

EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Part I

by ROBERT P. COONEY

At first glance, the structure of the Philippine education system appears to be a twin of that of the United States; elementary grades precede high school, followed by baccalaureate training and graduate opportunities. Professional, vocational-technical, adult, and non-formal education programs, as in the United States, are woven into the fabric of public and private education. In almost every structural respect, Philippine education resembles that of the United States, but at the same time it operates under distinct characteristics shaped by a history of academic and economic impoverishment.

When Spain colonized the Philippines early in the sixteenth century, the society was comprised largely of agrarian tribes, separated by rugged topography and the shores of some 7,000 islands, as well as by the diversity of over a hundred dialects within eight major languages. The Spaniards conducted an effective, 300-year campaign of Christianization and economic exploitation of most of the population.

Education as a social institution was virtually nonexistent prior to Spain's conquest. Under the Spanish regime, organized learning for most people consisted of little more than religion lessons in ungraded parish schools, while other kinds of knowledge were essentially denied to them,

including the Spanish language.

Colegios, which provided secondary level education and novitiate preparation for Spanish youth, were operated by the clergy, but less than a dozen of any significance were established between 1589 and 1892.

Higher learning centered on the University of

in the conflict did not signal Philippine independence.

By the turn of the century, the country was under the colonial control of the United States. The Americans, while considering foremost their own economic and military interests, immediately embarked upon the development of a centralized system of public elementary and secondary schools and the inculcation of English as the language of business and social unification.

Higher education was left to the private sector, often that of non-profit, sectarian organizations, but including proprietary corporations as well. Graduate education was essentially ignored. A notable exception to these developments was the creation of the public University of the Philippines in 1908.

By the time an independent Republic of the Philippines emerged in 1946, a United States-like educational structure was firmly in place throughout the nation, providing basic literacy skills for almost the entire population. Given the scarcity of schools at all levels less than 50 years before, this in itself was a substantial and significant accomplishment. The prevailing atmosphere

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Santo Tomas, founded in 1611 to perpetuate Spanish culture and colonial administration. University instruction was conducted in Spanish and limited to Spaniards, and, later, a small, upper class of Filipinos.

A formal system of public education was established by Royal edict in 1863, but never significantly developed. In 1898, Manila was occupied by United States troops in the course of the Spanish-American War, but Spain's fall

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SPECIAL REPORT



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and curricula of most institutions within this structure, however, were marked by the effects of colonial domination and the abject poverty of the nation. Adequately prepared teachers and appropriate teaching materials were in short supply. The foreign orientation of the curricula, and cultural confusion stemming from European and American influences on native life added further to the situation. Moreover, educational institutions, like the nation itself, were restrained from rapid development by severe limitations of resources.

THE PHILIPPINE SCHOOLS

The Constitution of the Re-

public of the Philippines vests in the national government full authority for the provision and regulation of education at all levels and in all sectors, public and private.

Executive power for this resides primarily in the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) under the leadership of a cabinet-level Secretary appointed by the President of the Republic. The central offices of the DECS are in Metro-Manila, but the Department maintains decentralized offices in each of the 12 administrative regions of the nation.

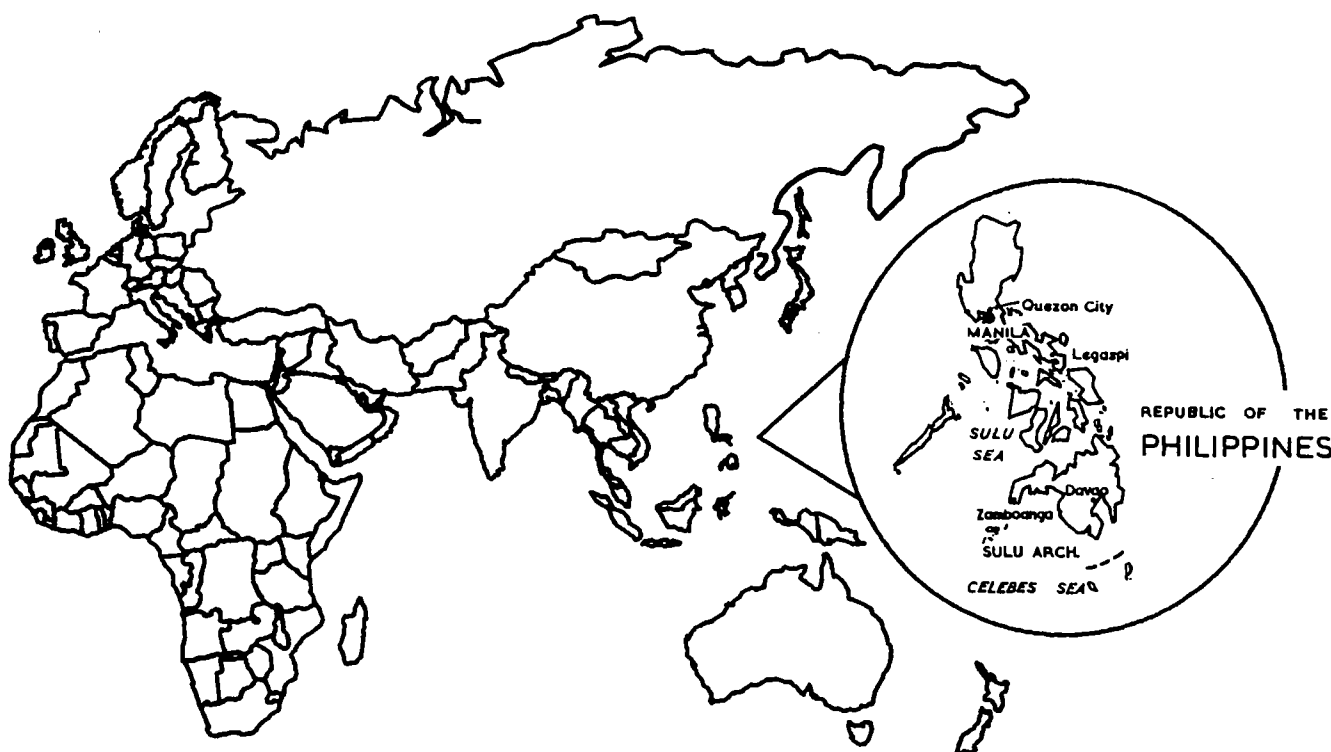
There are some 39,400 schools, colleges and universities in the Philippines, enrolling over 14 million students between June, the start of the academic year, and March.

The national government his-

torically has been unable to fund the needs of education at all levels and concentrates its resources on the 8.8 million students at the elementary level, leaving private institutions to serve almost half of the nation's 3.3 million secondary students and fully 85 percent of its 1.6 million tertiary level students.

In 1940, grade seven, which was then the last year of elementary school, was abolished to accommodate the government's fiscal retrenchment policy. Although mandated for public schools, the six-year elementary program was adopted in almost all private schools and still is in effect. Students enter high school, therefore, with only six years of elementary instruction.

Typically, college freshmen



THE PHILIPPINES AT A GLANCE

An archipelago of 7,100 islands stretching for nearly 1,000 miles between the southern tip of Formosa and the northern parts of Borneo and Indonesia, with a breadth of 700 miles, the Philippines has a total land area about the size of Arizona. Fewer than 1,000 of the islands are inhabited. It is the only predominantly Christian country in Asia, and the third largest English-speaking country in the world. The indigenous Malay culture has been infused through the centuries with foreign migrants from India, China, Japan, Arabia, Spain and America, resulting in a diversified population of over 58 million people (a 1986 estimate) speaking eight major languages with over a hundred dialects. After nearly 400 years of colonial rule, the Philippines became an independent republic on July 4, 1946.



Have had 10 years of preparation, six elementary and four high school grades, and are 16 years of age. Elementary and secondary education lasts one to two years shorter than in most other Asian nations and the United States. As a result, undergraduate curricula usually provide for basic remediation and many require five years for completion. (Zwaenepole, 1975)

Salaries for the nation's 441,000 public and private school teachers average about \$650 per year, less than the per capita family income of about \$700. Moonlighting by faculty members at all levels is common and small government loans are available to public school teachers to fund supplemental projects which augment meager salaries.

Instruction is characterized by teacher dominance and the use of static and traditional teaching techniques. (Franco, 1985) At many institutions it is also adversely affected by heavy teaching loads and inadequately prepared teachers. Textbooks, laboratory equipment and instructional supplies are in very short supply at all levels and in all but the most well-funded institutions.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Elementary education consists of six grades. Instruction is bilingual and students in the first two grades are taught in the regional vernacular, which is replaced in the remaining years with English and the national language, Pilipino, essentially the Tagalog dialect of the Capital region.

English is the official language of instruction, but it is almost always used in conjunction with Pilipino and another vernacular. Students often are not proficient in one or another, or all three languages. (Soriano, 1986)

Overcrowding, especially in urban schools, is common and many operate on double sessions.

Elementary instruction is generally weak in language, mathematics, and reading. Student attrition is substantial, owing principally to reasons

of family poverty, but also to classroom and teaching factors that inhibit student adjustment. (Carpio, 1985)

Although elementary education is compulsory and free, and most seven- to 12-year-old children attend school, 35 out of every 100 students entering the elementary grades do not complete grade six.

The most significant post-War development in elementary education has been the government's Program for Decentralized Educational Development (PRODED), begun in 1982 with a \$100 million World Bank loan. PRODED is part of a 10-year development plan to revitalize elementary education through massive provisions of textbooks and new instructional materials, new and repaired facilities and equipment, teacher training, and an entirely revamped curriculum stressing the three R's and geared to national needs. The long-term benefits of PRODED are expected to improve the elementary system.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary schools, where attendance is not compulsory, and until 1987, not free, are mainly the responsibility of local government.

Sixty-six percent of the high school age population are enrolled, but almost a third of the students do not graduate.

About 65 percent of the 3,400 public high schools are *barangay* schools--small, rural, community-run institutions which, in general, are poor, ill-equipped, and staffed by underpaid, inadequately prepared and unqualified teachers.

Most of the DECS support for secondary schools, however, is used for the salaries of *barangay* high school teachers. The balance is used to assist some 400 vocational schools and 625 nationalized high schools operated by national, city and municipal government.

The National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), a test similar in purpose and design to the American SAT and ACT examinations, is admini-

stered to all high school students seeking college admission. The results of the examination also are used as a general indicator of the quality of secondary education.

The NCEE consists of 300 multiple-choice items in seven subtests, and yields results in four dimensions: abstract reasoning, mathematical ability, verbal (English and Pilipino) ability, and reading comprehension. Students with a standardized composite score in the 50th percentile or above of the NCEE qualify for college admission, but many colleges, including the University of the Philippines and a number of private universities, administer their own independent admissions tests for greater student selectivity.

The NCEE test data indicate that qualifiers are generally good in abstract reasoning, but poor in verbal ability and reading comprehension. They are generally proficient in Pilipino and social studies, but deficient in mathematics, science and the practical arts. Graduates of the *barangay* high schools consistently score the lowest of all high school graduates on the NCEE, while those of private, sectarian schools score the highest in all four dimensions of the test.

Moreover, approximately 75 percent of the graduates of high schools in the Manila metropolitan area qualify on the NCEE as compared to about 50 percent in all other areas, indicating the better resources and teaching personnel of the urban schools, especially the sectarian schools of the Capital. About 37 percent of the *barangay* high school test-takers achieve qualifying scores. (Franco, 1985; Ibe, 1987)

The 1986 Constitution promotes greater access to secondary education by mandating free high school attendance, a provision that will be phased in, owing to its great cost. The DECS announced in 1987 a program to nationalize and significantly increase salaries for all high



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school teachers and to extend the results of PRODED into secondary schools through a planned \$55 million Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP), which begins in 1989.

END PART I

COMING IN OUR SPRING ISSUE....

**PART II OF "EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES"
BY ROBERT P. COONEY, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS
ON TERTIARY EDUCATION AND THE PHILIPPINE
ACCREDITATION SYSTEM.**

(Editor's note: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of World Education Services, Inc.)

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