disciplines) in licensure exams increased (in %)	2010	33.91	49.72	50.94	52.53	61.45	58.59

Conclusion

While the Philippines has no explicit policy on lifelong learning, many indicators indicate that lifelong learning is on the government's agenda. What is noteworthy is that an important pillar of lifelong learning, non-formal education, specifically that of the alternative learning system, is missing.

The fundamental law of the country, the Constitution, refers to a few principles of lifelong learning. A review of the four Development Plans since 2005 demonstrates the evolving interpretation and operationalization of lifelong learning. Only in the PDP 2017-2022 is the definition of lifelong learning offered. Notably, during this period, the Implementing Rules and Regulation for the Law on PQF (2019) came out with a different definition of lifelong learning. It is recommended that these definitions and those of other government agencies be reviewed and a common definition of lifelong learning be agreed upon.

The most recent development plan (2023-2028) has the most articulated and mainstreamed notion of lifelong learning (i.e., going beyond the education sector). This plan contains two strategy frameworks referring to lifelong learning, with indicators for providing opportunities for lifelong learning. The previous development plan also has a set of targets that are not entirely in line with the 2023-2028 indicators. As targets and indicators are important tools for monitoring lifelong learning, it is recommended that these two sets be jointly examined, juxtaposed, and compared with the SDG targets on Goal 4. An analysis of the different elements of Lifelong Learning in the present PDP indicates a tendency to focus on implementing the PQF. One should be careful that the lifelong learning policy and programs will not be reduced to the qualifications framework. The latest PDP refers to the development of lifelong learning policy in the form of a Lifelong Learning Bill. It refers to developing a lifelong learning development framework through the PQF National Coordinating Council (NCC). Lifelong learning as a master concept for education and training policies is broader than the PQF.

One limitation of this section is the lack of readily available, updated data from the three agencies focused on education and training. While many countries provide education datasets to make progress and accomplishments transparent, the same could not be said for education and training data in the Philippines. The websites of the three agencies are lacking in basic data. However, in a few instances, there are annual reports where some data could be collected. It is understood that such data could be requested from specific offices of the three agencies. It is clear that there is a lack of systematic data management which means the government is not able to track LLL opportunities and let alone recognize its accomplishments. Reviewing education and training systems to transform is necessarily based on evidence. Transforming education and training practices requires the most recent evidence to be available and utilized. As such, it is recommended that basic education and training data be systematically updated and made available on the respective agencies' websites. Furthermore it is also recommended that the three agencies collaborate to develop a LLL data platform where they could agree on what are LLL indicators and regularly provide the data on these.

Chapter 4
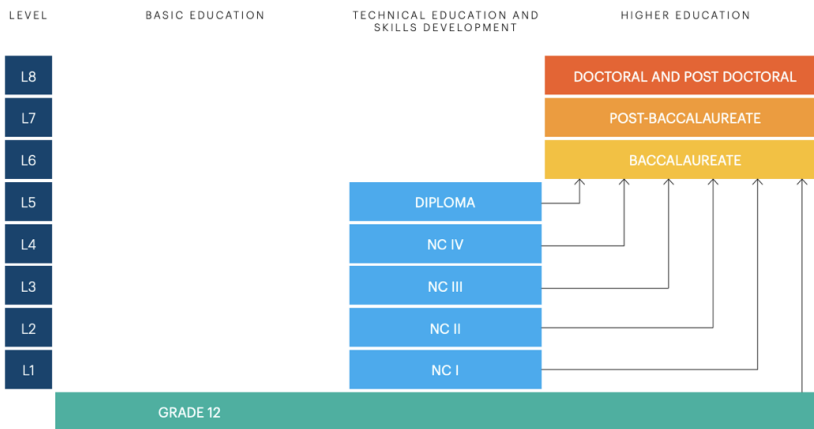# The Philippines Qualification Framework as one of the Levers for Lifelong Learning

"The stark difference is pag nasa DepEd or CHED, pag bagsak ka, bagsak ka na. And you have to retake the entire course, so baka ma-extend pa iyong course mo. Sa TESDA, hindi siya pass or fail. But not yet competent. So kung hindi ka pa competent sa isang bagay, uulitin mo lang hanggang maging competent ka.... Ang habol ay skills."

TESDA learner, on the difference between TESDA, DepED, and CHED

While Executive Order No. 83 establishing the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) was signed in 2012, it was only after six years that Republic Act No. 10968, also known as the PQF Act, was passed. Work on the PQF started with the constitution of the National Coordinating Committee (NCC), which was chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Education and composed of representatives from CHED, TESDA, the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE), Professional Regulations Commission (PRC), and other government agencies. Two years after the passage of the Executive Order, the architecture of the PQF was drawn up.

The PQF "describes the levels of educational qualifications and sets the standards for qualification outcomes (see Figure 8). It is a quality-assured national system for developing, recognizing, and awarding qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skills, and values acquired in diverse ways and methods by learners and workers of the country" (PQF n.d., paragraph 1)

FIGURE 8. THE ARCHITECTURE OF PQF

Source | PQF-NCC Resolution No. 2014-03 adopted on December 11, 2014

Alongside the PQF's development, the Philippines government participated in the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework (AQRF) group. This participation also helped shape the direction of the PQF's development, and served as a benchmark for the country.

Table 5 shows the general relationship between the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and the Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) (Castel-Branco 2021, 10).

TABLE 5. FUNCTIONS AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

FEATURE FOR COMPARISON	QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK TYPE	
	National	**Regional**
Principal function	Serve as a reference for the level of learning recognised in the national qualifications system	Serve as a translation facility for comparing qualifications levels between Member States
Developed by	National governments, in many cases through national agencies set up for this purpose	Countries in a region acting jointly, mostly with the help of a regional body or a regional association
Sensitive to	Local, national and regional priorities (e.g. literacy levels and labour market needs)	Collective priorities in member countries (e.g. enabling mobility of learners and workers across borders)
Value depends on	Degree of regulatory compliance required; the degree of ownership of key actors (such as industry, educational institutions and professional associations); the perceived or actual value for the whole population	Level of trust between member countries; Transparency of national quality assurance systems; mutually agreed regional priorities

| FEATURE FOR COMPARISON	QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK TYPE	
	National	**Regional**
Quality guaranteed by	Adherence to nationally agreed quality assurance systems, as illustrated by the practices of national bodies and educational institutions	The common application of the referencing criteria and guidelines, as well as the robustness and transparency of the national referencing process and of national quality assurance systems
Levels defined by reference to	National benchmarks, which can be integrated in different learning contexts, such as school education, work or higher education	General progress in learning in all contexts, applicable to all countries

Given the broad coverage of the PQF Act, it is crucial to know the different laws that are related to its implementation. These laws could also be considered as policies related to lifelong learning:

■   RA 7722 s. 1994 (Higher Education Act)

■   RA 7796 s. 1994 (Technical Educational and Skills Development Act)

■   RA 8981 s. 2000 (PRC Modernization Act)

■   RA 9155 s. 2001 (Governance of Basic Education Act)

■   E.O. 83 s. 2012 (Institutionalization of the Philippine Qualifications Framework)

■   RA 10533 s. 2013 (Enhanced Basic Education Act)

■   RA 10647 s. 2014 (Ladderized Education Act)

■   RA 10912 s. 2016 Continuing Professional Development Act

■   P.D 422 Labor Code of the Philippines: On DOLE Function

In September 2021, the World Bank published its review of the PQF, a mere four years after the PQF Act was passed. According to the World Bank, this review was requested by TESDA (as the Interim Secretariat of the PQF-NCC). TESDA asked that they "review key elements of the PQF, focusing on its relevance to industry and employers' needs, adequacy in its scope of coverage, appropriateness of design and methodology, and feasibility of implementation and utilization" (10). The figure below indicates the recommended short-, medium-, and long-term steps that must be undertaken to operationalize the PQF fully.

FIGURE 9. SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS FOR FULL OPERATIONALIZATION OF PQF (WORLD BANK 2021, 60)
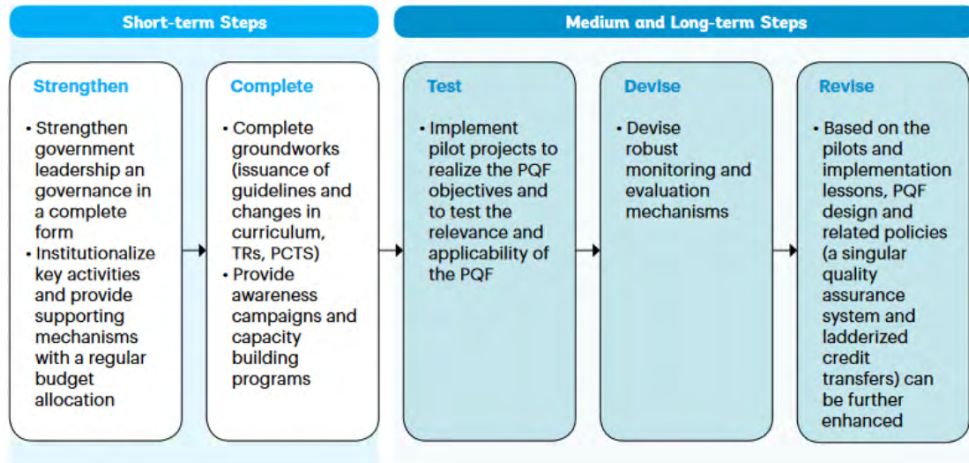
The story of the slow rollout and implementation of the PQF is not unique. It is part of a global narrative of qualifications frameworks, similar to the discourses of lifelong learning emanating from Europe.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), have been monitoring global developments of NQFs and RQFs. Since 2013, they have jointly published the Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks. According to Castel-Branco of the ETF:

> Over the last four decades, qualification frameworks have also been developed at sectoral levels, sometimes within a country and in other cases between countries, but limited to one sector and at transnational levels (2021, 5).

The 2017 Global Inventory estimates that, at that time, over 150 national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) worldwide were being developed or implemented. The 2019 Global Inventory shows no increase in the number of NQFs but highlights that the overall number of national and regional frameworks has remained stable, with the implementation of most frameworks expanding and becoming more thorough since 2017 (8). A few authors (Keevy and Bolton 2011; Tuck 2007) have explained that policy borrowing and diffusion could

be observed among many non-Western countries that adopt qualification frameworks originating from Europe.

Coles (2017) traces the evolution of the NQFs over time (see Table 6), allowing us to understand the context that led to the PQF´s development.

TABLE 6. EVOLUTION OF NQFS OVER TIME (COLES 2017, 16-17)

STAGE 1	The use of qualifications as a policy instrument occurred before the worldwide movement towards NQFs — in the 1970s, governments were driven by economic and social objectives that invariably called for higher levels of participation and stronger patterns of outcomes of education and training as well as greater relevance of education provision.
STAGE 2A	The first phase of NQF developments took place in the 1990s and was concentrated in the Anglophone countries and France. This was linked to a move towards more outcomes-based vocational education and training systems in these countries. These reforms involved the transfer of the control of training programs and qualifications from providers to their users, including employers and individuals. They also demanded, at least in vocational education and training, the establishment of independently agreed standards for the content of programs. The idea that learning occurs in work and social life grew in importance, and new routes to qualification were required for non-program-based learners.
STAGE 2B	At the same time, high-skill policies led to an expansion of higher education participation and the associated goal of greater flexibility manifested in the modularization of programs, use of learning outcomes, and experimentation with credit arrangements. It is also arguable that the employability of graduates has become a stronger policy objective of higher education institutions.
STAGE 3	Around the millennium, political, social, and economic drivers shaped the formation of international or regional qualifications frameworks (common reference frameworks). These frameworks aimed to support free trade agreements, the enhanced mobility of learners and workers, and general business support. These new frameworks were tools to make foreign qualification systems more understandable.
STAGE 4	The existence of the regional frameworks and the focus on international visibility of national qualifications stimulated the development of further NQFs that were adapted to the architecture of the regional frameworks. The emergence of comprehensive frameworks (including school, vocational, and higher education qualifications) in 2005 onwards enabled a more consistent and transparent view of qualifications systems to develop. The new qualifications frameworks are not simply national models of the regional archetype – they are seen as steps in a process of reform of qualifications systems to make the systems more responsive to a range of needs, including those of a range of individuals and the labor market.

BOX 4. KEY FINDINGS, ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND TRENDS OF NQFS BASED ON THE INVENTORIES (2017)

- The number of national and regional frameworks has remained stable, while the implementation of most frameworks has deepened and widened since 2017.

- Regional frameworks: European qualifications framework and ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework are considered operational.

- Several global trends, such as internationalization, digitalization, migration, mobility, and learning across borders, are changing education, training, and qualification systems. These trends set the context for implementing national and regional qualification frameworks.

- Digital learning is spreading worldwide, changing the relationship between formal/ traditional qualifications and digital credentials, open badges, MOOCs, etc.

- Comprehensive frameworks, including all levels and types of qualifications, are gaining ground in Europe and elsewhere. European countries use their frameworks to create comprehensive maps of qualifications, including all sectors 6(VET, higher education, general education, adult training) and to help validate non-formally and informally acquired competencies. This is seen as central to policies fostering people's lifelong learning and progression through different pathways.

- The concept of learning outcomes is becoming a common basis for almost all national and regional qualifications frameworks worldwide.

- Qualifications frameworks and initiated reform have increased the transparency of qualifications systems and better access to lifelong learning opportunities.

- The development of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is making learning outcomes visible and valued as part of reducing or removing barriers between learning and work and aiding career progression. The spread of NQFs based on learning outcomes has facilitated the validation and recognition of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired in a non-formal setting. However, the implementation, or wider application, of VNFIL is hindered by difficulties in gathering data to inform more effective policies and practices.

- Policymakers must present a more robust and more holistic case for the benefits that frameworks, skills, and qualifications can offer individuals, employers, and the wider society. While those benefits typically relate to labor market access and longer-term career prospects, they also contribute to non-employment-related outcomes, such as improved physical and mental health and reduced demands on criminal justice systems.

- Teachers and trainers shape the learning experience, from designing an overall plan to managing learning activities day to day. Presenting teachers and trainers as both designers of a learning process and experts in its delivery opens the prospect of greater integration between policymaking and practice and stronger support for innovation. Outcomes-based approaches promoted or facilitated by NQFs are leading to the introduction of modular curricula.

■   The main challenge for the coming years is, among other things, keeping NQFs up to the pace of digitization and thus establishing trust across national and regional borders.

Today, much of the government's focus is on qualifications frameworks—a stark difference from earlier years where qualifications systems were seen as the starting point. According to Tuck (2007), "the distinction between a qualifications 'framework' and a qualifications 'system' is important. Where it exists, the NQF is normally one component of the overall qualifications system. A qualifications 'system' is broader" (v). According to OECD (2007):

> National qualifications system is a broad concept that includes all aspects of a country's activity resulting in the recognition of learning. These systems include developing and implementing policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, skills identification arrangements, and processes for assessment, awarding, and quality assurance. In some countries, the system is managed centrally and appears to be a well-structured arrangement of interacting elements; in others, it is less integrated and coherent. A qualifications framework may or may not be in place (38).

In fact, as early as 2003, the OECD developed a study on the role of qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning. The conceptual framework of this study is captured in Figure 10 below.

FIGURE 10. THE FORM OF A MECHANISM
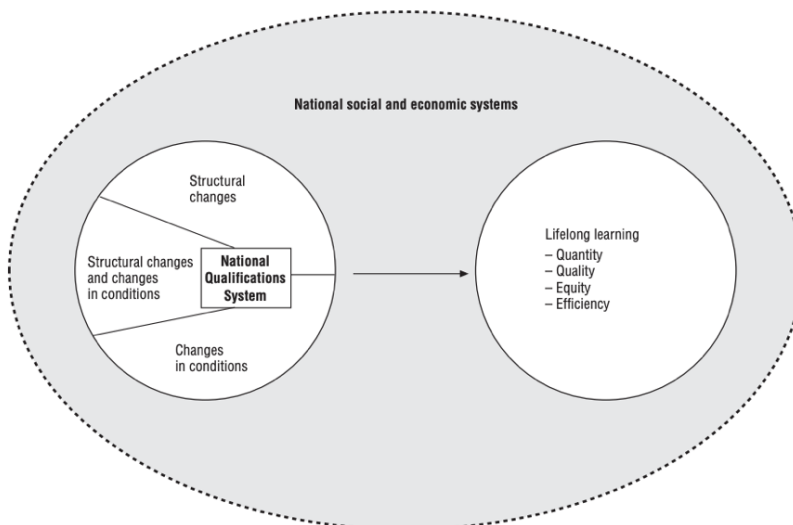
Based on the results of the country reports, the OECD (2007) identified the following main findings:

BOX 5. IDENTIFIED MECHANISMS (OECD 2007, 12)

Combining the diverse ways of analyzing the effect of mechanisms leads to identifying some potent mechanisms:

- Five highly ranked strong mechanisms: Providing credit transfer, Optimising stakeholder involvement in the qualifications system, Recognising non-formal and informal learning, Establishing a qualifications framework, and Creating new routes to qualifications.

- Three change mechanisms: Establishing qualifications frameworks, Communicating returns to learning for qualifications, and Investing in pedagogical innovation.

- Five highly ranked supporting mechanisms: Monitoring the qualifications system, Establishing qualifications frameworks, Investing in pedagogical innovation, Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes, and Improving information and guidance about qualifications systems

Figure 11 illustrates the diverse ways a qualifications system enhances lifelong learning.

FIGURE 11. HOW LIFELONG LEARNING COULD BE ENHANCED THROUGH A QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM (OECD 2007, 27)
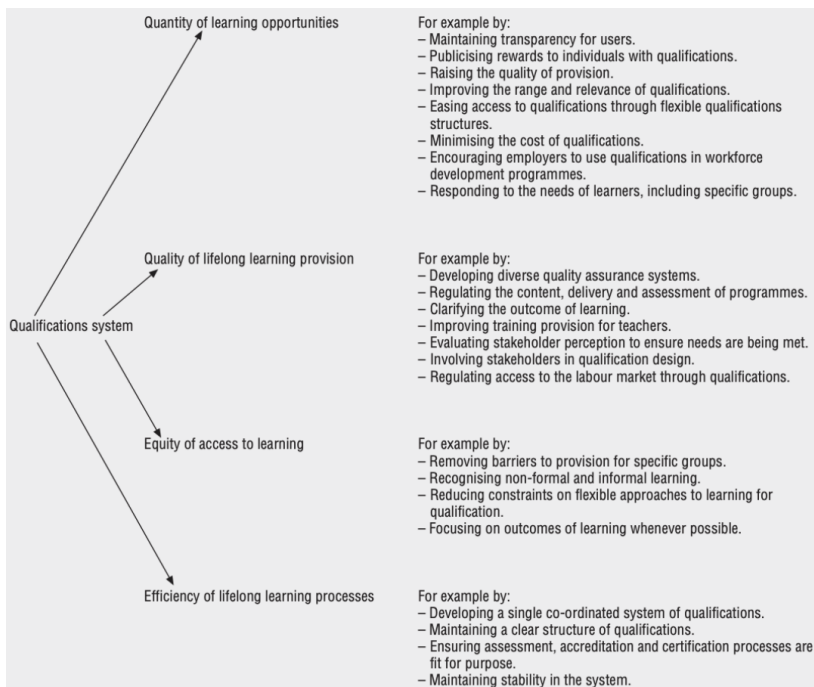
Worldwide, there is almost a fifty-year history of conceptualizing and implementing NQFs. The Philippine government, along with education and training stakeholders, could benefit from analyzing trends and using this information to reflect on the status of the PQF. The box below summarizes the trends, as argued by Coles (2017).

BOX 6. WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT NQFS? (COLES 2017, 20-21)

WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT NQFS?

Again, it is difficult to argue based on statistical evidence for the effectiveness of NQFs, but the following is possible to discuss:

■   NQFs are now part of the language of qualifications systems. The past's amorphous, complex, and idiosyncratic systems are now nationally and internationally discussed in ways that allow analysis, policy learning, and reform.

■   The emergence of comprehensive frameworks has made it possible to approach the shift to learning outcomes more systematically and consistently. This is not to say that the use of learning outcomes has been embedded overnight – the road to the full use of learning outcomes is a long one, and only in VET can we say that the use of learning outcomes is the norm.

■   NQFs have impacted qualifications governance arrangements. They have raised the profile of qualifications policies and influenced the creation of bodies to manage frameworks and qualifications. This has sometimes been seen through mergers of existing bodies, sometimes by drawing the qualifications management process into a ministerial department. The level of use of private (as opposed to public) provision remains small.

■   Where NQFs cover more than one sector, stakeholder involvement in qualifications processes has increased. NQFs have helped bring together stakeholders from different subsystems in education and strengthened the links between them, making them (in theory) more permeable.

■   NQFs have created level hierarchies that have highlighted gaps in existing qualifications provision.

■   Frameworks may have helped with issues of coherence and dealing with diversity in federal systems.

POSSIBLY, NQFS HAVE HAD LESS IMPACT IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

■   Teaching and learning generally remain separated from these frameworks even when learning outcomes are used across the board. However, quality assurance processes and regulations (sometimes associated with NQFs) have influenced provision – in that qualifications have changed and, by implication, what is taught, learned, and assessed may change.

- There is no evidence for raised standards directly attributable to frameworks.

- NQFs, by and large, have yet to create the seamless whole for the education and training systems that many expected. They have not removed inconsistencies, such as how credit is used across VET and higher education.

- NQFs are often cited as lifelong learning instruments. It is argued that for lifelong learning, there must be multiple access points to different pathways and linkages between qualifications in various education and training settings, for example, in higher education and VET. However, there is no evidence of an increased use of access points and pathways attributable to NQFs.

- Most NQFs have failed to improve qualifications to accommodate learning from education and training in the non-formal and private sectors.

- Qualifications systems remain confusing, although introducing qualifications types has made systems more transparent.

- The effect of the qualifications frameworks on the mobility of learners and workers is still uncertain. However, there are great expectations that qualifications frameworks will support mobility through better recognition of qualifications.

- Even with the lack of impact or evidence of impact, can we imagine a qualifications landscape without NQFs? The answer is probably no. NQFs provide the best response to the increasingly complex qualifications systems and the challenges of globalization.

Since the World Bank has reviewed the PQF, this section will not dwell on their main recommendations, and instead focus on one conclusion from the literature review: implementing National Qualifications Systems and National Qualification Frameworks requires a wide range of expertise and, consequently, needs dedicated, predictable funding. One reason why many NQFs have yet to move forward is the need for in-country knowledge of the multi-layered requirements of NQFs.

Related to this requirement of technical expertise is the governance of the NQF. In the Philippines, a PQF National Coordinating Committee is constituted by different government agencies. As there is no dedicated Plantilla staff associated with the PQF, the NCC has to rely on seconded and/or assigned personnel. There are several practices for the governance of PQF, but many countries have opted for a separate authority overseeing the NQF:

> As for the governance and management of the NQF, it is normal international practice for the management of the NQF to be assigned to an apex body, such as a national qualifications authority, which is independent of the government

> but accountable to it. Two key governance issues are policy coordination across government ministries and ensuring adequate involvement of stakeholders. At least the ministries responsible for education and labor will need to have a strong interest in the NQF. It is recommended, however, that one ministry be chosen to take the lead role to create an effective internal policy coordination mechanism (Tuck 2007, vii).

According to ETF, there are three models for the governance and management of NQFs:

1.   National Certifications Authority/NQF (Namibia, Kenya)

2.   National Certificate Agency and other functions (Ireland, Portugal)

3.   Directorate of the NQF within an institution independent of the education and training sector (France, Bahrain)

The features standard to the three models are:

A.   Status: Entities with autonomy (administrative, decision, financial)

☐   Not in the structure of ministries (no example of our sample)

☐   Combined sources of funding: State budget allocations, Revenues from user services, and Projects.

B.   Specific competencies in the thematic areas of responsibility: Own staff, experts contracted for defined tasks

C.   Associated stakeholders: Sectoral Councils, Chambers, Professional Associations

D.   Consultation: Approval of standards and reference qualification documents; Members of decision-making support bodies (e.g., Certification Commission, France)

E.   Well-organized and up-to-date websites, making all the information publicly available. Organization, various legal texts, reports and analyses, methodologies, directories, news, and tools for users' self-services" (Castel-Branco 2021, 43)

BOX 7. WHAT COULD A STAGE FIVE NQF LOOK LIKE? (COLES 2017, 17-18)

WHAT COULD A STAGE FIVE NQF LOOK LIKE?

Future national qualifications frameworks will probably all be associated with some geopolitical reference point and possibly more than one. This could lead to a more generalized form of NQFs that may be defined as simple-level hierarchies, with these levels defined offshore. The 'QF level' of qualifications could become the simplest reference to qualifications nationally and internationally, but this does not necessarily imply conformity of NQFs across countries.

The Stage Five NQFs could have a conformity of levels but will be more diverse in terms of the ways they are linked to national policy priorities, for example, funding arrangements, recognition/validation policy, and quality assurance of education and training. In other words, the functions associated with qualifications frameworks could be diverse and reflect the national identity rather than the NQF-level structure. NQFs themselves will probably be less hard-nosed as instruments of education and training policy than currently is the case and more useful as tools supporting a more diverse range of policies linked to education and training, such as social inclusion or labor market priority areas.

If the associated functions take center stage in NQFs, it is possible that framework governance will become more remote from national governments; mature frameworks in such a Stage Five are likely to be managed by agencies that have links to the government but are independent structures capable of independent consultation with main stakeholder groups.

In his reflections on the Irish NQF (which, at the time, had existed for five years), Coles (2017) raised the following questions on how to move forward (see Figure 12). It is recommended that the PQF NCC adapt these questions to the Philippine and regional context, and collectively reflect on them.

FIGURE 12. QUESTIONS MOVING FORWARD (COLES 2017, 8)

A — Is the NFQ helping to raise aspirations to learn?

B — Do citizens use the NFQ to see progression opportunities?
Does the NFQ help overcome barriers to qualifications?

C — Are valuable qualifications sitting outside the NFQ that could be brought in?
Is the NFQ raising the standard of qualifications in terms of content, assessment and certification processes?

Conclusion

The first policy on the Philippines Qualification Framework came out in 2012. Twelve years later, much work is still to be undertaken for a complete rollout. Meanwhile, NQFs and RQFs are gaining ground in numerous countries in all regions of the world. Given the advances in technology, many critical lessons could be shared and collectively analyzed. It is recommended that with the World Bank review, lessons learned from other countries be examined and used as the basis for immediate action. While a two-day exercise by the PQF-NCC was undertaken in July 2024, the recommendations and action points should be revisited in light of the above recommendation. As a few development agencies and the private sector are working on PQF-related programs, it is recommended that they be brought together to share their perspectives, and get their commitments to partner with the government in facilitating the implementation of the PQF. Finally, given the experience of many countries that have operational NQFs, and given the existing mechanism (i.e., PQF-NCC), it is recommended that an independent body manage and oversee the PQF. To determine the kind of model that will be used, a multi-stakeholder meeting is suggested so decision-makers can discuss and agree on the best governance model for the country.

Chapter 5
Understanding Learning Pathways through the Eyes of Learners
Exploring Learners' Experiences

"Noong second year ako, nagkaroon ako ng anxiety attack dahil sa failing grade ko. Dito mayroon kang kailangang i-maintain na grade, pagnakatatlong tres ka, matatanggal ka. And that was my first one. So mental health din ang kailangan."

Learner from AiTECH, on the mental and physical demands of the course

The Ladderized Education Act of 2014 (or Republic Act No. 10647) provides legal basis for the facilitation of one kind of learning pathway in the Philippines. As stated in Section 3, it ensures the interface between technical-vocational education and training and higher education, and refers to four types of processes that will help this interface:

- "Articulation refers to a process that allows students to make the smooth transition from one (1) course, program, or educational level to the next without experiencing duplication of learning. The guiding principle of articulation is that no student should repeat the same course content for which credit has already been received, even if elsewhere or from another institution. In general, articulated programs provide multiple entry and exit points and ladders of learning opportunities and allow a student to move from a technical-vocational course to a college degree program using the principle of credit transfer.

- Credit transfer refers to a credit conversion established to promote student mobility by ensuring the institutions' credit units are earned from different modalities.

- Equivalency refers to a process that involves assigning equivalent academic credits to the competencies demonstrated by a student through assessment tests, thereby providing entry points to the next higher-level qualification. The purpose is to provide opportunities for the student to continue to learn and to re-enter the

educational program at a higher level without unnecessarily retaking courses on which a student has already demonstrated competence and knowledge.

■   Ladderized education refers to harmonizing all education and training mechanisms that allow students and workers to progress between technical-vocational and higher education programs or vice versa. It opens opportunities for career and educational advancement to students and workers. It creates a seamless and borderless education and training system that will allow flexible entry and exit transfers between technical-vocational and higher education programs in the post-secondary school educational system."

The PQF Act is also another legislative instrument that ensures learning pathways by "supporting the development and maintenance of pathways and equivalencies which will provide access to qualifications and assist people to move easily and readily between the different education and training sectors and between these sectors and the labor market" (Section 4).

A critical assumption of these provisions is that the two agencies responsible for TVET and Higher Education are collaborating so that the mentioned mechanisms are jointly agreed upon and harmonized. Having said that, this section does not aim to confirm or verify such collaboration, as this chapter focuses on the individual learner and the institutions that facilitate their learning pathways. Instead of looking at the collaboration between the two main agencies of TVET and HE, this chapter will explore the learning histories of 13 learners.

BOX 8. PATHWAYS AND SEAMLESSNESS (HARRIS AND RAINEY 2012, 108)

Pathways and seamlessness in the post-compulsory education system are being promoted by governments in many countries. These notions refer to minimizing barriers for learners to move within and between academic, vocational, and community sectors of post-school education, and the desire to create national systems underpinned by educational choice. Initiatives in this area mesh with policy directions on widening participation and social inclusion and are in tune with global trends emphasizing change, flexibility, weakening of boundaries, and the importance of lifelong learning (Young 2006). Much of the attention, however, focuses on institutionalizing architecture for facilitating movement, and there has been far less consideration of, and research on, learners' actual experiences in their educational journeys (Harris and Rainey 2012, 108)

Learning histories have been underutilized as a means of exploring mechanisms for seamlessness, as the quote in the box above emphasizes. Seven of the interviewed learners

(four males and three females) were identified by the Antipolo Institute for Technology (AiTECH), while TESDA referred the six others (4 males and two females). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the 5 learners from AiTECH at the premises of AiTECH and the office of the Philippine Construction Association (PCA), while the rest were done through the video-conferencing platform Zoom.

Antipolo Institute of Technology (AiTECH) and AiTECH learners

According to the website of the Rizal Provincial Government (n.d.):

> The City of Antipolo Institute of Technology, distinctly referred to as "AiTECH" was established by the City Government of Antipolo by virtue of City Ordinance No. 2014-557 and was given the authority by CHED to operate as a Higher Education Institution (HEI) by virtue of Commission En Banc Resolution No. 339-2015, issued on June 23, 2015. AiTECH was the first CHED-recognized HEI among local colleges and universities (LUCs) in the Philippines."

It began offering its Bachelor of Science in Construction Engineering (BSCONE) program in the beginning of academic year (AY) 2015-2016. By AY 2021-2022, AiTECH started a revitalized bachelor's degree program as prescribed by CHED. The new degree program is now a Bachelor's in Construction Engineering Technology and Management (BCETM), and is the first college in the country to offer such a degree. It accepts students from Antipolo and Rizal. It also had a Senior High School Program that reached out to ALS learners.

A few learners mentioned that AiTECH is unique for several reasons. First, the quality of education is noteworthy, given that many professors also teach at bigger schools. Second, AiTECH is seen as a place where one can find family; this sense of community motivates students to achieve their goals. Third, the school has peer counselors who provide support for fellow students.

AiTECH ensures that students secure their diplomas and attain national certificates after graduation. The interviewed learners shared that AiTECH provides many things that other schools are not able to offer. Educators are hands-on with their students, encouraging them to become nation-builders. Furthermore, relevant TVET content is introduced during the semester, which prepares students for their training in TESDA, where they eventually get their national certificates. Given their close partnership with the private sector, AiTECH is able to jointly develop innovative projects. One example of this collaboration is the IDEA LAB, which investigates the use of bamboo in construction.

While AiTECH has only been operating as a local community college for less than ten years, it has already produced gainfully employed graduates. The learners' stories point to an institution that facilitates its students' learning journeys, whether by providing bridging programs before entering college, arranging for TVET training with TESDA, facilitating internships, or even supporting its students in their search for employment.

What are the elements that account for such good practice? Leadership is key. Several learners referenced the college's former President, Erlinda Pefianco, who spearheaded its launching. One learner even shared that during one training event in his high school, President Pefianco came as a speaker and encouraged students to enroll at AiTECH. The vision of the leader needs to be shared with the team or staff, and it is evident that AiTECH has a cohesive professional team in place, supporting the academic and extracurricular activities of the students.

Collaborations with local government and the private sector have also proved to be critical in AiTECH's success. The funding and involvement of the local government ensures predictable and consistent allocation of resources. In many of AiTECH's activities, representatives from the Office of the Mayor participate, if not the Mayor himself. Meanwhile, the close partnership with the construction industry enables sectoral players to take part in shaping the curriculum. Given the industry's close involvement in curriculum development, it is not surprising that construction companies are able to provide internships to the learners, with some learners even securing job offers. AiTECH's coordination with TESDA and other institutional linkages also facilitates the smooth processing and certification of the learners. Collaborations with the private sector and TESDA result in a vast network supporting learning requirements and certification demands.

Given the standards for the scholars, there is a relatively high motivation for learning. This is further strengthened by the community of staff and learners determined to make a difference. To understand the learners´ journey, excerpts from their interviews are presented.

BOX 9. BR'S LEARNING BIOGRAPHY

BR was already enrolled as a student at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) when he first learned about AiTECH. Due to certain financial constraints brought about by a family situation, he needed to transfer to a closer university. His father told him that AiTECH was also offering a degree in Engineering, and so he pulled out of PUP and took the AiTECH entrance exam in 2019. He said the entrance exam was a requirement as AiTECH is a government-funded institution that would like to attract quality students.

In Senior High School (SHS), BR was already interested in engineering, and so he took the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) track. This background proved advantageous as he did not have to take the bridging program upon entering AiTECH. He proudly shared that he was the only one in his batch who did not have to take the program.

Aside from his STEM background, he knew nothing about college life. The difficulty of adjusting to college was exacerbated by family challenges that affected his relations with other students. He said that, in one way, the pandemic was a blessing; it allowed him to reflect and process his own mental and emotional state. On top of his full-time class schedule, he also devoted time to his family and church ministry.

Nevertheless, the pandemic also brought on certain challenges; due to the pandemic, he has only been able to get four NC2 from TESDA. It took him five years to get his degree, including 800 hours of internship. In terms of college preparation, he advises future students to be ready for the hardships: complex subjects related to engineering, their professors, and the expectations of their families. Finding people who will help them is important as college life is complicated.

He was offered an internship at MEGAWIDE, but he turned it down because it required him to work until Saturday. He shared that he needed the two-day rest. Fortunately, the HR of MEGAWIDE referred him to the Philippine Constructors Association Inc. (PCA). According to BR, PCA provides many learning opportunities. He is able to learn from PCA trainings where he provides technical support.

BOX 10. MJ'S LEARNING BIOGRAPHY

In 2015, MJ finished 11th in his high school class. At the time, only students in the top ten of a class were granted automatic admission into AiTECH, and so MJ was not qualified to apply. His guidance counselor convinced him to still try and enter AiTECH, stating that he would not be able to pursue further studies otherwise. MJ already had two siblings in college, and the family could not afford a third one. In the end, the guidance counselor was able to facilitate his entrance.

His dream was to be an English teacher. He did not consider engineering, but when he got in, he wanted to understand what the title "engineer" meant. He said that every child wants to be called an engineer.

Initially, he did not know the difference between a Civil Engineer and a Construction Engineer, but as he went through the subjects, he began to see the distinction . Aside from the fact that construction engineers do not need to take a licensure exam, MJ saw that they have more training and actual skills in the construction industry.

MJ belonged to the last batch before the K-12 curriculum was implemented, and so he found it difficult to make the transition to college. This was true especially in the first years as his mathematics background was not as good. However, the two to three month bridging program offered by AiTECH before the start of the semester helped to improve his skills. He started taking TVET training in his second year. He has obtained 12 certificates from the joint training of Construction Manpower Development Foundation (C MDF) and AiTECH, and 5 NC2 from TESDA.

In preparation for entrance to AiTECH, he advised interested students to be ready for the stress, especially the demands of the construction tasks. Unlike other courses, the AiTECH course required mental and physical stamina. When he had problems at school, his peers in the church helped him and encouraged him to go on. It took him five years to finish with the first batch of entrants. Now, the course could be completed in four years.

After graduation, he was able to pursue his dream of becoming a teacher, as he now teaches part-time at AiTECH. Aside from teaching part-time, he also subcontracts for construction projects.

BOX 11. LILY'S LEARNING BIOGRAPHY

Lily learned about AiTECH through a chance visit to her brother´s school, which was just beside the college. There was no entrance examination, only an interview. She was accepted into two other colleges, but ultimately decided to attend AiTECH due to its proximity to her residence, her passion, and the free tuition that could free up resources for her family.

She initially wanted to be an architect, but as time passed, she developed a passion for construction engineering . She was on the STEM track in SHS, which allowed her to bypass the bridging program.

As part of the first batch of students during the COVID-19 pandemic, she experienced some difficulties with modular and online learning. It was also not easy to be at home most of the time because Lily had to balance school with household tasks. As time passed, she could adjust and find the right balance. Alongside her heavy academic schedule, she is also involved in extracurricular activities. At one time, she was the President of the Student Council. The NC certificates equipped her to supervise construction workers, as she was trained in the construction process. Lily is in the process of completing 800 hours of internship. She works part-time as a virtual assistant.

BOX 12. IRISH'S LEARNING BIOGRAPHY

Irish was part of the first batch of K-12 students. She learned about AiTECH when Pres. Pefianco and the Dean of the college went to her high school to discuss the possibility of entering AiTECH as an SHS STEM strand student. Irish initially wanted to pursue the Humanities and Social Sciences track, while her second choice was accounting. This was before she knew about AiTECH. Eventually, she pursued AiTECH's STEM program. She notes that the STEM offering was already directed to construction, so she already had an advantage compared to those who did not have this background.

In Senior High School, she still had second thoughts about continuing with AiTECH, doubting her competencies. By the second year, with support from the staff at AiTECH, she was convinced that the construction engineering course was for her. Joining a school organization helped her adjust and learn new skills. Aside from respecting the competencies of her professors, she is also proud to be part of the construction industry.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic prevented face-to-face meetings, she could get only one certification from TESDA. However, she also had other certificates of participation. Through the AiTECH Group Chat, she got information on the job opening at PCA where she now works.

TABLE 7. TESDA LEARNERS' RESPONSES

LEARNER	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON TESDA	PROGRAM FROM TESDA	DURATION OF PROGRAM	COMMENTS	WHAT IS POSITIVE ABOUT TRAINING
Male 1 23 y.o.	Electronic Engineering graduate SHS Tech VOC-ICT did not provide adequate Math for his course For engineering courses, STEM would be the best background	Cousin	Megatronic for the industrial field NC2	24 days	Due to his previous background, the trainer gave him advanced lessons for NC3	There was hands-on training with actual equipment The pedagogy of the trainer was commendable
Female 1 28 y.o.	Business Administration graduate Used the knowledge of family business	Facebook post from ASPIRANT (going to Korea)	Korean language Certificate of Participation	100 hours	The learner gave birth three years ago and did not have the funds to enroll in the Korean Language Center, so she studied online	I was able to recap my self-study I was able to study culture and was given a background of Korea I was provided with free workbooks for practice

LEARNER	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON TESDA	PROGRAM FROM TESDA	DURATION OF PROGRAM	COMMENTS	WHAT IS POSITIVE ABOUT TRAINING
Female 2 23 y.o.	BA in English Education graduate Licensed teacher SHS HUMMS	Learner was referred to when she applied for a job	Trainor's Methodology I		The learner has been teaching in a Japanese language agency, has a Japanese Prof NC4 based on self-study, and has purchased books online	There was structure to how it was taught New templates and procedures for assessment Flow is self-paced It is a free and accredited competency-based curriculum There was a good environment
Male 2 23 y.o.	Industrial Engineer graduate SHS STEM	From TESDA FB	English Proficiency	25 days	Learner needed English proficiency for future work After oath taking, he decided to do upskilling	The scholarship is a big help The approach of teachers with diverse learning backgrounds was really good. There was a conducive learning environment
Male 3 27 y.o.	Mechanical engineering graduate Basic education curriculum	Through work place	Facilitating E-learning session		For upskilling, he took Trainer's Methodology 1 He takes a leave from work when training	There is hands-on experience Through TESDA, they get access to qualified trainers. TESDA facilitates a network in the industry. It also provides a new career path
Male 4 20 y.o.	High School graduate ABM	Sponsor for scholarship	Automotive mechanic	One year	The Learner wanted to be a mechanical engineer but still needed to pass the exam One year of training could already land you a job Training builds confidence as you become competent The learner is now waiting for Porsche training	

Except for one learner, all TESDA-referred learners are college graduates. Additionally, most respondents went on training while waiting for work. Only one (out of six) was employed, and he would take leave during training as classes could be full-time or half-time. Training in TESDA is free, and learners are given a food allowance, which all learners appreciated (P160 for whole day sessions). Two learners shared that they undertook paid training required for certification and upskilling.

In contrast, half of them undertook self-study online to complement their existing training, particularly because the COVID-19 pandemic affected face-to-face training and internships. Regarding the positive features of the TESDA training, three of the most common responses were 1) hands-on training, 2) qualified trainers, and 3) a conducive learning environment.

To summarise the main difference, the first set of learners were studying or had completed their degrees in AiTECH with TVET requirements embedded in their curriculum. Meanwhile, in the second set of learners (i.e., those referred by TESDA) , almost all had completed their bachelor's degrees and were participating in different types of training while waiting for work. This means that for the AiTECH learner, the institution was facilitating the TESDA TVET training, so the sources of TVET training information for this case were just coming from AiTECH. On the other hand, there were different sources of information for the second set of learners—ranging from friends, workplaces, TESDA centers, and official Facebook pages.

These mechanisms—one that is institution-driven and another that is dependent on various sources—is essential in facilitating pathways. In a way, one could characterize the first type as seamless, as the institution has paved a pathway for the training to be undertaken. AiTECH, for example, adjusts its curriculum so that the learners are prepared for their hands-on training with TESDA. The second type could be described as diverging paths depending on the learners' situations. This description refers to the transition from academic to TVET.

A review of the learner's journey shows that even before entering tertiary institutions, the secondary education path, especially with the K-12 curriculum, could be as diverse as the learners' journeys. Many young learners still needed to figure out what track to take (whether academic, vocational, sports, or art design), and choosing which academic strand to pursue (e.g., STEM, HUMSS, ABM, or GAS) took a lot of work. Once they finish SHS, it is not always a smooth journey to tertiary studies given the many factors that could shape entry to this next level. These include entrance exams, grades in high school, availability of funds, geography, and family, which could conflict with the career preference of the learner. Flexible learning pathways have been advocated as a way to respond to the diverse

backgrounds, needs, and situations of the learners. This requires a better understanding of such diversity of situations. A good starting point would be studies like the PIDS series (David et al. 2018) which provides data on why learners are not in school.

TABLE 8. REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL (DAVID ET AL. 2018, 14)

| REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOLS | SECONDARY AGED-CHILDREN | | | | | | | | |
| | 2008 | | | 2014 | | | 2017 | | |
	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
Lack of personal interest	54.7	33.9	47.2	51.2	29	44.1	60.6	41.8	53.2
High cost of education	21.9	30.3	24.9	25.2	38.3	29.4	22.4	18.9	21.0
Too young to go to school									
Illness/Disability	5	8.2	6.1	10.4	16.7	12.4	7.8	9.8	8.6
Lack of nearby schools	3.3	5.6	4.1	0.6	2.7	1.3	4.6	4.7	4.6
Employment	9.2	7.8	8.7	6	1.9	4.7	3.4	12.5	7.0
Other reasons (incl. school records, marriage, housekeeping)	5.9	14.2	8.9	6.6	11.3	8.1	1.2	12.4	5.6

Note: Authors' calculations on microdata of APIS 2008, APIS 2014, APIS 2016, PSA

At the international level, it would be important to reflect on the OECD ten-country study (1988) on pathways and participation in Vocational and Technical Education and Training, which documented the training path of the youth in the system. It was the first attempt to systematize the country's youth participation in TVET from a pathway perspective. At the same time, it acknowledged the importance of understanding the whole education and training system.

As Raffe (1998) wrote:

> An education system is a network of pathways. In some systems, the different pathways may be separate, with few opportunities to move between them, so that each program is a component of just one pathway (or very few); in other systems, there may be numerous cross-roads, junctions and interconnecting routes, so that any program may be entered by students traveling along a variety of different pathways.

> We can, therefore, describe an education system and its components in terms of the characteristics of:

- individual programs: their entrance requirements, content, level, learning site (school, workplace), duration, certification, and the access or entitlement to further education or training which they may give;

- individual pathways: their starting point, length, sequence (for example, sequence of general and vocational programs and/or of programs at different levels), and destination; pathways may also be described in terms of the characteristics of their component programs (for example, we may talk of "general" or "work-based" pathways); and

- systems of pathways: the age or stage at which pathways diverge, the number and diversity of pathways, their interconnectedness, and so on; a system may also be described in terms of the characteristics of the average or typical pathways within it (for example, we may talk of a system with "long" pathways) (378).

Furthermore, Raffe (1998) argues that "decisions to participate are influenced by the opportunities, incentives, costs, and constraints (OICCs) associated with each program, and the OICCs, in turn, are influenced by the structure of pathways". At the same time, factors outside of the education system could also impact on OICCs.

After programs, the second element of the conceptual framework of the OECD study is the individual learner.

> The pathways approach thus links the level of the system, with which policymakers must engage, with the level of the individual. The OICCs associated with a particular set of pathways may vary across different categories of students...Young people's participation in VOTEC— and their responses to a given set of OICCs—depend on their aspirations and preferences. These are also likely to vary across different categories of young people, for example, in relation to gender, social class, and ethnicity, or nationality. Moreover, they may change autonomously—that is, independently of the education and training system and the labor market (Raffe 1998, 379)

According to Raffe (1998), the third element is information and guidance.

> Rational or not, young people's choices will depend on the information that is available to them, both about the available programs and about the associated pathways and their OICCs. (380).

While explaining the pathway framework's relevance for governments, Raffe underscores the limitations of examining the country reports.

> The first arises from the limitations of the available statistics. The second is the problem of empirically identifying pathways independent of policy intentions and the journeys that students make along them (382).

Acknowledging the heavy demands for data, Raffe enumerates the ideal data needed for a robust pathway study:

- describe flows as well as stocks—that is, data on student flows as well as on levels of participation;

- describe flows through the whole education and training system, including apprenticeship and part-time education, and into the labor market;

- compare students from different educational and social backgrounds and

- describe the system at different points in time, using categories that allow us to make comparisons over time" (382)

Raffe pointed out that participating countries at that time (1998) did not satisfy all the data requirements. More "stock" data was available than "flow" data. Notably, he mentioned that:

> "Most countries have poor information on flows through apprenticeship or part-time education, on entry to the labor market and subsequent outcomes, on young people returning to full-time education after a break, or on "second-chance" educational opportunities."
>
> [...] In order to understand pathways, it may be necessary to know about flows across more than one transition point. For example, a new pathway may allow students to move from VOTEC to higher education, but to judge the value of this pathway, we need to know whether the students who followed it had the same chances of success as other higher education students and whether their subsequent prospects were the same".
>
> [...] The pathways approach is concerned with changes in pathways and participation and therefore requires data on change over time" (383).

In addition to the data requirements, the challenge of empirically identifying pathways remains. There are two approaches: "The first approach identifies pathways based on the intentions of the policymakers who created them and the formal opportunities they put in place," (Raffe 1998, 384) and the second is based on the "journeys that students make along them" (382). Both approaches are needed as learners ultimately decide based on the program offerings.

If the Philippines were to conduct pathway studies to understand youth participation in different tracks, it would need to assess what datasets are already available and/or propose what is contextually appropriate for the country's education and training system. The different elements that Raffe highlights should be considered. Clearly, a learner perspective needs to be included.

Aside from the OECD studies, two countries have also pursued research on pathways and understanding how such knowledge could contribute to policy changes. McKenzie (2000) wrote about Australia's (work (together with OECD) in "pathway engineering" in the 1990s, saying:

> A common motivation in these policy initiatives has been the desire to better prepare young people for an increasingly uncertain economic and social future. The pace of change is so rapid that individuals need to acquire new skills and knowledge throughout their adult lives to maintain their employability and capacity to engage effectively in society, in other words, to be active lifelong learners. There is a growing recognition that a successful transition to work depends on having a sound foundation for further learning and skills that the labor market requires now (1).

He describes how the term "pathways" was introduced through the publication of "Young People´s Participation in Education and Training" (also known as the 1991 Finn Review). According to the Report, the concept was "a useful mental image to explain the various combinations of education, training and employment activities which individuals may undertake over time to reach a destination such as a desired qualification or type of employment" (13).

The imagery of the pathway had five elements:

- a set of interrelated experiences providing for progression;

- education and training should have a sense of continuity even when individuals cross institutional and sectoral boundaries;

- young people should have access to a range of different pathways and should be able to move from one to another without losing ground;

- there is a need for effective credit transfer and articulation arrangements to provide smooth bridges between pathways, and;

- signposts (information and career advice) are needed at the end of each pathway and each junction between pathways (McKenzie 2000, 2)

The Finn committee proposed "wide-ranging reforms, including the greater provision of vocational learning opportunities for secondary school students, the facilitation of student movement between the school, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and university sectors, and the establishment of national targets to help lift young people's educational participation and attainment" (McKenzie 2000, 2). But after a decade of substantial reforms, McKenzie points out that there is "still considerable disquiet in Australia about the nature and functioning of the pathways open to young people" (2000, 2).

In 1999, a Task Force was constituted to develop a Youth Pathway Action Plan. McKenzie's paper describes the developments after. He prefaces his work by insisting on the "need is for an approach that recognizes that a "system" of pathways results from an interaction between the pathways designs and reforms of policymakers on the one hand, and the decisions by young people and their families on the other" (2000, 3).

Using the OECD study, McKenzie (2000) argues that "young people´s pathways through education and into work in Australia can be characterized more as individually constructed than as institutionally based". He also refers to the Longitudinal Surveys on Australian Youth, which provide detailed information on learners' choices of "whether to leave to seek employment, including trying to obtain an apprenticeship or traineeship that is linked to employment, or whether to continue with their studies". The data from this survey provides a detailed mapping of the experiences of young people over time.

The bifurcation of the learning pathways research is also noted by South African researchers who would like to build on these two approaches and are interested in "developing a dialectical methodology which takes account of the relations between the individual learning pathway(s); and the system(s) of learning pathway provisioning, and how this relation may be placed under scrutiny in empirical work" (Lotz-Sisitka, Ramsarup, and Bolton 2017, 8-9). One important concept is articulation, and the researchers have referred to Hopper's (2009) definition.

> The principle that makes an integrated system come to life for the benefit of all learners is that of articulation (i.e., the actual connections between different learning pathways at the horizontal level and the transitions from one level to the next in vertical terms). enable young people to move through the system in accordance with their evolving circumstances and needs. [...] Effective articulation within an integrated system enables parallel and second chance learning pathways to emerge (27-31).

From this, Lotz-Sisitka and Ramsarup (2017) offer the perspective that,

> Articulation is the recognition of systemic articulation, which involves the joined-up systems incorporating qualifications, professional designations and other elements central to work and learning pathways (34).

They also show the multi-dimensionality of articulation, using the OECD definition,

> Articulation is not a mechanical matter of formal recognition of qualifications or prior learning experiences, necessary as these may be. It is also a learning concept, implying complementarity, continuous enhancement or development of competencies, achievement, and progression along a pathway that is personally meaningful and has social recognition and status (OECD 1998,51 as quoted in Lotz-Sisitka and Ramsarup , 44).

In her literature review on learning pathways, Ramsarup (2017, 75) describes its many features:

- Pathways have served as an influential organizing construct, and the imagery of the pathway, with its sense of order and structure, and linked education and training experiences that lead to employment, has had a significant impact on educational policy.

- Pathways are 'continuous' and should be seen as a series of stepping stones, making the trajectory 'fragmented and discontinuous."

- Direction – pathways lead somewhere, although there is often not known or understood, and sometimes they change direction. In reflecting on the complex patterns of movement, the Harris et al. study (2006:3) concluded that pathways are not linear and seamless but rather "stepping stones, zig-zags or lurches."

- The term 'pathways' helped to express length and complexity, illustrating something longer than a step.

- Pathways can interconnect. Travelers can choose between pathways to change direction, or they may "set off with no clear destination in mind.

Ramsarup also refers to Wheelahan (2009), who asserts that:

> putting pathways at the center of an education and training system helps to bring many parts of the system into direct relationship with each other and thus helps us to raise questions on how qualifications and curriculum provide for educational progression. Investigating the nature of pathways helps to create better flow within education and training, improved connections between education and work, and improved development and use of skills at work (7).

Ramsarup continues to elaborate on the two purposes of pathways according to Wheelahan (2009),

> "Firstly, pathways increase the effectiveness and efficiency of education systems—this, according to Wheelan (2009, 6), means that individuals need to be able to move between "different types of qualifications and different occupational sectors with ease," to reduce time and costs to individuals and governments. The second purpose is linked to equity and social inclusion: pathways aim to give access and opportunity to disadvantaged individuals" (78)

While useful as an organizing concept to examine the relationships between education and training systems, Ramsarup (2017) also identifies three critical points about the use of pathways, namely linearity and determinism, economism, and individualism.

Finally, Ramsarup unpacks the importance of transitions in the pathways discussion and presents Raffe´s framework for looking at transitions and pathways (see Figure 13).

FIGURE 13. FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSITION SYSTEMS (RAMSARUP 2017, 94)
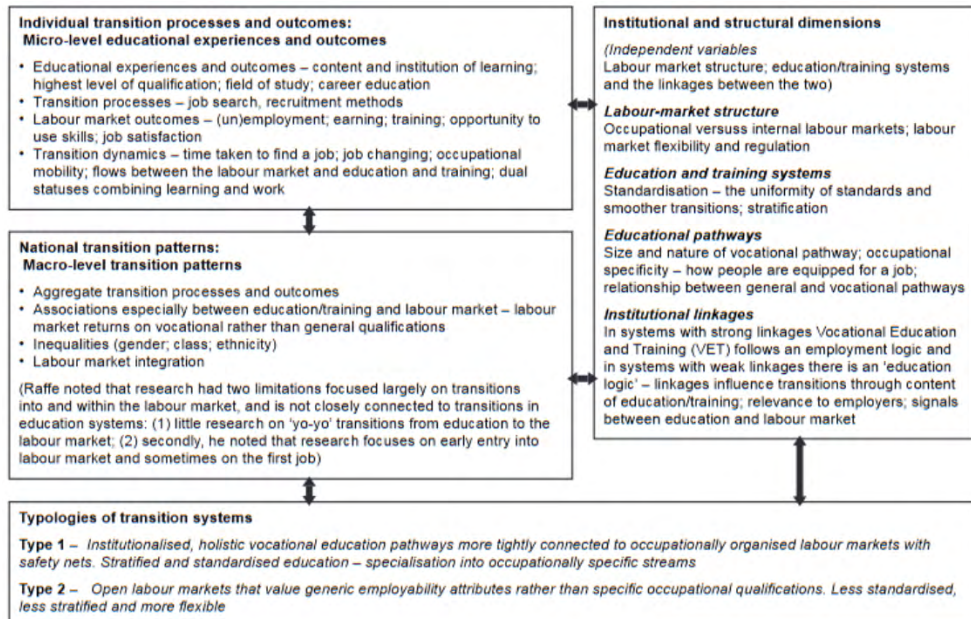
Reflecting on the almost 30 years of discourse and research on pathways, most of the discussion has focused on TVET, with the relationship between learning and work as a critical question. More recently, the pathways research has also encompassed higher education. In multi-country study by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, flexible learning pathways were explored from three perspectives: flexible entry pathways to higher education, flexible study opportunities, and flexibility toward graduation and finding employment. From Finland, the following are the national recommendations:

■ The concept of flexible learning pathways and the related objectives, development measures, and monitoring should be defined as one whole.

■ The statistical monitoring related to the realization of flexible learning pathways should be strengthened, and the existing data should be used more efficiently. Areas in need of improvement include longitudinal monitoring of the open pathway, improving the monitoring of transfer application procedures, and developing indicators for continuous learning.

■ Flexible learning pathways can promote the realization of equity and accessibility of higher education from the point of view of different equity groups. Drawing up national objectives and indicators for equity would support implementation at the

institutional level and promote monitoring at the national and institutional level (FINNEEC n.d., under "The key results and recommendations in Finland's country case report in 2020").

This chapter presented brief learners' journeys as an exploratory study. A sample of 13 learners from the tertiary sector, most of whom were moving from university to TVET, will surely not reflect the different modalities and combinations Filipino learners are exposed to. Patterns of movement are quite complex within and across various fields. A 2006 study on learning pathways in Australia showed the importance of conducting more studies that put learners' experiences at the center, emphasizing the non-linear journeys that learners take (Harris, Rainey, and Sumner 2006).

As a conclusion for this exploratory study, it is recommended that more in-depth studies on learners' journeys be undertaken to cover not only movement within the tertiary sector, but also include movement from the primary and secondary levels, especially from marginalized groups. These studies should cover the barriers and enablers for effective cross institution articulation. Three decades of research and policy work on learning pathways show that having an integrated perspective that embraces both the system and the individual approach is critical. The research of OECD, Australia, South Africa, and IIEP have provided several lessons on the key areas of consensus and contention. A comprehensive study on learning pathways in the Philippines must consider these lessons when developing the conceptual and methodological framework.

Conclusion

"Kung sa civil engineer, ang bala nila ay lisensiya. Kami po, ay iyong makapal na portfolio."

Graduate from AiTECH, who has acquired 5 NC2 from TESDA and 12 certificates of participation from CMDF

The human brain is wired to learn. This vital physiological, mental, emotional, and social process enables people to survive and, more critically, live in a community. Learning throughout life is, therefore, assumed to be part and parcel of any person´s development. This life process is intricately related to the now global education discourse of lifelong learning. A concept that was first introduced a hundred years ago to refer to adults' need for learning has been the subject of contestation and resignification so that now, in the 21st century, it is inscribed as one of the globally agreed development goals.

SDG 4, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," is associated with seven outcome targets and three means of implementation targets, measured with eleven indicators. What is evident in this goal is that governments, who are the signatories of these global agreements, need to push for lifelong learning opportunities for everybody. How they should accomplish this is assumed to be each government´s task, even if they are made accountable globally by the publication of each country's progress on the SDG4 indicators. It is now recognized that the existence of policies is a first step towards attaining national goals. Over fifty years ago, a UNESCO Report proposed "lifelong education as the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries" (International Commission on the Development of Education 1972, 182). Through time, lifelong learning became the preferred concept as governments and international agencies imbued it with different perspectives, from a holistic purpose of shaping the human being to a more economistic pursuit.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution, without explicitly mentioning lifelong learning, contains several provisions promoting equitable lifelong learning opportunities. This is the first reason to be optimistic. It is vital to note that through time, the term lifelong learning has crept into education and training discourses in the country. Eventually, the Philippine Development Plans, starting from 2004, contained references to the concept. However, as one examines the discourses associated with it, terms like competition and work slowly became key elements for pursuing lifelong learning. This is not surprising, as the dominant

economic perspective has permeated national policies in a globalized world. This is where one must be cautious about the country's future of lifelong learning policies.

Aside from the different government definitions of what constitutes life learning, the two draft bills on lifelong learning focus on skills and TVET. In the short term, it is therefore recommended that education and training stakeholders review definitions and provisions of lifelong learning in government agencies' draft bills and collectively arrive at a shared understanding of the term and its implications for future bills and government programs. As part of the exercise, it would be important to relate how lifelong learning could contribute to the AmBisyon Natin 2040, a long-term vision for the Philippines where Filipinos could look forward to a "Matatag, Maginhawa at Panatag na Buhay." This renewed perspective on lifelong learning should be systematically shared among the stakeholders so that it can be understood and used consistently as a basis for policies and programs.

Given the importance of lifelong learning practices, there are countless examples of lifelong programs worldwide, and we should be optimistic that our neighbors can help us unpack how to make lifelong learning policies operational. While not labeled as lifelong learning programs in the Philippines, many existing practices could also be sources of inspiration and concrete lessons. What needs to be updated is data from basic education, TVET, and Higher Education that must become readily available to the public. To convince stakeholders that lifelong learning matters, we need stories and numbers. In the mid-term, it is recommended that the three education and training agencies work together with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) to arrive at uniform indicators for lifelong learning (using the SDG targets and indicators as a starting point) and commit to publication in three to four years.

The existence of two laws, the 2014 Ladderized Education Act and the 2018 PQF Act, which facilitate lifelong learning, is cause for optimism. On the other hand, their slow rollout is reason for caution. Starting as an Executive Order in 2012, the PQF could be considered more than ten years old, but only a few outcomes have been demonstrated. The reality is that Qualifications Frameworks are one of the most complex mechanisms for individuals' learning to be recognized and accredited. Fifty years of NQF practices indicate that several interrelated factors produce operational and purposeful qualifications. A broader perspective of the qualification system allows us to situate the NQF in the context of education and training. Recognizing that it is essential that we learn lessons from decades of NQF practices worldwide, it is recommended that a broader discussion of the PQF and the lessons from the world be organized in the short term. As evidence points to the critical role of an NQF authority for an operational NQF, it is recommended in the

mid-term that a PQF authority be implemented. This recommendation is premised on the broader discussion mentioned earlier, where PQF stakeholders are vital to crafting the critical features of the PQF authority.

One of the acknowledged features of the lifelong learning discourse (in comparison to the lifelong education concept) is the centrality of the learner. Previously, the teacher was believed to be the center of the classroom. What does the shift mean? Notions like facilitating learning, learning environments, and learning outcomes have become more popular. Since its introduction fifty years ago, the idea of learning outcome has been the subject of debate, with one side arguing for the limitations of measuring learning, and another stating that it is more applicable to TVET. What is essential here is to appreciate that a concept like learning (a vital life process) could easily be attached to a technical referent (e.g., outcomes) or, more recently, crisis, poverty, loss, or recovery (i.e., learning crisis, learning poverty, learning loss, and learning recovery). Unfortunately, not much research in the Philippines has been undertaken on the individual learners, probing how they learn, their learning journey, and how the learners respond or adapt. The short interviews with 13 learners, all living in Metro Manila, give a different narrative from the more recent dominant discourse that the country is facing a learning crisis or learning poverty. As an exploratory study on learning pathways from the learner´s experiences, the stories present 13 different pathways as each learner confronts all types of obstacles, gets various kinds of support, and eventually decides the way forward in their learning journey. They all tell the story of resilience, determination, courage, and no trace of learning crisis or poverty.

Our chosen narrative is critical in determining the path to a transformed future. As a country, we constantly face stories of success and horrible failures. We encounter potholes and roadblocks in our lifelong learning journeys, but we can also gain hope from the youth who continuously aim to learn more. In one way, we should also acknowledge that millions of Filipinos work abroad because of our education and training system. In the end, we could either adopt the lifelong learning narrative we see from other countries, or we could carefully craft a narrative that showcases not only our individual strengths, but also the collective struggles of its people to be "Matatag, Maginhawa at Panatag na Buhay." As Dave (1976) has argued, "when the principle of lifelong education is universalized and applied on a mass scale to different societies, it is likely to take different operational modalities under different socio-economic, political and cultural conditions" (35).

Interview Questions for the Learners

1. Paano mo nalaman ang tungkol sa programang ito?

2. Ano-anong mga bagay ang tinanong mo tungkol sa programang ito? Paano mo na desisyon na pumasok sa programang ito?

3. Kailan ka nag-umpisa sa programang ito? Ilang oras ang ginugugol mo bawat araw sa partisipasyon/paglahok sa programang ito? May hiwalay ka bang panahon na ginugugol para sa paghahanda sa programang ito? Kailan ka matatapos?

4. Sa tingin mo, may sapat na paghahanda ka bago pumasok sa programang ito? Ano ba ang kailangan paghahanda para sapat na lumahok sa programang ito?

5. Ano anong mga bagay/elemento ang nagustuhan mo sa programang ito? Kung may kaibigan kang magtatanong tungkol sa programang ito, anong tatlong bagay ang masasabi mo?

6. Sa tingin mo, anong mga bagay ang pwedeng baguhin/ palitan para mas maging epektibo ang programa para sa mag-aaral/sa estudyante?

7. Pagkatapos ng programa, ano ang balak mo?

8. May iniisip ka bang programang pwedeng lahukan pagkatapos nito?

Biographical note

Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo is an education expert with extensive experience in program development, research, and advocacy. Recently retired, she has served in various roles, including Head of Education at the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa and Deputy Director at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, Germany. With a background in sociology and a master's degree in Development Studies from the University of the Philippines, her work spans lifelong learning, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), higher education, and sustainable development. She has led high-level regional strategies, authored influential publications, and contributed to the creation of global and regional education policies. Her career reflects a deep commitment to advancing education access, equity, and quality across diverse contexts.

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