

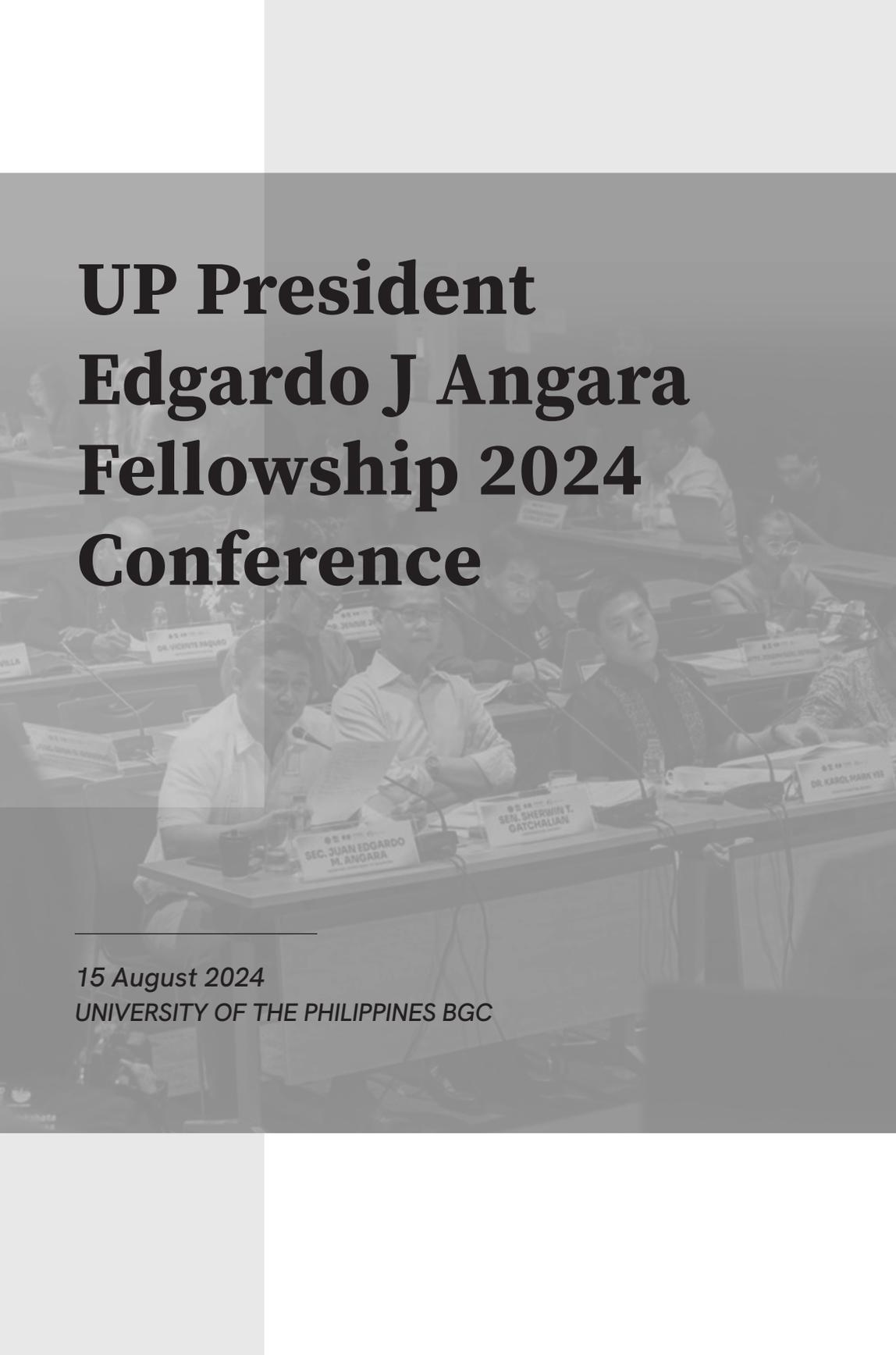
UP President Edgardo J Angara Fellowship 2024 Conference

15 August 2024

UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES BGC



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
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STUDIES



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UP CIDS Proceedings

is published by the

University of the Philippines**Center for Integrative and Development Studies**

Lower Ground Floor, Ang Bahay ng Alumni
Magsaysay Avenue, University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City 1101

Telephone: (02) 8981-8500 loc. 4266 to 4268 / (02) 8426-0955

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ISSN 2718-9295 (Print)

ISSN 2718-9309 (Online)

Cover image credit

"Need for decentralization, industry participation among EDCOM 2-UPPEJA Fellows' findings"

EDCOM 2 Communications, 18 August 2024. <https://edcom2.gov.ph/need-for-decentralization-industry-participation-among-edcom-2-uppeja-fellows-findings/>

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Proceedings for the University of the Philippines PEJA Fellowship Roundtable Series

ISSN 2619-7278 (Print)
ISSN 2619-7286 (Online)

Policy Brief
2025-10

■ HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH AND POLICY REFORM PROGRAM

STRENGTHENING HIGHER EDUCATION

By Examining the Partnership Between UP CIDS-HERPRP and EDCOM 2 for the UP PEJA Fellowship

Jake Sumagang and Marie Lara Pauline Bobier

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief examines the ongoing partnership between the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program (UP CIDS-HERPRP) and the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2). This partnership aims to tackle pressing challenges in the Philippine higher education sector. Through a combination of collaborative research, policy development, and capacity-building initiatives, this partnership leverages the academic expertise of HERPRP and its connections, and the legislative authority of EDCOM 2 to support data-driven reforms. Emphasis is placed on enhancing the accessibility, quality, and equity of higher education. Key policy recommendations for this partnership will highlight strategies for addressing the current issues through collaboration between both parties.

The UP CIDS HERPRP is a leading institution in educational policy research, aiming "... to chart a research agenda, systematically build an evidence base for policy analysis, and create a network of experts and researchers doing work in this sector. HERPRP also serves as a connecting body seeking to build partnerships and working collaborative networks among stakeholders" (UP CIDS, n.d.). Meanwhile, EDCOM 2 is tasked "with the mandate of conducting a "comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector to recommend transformative, concrete and targeted reforms in the sector with the end in view of making the Philippines globally competitive in both education and labor markets" in the next three years, from 2023 to 2027" (EDCOM 2, n.d.).

The University of the Philippines Foundation, Inc. (UPFI) supports the University of the Philippines (UP) system. According to the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNOC), it is established as a nonstock, nonprofit organization. UPFI's primary mission is to manage and allocate financial resources for various academic and research initiatives. This foundation is pivotal in fostering the growth and development of the university's educational and research capabilities.

One of the key contributions of UPFI is its sponsorship of UP President Edgardo J. Angara Fellowship (UP PEJA). This prestigious fellowship program is designed to support the research endeavors of distinguished fellows.

Strengthening Higher Education by Examining the Partnership Between UP CIDS-HERPRP and EDCOM 2 for the UP PEJA Fellowship

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Introduction

Fernando Paragas

*Convenor, Higher Education Research and Policy Program
UP Center of Integrative and Development Studies*

The conference began with an introduction by Dr. Fernando Paragas of key officials and representatives, including Department of Education Secretary Juan Edgardo “Sonny” Angara, Senator Sherwin “Win” Gatchalian, Congressman Roman D. Romulo, and Dr. Karol Mark Yee. Dr. Paragas then welcomed attendees and explained the historical significance of the conference. He also highlighted that the University of the Philippines (UP) Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS), founded by former UP President Edgardo J. Angara in 1985, plays a critical role in addressing national issues through its multidisciplinary approach.

Such collaboration among key figures and institutions in education and development, including various academic and governmental organizations such as the Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, and several universities, aims to address educational issues in the Philippines.

The conference represents a pivotal moment for the UP CIDS. UP CIDS leverages the university’s multidisciplinary expertise to tackle national challenges, focusing on three clusters: education and capacity building, development, and sociopolitical topics. Through its 13 programs, UP CIDS conducts research, shares findings, and collaborates with stakeholders to improve educational principles, policies, and processes, particularly in partnership with EDCOM 2.

UP CIDS serves as the university’s policy research arm. This partnership with EDCOM 2 marks a milestone as the first institutional collaboration in administering the UP PEJA Fellowship Awards. These awards have funded numerous research projects, many of which have been published in the Philippine Journal of Public Policy.

The culmination of this initiative is a conference where fellows present their findings on higher education policy, addressing pressing issues and offering actionable insights. Their work, characterized by its depth and breadth, is

set to be published, with five manuscripts contributing to a special issue of the Philippine Journal of Public Policy. This partnership underscores the importance of evidence-based policymaking and the role of academia in shaping national development.

Opening Remarks

Rosalie Arcala Hall

Executive Director, UP Center of Integrative and Development Studies

Dr. Rosalie Arcala Hall emphasized the significance of the UP PEJA awards, which have funded various research projects that resulted in public policy journals accessible through the UP CIDS website. For the first time, the UP CIDS and EDCOM 2 achieved a significant milestone by collaborating with another institution to oversee the PEJA awards. This marks the first institutional partnership in the UP CIDS portfolio.

As part of its mandate, UP's policy research unit is tasked with establishing linkages with stakeholders to influence policy development. In alignment with this goal, twenty manuscripts have been prepared for this conference, addressing policy issues relevant to scholars, policymakers, and other stakeholders across various aspects of higher education.

Dr. Rosalie Arcala Hall then introduced Education Secretary Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara, whose speech focused on the long-standing portfolio of UP CIDS, which had managed the UP PEJA fellowship for many years.

Sec. Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara

Secretary, Department of Education

UP PEJA fellowship program ardent supporter and Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Sonny Angara was welcomed to the conference. He underscored the importance of evidence-based policies in education, citing over 300 laws the collaboration sponsored. Many of these laws are focused on lifelong learning and education. He acknowledged the contributions of the late Senator Edgardo Angara in shaping Philippine education and reiterated the importance of knowledge and data in creating sound education policies.

The speech highlights a pivotal event that brings together government officials, academics, and private sector representatives to tackle urgent issues in Philippine education. Organized by the University of the Philippines

Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) and EDCOM 2, the conference celebrates the work of UP PEJA Fellows—scholars whose research and policy recommendations aim to address the nation’s educational challenges.

The speaker begins by acknowledging key individuals, including Senator Win Gatchalian, a staunch advocate for education reform, and various leaders and organizations that have contributed to the success of EDCOM 2.

The UP PEJA Fellowship, an initiative under UP CIDS, embodies Angara’s vision of producing high-quality research to inform government policies. The fellowship, previously exclusive to UP academics, has now expanded to include researchers from other institutions, ensuring a broader and more diverse pool of perspectives. The current batch of fellows has produced studies on critical issues such as governance, financing, higher education regulation, technical-vocational training, and economic complexity. Their work addresses the declining quality of Philippine education, a crisis reflected in dismal test scores and other performance metrics.

Senator Angara emphasizes that these research outputs are not merely academic exercises but offer actionable solutions to bridge the gap between the academe, researchers, and other public intellectuals in fulfilling their respective nation-building roles. He believes that it is not the monopoly of a single university or school, or a tradition to source scholars. The latest batch of PEJA fellowships is open to all academics and researchers.

The presentations will tackle different topics and a roadmap for higher education. Some of the findings have already influenced policies at DepEd, including initiatives to increase school maintenance and operational budgets by addressing the lack of resources for the 46,000 schools in the country. Senator Angara mentioned the shift of resources towards school maintenance and operational expenses with the budget prepared by the Department’s predecessor. He strongly advocated for the decentralization of the Philippine education system. Secondly, he emphasized the implementation of career progression for teachers by creating new middle-level teaching positions to improve promotion opportunities and reduce teacher attrition. He discussed the Teacher Career Progression initiative in recent policies aimed at enhancing teachers’ career trajectories and addressing the lack of middle-level positions, which has led many teachers to seek opportunities abroad.

Additionally, he proposed reducing administrative burdens by suspending unnecessary reporting requirements to allow teachers to focus on instruction. The third recommendation was to improve school feeding programs, specifically targeting younger students to achieve better nutritional outcomes.

Lastly, he underscored the importance of addressing mental health concerns in schools. This issue, highlighted by recent data showing a rise in bullying and suicide incidents, may be partly attributed to a shortage of guidance counselors. He proposed tackling this through new legislation and partnerships to provide better mental health support for students.

The speech highlights the findings of EDCOM 2, which inspired these reforms, and praises the collaborative efforts between government agencies, such as the Civil Service Commission (CSC), and academic institutions. It also acknowledges the potential of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to bridge resource gaps and enhance education governance.

In closing, the speaker commends EDCOM 2 and its partners for their rigorous, data-driven work and encourages continued collaboration to build a more resilient and equitable education system. They express optimism that the insights gained from the UP PEJA Fellows' studies will help shape a brighter future for Philippine education. The event, they conclude, marks a significant milestone in addressing the nation's longstanding educational challenges.

Senator Sherwin “Win” T. Gatchalian

Commissioner, EDCOM II

As a champion of education reform, Senator Sherwin “Win” Gatchalian delivered a speech emphasizing the critical role of partnerships in advancing evidence-based policymaking in Philippine education. Addressing an audience that included Secretary Sonny Angara, UP CIDS representatives, EDCOM 2 members, and UP PEJA Fellows, he highlighted the legacy of the Angara family in championing education reform, beginning with former Senate President Edgardo Angara.

The senator acknowledged EDCOM 2's dedication to evidence-based recommendations, which are central to its charter and enabling law. With its tight three-year timeline mandated by Congress, EDCOM 2 has relied extensively on collaborations with institutions like UP CIDS and other partners. He commended Executive Director Karol Yee for successfully mobilizing over 130 researchers to conduct nearly 90 studies simultaneously, despite limited resources.

UP CIDS, described as one of EDCOM 2's most proactive partners, has played a vital role in facilitating research that supports actionable policy recommendations. Senator Gatchalian emphasizes the value of these partnerships, which enable EDCOM 2 to fulfill its mandate efficiently and effectively. They express gratitude to UP CIDS, the PEJA Fellows, and other collaborators for their dedication and generosity, highlighting that the success of EDCOM 2's mission is deeply rooted in the strong relationships it has built across sectors.

In closing, the speaker reiterates the importance of evidence-based solutions in addressing the challenges of Philippine education and underscores the collective effort required to achieve meaningful reform within the given constraints.

UP President Edgardo J. Angara Fellowship 2024

Presentation Introductions

The fellowship program was led by the program co-convenor from the UP College of Mass Communication, Assistant Professor Maria Jeriesa Osorio, and John Carlo Punongbayan, Assistant Professor at the UP School of Economics.

The emcee introduced the UP PEJA Fellows, highlighting their expertise, accomplishments, and the significance of their contributions to the conference on education governance. These distinguished scholars and practitioners presented their papers, offering evidence-based insights and policy recommendations for improving the Philippine education system.

The first speaker was Dr. Rosario G. Manasan, a retired senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS). Her expertise lies in public finance and fiscal policy, focusing on taxation, public expenditure management, fiscal decentralization, and social sector issues. A prolific writer, her research has profoundly influenced policy discussions on fiscal management.

The second set of speakers was Kenneth Isaiah Ibasco Abante and Ria Supreme Balgos Comiya. Kenneth Abante is the President of the WeSolve Foundation, working on policy and systems change, particularly in sustainable transport and budget transparency. Ria Comiya is a policy researcher and community organizer specializing in disability inclusion, public budgeting, and education reform. Their research, “Kakayanin Natin: Empowering Citizens to Participate in Improving Education Governance in the Philippines,” emphasizes citizen participation in governance, showcasing the power of collective action in addressing educational challenges.

The next presenter was Dr. Asunta Cuyegkeng, a professor at De La Salle University, Executive Director of the Lily Gokongwei Leadership Academy, and Chair of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Technical Working Group on Institutional Sustainability. Her research, titled “Understanding Systems: Creative Strategies and Enabling Leadership—A Systems Thinking Approach for More Effective Delivery of Educational Services,” advocates for systems thinking and strategic leadership in addressing challenges in educational service delivery.

Dr. Maria Regina “Gina” M. Hechanova-Alampay, a full professor at Ateneo de Manila University and Chief of Party for USAID’s Renew Health Project, presented her paper, “Innovations in School Governance.” Her paper explores innovative strategies to enhance governance in schools, with a focus on improving organizational and operational efficiency.

Lastly, for the morning session speakers, Dr. Elizabeth M. King, a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and the UP School of Economics, presented her work titled “Decentralization and Participatory Governance in Education Systems: Global Experiences and Lessons for the Philippines.” This brings a global perspective on decentralized education governance, offering lessons that could be adapted to the Philippine context.

The emcee highlights the fellows’ collective expertise, emphasizing the relevance of their papers to the urgent need for education reform in the Philippines. The breadth of topics—ranging from fiscal policy to systems thinking, citizen participation, and global governance lessons—demonstrates a comprehensive approach to tackling the nation’s education challenges. The presentations promise to deliver transformative solutions grounded in rigorous research and practical applications.

SESSION 1

Governance & Finance

Session 1A

Kakayanin Natin: Empowering Citizens to Participate in Improving Education Governance in the Philippines

Kenneth Isaiah Ibasco Abante and Riz Supreme Balgos Comia

Riz Komiya, a former public school teacher from Quezon and now a UP PEJA Fellow, along with his fellow UP PEJA Fellow, Ken Abante (who joined online with fellow teachers Jesh Viliasses and Hams De Leon), presented their policy research paper titled “Kakayanin Natin: Empowering Citizens to Participate in Improving Education Governance in the Philippines.”

Abante and Komiya’s policy study explored the role of citizen participation in enhancing education governance and identified ways to strengthen community involvement in decision-making processes within schools. Their study found that although there are over 30 policy mechanisms allowing for citizen participation in education governance, many ordinary citizens are unaware of how to engage effectively. This disconnect between policy and its real-world application hinders meaningful involvement in education reform efforts.

The study highlighted the dual roles that teachers often play as both educators and providers of social services. They stressed that overworked teachers are burdened with tasks beyond their mandate, including addressing issues like malnutrition and the economic status of students. This, they argued, detracts from their ability to focus on improving learning outcomes.

The study also found that teachers face difficulties in accessing timely and usable education data for targeted and contextualized initiatives, despite the support of the public education system from civil society, ordinary citizens,

researchers, and organizations. In their research, they compiled 26 student and teacher assessments across the country's basic education sector, and the results showed that only seven of these assessments were publicly available. Of those seven, only two were available internationally. Another critical issue raised was the lack of publicly available and accessible data on student and school performance. Despite these challenges, education leaders still find ways to support the needs of learners.

One young learner cited by Principal Elena, a boy named Mark, whose educational journey helped him become a student leader and is now entering a prestigious state university, organized learning recovery programs for his fellow students. Elena shared how their mayor and barangay officials worked to improve enrollment in her school's catchment area when they learned about young learners like Mark.

To relieve teachers of these additional responsibilities, the presenters recommended the following: First, advocates can use a map to maximize the 30 participation mechanisms, to cultivate strengths, address challenges, and harness the community's sense of possibility to help improve education. This map can be accessed at bit.ly/participate.dashmatrix, anchored in the partnership framework from the DSWD.

Second, they proposed that DepEd hire more nonteaching personnel to manage social services and support learners' needs, thereby freeing up teachers to focus on education. They reiterated that there should be a clear process for accessing nutritious food and referring students to feeding initiatives by the barangay, DepEd, or DSWD.

Third, DepEd can flip the bureaucracy to support the frontlines, shifting from a culture of obedience or compliance to genuine participation. Best practices from several local governments that have initiated innovative ways to ensure that people can take part in local decision-making could be applied here.

Lastly, they recommended that DepEd, CHED, and TESDA invest in an open education data team to proactively disclose datasets, such as tables, dashboards, and scorecards. Empowering advocates and grassroots communities requires that education performance indicators be disclosed in the public interest, in a way that respects data privacy while also protecting freedom of information.

Abante and Komiya argued that the gap in data transparency hinders the ability of civil society, parents, and other stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to education governance. They also noted that the data may be biased because it is based on Quezon City. They are working to validate their findings with more stakeholders across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

In closing, the research aims to encourage every education stakeholder to go beyond just being beneficiaries because education is everyone's responsibility.

Decentralization and Participatory Governance in Education Systems: From Global Experience to Lessons for the Philippines

Elizabeth M. King

Nonresident Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

Visiting Professor, UP School of Economics

As a nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Dr. Elizabeth King discussed the importance of social and emotional skills in students, linking them to broader educational outcomes. She presented a comparative analysis of decentralized education models from other countries and how they could inform policies in the Philippines. Her presentation was titled “Decentralization and Participatory Governance in Education Systems: From Global Experience to Lessons for the Philippines.”

The discussion on decentralization in Philippine education highlights the complexities and prerequisites for implementing such reforms successfully. While decentralization has the potential to improve education governance and outcomes, it is not a guaranteed solution. The challenge lies in designing and executing the reform thoughtfully, considering the Philippine context and learning from global experiences.

According to the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data and other international tests, the Philippines is a highly diverse country in terms of cultures and languages. As an archipelago with many islands, the country faces unequal distribution of resources and administrative capacities across its provinces and municipalities. These disparities are among the reasons why decentralization may be necessary. As a result, it is harder for the central government to adequately support every school across the

country. Dr. King's key points raised important questions for policymakers, particularly regarding which specific functions should be decentralized as part of the Strategic Reform Design.

Dr. King began by discussing why decentralization is particularly important for a country like the Philippines, with its large and geographically diverse education system. She argued that decentralizing certain functions could lead to more responsive and context-sensitive governance, especially in rural and remote areas. Dr. King highlighted key lessons from countries that have successfully decentralized their education systems.

Dr. King emphasized that decentralization does not mean reducing the central government's influence. Instead, the central government should focus on strategic roles like policy formulation, setting standards, providing capacity-building support, and ensuring equity across regions. Based on her extensive research, she recommended adopting a phased, selective, and iterative decentralization process rather than implementing a sweeping reform across the system. She also stressed the need for the central government to prioritize strategic roles by clarifying responsibilities and distributing tasks among local government units (LGUs), schools, and private-sector stakeholders. A key point she made was the importance of clearly delineating and communicating the roles and responsibilities of the central government, as ambiguity can lead to inefficiencies and overlaps.

Dr. King then addressed fiscal considerations, specifically vertical and horizontal fiscal balance. Vertical fiscal balance refers to aligning fiscal transfers with the responsibilities assigned to LGUs. For example, if local governments are tasked with hiring teachers, they must have adequate resources. Horizontal fiscal balance addresses disparities among LGUs to prevent inequities in resource allocation and service delivery. Mechanisms like equalization grants could help mitigate these disparities.

One of the major concerns in decentralization is fiscal imbalance. The disparities in local administrative and technical capacities highlight the need for the central government to provide monitoring and accountability through transparent reporting mechanisms. This builds trust and accountability among stakeholders. Numerous studies have shown that stakeholders who are actively involved in the performance of schools and students can improve the education system.

In conclusion, decentralization in Philippine education offers an opportunity to improve governance, accountability, and outcomes, but only if implemented thoughtfully. A phased and iterative approach, coupled with clear delineation of roles, fiscal balance, capacity-building, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems, is essential. Policymakers must draw lessons from other countries while tailoring the reform to address the Philippines' unique challenges and opportunities. Sustained commitment and multi-stakeholder engagement—including LGUs, communities, schools, and the private sector—will be key to the success of decentralization efforts.

Efficiency and Equity in the Delivery of Education in the Philippines

Rosario G. Manasan

Asian Development Bank Consultant and Senior Research Fellow (Retired) of the Philippine Institute for Development Studies

Dr. Rosario Manasan presented her analysis of how fiscal resources are allocated across different levels of education in the Philippines, titled “Efficiency and Equity in the Delivery of Education in the Philippines.”

The presentation highlights critical challenges and constraints in the Philippine education sector, particularly in resource allocation, spending efficiency, and planning. A significant concern is the declining appropriations for education under the General Appropriations Act (GAA), which dropped to an average of 3.3 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) between 2020 and 2025, down from nearly 4 percent in 2017. This decline is linked to increased national government debt servicing. Additionally, fiscal resources have shifted toward higher education and technical-vocational education and training (TVET) sub-sectors, driven by the free higher education initiative in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs). This shift has reduced the share of the budget for basic education, despite its foundational role in developing learners.

In the basic education sector, the Philippines records the lowest cumulative spending per student among participating countries in PISA assessments, contributing to poor outcomes in reading and mathematics. Low spending is compounded by inefficiencies in budget utilization, particularly within DepEd. Critical areas such as the National Achievement Test (NAP), procurement of

learning materials, and classroom construction suffer from delays caused by centralized fund management, slow release of sub-Allotment Release Orders (AROs), and low approved budgets for contracts. Poor planning exacerbates these challenges, with significant classroom deficits (165,000 classrooms needed) coexisting with approximately 40 percent excess classrooms in other areas. Similar issues of uneven teacher distribution persist, further straining the system. Teacher training, a key driver of educational quality, is underfunded at less than ₱1,500 per teacher annually, limiting opportunities for professional development.

Meanwhile, TVET spending has increased from 0.05 percent of GDP (2011–18) to 0.07 percent following the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act. While this rise is notable, it remains insufficient to meet the growing demand for skills training aligned with workforce needs.

Addressing these challenges requires a multipronged approach. First, there is a need to reassess fiscal priorities to allocate more resources to basic education while maintaining balance across subsectors. Decentralizing fund management and streamlining budget execution can minimize delays and ensure the timely disbursement of resources. Improved planning, using data-driven mechanisms, is essential to address classroom and teacher imbalances. Sufficient budget allocation is also needed to implement the career progression policy meaningfully, as increased investment in teacher training is crucial to enhancing teaching quality. Continued support for TVET can help align skills training with industry demands. Dr. Manasan also pointed out that while there has been an increase in funds for higher education, basic education continues to face funding deficits, which negatively affect overall educational outcomes. She recommended hiring more TESDA assessors and ensuring their skills are kept up to date with new industry practices and technologies.

In conclusion, the Philippine education sector faces critical challenges in resource allocation, spending efficiency, and systemic planning. Addressing these issues requires a dual approach: increasing investments in key areas like basic education and teacher training while simultaneously improving the efficiency and accountability of fund utilization. By learning from best practices globally and fostering evidence-based planning, the education system can better align its resources with its goals of quality and equitable learning for all.

Systems, Strategies, and Leadership: A Systems Thinking Approach for Effective Delivery of Educational Services

Ma. Assunta C. Cuyegkeng

Professor, Ateneo de Manila University

A professor at the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, Dr. Cuyegkeng's paper, titled "Systems, Strategies, and Leadership: A Systems Thinking Approach for Effective Delivery of Educational Services," focused on the complex interrelationships within the education ecosystem.

This study employs systems thinking to identify feedback mechanisms within the management and delivery of educational services in DepEd. By using causal loop diagrams and system archetypes, the research demonstrates how certain initiatives may lead to unintended consequences or counterproductive processes that undermine their intended outcomes. The analysis is based on DepEd orders and memoranda pertinent to school systems and learning performance, as well as themes emerging from focus group discussions and interviews with DepEd leaders from regional and divisional offices, specialists, and schools across the country. These findings align with the Year One conclusions of EDCOM 2 and criticisms of the education sector, particularly its struggles to implement reforms due to frequent leadership changes, resistance to change, and an entrenched agency culture.

The research reveals several policy concerns. First, although DepEd operates within a hierarchical structure and has implemented efforts to improve educational services, varying interpretations and implementations of its orders and memos often lead to inefficiencies.

Second, DepEd's centralized structure and culture hinder the effective localization of policies. School leaders often adapt DepEd directives to fit their contexts, but their effectiveness depends on their management, leadership, and innovation competencies. This aligns with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) and NEAP programs.

Third, while DepEd prioritizes managing and delivering educational services, its efforts lack a clear focus on improving learning outcomes. School leaders employ strategies such as teacher management, school innovations, learner

well-being initiatives, and stakeholder engagement to address these gaps, but their impact remains largely absent in PISA and National Achievement Test results.

Fourth, many existing school-level innovations are ad hoc, tactical, or stopgap measures. A more strategic approach is needed to align innovations to improve student learning outcomes, not merely enhancing the school environment.

Finally, access to educational data is limited, impeding its use for effective monitoring, planning, and research.

To address these issues, the study offers several policy recommendations. First, DepEd orders and memoranda should be accompanied by communication plans and implementation toolkits to help school leaders effectively disseminate and operationalize these directives. For instance, principals often need to simplify legalistic memos for teachers, which could be mitigated by providing clearer guidelines.

Second, NEAP should continue to develop school leaders' management and leadership competencies while fostering strategic thinking and innovation skills. Training must move beyond general theories to address context-specific pedagogical adaptations. Next, DepEd can collaborate with partner institutions specializing in design thinking and innovation to train teachers and improve students' mastery of skills. The focus should shift from "gaming" standardized tests to fostering deeper learning and skill acquisition. Resources such as AI-supported tools, including Khan Academy, can supplement traditional teaching methods. For example, a study by Ateneo GSB, led by Dr. Christian Milambiling, highlights the potential of Khan Academy Philippines in enhancing Grade 4 math instruction.

Finally, while making all educational data publicly available may not be feasible, forming a group to oversee controlled access for researchers and administrators can support better policy planning and monitoring. Another critical observation is the frequent time delays in completing initiatives due to policy changes before their full implementation. Addressing this issue requires greater consistency and commitment to seeing initiatives through to completion.

Ultimately, by adopting these recommendations, Dr. Cuyegkeng stressed the importance of how DepEd can improve the alignment between policies, implementation, and learning outcomes, fostering a more adaptive and effective education system. She advocated for better leadership training and strategic innovation competencies for school heads and teachers to manage the school ecosystem effectively. Her presentation explored how certain governance structures and policy decisions within DepEd create unintended consequences that hinder educational progress.

Innovations and their Enablers and Barriers in Philippine Basic Education: Policy and Governance Implications

Maria Regina Hechanova Alampay and Camille Yusay

Ateneo de Manila University

Dr. Gina Hechanova-Alampay, a professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, presented “Innovations and their Enablers and Barriers in Philippine Basic Education: Policy and Governance Implications,” which explored the barriers to innovation within the centralized bureaucracy of the Department of Education (DepEd). She highlighted how a culture of compliance, lack of leadership support, and frequent turnover of school leaders impede educational reforms.

This paper adopts an organizational development (OD) perspective to analyze the barriers and enablers of innovation in Philippine basic education, focusing on their policy and governance implications. Through participatory action research involving 30 school leaders from nine regions, ranging from regional directors to school principals, the study identifies both promising innovations and structural obstacles that hinder their widespread implementation. Encouragingly, numerous grassroots innovations are being implemented. These include academic programs such as using indigenous games to teach mathematics, leveraging digital platforms to enhance access to education, and automating assessments to quickly identify and address learning gaps. Nonacademic initiatives are also flourishing, addressing mental health, teacher well-being, and governance challenges.

However, two critical challenges persist. First, many of these innovations are not monitored or evaluated, leaving their actual impact on learning outcomes

uncertain. Second, promising practices often remain localized, lacking mechanisms for scaling or sustaining them across regions. This results in missed opportunities for national-level improvements due to inadequate sharing and adoption of effective practices.

The policy implications of these findings reveal systemic and cultural challenges within the education sector. While the governance framework established by Republic Act (RA) No. 9155 grants autonomy to regions and schools, the lack of fiscal autonomy undermines this flexibility. Regional and school leaders face difficulties in innovating because financial decisions are centralized. This challenge is compounded by the central office's focus on operational programs rather than on developing policies, standards, and tools to empower field offices. DepEd's organizational structure is likened to an "inverted pyramid," with a disproportionate number of personnel at the central office compared to the field, leading to inefficiencies in resource allocation.

Specific policies also pose barriers to innovation. For instance, RA No. 7880 assigns responsibility for school building construction to the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), a change that has garnered mixed feedback. Some school leaders advocate for returning this responsibility to local control, citing perceived advantages in cost and quality. Similarly, the National Book Development Board (NBDB) policy on textbook publication has resulted in delays and underutilization, prompting calls for its repeal. Furthermore, generic research management guidelines fail to provide targeted support for innovation, leaving field offices grappling with conflicting and siloed policies from various central office bureaus.

From an OD perspective, the culture within DepEd significantly contributes to these challenges. Basic education pedagogy emphasizes obedience, a value mirrored in leadership styles. While leaders are nominally granted autonomy, a compliance-driven culture means nonconformity is often penalized, fostering a one-size-fits-all approach that stifles innovation. Additionally, the large central office is marked by silos and poor coordination, resulting in overlapping and conflicting policies that confuse field offices and create inefficiencies.

To address these challenges, the paper advocates for a cultural shift from compliance-driven practices to one that promotes innovation, empowerment,

and strategic thinking. Policy solutions alone are insufficient; changing the culture within DepEd is essential. Dr. Hechanova-Alampay's recommendations include promoting transformational leadership to create an environment that fosters sustainable innovation across the DepEd system. This entails granting greater fiscal autonomy to field offices, establishing mechanisms for evaluating and scaling innovations, and fostering a leadership style that supports openness and empowerment.

This cultural transformation requires role modeling from top leadership down to the grassroots. Leaders and teachers need targeted training to embrace autonomy and innovation, supported by an evaluation system that incentivizes the adoption of effective practices. The central office should focus on enabling and empowering field offices through policy development, standards-setting, and capacity-building, rather than maintaining rigid control.

The paper concludes by emphasizing the enormity of this challenge. While policy reform is critical, building a culture of innovation demands sustained effort, resources, and commitment at all levels of the education bureaucracy. Through leadership development, strategic investments, and a shift away from a compliance-centric mindset, DepEd can create an environment where innovations thrive and lead to lasting improvements in student learning outcomes.

Comments and Feedback from the Panel

Secretary Angara's reflections and comments on the presented papers highlighted both the opportunities and challenges within the Philippine education sector. He acknowledged the academics' efforts and their alignment with ground realities, as these bridge research findings with actionable policy.

Secretary Angara expressed particular interest in the participatory mechanisms mentioned in Dr. Abante and Komiya's paper. This focus on transparency and inclusion is essential, especially in education governance. Collaborating with stakeholders and institutionalizing these mechanisms can strengthen accountability and shared responsibility.

The discrepancy between GDP spending figures (3.3 percent in Dr. Manasan's paper versus 3.7–3.8 percent from other sources) is worth reconciling to ensure accurate planning and advocacy. Senator Angara's suggestion for an

app that consolidates data on teachers, classrooms, and other resources is a step in the right direction. By leveraging technology, resource gaps can be visualized and addressed in real time, facilitating better decision-making.

He also highlighted the prevailing “memocracy” culture within DepEd, where actions often wait for memos. This underscores the need for a shift towards a culture of proactivity, innovation, and autonomy. A decentralized and adaptive approach could empower leaders to act decisively while fostering accountability. This perspective echoes the recommendations from Dr. Hechanova-Alampay’s paper, emphasizing the need for role modeling, leadership training, and systemic reforms to transition from compliance to empowerment. His vision for fostering a culture of measurement, assessment, and innovation aligns with global best practices. Gradual decentralization, paired with clear standards and support mechanisms, could address the concerns raised by both experts and field practitioners. A case-by-case approach to decentralization, informed by empirical data and pilot testing, seems a pragmatic way to balance autonomy with accountability.

His acknowledgment that career progression plans without sufficient funding are unsustainable reflects a nuanced understanding of bureaucratic challenges. The recommendation to realign resources to support career progression is a critical first step, even if full implementation will take years.

He also agreed on the value of establishing a delivery unit within DepEd to identify, evaluate, and scale district- and division-level best practices. A systematic mechanism for sharing and adopting innovations could address the current silos and ensure that effective practices are replicated nationally.

Secretary Angara recognizes that decentralization is a nuanced and challenging process. Pragmatism, as suggested, is key—balancing horizontal (across schools and regions) and vertical (between central and local levels) aspects while ensuring quality and equity in education delivery.

His remarks reflect a deep understanding of the complexities of the education sector and a commitment to evidence-based reform. Combining insights from the presented papers with a pragmatic approach, particularly in fostering a culture of innovation and decentralization, has the potential to transform Philippine education. Achieving this long-term vision will require sustained collaboration across sectors, continuous learning from local and

international best practices, and a shared commitment to empowering learners and educators.

Senator Gatchalian also provided a thoughtful exploration of the potential and challenges of decentralization in the Philippine education system. His insights, drawn from his experience as a local chief executive and informed by international models such as Vietnam's, offer a balanced and pragmatic view of this complex issue.

He agreed that decentralization could empower local governments to tailor educational operations to the specific needs of their communities, addressing disparities more effectively. It could also alleviate the central office's administrative burden, allowing it to focus on policymaking and strategic oversight. However, he pointed out significant challenges, such as the politicization of education, particularly in remote areas. Without robust safeguards, there is a risk of teachers and school leaders being subjected to political influence. Policy frameworks must include mechanisms that protect the integrity of education personnel and processes from such interference.

Senator Gatchalian highlighted Vietnam's model, which balances centralized policy direction with localized operational accountability, supported by fiscal transfers. In this system, local governments manage operational expenses like salaries and utilities while being held accountable through rigorous monitoring mechanisms. Adapting such a model to the Philippine context would require designing tailored systems of checks and balances. This underscores the tension between decentralizing funds and ensuring accountability. A transparent and well-structured fiscal oversight system, combined with capacity-building for local government units (LGUs), could help mitigate this issue. The challenge lies in fostering a culture of trust while maintaining robust accountability systems.

He noted that the Philippine government's tendency to tighten controls following instances of corruption can stifle innovation and efficiency. A more balanced approach could involve risk-based oversight, where entities with strong performance records are granted more autonomy, while those with identified issues are subject to stricter monitoring. He emphasized that decentralization assumes a certain level of competence and integrity. Thus, building the capacity of LGUs and providing training for local education administrators are essential steps toward successful decentralization.

Moving forward, Senator Gatchalian recommended piloting decentralization programs in select regions or provinces. These pilots could provide valuable insights into what works and what adjustments are needed. He supports strengthening local capacity by providing training, resources, and clear guidelines to LGUs to ensure they are equipped to manage decentralized functions effectively. Developing accountability mechanisms, such as transparent monitoring systems to track the use of funds and outcomes, is also critical. Regular audits and public reporting can help build trust.

Senator Gatchalian emphasized the importance of engaging stakeholders, including educators, local officials, and community members, in the planning and implementation process to ensure buy-in and shared responsibility. Lastly, he advocated for gradual decentralization, implemented in phases—starting with administrative functions and gradually expanding to fiscal autonomy as local capacity improves.

ED Karol Yee's comments and inquiries focused on fiscal allocation, governance, and decentralization in education policy. His reflections touched on critical aspects of education spending and governance challenges, drawing attention to key areas for improvement.

ED Yee began by addressing Dr. Manasan's discussion on the 3.3 percent of GDP allocated to education and its connection to debt service, reflecting the broader fiscal environment. He noted that if a substantial portion of government resources is allocated to debt repayment, it constrains the fiscal space available for social services, including education. ED Yee emphasized the importance of exploring whether the 3.3 percent of GDP spent on education is limited by rising debt obligations or influenced by other spending priorities. Moreover, he highlighted that this figure typically reflects national government appropriations for basic education through DepEd and may not fully capture spending by local government units (LGUs), the Special Education Fund (SEF), early childhood care and development (ECCD), and nutrition programs. Including these elements, he suggested, could provide a more comprehensive picture of total education spending as a proportion of GDP.

Continuing his analysis of Dr. Manasan's points, ED Yee raised concerns about per capita spending in basic education, observing that current budgetary formulas result in uniform spending across grade levels. He noted

that younger grades, particularly Kinder to Grade 3, require smaller class sizes, specialized teaching aids, and more intensive teacher training. He referenced Vietnam's model, which allocates higher per capita spending in primary education, as a noteworthy example of prioritizing formative years essential for literacy and numeracy foundations. Yee argued for revisiting the current maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) formulas, suggesting weighted adjustments to allocate higher funding to early grades. Such adjustments could account for smaller student-teacher ratios, additional learning materials, and programs targeting foundational skills, aligning with global best practices and evidence on the long-term benefits of early childhood interventions.

On infrastructure utilization, ED Yee highlighted Dr. Manasan's mention of excess classrooms, which may be linked to outdated school mapping or population shifts. Urbanization and declining enrollment in certain areas, he observed, could result in underutilized infrastructure. He underscored the importance of a comprehensive school infrastructure database to track classroom utilization rates by location, enabling the identification of mismatches and the implementation of reallocation or repurposing strategies.

Turning to Dr. Hechanova-Alampay's presentation, ED Yee explored organizational challenges within DepEd, particularly issues stemming from conflicting directives and fragmented policy development. He noted that policies often emerge in silos without adequate cross-bureau consultation, leading to contradictory mandates. For instance, initiatives prioritizing mental health might conflict with efforts to limit teacher workloads, as these directives may originate from separate bureaus with insufficient coordination. Yee attributed this issue partly to the size and segmentation of DepEd's central office, which lacks a central clearinghouse mechanism to ensure coordination and streamline policy dissemination.

ED Yee also examined the culture of compliance, often referred to as "memocracy," which prioritizes adherence to directives over local discretion. This culture, he argued, stems from a history of centralized governance, where fear of reprimand discourages innovation and prevents the contextual adaptation of policies.

On decision-making, ED Yee observed that while principal rotations occur at the division or regional levels, suggesting a measure of decentralization,

the absence of clear frameworks governing these decisions leads to inconsistencies. Frequent rotations, he argued, disrupt community familiarity and ongoing initiatives, undermining long-term planning and accountability. He recommended establishing parameters for decision-making, such as guidelines on principal tenure based on performance, community impact, and school needs. Balancing continuity with exposure to diverse contexts, he emphasized, is crucial to empowering leaders while maintaining equity.

ED Yee further noted that while the current system delegates certain operational decisions to regional and division levels, significant fiscal and strategic control remains centralized. This mismatch between perceived and actual decentralization limits true autonomy. He suggested revisiting the framework for local decision-making to define clear boundaries, mandate transparency and accountability mechanisms, and provide capacity-building programs for school leaders to enhance decision-making skills.

As part of his recommendations, ED Yee called for the establishment of a robust monitoring system to capture comprehensive education spending, including contributions from LGUs, SEF, and ECCD, for a more accurate analysis of GDP allocation. He also proposed developing a centralized database to track classroom utilization, school performance, and resource allocation. Revisions to MOOE formulas, he suggested, should allocate higher per capita spending to early education, reflecting the critical importance of foundational years.

To address organizational challenges, ED Yee advocated for instituting a clearinghouse mechanism at DepEd's central office to ensure coordination among bureaus and prevent conflicting directives. He also emphasized the need to empower local leaders by providing clear guidelines and training while ensuring accountability. Introducing tenure policies for school leaders that balance stability with exposure to diverse contexts, he added, could further enhance governance.

Finally, ED Yee highlighted the need for a cultural shift toward trust and accountability. By implementing these measures, he envisions a more responsive and effective Philippine education system capable of addressing both immediate and systemic challenges.

Dr. Rosalie Hall's comments emphasized the importance of data accessibility, coordination, and local government involvement in education financing. The responses and recommendations aligned with the presenters' observations included the creation of a Centralized Data Group. Establishing a dedicated unit within CHED or a similar educational agency to consolidate, clean, and maintain datasets was a pivotal step. UP's initiative with the election and local governance dataset, as well as the mirroring of PSA's FIES data, was commendable. Scaling this model to include education data (e.g., school performance metrics, SEF usage, and LGU contributions) could have created a robust resource for interdisciplinary research. As mentioned, organizing CHED memos and other documents into an AI-accessible format would have greatly benefited researchers and analysts. This could have involved natural language processing tools to sift through vast amounts of policy documents, research papers, and memos for actionable insights.

Other recommendations for data included conducting a nationwide audit of SEF allocation and utilization to identify disparities and inefficiencies, and developing guidelines or frameworks for best practices in SEF spending. For example, encouraging LGUs to prioritize foundational needs like early-grade literacy, numeracy programs, or teacher training.

Policy recommendations on financing suggested exploring models where LGUs took on specific responsibilities (e.g., infrastructure maintenance, teacher allowances) with accountability mechanisms in place and establishing matching funds from the national government for LGUs that demonstrated effective SEF utilization.

For capacity building for data utilization, Dr. Hall recommended training LGU personnel on data collection and analysis to support informed decision-making at the local level and encouraging collaborations between LGUs and academic institutions to develop localized education improvement plans based on empirical evidence. Addressing these gaps could have led to more equitable and impactful education outcomes nationwide.

In response, Dr. Hechanova-Alampay highlighted key challenges in policy development, communication, and implementation within DepEd. Policies are often perceived as reactive, addressing problems caused by a few while inadvertently burdening the majority. This reactive nature suggests insufficient deliberation during policy formulation. Furthermore, policy

implementation and communication are lacking, as policies are disseminated without clear toolkits, implementing rules and regulations (IRRs), or adequate resources.

Regarding the issue of principals, two major concerns were raised: the diaspora of teachers and the lack of succession planning. While there is career pathing for teachers, there appears to be no robust succession or talent management program to adequately prepare future principals. Some regions have initiated localized principal development programs, but a systematic and comprehensive approach remains absent at the national level, underscoring a critical need for improvement.

Dr. Cuyegkeng also emphasized critical gaps in career pathing and succession planning for school heads within DepEd. While existing orders outline clear stages, domains, and strands for career progression, the process for becoming a principal relies heavily on meeting certain criteria, which may not adequately assess a candidate's managerial or leadership skills. This lack of preparation is concerning, as unqualified principals may struggle to manage schools effectively, highlighting the need for robust training and competency development programs.

Moreover, the importance of mastery in literacy and numeracy was discussed, with a call to move beyond teaching for specific tests like PISA and focus on deep skill acquisition. Leveraging tools such as Khan Academy, which provides tailored exercises at the learner's level, was proposed as a strategic approach. The potential for partnerships with platforms like Khan Academy Philippines was noted, including the need for localized apps in Filipino to support student learning. These collaborations, if thoughtfully implemented, could play a pivotal role in enhancing foundational skills among students.

Ms. Comia also addressed questions on the utilization of fiscally devolved funds and how LGUs manage the Special Education Fund (SEF). An example highlighted was Quezon City's establishment of the Education Affairs Unit (EAU), which focuses on coordinating education initiatives, fostering civil society involvement, and creating spaces for participation. One successful policy implemented by the EAU is the Parent Effectiveness Program, which actively engages parents in educational matters, demonstrating how devolved SEF funds can be effectively used.

Another concern raised was ensuring fiscal responsibility in devolved funds, as noted by Senator Gatchalian. A proposed solution involves involving civil society in accountability measures. For instance, civil society groups have audited DPWH and DepEd-built facilities for disability inclusion and accessibility features, sharing findings to advocate for improvements. This collaboration shows that not all responsibilities need to fall solely on the government; civil society can play a critical role in ensuring accountability and effective use of devolved funds.

Dr. King also highlighted the importance of incorporating a Readiness Index in the sequential, selective, and iterative approach to decentralizing the education system. This index would evaluate the capacity of LGUs across geographic regions to determine which are prepared to undertake transformation and which may need additional support. This tool is seen as essential in designing and implementing effective decentralization strategies.

Further, concerns were raised about Filipino students ranking among the lowest globally in terms of growth mindset—the belief that they can improve and achieve better results over time. This troubling outcome highlights potential issues in pedagogical approaches that may contribute to students' lack of confidence in their ability to grow. Addressing this deficit in growth mindset, alongside fostering students' social and emotional skills, was identified as a priority, on par with improving competencies in math, reading, and science. These non-cognitive skills are vital for holistic student development and should be integrated into the broader educational reform agenda.

Lastly, Dr. Manasan clarified the figures on government spending for education, correcting that 3.7% of GDP is allocated to the total education sector, while 3.3% is for the basic education sector. Regarding questions from ED Yee, Dr. Manasan noted that detailed estimates can be provided outside the forum, as the calculations are complex. She also addressed the issue of LGU spending on education, which was analyzed in her paper for a limited timeframe. The findings reveal that LGU spending is highly uneven, with many LGUs failing to utilize their full Special Education Fund (SEF) allocations, resulting in significant surpluses. Despite this, LGU spending was found to increase total education spending by 0.2 percent of GDP and basic education spending by 0.15 percent of GDP.

Session 1B

Aiming for Seamless and Integrated Lifelong Learning Delivery in the Philippines

Dina Ocampo, Adrian Cristobal, and Kaye Sandigan

University of the Philippines; De La Salle University; University of the Philippines

Dr. Dina Ocampo is a professor at the University of the Philippines College of Education. She is also a co-convenor of the Education Research Program at the UP CIDS. Her presentation, "Aiming for Seamless and Integrated Lifelong Learning Delivery in the Philippines," focused on inclusive education reforms, particularly emphasizing the need to address systemic inequities in the education system.

The discussion highlighted the importance of reimagining education as a lifelong continuum that addresses learning at all stages of life. The paper emphasized three types of education: formal (institutionalized and intentional, covering basic to higher education), non-formal (alternative or complementary programs for youth and adult literacy), and informal (spontaneous learning through experiences and interactions). Lifelong learning requires a broader perspective beyond basic education, covering early childhood through adulthood and integrating diverse learning pathways.

The study drew inspiration from countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Pakistan, and Finland to benchmark effective systems. Findings revealed that the Philippines underreports its education programs (e.g., ECCD and adult education) and lacks comprehensive coverage for early childhood (below three years) and adults (mid-20s and beyond). Adult education in the Philippines is viewed more as a catch-up mechanism than a means for upskilling, a missed opportunity to boost economic participation.

While policies like the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) and K-12 pathways exist, there are gaps in inclusivity and service delivery for marginalized groups, such as those with special needs or those unable to participate due to illness. The rigid education system fails to accommodate diverse learner trajectories. The study recommended integrating greater inclusivity and flexibility in pathways, emphasizing transitions across life stages, from ECCD to adult education.

A significant recommendation was the creation of local Lifelong Learning Boards, an expansion of existing local school boards. These boards would coordinate programs across formal, nonformal, and informal education for all ages, ensuring alignment with PQF levels. Reporting should shift focus from higher authorities to local communities, fostering transparency and local accountability. Micro-credentialing was also proposed to encourage adult learners to gain new skills.

Dr. Ocampo's policy recommendations include broadening the scope of local governance in education through Lifelong Learning Boards to orchestrate programs for all ages in collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations. She also suggested prioritizing inclusivity and flexibility in pathways for learners, recognizing diverse needs and circumstances, and establishing robust systems for tracking and reporting education programs across all sectors, ensuring that data is accessible and relevant to communities. Lastly, she recommended shifting the focus from aspirations and promises of lifelong learning to tangible service provision for every life stage.

This approach envisions education as a seamless, inclusive system that empowers individuals throughout their lives, fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability.

Governance Cultures, Perspectives & Practices in Philippine Basic Education Settings: Focus on Teacher In-Service Training and Development

*Ma. Glenda Lopez Wui, Enrique Niño P. Leviste, Jessica
Sandra R. Claudio, and Roselle Trishia M. Reyes*

Ateneo de Manila University

Dr. Glenda Lopez Wui is an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ateneo de Manila University. She has authored articles that have appeared in international publications on topics such as youth, civic engagement, literacy, academic motivation, and migrant communities. Joining her in the presentation is Dr. Enrique Niño Leviste, an associate professor at the same department. He is currently the Director of the Institute of Philippine Culture.

Their paper, titled “Governance Cultures, Perspectives, and Practices in Philippine Basic Settings: Focus on Teacher In-Service Training and Development,” focuses on governance and leadership within the education system, particularly how leadership competencies at various levels impact the effectiveness of policy implementation. Their research examined the roles of school heads, local government officials, and national policymakers in shaping education outcomes.

The discussion highlighted pressing concerns and actionable policy recommendations to address challenges in elementary education, based on feedback from eight principals and 60 survey participants.

The paper addressed several key concerns within the education system. One of the primary issues discussed was inadequate infrastructure and bureaucracy, with persistent challenges related to school facilities that remain unresolved despite repeated reporting. These problems are further exacerbated by slow and inefficient bureaucratic processes that hinder timely solutions.

Another critical issue was the collaboration with stakeholders. Principals and teachers highlighted the importance of building strong, transparent relationships with local government units (LGUs), barangay officials, and parent-teacher associations (PTAs), emphasizing that such collaborations could foster a more supportive and efficient educational environment.

Transparency and accountability were also identified as crucial areas for improvement. The need for regular program reviews and financial reporting to stakeholders was stressed, ensuring that the use of resources could be effectively monitored and managed. The discussion also underscored the need for Teacher Professional Development, with many teachers expressing a strong interest in further training, particularly in information technology. They also sought support for pursuing graduate studies, viewing it as an essential step for their professional growth and advancement.

Finally, the issue of teacher welfare was raised, focusing on the significant need for stress management support, improvements in salary, and the reduction of administrative burdens. Teachers suggested that hiring additional staff could alleviate these pressures, allowing them to focus more on their teaching responsibilities and less on administrative tasks.

According to their paper, survey findings revealed that principals reported persistent unmet demands for additional classrooms and that new teachers were pursuing advanced degrees due to resource constraints, with 45 percent citing cost as a barrier to professional development. The survey also showed that a significant 75 percent of teachers reported work-related stress, and a majority advocated for salary increases to match growing demands.

Policy recommendations based on the concerns raised include infrastructure assessment and action, stakeholder collaborations, regular reporting, support for professional development, and, most importantly, teacher welfare enhancements.

Comments and Feedback from the Panel

ED Karol Yee raised concerns regarding barriers to professional development (PD). While cost was a dominant concern—particularly for certified or accredited training programs—the teachers also identified other obstacles. These included time constraints, as balancing teaching responsibilities, administrative tasks, and personal commitments left little time for professional development opportunities. Teachers in remote areas expressed difficulty accessing PD programs without traveling significant distances, highlighting the limited availability of local training options. Additionally, some teachers noted that the available training programs did not align with their specific professional needs or subject areas. Lastly, the lack of institutional support was also noted.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, such as offering free or subsidized training, expanding access to localized or online PD options, and ensuring institutional support to encourage and facilitate teacher growth.

Dr. Leviste responded that, in addition to cost, teachers identified several other barriers to participating in professional development (PD) programs. He discussed time constraints, where teachers expressed that their heavy workload leaves them with very little time to engage in PD opportunities. Balancing teaching, administrative tasks, and personal commitments creates significant obstacles to participation. He also highlighted limited scholarship opportunities, noting that while some teachers have pursued advanced degrees, there is a lack of sufficient scholarship programs to support more teachers in obtaining higher education or specialized training. Another

concern was low participation rates. Even among surveyed teachers and school heads, the number of those who could take advantage of PD programs or earn master's degrees was relatively low, reflecting the combined effects of time and resource limitations.

Secretary Angara emphasized that shifting the focus of alternative learning systems from catch-up to upskilling had been vital. Aligning the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems (BALS) with a more inclusive and forward-thinking model could have significantly enhanced its impact by empowering individuals to contribute productively to society, rather than merely meeting minimum education standards.

He also recognized the importance of addressing not only the career progression of teachers but also that of the 100,000 nonteaching personnel within DepEd—including lawyers, accountants, dentists, guidance counselors, and administrative staff. This recognition was seen as a crucial step toward fostering a holistic and equitable support system within the education sector. Regarding pathways and the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF), he believed that collaboration and external expertise would have been instrumental in refining these systems. Engaging experts from EDCOM and other education stakeholders would have bridged current gaps, ensuring that DepEd could have effectively implemented inclusive and accessible pathways for all learners and personnel.

Secretary Angara strongly supported these reforms, recognizing their importance in driving meaningful and sustainable improvements in the education system. He expressed gratitude for highlighting these issues and for the openness to collaboration and innovation that had been demonstrated.

The response also highlighted the importance of recognizing and integrating existing educational programs, such as those from the Department of Agriculture, into formal systems. This integration would have ensured that these programs were effectively mapped onto broader education initiatives. Two key issues were emphasized: the lack of proper reporting and the need to ensure the quality and impact of these programs, particularly regarding their relevance to job readiness and desired outcomes. The speaker commended the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) micro-credentialing efforts across various industries, describing it as an impressive initiative that deserved to continue. Finally, he stressed the need to prioritize adult education, viewing it

as a vital resource for societal progress. Empowering adults not only enhanced their skills and livelihoods but also positively impacted children's learning and family dynamics, underlining the interconnected nature of education across generations.

Synthesis

Prof. Ernesto Garilao

Standing Committee Member, Governance and Finance

Professor Ernesto Garilao, a recognized expert in public governance and finance, delivered the concluding remarks for the morning session, synthesizing the key discussions on improving the Philippine education system through better financial management and governance reforms.

He underscored the critical role of decentralization in improving governance structures within the Department of Education. Professor Garilao noted that decentralization, if implemented effectively, could empower local government units and school heads to address context-specific challenges. However, he emphasized the need for robust accountability mechanisms to ensure that resources are used appropriately at the local level and to avoid disparities in education quality across regions.

In line with the presentations on fiscal decentralization, Professor Garilao highlighted the importance of strategic financial management to ensure that education funds are used efficiently. He stressed the need to improve the utilization of allocated budgets, addressing issues of underutilization and misallocation of funds that often hinder the implementation of essential programs, such as those for marginalized students and special education.

Professor Garilao reinforced the argument made by several speakers about the importance of strong, strategic leadership in schools. He noted that school heads and local education officials must be equipped with the skills to manage resources effectively, innovate at the local level, and lead with accountability. Leadership training programs should focus on financial literacy, governance, and decision-making to ensure that school leaders can drive meaningful reforms.

He advocated for greater public-private partnerships (PPP) in the education sector, recognizing the private sector's potential to support government efforts in bridging funding gaps, providing technological resources, and delivering training for teachers and school leaders. He emphasized that collaborations between government and private organizations could accelerate educational innovations and bring about sustainable improvements in learning outcomes.

A key point in his conclusion was the importance of ensuring equity in resource distribution. Professor Garilao stressed that decentralization should not exacerbate existing inequalities between regions. He called for careful planning and the establishment of safeguards to ensure that underserved areas, particularly those in rural and remote regions, receive sufficient resources and support to meet national education standards.

In closing the morning session, Professor Garilao emphasized that improving governance and financial management in the education sector requires a multifaceted approach, combining strong leadership, strategic resource allocation, and community engagement. He expressed optimism that the discussions during the morning session had provided actionable insights and that continued collaboration between policymakers, educators, and stakeholders would lead to sustainable reforms in the Philippine education system.

SESSION 2

Higher Education Roadmap, Industry, and Agriculture

Economic Complexity and Human Capital Development in the Philippines

Michael R. Cabalfin

Senior Economist, Department of Finance

As an experienced economist, Dr. Michael Cabalfin presented his research, “Economic Complexity and Human Capital Development in the Philippines,” focusing on key export sectors and their contributions to economic growth, output, and employment. Dr. Cabalfin started his presentation by defining economic complexity as a measure that is determined by the diversity and uniqueness of a country’s exports, with more complex economies producing more varied and unique goods. He proceeded to contextualize this in the Philippines, where the country ranked 33rd out of 133 countries in 2021, and fell to 37th place in 2022.

According to Dr. Cabalfin, the Philippines’ average product complexity index (PCI) in 2021 was 0.76. The most complex exports were machinery and vehicles (PCI 0.82), followed by chemicals (PCI 0.56). His analysis revealed that machinery and vehicles accounted for 48 percent of total exports, dominated by electric machinery and office equipment. Metalworking and general industrial machinery had the highest PCI (1.43 and 1.13, respectively) but low export shares. Service exports were led by ICT (93 percent of total service exports), although ICT and finance had low complexity. Chemicals, particularly organic chemicals and artificial resins, had high PCI but limited shares in overall exports.

Dr. Cabalfin highlighted several policy concerns in light of his analysis. The share of manufacturing in total value added and economic growth

has decreased, with manufacturing's share of employment dropping to 10 percent. Labor productivity in manufacturing increased significantly, but only a small fraction accrues to workers. Furthermore, the educational attainment of the manufacturing workforce remains low, with limited enrollment in technical and vocational education (TVET), information technology, and natural sciences. Recommendations include promoting production, exports, and employment in high-complexity sectors such as machinery, vehicles, chemicals, ICT, and finance. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance human capital through increased educational opportunities in these key sectors. Finally, Dr. Cabalfn also emphasizes the need to promote enrollment in TVET and higher education among workers in the manufacturing and vehicle industry, finance, ICT, and natural sciences, particularly chemistry.

Strengthening Higher Agriculture Educational Institutions and Vocational-Technical Training Programs on Entrepreneurship for Greater Contribution Towards Agriculture and Fisheries Productivity

Luis Rey I. Velasco

Adjunct Professor, University of the Philippines Los Baños

Dr. Luis Velasco is a known academic in the field of agriculture, having spent 42 years of his career in UP Los Baños. His paper, “Transforming Philippine Agriculture: The Imperative Roles of Higher Education Institutions,” explored how higher education institutions (HEIs) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions can enhance agricultural productivity and growth in rural areas by fostering entrepreneurship among the rural youth. His analysis highlights the complementary roles of these institutions in educating young people to become agriculture and fishery entrepreneurs and in generating innovations that improve productivity. The study's findings, Dr. Velasco emphasized, are anchored on the premise that human and intellectual capital are central to addressing low productivity in agriculture and fisheries, which is often due to a lack of entrepreneurial skills and competence.

His study found that the current capacity of HEIs in agriculture to produce agriculture entrepreneurs or agripreneurs is limited, leading to a mismatch

between the academic preparation of graduates and the opportunities for entrepreneurship in rural areas. Conducting focus group discussions with faculty from selected HEIs, Dr. Velasco discussed that while some programs cover entrepreneurship, most graduates opt for employment rather than starting their own agribusinesses. This issue, he argues, stems from the faculty's lack of entrepreneurial experience and business networks, which limit the ability of HEIs to foster an entrepreneurial mindset.

To address this, Dr. Velasco recommended the introduction of a two-year enterprise-based professional studies program in agripreneurship, offering full scholarships to graduates of agriculture and fishery degrees. This program would require students to activate their agribusiness models in their second year while still receiving financial support. Additionally, providing personal loans to support graduates' initial agribusiness operations is suggested. The research also recommends forming a Technical Working Group, including CHED, DTI, and others, to oversee agripreneurship education. HEIs should enhance research, business incubation, and establish a support office to offer mentorship, credit access, and market links for graduates.

Leveraging Higher Education to Resolve Healthcare Constraints

Carmencita D. Padilla

Professor Emeritus, University of the Philippines Manila

A world-renowned clinical geneticist and a National Scientist of the Philippines, Dr. Carmencita D. Padilla presented her study entitled "Leveraging Higher Education to Resolve Healthcare Constraints." The study examined the critical role of health workers in ensuring functional health systems and achieving the highest attainable standards of health.

Dr. Padilla began her presentation by contextualizing how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the global demand for healthcare workers, worsening existing shortages, particularly in rural and underserved areas of the Philippines. The study centered on three key health professions: medicine, nursing, and midwifery. Analysis revealed significant dropout rates from enrollment to licensure, with only a portion of graduates passing board exams and entering the health workforce. For instance, out of 502,000

licensed nurses, only 307,000 are active in the health sector, reflecting a significant workforce gap due to migration and other factors.

Dr. Padilla identified three major policy concerns. First, she emphasized that retention of health workers, either within the Philippines or the profession, is crucial. There is a need for strategies to reintegrate returning migrants into the workforce. Second, both external and internal migration remain a critical issue, with many health workers transitioning to non-health sectors. Third, supply-demand mismatches in the health labor market and a lack of real-time data hinder effective workforce planning. Dr. Padilla also noted the lack of coordination among agencies, with gaps in data sharing and collection, making it difficult to craft informed policies. Investments in the health workforce, she emphasized, are essential to ensure competitiveness with overseas opportunities and other industries.

Dr. Padilla's key recommendations include forming a high-level council to address workforce retention, integration, and migration, establishing a comprehensive data system with mandatory entry for all health professions, and improving the pre-service and in-service training to enhance workforce readiness. Without these reforms, the Philippines risks falling short of its universal healthcare goals and SDG targets.

Navigating the Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Era: Charting the Course for Curricular Reform in Higher Education in the Philippines

John Paul C. Vergara

Professor, Ateneo de Manila University

Dr. John Paul Vergara, a professor of Computer Science specializing in algorithms, computability, and artificial intelligence, presented his study, "Navigating the Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Era: Charting the Course for Curricular Reform in Higher Education in the Philippines."

He foregrounded his study by highlighting how AI is poised to disrupt various sectors, particularly education, as it alters the way knowledge is absorbed and generated. While some universities in the country have already implemented AI-related reforms, nationwide adoption will require guidance from CHED

through memorandum orders and policy standards and guidelines (PSGs). The study is based on a review of international studies on student and teacher perceptions of AI, as well as institutional responses. Common concerns include academic integrity and the need for AI literacy among both teachers and students. AI literacy serves as the foundation for the recommended curricular reforms.

One of Dr. Vergara's key recommendations was for HEIs to draft policies on AI use, with templates provided by CHED. Additionally, AI should be integrated into the general education curriculum to ensure all graduates have foundational knowledge of AI, including its ethics and societal impact. For degree programs, Dr. Vergara suggested that CHED's technical committees should revise curricula to include advanced AI topics relevant to each discipline. The study also emphasizes the need to incentivize AI research, particularly projects that contribute to national development. Recommended areas of focus include developing AI tools that address bias and cultural sensitivity and creating a common research data portal to support AI research.

Dr. Vergara concluded that while some local universities have already taken steps toward AI integration, broader coordination and policy support are necessary. A national AI strategy, along with curricular reforms and research incentives, is essential to prepare the country's higher education sector for the AI-driven future.

Developing Regional Economic Complexity through Product Specialization

Krista Danielle S. Yu

Full Professor, De La Salle University

Dr. Krista Danielle Yu presented her research, "Developing Regional Economic Complexity through Product Specialization," addressing key policy concerns for enhancing economic complexity in the Philippines at a regional level. It was conducted as part of the Tatak Pinoy initiative, originally commissioned by Senator (now Secretary) Sonny Angara. Her study drew on key informant interviews with HEIs, the private sector, and government entities, alongside data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). It focused on the poorest regions in

Luzon (Region 5), Visayas (Region 8), and Mindanao (Caraga and BARMM), aiming to align regional development with the national vision, *Ambisyon Natin 2040*.

Dr. Yu highlighted several challenges that emerged from the study, including the lack of empowerment among farmers to engage in value-adding activities, low awareness of career prospects, lack of research and development (R&D) funding, and outdated training materials. For example, while some local government units (LGUs) are willing to support farmers, the farmers themselves often lack confidence in participating in value-added processes. Additionally, training materials provided by TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority) were deemed outdated by private sector representatives.

The study proposed several policy recommendations, such as strengthening academe-industry linkages, investing in R&D, and integrating entrepreneurial values into the basic education curriculum. It also suggested redesigning training strategies to move beyond computer-based lectures, advocating for more hands-on industry immersion experiences. Dr. Yu underscored the need for comprehensive reforms in education, training, and support systems to boost regional economic complexity and enhance the competitiveness of Filipino products under the *Tatak Pinoy* program.

Cultivating Innovation in the Philippines by Addressing Policy Gaps and Creating Pathways for Collaborative Progress Between Academe and Industry

Luis G. Sison

Professor, University of the Philippines Diliman

As an advocate for upscaling technology and innovation, Dr. Luis Sison presented his study, “Cultivating Innovation in the Philippines by Addressing Policy Gaps and Creating Pathways.” His study focused on two key challenges: increasing the effectiveness of demand-creating policies for academic-industry collaboration and improving university curricula to support these efforts.

Dr. Sison started his presentation by highlighting an example from 2014 when four engineering students developed a low-cost hearing screening device for newborns as part of their thesis, after learning about challenges in this field from medical experts. Their project eventually led to a multi-university collaboration, supported by various organizations, and is now set for clinical evaluation. His study emphasized the need for more success stories like this one, achieved more quickly, by leveraging policies such as RA No. 9709 and others. However, challenges such as supply chain issues and limited technology transfer still hinder progress. Dr. Sison suggested looking to countries like Vietnam, which has implemented a five-year bamboo value chain plan, and Australia, whose Cooperative Research Center (CRC) model has generated significant economic impact and job creation through industry-academia-government consortia.

Recommendations for improving demand-creating policies included aligning university R&D agendas with these policies and tightly managing research and development (R&D) and technology transfer processes to meet industry targets within a finite time frame. Additionally, universities were encouraged to adopt best practices from leading ASEAN institutions, such as setting up industry advisory boards and conducting reverse pitches, where industries present their challenges to the academe for targeted R&D solutions. Dr. Sison emphasized the need to maximize faculty involvement in research despite their teaching loads, highlighting the value of faculty advising in thesis projects and technopreneurship courses. By mapping these courses to industry impact, universities can create continuity between innovation courses and prototyping or technology generation projects, ultimately supporting demand-creating policies. Universities, Dr. Sison suggests, can enhance their role in innovation by fostering industry contact and market validation, while partnering with agencies like DTI to ensure timely achievement of innovation milestones.

Comments and Feedback from the Panel

Congressman Roman Romulo, as a legislator overseeing budget hearings, emphasized the importance of actionable plans. While he agreed with the general proposals, he noted that many ideas presented were too broad and lacked the detailed steps needed for implementation. In particular, he pointed out the paper by Dr. Luis Sison that, despite discussions during budget hearings for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), these

concerns were not reflected in the budget. Roman recommended that further discussions be held with the new leadership of DTI, urging that the paper be presented to the new secretary for actionable outcomes.

EDCOM 2 Executive Director Karol Yee raised specific concerns about the practical application of research to address urgent national issues, such as nutrition. He asked Dr. Sison how the proposed recommendations could directly tackle real-world problems, particularly in improving childhood nutrition through the use of technology and research. ED Yee also questioned Dr. Carmencita Padilla about the dropout rates in health programs like medicine, nursing, and midwifery, suggesting that the data presented should be more detailed, with a focus on socio-economic factors, regional differences, and specific institutions. This would help target interventions more effectively. He also inquired about the possibility of adjusting the qualifications framework for health professionals, proposing the introduction of alternative qualifications, such as nurse practitioners for primary care.

CHED Commissioner Dr. Cynthia Bautista highlighted gaps in data, particularly in the health sector, and commended Dr. Padilla for proposing the establishment of a high-level council to address health labor market challenges. She emphasized that the health sector's issues extend beyond international migration, noting the internal migration of workers to urban areas as a contributing factor as well. Dr. Bautista also suggested that a more granular approach to data collection could aid in formulating precise interventions.

Representative Kiko Benitez echoed the need for more operationalization in policy recommendations, particularly in the healthcare sector. He asked Dr. Padilla to explore further stratification of healthcare qualifications, such as the potential for nurse practitioners in primary care. He also pointed to the lack of funding for preventive healthcare in the Universal Health Care Act, a challenge that impacts primary health care and wellness, which he believes should be addressed by refining healthcare worker qualifications and roles.

Senator Win Gatchalian raised a crucial point about the Philippine Innovation Act, which seeks to remove bureaucratic barriers and promote entrepreneurial growth, particularly in the MSME sector. He questioned why this law was not addressed in the recommendations and asked for insights into how the academic community has interacted with this policy. He urged

a stronger connection between the research community and the business sector, particularly in fostering innovation for MSMEs.

Director Redilyn Agu of TESDA discussed the challenges in aligning workforce development programs with industry needs. She pointed out that while TESDA has developed various technical-vocational courses, particularly in the medical field, during the pandemic, many industries are unaware of these courses. She also inquired about the role of generative AI in workforce development, particularly in the MSME sector. Director Redilyn suggested that collaboration between government, industry, and academia is essential for creating courses that are not only relevant but also applicable to the real needs of the workforce, especially in digitalization and AI integration.

Synthesis

Elyxzur C. Ramos

Standing Committee Member, Higher Education

Dr. Elyxzur Ramos synthesized the presentations on the Higher Education Roadmap, Industry, and Agriculture. Drawing insights from the six PEJA fellows who presented, Dr. Ramos emphasized the interrelationship between economic growth, education, and policy frameworks, which are integral to the country's national development efforts.

In the first thematic area, economic complexity and industry-academic linkages, Dr. Ramos underscored the importance of developing regional economic complexity through specialized manufacturing, targeting key sectors such as machinery, chemicals, and ICT. Dr. Ramos also reiterated the need for a stronger alignment between educational programs and industry demands, enhancing research and development (R&D), and incorporating entrepreneurship into the educational system. However, Dr. Ramos noted, the challenge often lies not within the industry but in academic institutions, where excessive regulation hinders effective industry-academic collaboration. This, he emphasized, calls for a reevaluation of policies that impede flexibility in aligning academic curricula with industry needs.

Further supporting the need for better academic-industry collaboration, he also shared the advocacy for demand-creating policies that can drive innovation through enhanced R&D, career awareness, and updated training

materials. These initiatives are vital for building a workforce equipped to handle value-adding processes, reinforcing the importance of systematizing industry partnerships within educational frameworks.

On curricular reforms and human capital development, Dr. Ramos elaborated on some speakers' alarm over the pressing need for reforms in the education system to address challenges, such as AI integration and healthcare constraints. He highlighted the necessity for high-level councils and dedicated centers to lead educational reforms, ensuring that the workforce is equipped to meet the demands of modern society and the economy.

In the area of entrepreneurship and sectoral support, Dr. Ramos reinforced the cultural challenges that hinder entrepreneurship in these sectors, including the perception that agricultural work is difficult, dirty, and low-paying. Addressing these cultural barriers is essential to attracting talent and enhancing entrepreneurship in agriculture and fisheries.

Dr. Ramos' synthesis highlighted the need for a comprehensive policy framework that promotes economic complexity, integrates AI and entrepreneurship into education, and strengthens sectoral support through coordinated efforts between the government, industry, and academia. These integrated approaches, he argued, are crucial for driving sustainable development in the Philippines and ensuring that the workforce is prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The session concluded with a call for further research and deeper exploration of these critical topics.

SESSION 3

Higher Education Regulation and Tuition

Exploring Socialized Tuition as an Alternative to Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (UAQTEA)

Geoffrey M. Ducanes

Associate Professor, Ateneo de Manila University

As an economics professor who specializes in econometrics, Dr. Geoffrey Ducanes presented his research, “Exploring Socialized Tuition as an Alternative to Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (UAQTEA).” He started his presentation by emphasizing that his rationale behind this exploration is that UAQTEA, in its current form, is fiscally unsustainable. Its design hinders the fulfillment of its primary objective—ensuring equal access to quality tertiary education for all Filipinos. Dr. Ducanes cited multiple factors for the growing cost: a rising college-age population, increased enrollment in higher education institutions (HEIs), more public HEIs eligible for UAQTEA coverage, and rising per capita income, which correlates with a higher demand for tertiary education.

To provide quality education, Dr. Ducanes underscored that significant investment is required in infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development. However, he also noted that continuous budget increases to accommodate expanding enrollment limit the capacity to fund these quality improvements. As an alternative, he proposes that a socialized tuition scheme can offer a more sustainable model. Under this system, students pay tuition based on their family’s capacity to pay, ensuring that low-income students not only receive free tuition but also stipends, similar to the tertiary education subsidy under UAQTEA.

Dr. Ducanes explained that socialized tuition has been implemented successfully in the University of the Philippines prior to UAQTEA and in other countries such as Chile, Italy, and parts of Canada and the United States. Implementing such a system would require determining income indicators, such as total or per capita household income, and setting income thresholds for eligibility. For example, setting a threshold at ₱250,000 annual household income—equivalent to the upper bound of the seventh income decile—would mean only students from the top three income deciles would pay tuition. This could generate approximately ₱9.13 billion in savings, which could be redirected to improve public HEIs and provide more financial support to low-income students. Increasing the income threshold would yield progressively smaller savings.

Dr. Ducanes concluded his presentation by highlighting that as UAQTEA's budget requirements grow, socialized tuition presents a sustainable alternative that would enable the government to better allocate resources toward improving education quality while still supporting students from low-income households.

Using Artificial Intelligence to Support Basic Education Teachers in Under-resourced Contexts

Maria Mercedes T. Rodrigo

Professor, Ateneo de Manila University

Dr. Maria Mercedes Rodrigo is the head of the Ateneo Laboratory for the Learning Sciences. She presented her paper, “Using Artificial Intelligence to Support Basic Education Teachers in Under-resourced Contexts.” The study, conducted with May Marital Landron Felipe of the University of Science and Technology in Mindanao, aims to maximize limited resources to increase efficiency and equity in education delivery.

The study, according to Dr. Rodrigo, emphasized the need to improve both the administrative and academic tasks of teachers through AI. One of the key recommendations is for DepEd to leverage its ICT Services office, or an equivalent entity, to evaluate, select, and develop AI-enabled tools that assist teachers. A specific AI technology highlighted is retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), a process that optimizes large language models (LLMs) by linking them to an authoritative data source, which could help mitigate

known limitations such as outdated information or inaccuracies. Dr. Rodrigo noted that a RAG-based system built on DepEd's data could enhance existing AI applications and better serve teachers.

Furthermore, Dr. Rodrigo advocates for a comprehensive training program for teachers to help them effectively use these AI tools, as well as providing ongoing support. Teachers, she argued, should have access to assistance with lesson planning, assessment development, and real-time support during lessons, particularly in cases where technology might fail, to avoid reverting to traditional teaching methods.

The study also suggested developing a database of AI-infused lesson plans to boost teachers' confidence in using AI by offering easy and successful implementations. Dr. Rodrigo proposes that the DepEd create a learning analytics arm to analyze data generated from AI tools, helping identify patterns of effective or ineffective technology use. This, in turn, would inform resource allocation and interventions. Additionally, Dr. Rodrigo underscores the importance of mobile technologies for learning in low-connectivity areas and suggests that LGUs increase their support for public schools using the Special Education Fund. The recommendations were grounded in desk research, scientific papers, interviews with 48 public school teachers, and a review of existing AI tools for education.

The Economic Regulation of Philippine Higher Education

Michael A. Alba

President, Far Eastern University Public Policy Center

Dr. Michael Alba's colleagues from the Far Eastern University (FEU) Public Policy Center presented the paper, "The Economic Regulation of Philippine Higher Education", on his behalf. Dr. Alba's study focused on a statistical analysis of CHED Memorandum Orders (CMOs) and higher education financing in the Philippines. The study had three main objectives: (1) building a CMO database for public use, (2) identifying major topics in the CMOs using latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic modeling, and (3) investigating the development of these topics over time.

The CMO database is intended to enable researchers and policymakers to track trends and patterns over the years, and to identify gaps and practices in higher education regulations. The topic modeling identified two optimal themes: education standards (minimum requirements for programs, faculty, and facilities) and guidelines (rules and regulations). These findings were based on an incomplete dataset comprising five out of 15 classifications, and the next steps involve analyzing these themes in more depth over time.

The second part of the research delved into higher education household expenditure, exploring the financial burden on households using data from the 2021 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) and the Labor Force Survey (LFS). The analysis by Dr. Alba's team found that higher education behaves like a luxury good, where a unit increase in income leads to more than a proportional increase in spending on education. Expenditure share was notably low in the lowest income decile and high in the highest income decile, underscoring the limited financing options for poor households. The fiscal overview of public higher education budgets in the Philippines revealed that from 2010 to 2024, national government subsidies to State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) comprised the largest share of the higher education budget, totaling ₱909 billion, or 73 percent of the ₱1.3 trillion allocated during this period. CHED received 27 percent of the budget, while the Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) derived its funding from sources such as travel taxes, Professional Regulation Commission fees, and lottery operations.

Key recommendations from the study include ensuring greater transparency in CHED's reporting on the HEDF and government budget allocations, improving oversight of higher education funding, and aligning higher education policies with national economic development goals. The study emphasized the need for fiscal accountability and for CHED to submit comprehensive reports on the funds it manages to aid in the effective deployment of resources.

From Pixels to Policies: GIS Analysis of Educational Pipeline Access Points and Disparities

Felicia I. Yeban

Professor, Philippine Normal University

Dr. Felicia Yeban, in observance of the Buwan ng Wika, presented her paper, “From Pixels to Policies: GIS Analysis of Education Access Points and Disparities,” in Filipino. She started her presentation by expressing interest in utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) due to the wealth of educational data available, and sought to explore how tools like GIS and Power BI could analyze access to education. Her study focused on the distribution of elementary, secondary, and tertiary schools across various political divisions in the country, from regions down to municipalities and cities.

Assisted by two faculty members from PNU, Mr. Delniomos and Mr. Cipriano, and with the input of Dr. Esther Ohana, former president of PNU, the team processed and visualized data that tracked the educational pathways of students who graduated in 2022, who had started school in 2006. The findings showed that, for every 10 students entering elementary school, 8 continue to junior high school, 5 proceed to senior high school, and only 3 finish college. This suggests that 7 in 10 students exit the system before completing tertiary education. Dr. Yeban noted that while the Department of Education aims for elementary schools to be within one to three kilometers of students, the actual average distance is 4.6 kilometers. For secondary schools, this distance increases to eight to nine kilometers. These distances, the research posited, could be a contributing factor to dropout rates.

A regression analysis, using data from DepEd, CHED, and the 2020 census, further revealed that the mere presence of schools does not significantly impact educational completion. Dr. Yeban explained that factors such as poverty likely play a more prominent role, especially at higher levels of education, where students often enter the workforce earlier. However, she noted that increasing the number of junior high schools appeared to correlate with higher completion rates at that educational level.

Dr. Yeban’s paper also examined the mission and vision statements of public higher education institutions (HEIs). It uncovered inconsistencies between institutions’ focus on national, regional, and local development, with some

overlap in roles. The speaker recommended a clearer division of labor among HEIs, with specific institutions focusing on either national, regional, or local development.

Dr. Yeban concluded her presentation by offering policy recommendations, including revisiting the curriculum, expanding online education options, and developing a national education data system. Such reforms, she suggested, would align education programs with the needs of the economy, contributing to the creation of a seamless lifelong learning ecosystem.

Comments and Feedback from the Panel

Dr. Rosalie Hall of UP CIDS raised critical questions regarding the proposed shift from the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (UAQTEA) to a socialized tuition fee system, inquiring about the practical mechanisms for tuition collection and the broader implications of reversing the current funding process. She also stressed the importance of understanding the differences between dropout rates and attrition and raised questions about student progression through different educational levels, highlighting the need to include graduate studies in discussions about the Philippine education system.

Representative Roman Romulo provided historical context for the UAQTEA, noting its origins in the UniFAST law. He suggested that Dr. Ducanes' proposal might overlook existing frameworks within UniFAST and raised concerns about ensuring educational quality when expanding the voucher system. He also pointed out that a lack of student interest, rather than access, was the primary reason for dropouts, emphasizing the need for quality assurance measures.

CHED Executive Director Cinderella Jaro expanded on the complexity of UAQTEA, emphasizing its focus on social equity by providing subsidies for economically disadvantaged students. She sought clarification on the data used to estimate potential savings under a socialized tuition scheme and questioned sustainability concerns. ED Jaro also discussed the challenges of implementing AI in basic education due to access barriers, the careful monitoring of the Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF), and the need for public higher education institutions (HEIs) to specialize based on regional needs. She stressed the importance of complementarity between public and

private HEIs and expressed support for strengthening the qualifications of CHED commissioners. On internationalization, she noted that the number of higher education institutions in the Philippines is increasing, and CHED is focusing on transnational education to enhance global competitiveness.

Synthesis

Vincent Fabella

Standing Committee Member, Governance and Finance

Dedicating his career to the field of education, Dr. Vincent Fabella ended the session with a synthesis of the challenges and opportunities within the Philippine education system, particularly focusing on the issues discussed by the presenters: tuition policy, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching, and higher education financing.

Dr. Fabella took note of the discussion on socialized tuition as an alternative to the UAQTEA, which generated substantial debate regarding fiscal sustainability and the need for more targeted educational subsidies. He emphasized the importance of shifting from blanket subsidies to a more tailored financial assistance system that reflects varying income levels and institutional needs. Additionally, he also noted that some students benefiting from free tuition were willing to contribute partially toward their fees, which could aid in ensuring the sustainability of such programs. Dr. Fabella reiterated that access to reliable and comparable data across institutions was critical for effective policy implementation, both for tuition reforms and broader educational initiatives.

In the discussion on AI integration in education, Dr. Fabella highlighted the role of education authorities in promoting AI adoption and creating an environment that supports collaboration and resource-sharing. The concept of “bring your own AI” emerged, emphasizing decentralized usage among teachers. It was also suggested that government negotiations for bulk purchases or discounts, similar to previous collective efforts for digital technologies, could reduce costs and expand access to AI tools in schools.

The session also addressed higher education financing and retention issues. Dr. Fabella echoed the disparities in school proximity, particularly between elementary and junior high school levels, that contribute significantly

to dropout and retention challenges. The importance of infrastructure investments to improve accessibility and retention in rural areas was emphasized, alongside calls for more efficient use of higher education budgets.

SESSION 4

Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Lifelong Learning Open Forum

Understanding Labor Market Outcomes of Graduates in the Informal Economy

Lisa Grace Bersales

Professor Emeritus, University of the Philippines

Dr. Lisa Bersales was the first national statistician of the Philippines and led the implementation of the Philippine Statistics Act of 2013, which established the Philippine Statistics Authority. She presented her study titled “Understanding Labor Market Outcomes of Graduates in the Informal Economy,” focusing on the Philippines’ changing demographics over the past 15 years.

Dr. Bersales started her presentation by highlighting that the increasing working-age population (15–64 years) presents potential for economic growth. However, she noted that to harness this opportunity, the working-age population must remain healthy and well-educated. Graduates in the informal economy, characterized by limited access to social protection and quality work, are less productive. Dr. Bersales’ research investigates the prevalence of informal work among senior high school, college, and TVET graduates, along with the causes of informality.

Dr. Bersales' analysis of the data from the Philippine Statistics Authority's Labor Force Surveys (2021–22) shows that individuals with postgraduate degrees have the highest labor force participation rate (79.6 percent), while senior high school graduates have the lowest (38.6 percent). Although TVET graduates have a high participation rate, underemployment is highest among them. Further analysis reveals that individuals with no formal schooling are most likely to be in the informal sector (69.1 percent), followed by those with college units (34.6 percent). Many of these individuals are self-employed without paid employees.

The study recommends enhancing senior high school employment and entrepreneurship objectives. Her findings suggest that TVET training should prioritize women's entrepreneurial skills and awareness of social protection schemes, as they are more likely to be employed informally compared to men. Higher education institutions and state universities, she emphasizes, should empower students to complete their degrees, as those who do not are at a higher risk of joining the informal workforce.

Navigating/Negotiating the Lifelong Learning Terrain in the Philippines: Path of Optimism and Caution

Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo

Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo's paper focuses on lifelong learning and its policy development, with an emphasis on the Philippines' education and labor market. She began her presentation by expressing gratitude to TESDA for facilitating interviews with learners from the Antipolo Institute of Technology and workshop participants. Medel-Añonuevo started with the evolution of lifelong learning, noting its origins in adult education a century ago and its current focus on economic livelihoods rather than holistic human development.

Medel-Añonuevo highlights the shift in terminology and focus, from “lifelong education” to “lifelong learning,” emphasizing the dominant human capital model. According to her, this model—currently shaping policies globally—often reduces lifelong learning to economic terms. In the Philippines, she noted that despite the absence of a specific constitutional mandate on lifelong learning, the principles of nonformal, formal, and informal learning align with lifelong learning ideals. However, the Philippine Development

Program, while incorporating lifelong learning, places it within the income-generating sector rather than the educational cluster, reflecting its economic focus. Medel-Añonuevo underscored the need for a broader, more inclusive definition of lifelong learning. She highlighted that the current discourse often limits learning to earning, neglecting the holistic aspects of human development. The presentation also stressed the importance of reliable data to inform policy decisions, noting the lack of comprehensive data on lifelong learning despite the Philippines' commitment to the SDG 4 agreement.

Medel-Añonuevo also critiqued the slow rollout of the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF), recommending the establishment of an independent body to manage its implementation. Additionally, she called for a deeper understanding of learners' life stories, emphasizing the need for in-depth studies on their journeys to inform more effective lifelong learning policies. Finally, she presented innovative practices, such as the Antipolo Institute of Technology's collaboration with TESDA and the private sector, highlighting its success in bridging education and employment. Medel-Añonuevo concluded with a call for policies rooted in the lived experiences of learners.

Ambisyon ng mga Kabataang Pilipino: Centering Youth Aspirations in Education Reform

Cleve V. Arguelles

President and CEO, WR Numero

Assistant Professorial Lecturer, De La Salle University

Joel Paulin Mendoza

Education Specialist, World Bank

Cleve V. Arguelles presented the paper, titled “Ambisyon ng mga Kabataang Pilipino: Centering Youth Aspirations in Education Reform,” which explores the aspirations of young Filipinos and the role of education in shaping and enabling these aspirations. The study addresses the critical issue of aspiration gaps and failures among Filipino youth.

Arguelles began his presentation by emphasizing how Education is a transformative institution that empowers individuals to define and pursue their life goals. He added that it provides not only knowledge but also instills

a sense of agency, essential for personal and social progress. Arguelles and Mendoza's research examines how young people in the Philippines navigate complex, nonlinear transitions to adulthood, with increasing aspirations despite facing socioeconomic challenges. Utilizing data from the University of the Philippines Population Institute's (UPPI) 2021 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey, the study found that while 75 percent of young Filipinos aspire to earn a college degree, only 23 percent of those aged 20–24 achieve this goal, exacerbating the aspiration gap.

Arguelles underscored the importance of the capability to aspire, which is socially determined and unevenly distributed. He also highlights the role of external factors like parental education and migration intentions in shaping youth aspirations. Arguelles called for reforms in the education system to address these disparities. The study's recommendations include evaluating the National Career Assessment Examination, developing early warning systems for at-risk youth, and expanding programs like Brigada Eskwela to foster community involvement in nurturing aspirations. Additionally, the study advocates for campus and industry immersions to offer real-world experiences and broaden students' perspectives.

Ultimately, Arguelles stresses the need for policies that support the aspirations of Filipino youth, with an emphasis on creating environments conducive to aspiration growth. By addressing aspiration failures and gaps, he concludes, the study aims to foster a more educated and competitive workforce, contributing to national development.

Comments and Feedback from the Panel

UP CIDS Higher Education Research and Policy Reform Program Co-convenor JC Punongbayan led the open forum for the final session with the panel and the audience.

Professor Elma Laguna from the University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) commended the use of secondary analysis from the Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey (YAFSS) but expressed concern over the data's limitations. While YAFSS offers insights into sexuality and fertility, she raised an alarm over its limited coverage of education and employment, potentially affecting the findings on aspiration gaps and failure. She emphasized the importance of defining these terms more clearly, particularly

in light of the data constraints, urging that the analysis differentiate between aspiration failure caused by educational barriers versus other socio-economic factors.

Representative Kiko Benitez echoed Laguna's concerns, suggesting that aspiration gaps and failure should be interpreted more broadly, beyond just educational attainment. He pointed out that students balancing work and studies may shift their aspirations due to life circumstances, rather than experiencing failure. He stressed that aspirations are dynamic and evolve over time, influenced by transitions between formal education, work, and informal learning. He suggested incorporating the concept of lifelong learning into the research, recognizing how individuals navigate nontraditional educational and labor pathways.

Dr. Rosalie Hall also supported the need for clearer definitions but proposed a more targeted approach. She recommended profiling specific groups, such as young mothers, to better understand their unmet aspirations. She suggested aligning these profiles with lifelong learning opportunities to offer tailored policies. She emphasized the importance of understanding the unique challenges faced by these groups, advocating for policy recommendations that focus less on broad statistical trends and more on practical solutions to address aspiration gaps.

CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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