

## **Philippines - Educational System - an Overview**

Three government organizations handle education in the Philippines. These are the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). In 1999, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, which governs both public and private education in all levels, stated that its mission was "to provide quality basic education that is equitably accessible to all by the foundation for lifelong learning and service for the common good." The Department also stipulated its vision to "develop a highly competent, civic spirited, life-skilled, and God-loving Filipino youth who actively participate in and contribute towards the building of a humane, healthy and productive society." All these ambitions were embodied in the development strategy called "Philippines 2000."

The academic year in the Philippines is patterned after its wet/cool and dry/hot seasons. The hottest months of the year are from March to May, thus making them the "summer break." The wet season starts in June, which also marks the beginning of the academic school year. Beginning 1993, DECS increased the number of school days from 185 to 200. The school year ends during the first few weeks of March. The Philippines, a Catholic country, has a two- to three-week break during Christmas in December and a four- to five-day break at the start of November to celebrate the Day of the Saints and the Day of the Dead.

The language of instruction has been a much debated topic. For a country dispersed over 7,107 islands, with 11 languages and 87 dialects, colonized by Spain for more than 300 years, and educated by the Americans, the decision to pick a particular language of instruction has been very controversial. The languages used for instruction have switched from Spanish to *Tagalog*, to English to the local vernacular, including some Chinese languages, and Arabic, which is used in the southern part of the country.

According to an official publication of the U.S. Library of Congress, the Philippine census reported that during the 1990s a total of 65 percent of Filipinos understood English. During the last four decades of the twentieth century, education in all levels had vastly improved. In the compulsory elementary level, from 1965-1966, there were a total of 5.8 million students enrolled, 4.5 percent of which were in private institutions. In 1987-1988 these numbers grew to 9.6 million enrolled, 6.6 percent of which were in private schools. By school year 1999-2000, 12.6 million were enrolled with 7.1 percent in the private sector. This level is for grades 1 through 6—ages 7 to 12. The various Philippine grade levels are referred to with cardinal numbers (one, two, three) rather than ordinal numbers (first, second, third). Secondary education is taught for 4 years from ages 13 to 16.

Primary and secondary schools are taught from Monday to Friday, starting at 7:30 A.M. The school day begins with a flag raising, national anthem, and pledge of allegiance. Students usually have an hour for lunch. School cafeterias are mostly non-existent and those that exist are largely inadequate. Students either go home for lunch or pack their lunch. Some parents, usually mothers, come to school to bring warm lunch for their children. Classes resume for the afternoon, until about 4:30 to 5:00 p.m. In some areas, due to lack of facilities, certain schools are forced to have double shifts, minimizing the hours children spend in school.

Access has been a problem for certain sectors of the population and DECS has made this the number one priority. In the secondary level for 1965-1966, approximately 1.17 million students were enrolled with 62.3 percent in the private sector. In 1987-1988, there was a total of 3.49 million students enrolled, 40.8 percent of whom were in private schools. By 1999-2000 there was an overall total of 5.1 million students, with 24 percent in private schools.

Higher education in the Philippines is strongly in the private sector. Most bachelor degrees are for four years. Students are usually from 17 to 20 years old. In 1985, the private sector of higher education was close to 80 percent of the student population. Of these institutions one-third are considered non-profit, while two-thirds function for monetary gain. This has led to the reputation of certain schools as "diploma mills" and to the more serious problem of producing unqualified, unemployed, and underemployed graduates.

During the 1970s, there was a wide discrepancy in the literacy rates of the various regions of the country. The capital region of Metro Manila had a 95 percent literacy rate; the Central Luzon area had a 90 percent literacy rate while the Western portion of Mindanao had a 65 percent rate. Three principal indigenous languages in the Manila area are *Cebuano* in the Visayas, *Tagalog* and *Ilocano* in the northern portion of Luzon. In 1939 Filipino (which is based on the Tagalog language) was made the national language. Filipino later evolved to *Filipino* which is based on the languages used in the Philippines. English still remains the most important non-indigenous language used by media, higher education, private, primary and secondary schools, government administration, and business. Only a handful of families have maintained speaking in Spanish. The multiplicity of languages used in the Philippines has not affected its literacy rate of 94.6 percent, one of the highest in East Asia and the Pacific region.

Technology use is starting to gain momentum in the overall education of the Philippines. In 1999, there were 93 Internet Service Providers (ISP) in the country. By the beginning of 2001, the participation of nongovernmental organizations and the private sector in education was evident with the donation of 1,000 personal computers for use during school year 2001-2002 in 1,000 public high schools of 16 regions. The program, called One Thousand PCs, has four major components, namely: curriculum development with the creation of a one year course on computer education as a specialization in entrepreneurship; teacher training for recipient schools; courseware development through the creation of Information Technology materials; and the purchase of hardware from the private sector through the Adopt-A-School Program. The Department of Trade and Industry chaired this project.

Curricular development is under the jurisdiction of the DECS. Authority slowly trickled down to the municipal/local levels as the system shifted to decentralize decision-making and empower local schools. Despite these efforts, much of the important decisions, such as the purchase of all public school textbooks, is done by DECS.

Important curricular changes needed to respond to emerging student needs are limited due to budgetary constraints. Three tests are administered to students, the preparation for which must be addressed through further curricular development. These tests are the National Elementary Aptitude Test (NEAT), the National Secondary Aptitude Test (NSAT), and the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE).

The Philippine population grows at a rate of 2.07 percent per year. In July 2000, the estimated population was 81,159,644 people. About 37 percent of this population was from birth to 14-years-old. A 2 percent yearly population growth translates to about 1.6 million children born every year. This growth rate strains the resources of the educational system. During 1999-2000, a 2 percent increase in the number of students meant 8,000 more classrooms needed. The deficit was 29,000 since DECS was able to build only 6,000 new rooms for the year. More teachers required (total lack of 21,000 since the budget allowed for hiring only 4,700 new teachers) 400,000 more desks (of the 2.2 million needed, only 500,000 were purchased) and 10 million additional textbooks with a ratio of 2 students per book. To alleviate this strain, certain schools hold double sessions (one in the morning and another in the afternoon) in elementary schools. Some high schools even have triple sessions due to space and resource problems.

As for gender distribution in the elementary level, male and female students are almost equally represented, while there are more females students at the secondary and higher education level. In rural areas, men are expected to do work while women are allowed to pursue education. Males have a higher rate of failure, dropout, and repetition in both elementary and secondary levels.

Ref.: <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1199/Philippines-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-AN-OVERVIEW.html>