

Public Education in Limbo

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Public education in the Philippines has long been viewed as a pathway out of poverty. Parents often tell their children, “Mag-aral ka para hindi ka maghirap,” emphasizing the importance of education. On the other hand, while access to classrooms has improved, the quality of education remains a common significant concern.

Recent data from the Philippine Statistics Authority show that almost 19 million students who graduated from junior and senior high school in 2024 can read words but cannot fully understand what they’re reading (Bordey, 2025; Ancho et al., 2021). This is what they call “functionally illiterate” they can read but struggle to understand what they read. It’s a painful reality for many Filipino families who dream of a better future for their children. When students finish school without truly understanding what’s in the books, it’s like they’re given a diploma but not the power to use it.

Many students walk for miles or ride small boats just to reach school, yet they sit in classrooms where the lights don’t work and fans are broken. For them, going to school is already a victory—but what kind of learning awaits them when even basic tools are missing? According to Closs et al. (2022), learning environments with poor physical conditions greatly affect students’ motivation and academic performance. This shows that improving education isn’t just about teachers and books; it’s also about creating spaces where students feel safe and supported.

In many public schools, especially in rural areas, classrooms are overcrowded, with students sharing outdated textbooks or lacking basic learning materials. Teachers, burdened with large class sizes and administrative tasks, often resort to rote teaching methods revealed by Abella et al. (2024). Students spend their days copying from the blackboard, leading to a mindset of “Basta makapasa,” where passing becomes more important than genuine understanding. Teachers, too, feel the strain. Many are forced to teach subjects outside their expertise and work overtime

without adequate compensation. Despite their dedication, they are constrained by a system that lacks sufficient support and resources.

Parents also carry the weight of this crisis. Many work multiple jobs or go abroad just to afford school expenses, hoping their children's lives will turn out better than theirs. However, when students graduate without real skills or critical thinking, families are left disheartened. As stated by Moneva et al. (2020), the emotional and financial burden on families increases when the education system fails to deliver true learning outcomes. Education should be a tool for empowerment, not just a ritual of attending classes and receiving diplomas.

This crisis shows reality of immediate action. The government must prioritize not just the construction of school buildings but also the provision of quality learning materials, comprehensive teacher training, and fair compensation. It's important to shift the focus from mere access to ensuring that every Filipino child receives a meaningful education. Only then can Filipino truly live out the promise that education is the key to a better future.

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