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Exploring the Education Agenda of the 16th Congress of the Philippines

ABSTRACT: Every leadership and administration of the Philippines faces gargantuan challenges that relate to education. With the growing younger population, the need to properly educate the young people as future citizens and leaders of this country is an insurmountable task. The 16th Congress of the Philippines was not remiss of its main function to initiate policies and pass critical laws that will widen access to education. This qualitative study employed documentary analysis in exploring the legislative agenda on education of the 16th Philippine Congress. The data were culled from the websites of relevant government agencies, such as the Senate and the House of Representatives. After the analysis of the thick and rich data, 13 major themes emerged, namely: (1) enhancing curricular programs; (2) promoting student's rights; (3) promoting the rights and welfare of teachers; (4) strengthening teacher training; (5) support to alternative learning system and special education; (6) galvanizing technical-vocational training; (7) enhancing school administration; (8) reinforcing open and distance education; (9) rehabilitating school facilities; (10) improving early childhood education; (11) supporting stakeholder's participation; (12) creating/converting/separating schools/colleges; and (13) cultivating culture and heritage. The study showed that there were diverse agenda on education that were designed to improve the delivery of education, improve rights and welfare of teachers and students, mobilize resources for education, and strengthen accountability.

KEY WORD: Education Legislative Agenda; Curricular Enhancement; Student's Rights; Teacher's Rights; Philippine Congress.

RINGKASAN: "Mengeksplorasi Agenda Pendidikan dari Kongres ke-16 di Filipina". Setiap kepemimpinan dan pemerintahan Filipina menghadapi tantangan besar yang berhubungan dengan pendidikan. Dengan pertumbuhan penduduk muda, kebutuhan untuk mendidik generasi muda dengan baik sebagai warga negara masa depan dan pemimpin negara adalah tugas yang tidak mudah diatasi. Kongres Filipina ke-16 tidak lengah dari fungsi utamanya untuk memulai kebijakan dan meloloskan undang-undang penting yang akan memperluas akses ke dunia pendidikan. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan analisis dokumenter untuk mengeksplorasi agenda legislatif tentang pendidikan dari Kongres ke-16 di Filipina. Data diambil dari situs web lembaga pemerintah yang relevan, seperti Senat dan Dewan Perwakilan. Setelah analisis data secara rinci dan kaya, 13 tema utama muncul, yaitu: (1) meningkatkan program kurikuler; (2) mempromosikan hak siswa; (3) mempromosikan hak dan kesejahteraan guru; (4) memperkuat pelatihan guru; (5) dukungan untuk sistem pembelajaran alternatif dan pendidikan khusus; (6) menggableng pelatihan teknis kejuruan; (7) meningkatkan administrasi sekolah; (8) memperkuat pendidikan terbuka dan jarak jauh; (9) merehabilitasi fasilitas sekolah; (10) meningkatkan pendidikan anak usia dini; (11) mendukung partisipasi pemangku kepentingan; (12) menciptakan/mengubah/memisahkan sekolah/perguruan tinggi; dan (13) menumbuhkan budaya dan warisan. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa ada beragam agenda pendidikan yang dirancang untuk meningkatkan ketersediaan pendidikan, meningkatkan hak dan kesejahteraan guru serta siswa, memobilisasi sumber daya untuk pendidikan, serta memperkuat akuntabilitas.

KATA KUNCI: Agenda Legislatif Pendidikan; Peningkatan Kurikulum; Hak-hak Siswa; Hak-hak Guru; Kongres Filipina.

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INTRODUCTION

Every leadership and administration of the Philippines faces gargantuan challenges that relate to education. With the growing younger population, the need to properly educate the young people as future citizens and leaders of this country is an insurmountable task. But, with every reform agenda that the Department of Education and other education agencies of the country are pushing, there are small milestones that may lead toward the attainment of quality education for all (Hirosato, 2001; and Durban & Catalan, 2012).

Although improving the quality education is the primary task of education agencies, like DepED (Department of Education), CHED (Commission on Higher Education), and TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority), there is a strong recognition that other sectors of the society should play in the education of the young people. The business sector, the parents, the various foundations, and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), which are committed and concerned with the quality of education, are actively involved and cooperating with the government to contribute and do their share in this national agenda, so that the Philippines will be competitive in the global arena (Ulleberg, 2009; and Macasaet, 2013).

The administration of President Aquino, for example, has spelled out its education agenda as follow: 12-Year Basic Education Cycle; Universal Pre-Schooling for All; *Madaris* Education as a Sub-System within the Education; Technical-Vocational Education as an Alternative Stream in Senior High School; “Every Child a Reader” by Grade 1; Science and Math Proficiency; Assistance to Private Education as Partners in Basic Education; Medium of Instruction Rationalized; Quality Textbooks; and Covenant with Local Governments to Build More Schools (MGG, 2013; and Hernandez, 2014).¹

These education agenda served as targets

¹See also, for example, “Pres. Aquino’s Social Contract: A Convoluted Blueprint for National Failure” in *The Vincenton Post*. Manila: June 2, 2012. Available online also at: <https://fvdb.wordpress.com/2012/06/02/pres-aquinos-social-contract-a-convoluted-blueprint-for-national-failure/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

of the government to attain the expected outputs as stated in the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals), especially Goal Number 2 which is to achieve universal primary education; and Target 4: Achieve universal access to primary education by 2015 (*cf* MGG, 2013; Udjoa & Pillay, 2015; and Unterhalter, 2017).

The renewed commitment to attain the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) put emphasis on the education on ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.² The forthcoming ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) integration is also another compelling reason for the Aquino administration, for example, to galvanize all its resources in order to improve the quality of education. Likewise, the education agenda of Aquino administration is in consonance with its key “result areas”, which are as follows:

Transparent, accountable, and participatory governance – to institutionalize open, transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance;

Poverty reduction and empowerment of the poor and vulnerable – to translate the gains from good governance into direct, immediate and substantial benefits for the poor;

Rapid, inclusive, and sustained economic growth – to achieve rapid economic expansion that generates jobs and livelihood for and increase the income of the poor while moving away from the boom-and-bust cycle of the economic performance of the past;

Just and lasting peace and the rule of law – to attain a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace within the bounds of our law; and

Integrity of the environment and climate change adaptation and mitigation – to promote sustainable natural resource utilization and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies and measures among national government agencies, the Local Government Units (LGUs) and their respective communities, the general public, and other stakeholders (cited in Phelps *et al.*, 2010).

Since human capital is one key factor to economic development, its important the national government should not be remised in its role to support the education sector by

²See “Sustainable Development Goals: United Nations”. Available online at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

legislating and implementing key education reforms (Klein, Rice & Levy, 2012; and Unterhalter, 2017). It is in this context that the researcher explored the legislative agenda on education by the past Congress to enlighten the education stakeholders and be able to mainstream their future efforts in maximizing the national as well as the local efforts and initiatives to improve the quality of education in the country.

METHODS

This qualitative research employed documentary analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; and Cardno, Anderson & McDonald, 2017) in exploring the initiatives and efforts of the legislative body specifically the House of Representatives in its efforts to pass laws that will aim to attain the set goals under SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), key result areas, and the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) integration. There are two major committees in the House that concern on education, namely: committee on basic education and culture; and committee on higher and technical education.

The data and information in this research were culled from the websites of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives and other government websites, like the Office of the President, DepEd (Department of Education), Official Gazette, among others. The two government websites (Philippines Senate and House of Representatives) were updated and generally provide almost all the necessary information, accomplishment, and other reports of the two government legislative institutions.

After the data were downloaded, the researcher analyzed the disparate, rich, and thick data in order to arrive at major themes. The following are the thirteen major themes that emerged: (1) Enhancing Curricular Programs; (2) Promoting Student's Rights and Welfare; (3) Promoting the Rights and Welfare of Teachers; (4) Strengthening Teacher Training; (5) Support to Alternative Learning System and Special Education; (6) Galvanizing Technical-Vocational Training; (7) Enhancing School Administration; (8) Reinforcing Open and Distance Education; (9) Rehabilitating

School Buildings/Facilities; (10) Improving Preschool/Early Childhood Education; (11) Supporting Stakeholder's Participation; (12) Creating/Converting/Separating Schools/Colleges; and (13) Cultivating Culture and Heritage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Legislative Proposals on Education. After collecting from the list of legislative proposals of the House of Representatives during the 16th Congress that started on July 2013 and lasted on July 2016, the following major themes were generated after a thorough documentary analysis:³

First, Enhancing Curricular Programs. The lawmakers have so many proposals related to curricular enhancement or reform. The curricular reforms aim to include various topics or subjects in the existing curricula of elementary, secondary, and tertiary education in the public school system (Florestal & Cooper, 1997; and Barlongo, 2015).

On Local History/Culture/Heroism. There are proposals to: include Moro history, culture, and identity; integrate local history and indigenous culture education; establish culture and gender sensitivity program; include life, works, and ideals of Andres Bonifacio; establish a national program to expand opportunities for Filipino students to serve their communities; integrate cultural heritage and tourism modules; and provide Philippine cinema appreciation (Doronila, 1997; and Mateo, 2001).

On Values, Humanities Education. There are bills that aim to: make a separate course on ethics; provide a national program to improve the quality of instruction in the humanities; mandate the inclusion of career planning, counselling, and coaching and personal; development intervention courses; and include values formation as a separate subject (Udani, 2002; and Ajagbawa et al., 2014).

³See also, for comparison, "Senate Report Card. (December 30, 2015): Drilon Says 16th Congress Marked by Landmark Laws, Vows Election Fever Won't Distract Senate Work". Press Release, Senate of the Philippines. Available online also at: https://www.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2015/1230_drilon1.asp [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017]; and "RA 10756, Official Gazette of the Philippines, April 8, 2016". Available online at: <http://www.gov.ph/2016/04/08/republic-act-no-10756/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

On Health Education. There are bills that aim to: mandate the DepED (Department of Education) and CHED (Commission on Higher Education) to include integrated health; strengthen the classroom instruction and innovating campus information dissemination in secondary schools concerning the ramifications of using alcohol, tobacco, and drugs; develop a basic first aid; require K-12 high school students to undergo cardio pulmonary resuscitation training; and provide mandatory anti-obesity education program and exercise including play and traditional Filipino games (Mundo ed., 2013; and Barlongo, 2015).

On Information and Communication Technology Education. Some House bills are to: provide information technology system; institute cyber education; provide for computer education; provide free information and communication technology courses in SUCs (State Universities/Colleges); and integrate robotic application (Mendoza et al. eds., 2007; and Nebres ed., 2008).

On Entrepreneurship Education. There are proposals to: provide for the inclusion of entrepreneurship as a subject; mandate the inclusion of personal finances; and require the inclusion of basic financial management and entrepreneurship (Evangelista, 2013; and Briones, 2016).

On Good Governance/Anti-Graft. There are House bills to: include topics on good governance, public ethics, and accountability in public service; provide mandatory voters education program; and require the teaching and inculcation of the need of every person to fight the evils of graft and corruption in the society (cf Anello, 2008; and Sakuma et al. eds., 2012).

On Sustainability of Curriculum. There are proposals to: mandate that education curriculum and the consequent preparation of textbooks and related materials should have continuity and that the same should not be affected for a period of at least six years; and prescribe required minimum knowledge and competencies for every curricular subject (Kagawa & Selby, 2015; and Oracion, 2016).

On Disaster Management. There are House bills to: integrate a mandatory subject or course on disaster risk management

education; establish basic disaster preparedness education; and mandate the DepED (Department of Education) and CHED (Commission on Higher Education) to include disaster risk reduction awareness subjects (Luna, Bautista & Guzman, 2008; and Mamon, Suba & Son, 2017).

On Driver's Education. There are proposals to: integrate the study of road safety and signs in the curricula; provide mandatory study of human rights in the curricula; and provide for the inclusion of driver's education program (cf Dragutinovic & Twisk, 2006; and CRD, 2016).

On Environment Education. There are bills to: improve environmental justice education; and provide for environmental education (Boyd, 2013; and Rosa et al., 2015).

On Sports/Physical Education. There are bills to: make swimming a mandatory subject; and include traditional games and sports in PE or Physical Education's course (cf Zourikian, Jarock & Mulder, 2012; and UP, 2016).

On Labor Education. There are proposals to: mandate the CHED (Commission on Higher Education) to include labor education; and mandate a separate course on worker's rights (DoLE, 2011; and Orbeta Jr., Gonzales & Cortes, 2016).

On ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). There are two opposite proposals on ROTC: one is to re-institutionalize the mandatory military and ROTC for students; and the other is to abolish it (Labuguen et al., 2012; and Manalo, 2013).

On PwDs (Persons with Disabilities). Another proposal is to mandate the SUCs (State Universities/Colleges) to offer courses designed to cater to the needs of persons with disability (Weber, 2012; Mundo ed., 2013; and Sabillo, 2015).

On Medium of Instruction. There are also proposals that would strengthen and enhance the use of English as the medium of instruction (Gorgonio, 2012; and Dearden, 2015).

Sustaining Madrasah School. A bill was submitted to provide government assistance to *madrasah* (Islamic modern school) education system. The House of Representatives would like to provide various supports like nutrition and feeding program;

classroom facilities, such as desks, tables, chalkboards, and other basic classroom needs; textbook assistance funds; scholarship grants to deserving students; education loan fund; In-Service Training fund for teachers; among others (Luna, Bautista & Guzman, 2008; and USAID, 2017).

Second, Promoting Student's Rights and Welfare. As regards to *Student's Rights*, the following House bills were submitted by law makers: Prohibit the unauthorized sale of tickets and collection of contributions and solicitations from students; Enforce the constitutional right to the free exercise of religion by students; prohibit public and private schools from disallowing students with delinquent tuition fee to take the midterm or final exams; Prohibit preschools and elementary schools from requiring the graduating pupils to wear a toga during graduation rites; Provide a Magna Carta of Students; Protect the right of students of courses requiring professional licensure examinations to enrol in review centers of their choice; Impose a three-year moratorium on tuition and other fee increases; Provide a Magna Carta for youth; Penalize the imposition of "no permit, no exam policy"; Establish a career guidance and counselling program; Promote equity and justice in higher education by providing for student representation in the CHED (Commission on Higher Education); Direct DepED (Department of Education) to institutionalise a student's grievance act mechanism to cushion off arbitrary and adverse disciplinary cases affecting graduating students; Prohibit the withholding of students official records for transfer purposes by reason of non-payment of tuition fees; Uphold and promote campus journalism and campus press freedom; and Provide guidelines in collecting school's contribution (Recana, 1973; and Estrada, 2008).

On Scholarships/Grants for Students. In terms of scholarships/grants for students, there are numbers of bills pertaining to the following: Provide scholarship on ICT (Information and Communication Technology); Unify and rationalize existing scholarship of the government; Prove Magna Carta of the Poor; Provide study now pay

later; Grant college scholarship to students who graduated valedictorian and salutatorian; Provide book allowance to qualified students; Provide for a full tuition subsidy in SUCS (State Universities/Colleges); Encourage the production of one college scholar for every Filipino family; Integrate students' assistance law; Subsidize school fees; Create a national student loan board to formulate and implement national student loan program; Institutionalize a Tulong Dunong program for students of underprivileged families; Grant scholarship for children of small farmers; Require all colleges and universities to provide college scholarship grant to at least ten percent of their total student population who are poor but deserving students; Free college entrance exam to graduating high school students in SUCs; Provide incentives for new graduates of colleges and universities; Establish a voluntary students loan program by banks; Mandate all state colleges and universities to confer automatic admission and provide scholarship grants to all top ten public high school students of their graduating class; Institute a public administration and governance scholarship program; Grant discounts on basic education services to underprivileged students; Create a comprehensive national loan program; and Establish for free college education to one public high school graduate in a family (Estrada, 2008; and Aquino III, 2010).

On Health/Nutrition Program for Children. These are the proposed laws on health and nutrition to: provide for a national nutrition program; provide mandatory national child nutrition program; establish a national vision screening program for kindergarten pupils; establish a board of health education and bureau of health education under DepED (Department of Education); mandate milk feeding of school children; institute a national free lunch program to children; providing free breakfast program for public school children; provide school health and nutrition program; promote the health of students; provide for the establishment, maintenance, and operation of national feeding program for school children; provide for a mandatory nationwide child nutrition program; and

regulate the availability of beverages to children in schools (Estrada, 2008; and Briones et al., 2017).

Third, Promoting the Rights and Welfare of Teachers. Following is proposals pertaining the promoting the rights and welfare of teachers in the Philippines:

On Scholarships/Grants for Teachers/Non-Teaching Personnel. There are proposals to provide scholarship grants to public school teachers to pursue their graduate studies; and to institutionalize scholarship grants to all public school teachers (OADGP, 2012; and Acosta & Acosta, 2016).

On Monetary Incentives for Public School Teachers. As regards to the monetary incentives to teachers, there are proposals to: add support and compensation for education in basic education; increase the salary of public school teachers and non-teaching personnel; upgrade of salaries of educators in SUCs (State Universities/Colleges); grant exemption to public school educators and education personnel from SSL; and grant discount privileges for public school educators (cf OADGP, 2012; and Imberman, 2015).

On Non-Wage Benefits for Public School Teachers. There are proposals for non-wage benefits for teachers, namely to: provide free tertiary education of teachers' children in state colleges/universities; provide benefits/Incentives for Day Care Workers; provide instructional allowance for Public School Teachers; provide automatic expenditure for medical examination and treatment public school educators and employees; increase the pension of retired teachers; provide medical allowance to public school teachers; grant additional insurance benefits to all public school teachers; provide for additional benefits for public school teachers who are killed in the performance of their duties; grant free post secondary education in SUCs (State Universities/Colleges) and public technical vocational schools to dependent children of public elementary and high school teachers; grant a non-wage benefit to public school teachers in the form of free tertiary education to SUCs for one of their dependent; provide subsidised housing program; and provide incentives to public school teachers who are

assigned outside of their towns and provinces (Weingarten, Cortese & Johnson, 2009; OADGP, 2012; and Acosta & Acosta, 2016).

On Teacher's Rights. The 16th Congress were keen on promoting the rights of teachers by proposing laws that aim to: provide for a magna carta for kindergarten teachers; create plantilla in DepED (Department of Education) for volunteer teachers, for at least 5 years of continuous service; prohibit the hiring of teachers in the public sector through contract of service or job order; provide security of tenure to teachers; and make election service voluntary for public school teachers (Carlos et al., 2010; and NEDA, 2017).

Support to Non-Teaching Personnel. The proposed in relation to the support of non-teaching personnel were pushed by legislators such as bills that aim to: provide equal opportunity for appointment or assignment of non-teaching personnel; provide classroom instruction experience to professional public school employees who are not classroom teachers; and recruit, hire, and training additional school-based guidance counsellors, psychologists, school social workers, and mental health personnel (NEDA, 2017; and Quismorio, 2018).

Fourth, Strengthening Teacher Training. House bills, which aim to strengthen the teacher training program, include the following: strengthen the continuing professional education program of teachers; provide scholarship program for students enrolling in teacher education and providing incentives for teaching in the public schools; establish a teaching residency program under DepED (Department of Education); establish national teacher academies in order to encourage and facilitate entry into teaching profession; developing globally competitive science and math teachers; provide ICT (Information and Communication Technology) training for basic education teachers; strengthen the recruitment and training of public school teachers; require independent proficiency assessment in the appointment and hiring of teachers; strengthen the recruitment and training of Filipino teachers; create grant programs for retain highly qualified teachers in rural communities; and

establish a national accrediting agency for teacher education institutions (cf Udani, 2002; and Mubanga, 2012).

Fifth, Support to Alternative Learning System and Special Education. The 16th Philippine Congress did not lack initiatives to strengthen the alternative learning system. The following proposals aim to: provide alternative online learning system for high school and first two years in college; provide for the ALS (Alternative Learning System) of education for adults, out of school youth and members of cultural minorities and IPs (Indigenous Peoples), PWDs (Persons with Disabilities); and institutionalize the alternative classroom learning experience program (Hoop, 2009; and Musa & Ziatdinov, 2012).

These are the proposals on special education: to establish at least one SPED (Special Education) center for every component city and at least two sped teachers for every highly urbanised city; and to establish one special education center for each school division and at least 3 SPED centers in big school division for CSN or Children with Special Needs (Hoop, 2009; and Pajaron & Sarmiento eds., 2018).

Sixth, Galvanizing Technical-Vocational Training. The proposals on technical-vocational training were also one of the most important considerations of the 16th Congress. The following proposals aim to: institutionalize the open technical-vocational school system; strengthen the interface of technical-vocational training and higher education; strengthen the ladderized interface between technical-vocational education and training and higher education; and establish a district skills training center for out of school youth (cf Hoop, 2009; and Eicker, Haseloff & Lennartz eds., 2016).

On Change/Shift of Academic Calendar. There were a number of proposals to shift or change the calendar year from June – March to September – May. Torrential rains and heavy floods often disrupt classes in all levels resulting to the suspension of classes and irregular school days. The revision of the school calendar for health, safety, and welfare of the school children and youth (Editorial, 2014; and Cruz et al., 2017).

On Quality Assurance. To improve the quality of education, there are proposed laws on quality assurance, which aim to: strengthening the voluntary accreditation of private schools; prescribe uniform qualification standards for college or university faculty; ensure quality in all higher education institutions thru a quality assurance system; and prohibit the unlawful sale and purchase of dissertations, theses, term papers, essays reports or any other assignment or school work (Corpus, 2003; and Conchada & Tiongco, 2015).

On Quality of Textbooks. Textbook-related proposed laws aim to: make the production defective textbooks a crime; decentralize the textbook procurement program in the DepED (Department of Education); require publishers of all books to furnish certain government libraries and SUCs (State Universities/ Colleges) printed books free of charge; create the National Textbook Review Board; and establish the books for the barrios program (Nebres ed., 2008; and Bacani ed., 2017).

Seventh, Enhancing School Administration. Some House bills on school administration aim to: establish guidelines for the operation of LUCs (Local Universities or Colleges); provide stiffer penalty for theft, robbery, and destruction of public school properties; recognize the vital role of school heads as chief executive in the schools; strengthen the role of school district supervisors as head of school district; and develop an educational strategies that addresses the educational needs of all member of local communities (cf Udani, 2002; Mubanga, 2012; and Conchada & Tiongco, 2015).

Reorganization of Education Agencies. Proposed laws to strengthen Mindanao State University system as national peace university; and also to strengthen of the CHED or Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines (Reyes, 2009; and Mundo ed., 2013).

Creation Special Office in the DepED (Department of Education). There are proposals that aim to: establish foreign student office to promote local education and tourism; create a bureau of health education; mandate the creation of national literacy institute; establish the national education coordinating

council; and create Community School Board (Macaranas, 2007; and Syjuco, 2007).

On Recognition of International Schools. There were three proposed laws to recognize educational institutions/schools in the Philippines as international schools, like Canadian American Foundation, German School, and British School in Manila (Crystal, 2003; and Reyes, 2008).

On Declaration of Special Day. There were efforts of the legislators to declare or recognize certain dates or days as special days, like: Declaring November 17 of every year as National Students Day based on International Students Day, the day commemorates the students resistance in Prague, Czech during the NAZI (*National Sozialismus*) occupation of 1939; Declaring October 5 as National Teachers Day; Recognizing the observance of July 25 of every years as National Campus Freedom Day; and Declaring the 20th of every September as National Young Martyr's Day (cf Wardhani, 2010; and Venecia et al., 2017).

On Higher Education Reforms. There are two proposals about higher education that aim to: rationalise the typology of higher education institutions; and establish the tertiary education transition fund to develop and sustain tertiary education institutions during the transition period of the K-12 (Hernandez, 2014; and Carillo, 2017).

On Promoting Security and Safety in Schools. When it comes to securing the safety of the schools, the lawmakers have the following initiatives: mandate all higher education institutions to create a crime prevention committee that shall ensure the safety and security of their students; post the current crime rate and conditions in the area, where the school is located; mandate higher education institutions to promote the safety and security of all students from internal and external threats; establish innovative programs to ensure and provide safe school environments; and define campus hazing, enumerate forms of hazing by CHED or Commission on Higher Education (cf Nakamura, 2004; and Hofer et al., 2016).

On Amendments to Existing Education-Related Laws. There were also some initiatives

to amend existing laws related to education, like the Higher Education Modernization Act or RA (Republic Act) 8292, RA 10533, or Basic Education Act of 2013 (K-12 Law), and the GASTPE or Government Assistance to Students and Teachers on Private Education (Hernandez, 2014; Umali, 2015; and Carillo, 2017).

On School Gardening. A proposal was submitted to establish a bio-intensive vegetable garden in every elementary school and high school in the country. Another proposal was to integrate an agricultural science subject in the curriculum (cf Kommu, 2010; and Dirks, 2011).

Eighth, Reinforcing Open and Distance Education. Furthering the access to education, the 16th Congress proposed the following laws to: expand access to education through open learning and distance education; strengthen the open learning system in higher education; expand access to education through open learning and distance education in post secondary and tertiary levels of education; and institutionalize the opening of night classes using existing elementary and high school facilities all over the country (Mnyanyi & Mbwette, 2009; Hernandez, 2014; Umali, 2015; and Carillo, 2017).

Ninth, Rehabilitating School Buildings/Facilities. Proposals to improve or rehabilitate school buildings were submitted by lawmakers. These policy proposals aim to: provide for the rehabilitation and repair of Gabaldon school houses nationwide; provide for mandatory annual inspection in all school buildings by the city engineer; provide repair, construction, and rehabilitation of existing structures of PUP (Polytechnic University of the Philippines); provide for the construction of one toilet for every five classroom in public elementary schools; require the establishment of fully equipped science laboratories in every public elementary and secondary schools; establish a comprehensive and integrated national policy and program guidelines for the operation and maintenance of dormitories and boarding houses; and mandates the all illegal wood products confiscated by DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) be donated to the DepED (Department of Education) to be used for the

construction of classroom, chairs, tables, and other school facilities (Candido, 2018).

On Support to Libraries. It is interesting to note that there were strong initiatives to support libraries. Proposals related to library aim to: mandate the nationwide establishment of city libraries; provide for the free use of computers with internet access in all public libraries; promote the establishment of mobile libraries; provide for elementary, secondary, and tertiary school library media resources, technology enhancement; and provide for the establishment of a public library for every *barangay* or district (Lanchovichina & Lundstrom, 2009; and CB, 2012).

Tenth, Improving Preschool/Early Childhood Education. Initiatives to improve the governing the system of preschool education by prescribing standards and regulations of preschool facilities and services; and to establish early learning programs for indigent pre-kindergarten children were submitted by lawmakers (Luistro ed., 2012; and Mundo ed., 2013).

Eleventh, Supporting Stakeholder's Participation. A proposed law aim to increase the participation and responsibility of LGUs (Local Government Units) in the administration of education. As always articulated, education cannot be achieved by one person or one sector of society, there is an imperative for all sectors or stakeholders to actively participate in the education of the young people (Dayrit, 2005; and Orbista, 2012).

On Role of Parents in Education. Recognizing the role of parents in the education of their children, two House bills were submitted in order to strengthening the role of parents associations; and enhance the PTCA (Parent, Teachers, and Community Association) in promoting and protecting the rights of children and youth. Likewise, there were proposals to support effective programs that provide assistance to parents, who want to help their children become successful readers; and to establish a national *nanay* or mother teacher training program to strengthen parent engagement and responsibility in the education of their children (Gordoncillo et al., 2008; and Acheron, 2012).

Twelveth, Creating/Converting/Separating

Schools/Colleges. There many House bills that aims to establish SUCs (State Universities/ Colleges), LUCs (Local Universities or Colleges), art and trade schools, elementary schools, high schools, national high schools, national technical-vocational high school, senior high schools, national science highs schools, open high schools, high school for sports, Philippine Business and Finance High School System, merchant marine academy for Mindanao, district skills and training centers, and lineman training academy (Florida, 2006; and Tulio, 2008).

Likewise, there are many proposals to separate/convert satellite or annex campuses from big elementary schools or high schools to become separate and independent schools. There are also proposals to convert a state college to state university. Another proposal aims to convert a satellite campus of a big state university become another state university. There were a number of bills that aim for change of name of schools/colleges (Florida, 2006; Tulio, 2008; and Sutton, Muller & Langenkamp, 2013).

Thirteenth, Cultivating Culture and Heritage. There are House bills to: establish the Kalinga heritage museum and cultural center; mandate Filipino beauty pageant contestants in international beauty pageant; competitions to wear or use costumes designed or created by Filipino fashion designers; declare a public school as a cultural heritage zone; allow the Philippines flag to be flown half mast in certain DepED (Department of Education) schools or school district offices to mourn the death of former or incumbent public school teacher; provide for the promotion, protection, and development of Philippine music industry; provide public elementary school students free admission in all public museums and historical shrines; provide for an artists welfare protection and information act; strengthen the rules on proper use and display of our national symbols; and designate Philippine national performing arts companies (cf Drum, 2001; and Namiki, 2016).

The House bills are diverse in its scope which covers many categories. The general goal of these House bills is to improve and

make education accessible to every Filipino citizens (*cf* Castellanos *et al.*, 2007; and Levinson, 2009).

Landmark Education Laws: Case Study of Under the PNoy Aquino Administration.

With the efforts of both Houses of Philippine Congress (Senate and the Lower House) to widen access to education among the Filipino youth, together with the support of the executive branch of the government, the following major laws were signed and enacted:

RA (Republic Act) 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which encompasses at least one year of kindergarten education, six years of elementary education, and six years of secondary education, in that sequence. Secondary education includes four years of junior high school and two years of senior high school education.⁴

Preschool or kindergarten, for 5 years old kids, will be one year preparatory to Grade 1. As a mandate of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, elementary education, which is composed of 6 years, is free and compulsory. Secondary education is the third stage of compulsory basic education. It consists of four years of junior high school education and two years of senior high school education. The entrant age to the junior and senior high school levels are typically twelve and sixteen years old, respectively (Florida, 2006; and Francia, 2010).

To make education effective and inclusive, basic education shall be delivered in languages understood by the learners as the language plays a strategic role in shaping the formative years of learners (*cf* Florida, 2006; and Robinson & Kay eds., 2010). Further, RA 10533 mandates the DepED (Department of Education) to adhere to the following standards and principles in developing the enhanced basic education curriculum:

- (a) The curriculum shall be learner-centered, inclusive and developmentally appropriate;
- (b) The curriculum shall be relevant, responsive and research-based;

- (c) The curriculum shall be culture-sensitive;
- (d) The curriculum shall be contextualized and global;
- (e) The curriculum shall use pedagogical approaches that are constructivist, inquiry-based, reflective, collaborative and integrative;
- (f) The curriculum shall adhere to the principles and framework of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which starts from where the learners are and from what they already knew proceeding from the known to the unknown; instructional materials and capable teachers to implement the MTB-MLE curriculum shall be available;
- (g) The curriculum shall use the spiral progression approach to ensure mastery of knowledge and skills after each level; and
- (h) The curriculum shall be flexible enough to enable and allow schools to localize, indigenize and enhance the same based on their respective educational and social contexts. The production and development of locally produced teaching materials shall be encouraged and approval of these materials shall devolve to the regional and division education units.⁵

RA (Republic Act) 10665, or Open High School System Act, is a law that establishes an alternative secondary education program to provide access to secondary education through the open learning modality as part of the DepED (Department of Education)'s program in order to realize the mandate of the Philippine Constitution to broaden access to relevant quality education through the employment of an alternative secondary education program that will enable the youth to overcome personal, geographical, socioeconomic and physical constraints, to encourage them to complete secondary education.⁶

RA (Republic Act) 10687, or Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) Act, which has the following objectives:

- To allocate and utilize properly all government resources intended for students through effective beneficiary targeting; to ensure consistency, continuity, and, efficient coordination of student financial assistance policies and programs; to ensure regional equity in the distribution of student financial assistance

⁴See "RA 10533, Official Gazette of the Philippines, May 15, 2013". Available online at: <http://www.gov.ph/2013/05/15/republic-act-no-10533/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

⁵*Ibidem*, see "RA 10533 ...".

⁶See "RA 10665, Official Gazette of the Philippines, July 9, 2015". Available online at: <http://www.gov.ph/2015/07/09/republic-act-no-10665/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

slots; to produce a pool of highly qualified graduates and technical experts who will contribute to the country's high-level labor force through merit and talent-based Scholarships; to facilitate access to quality education: through Grants-in-Aid for students belonging to marginalized sectors; and to assist students with liquidity issues through Student Loans.⁷

RA (Republic Act) 10699, or the National Athletes, Coaches, and Trainers Benefits and Incentives Act, in order to promote excellence in sports by looking after the welfare of national athletes and coaches competing for the country and by providing benefits and incentives for national athletes and other athletes who win in international sports competitions and bring honor and recognition to the country.⁸

RA (Republic Act) 10648, or "Iskolar ng Bayan Act", which gives automatic admission and provision of scholarship grants by all state colleges and universities to public high school students who belong to the top ten places of their graduating classes (*cf* Florido, 2006; and Geronimo, 2015).

RA (Republic Act) 10647, or the Ladderized Education Act, is in line with the constitutional guarantee for the State to promote the right of all citizens to quality and accessible education at all levels and to establish, maintain and support a complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and contributory to national development, It is hereby declared the policy of the State to institutionalize the ladderized interface between TVET (Technical-Vocational Education and Training) and higher education to open the pathways of opportunities for career and educational progression of students and workers, create a seamless and borderless system of education, empower students and workers to exercise options or to choose when to enter and exit in the educational ladder, and to provide job platforms at every exit as well as the

⁷See "RA 10687, Senate of the Philippines". Available online at: https://www.senate.gov.ph/republic_acts/ra%2010687.pdf [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

⁸See "RA 10699, Official Gazette of the Philippines, November 13, 2015". Available online at: <http://www.gov.ph/2015/11/13/republic-act-no-10699/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

opportunity to earn income.⁹

RA (Republic Act) 10650, or the Open Learning and Distance Education Act, with the aim to expand and further democratize access to quality tertiary education through the promotion and application of open learning as a philosophy of access to educational services, and the use of distance education as an appropriate, efficient and effective system of delivering quality higher and technical educational services in the country.¹⁰

RA (Republic Act) 10679, or the Youth Entrepreneurship Act, which aim to promote the sustained development of young Filipinos, whose aptitude and skill in the field of finance and entrepreneurship shall be encouraged and honed through education and specialized training programs. Towards this end, the State shall establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education and training to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit among our youth as well as support and promote the growth of young entrepreneurs nationwide.¹¹

RA (Republic Act) 10618, or the Rural Farm Schools Act, which provides alternative delivery mode of secondary education. The public rural farm schools shall be free from tuition and other school fees, except those fees which may be allowed by the DepED (Department of Education). Private rural farm schools shall set a minimal tuition and other fees subject to the approval of the DepED.¹²

The relatives of CARP (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program) beneficiaries up to the third degree of consanguinity in the descending line shall be exempt from payment of the fees. The Department of Education will:

[...] institutionalize high standards of quality assurance in rural farm schools. These standards

⁹See "RA 10647, Senate of the Philippines". Available online at: https://www.senate.gov.ph/republic_acts/ra%2010647.pdf [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

¹⁰See "RA 10650, Senate of the Philippines". Available online at: https://www.senate.gov.ph/republic_acts/ra%2010650.pdf [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

¹¹See "RA 10679, Senate of the Philippines". Available online at: https://www.senate.gov.ph/republic_acts/ra%2010679.pdf [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

¹²See "RA 10618, Official Gazette of the Philippines, September 3, 2013". Available online at: <http://www.gov.ph/2013/09/03/republic-act-no-10618/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

shall involve prescribing guidelines and policies on the operation and management of rural farm schools as well as basic curricular content to ensure the credibility and academic integrity of rural farm schools (cited in Atchoarena & Gasperini eds., 2003).

RA (Republic Act) 10410, or known as the EYA (Early Years Act) of 2013, which shall institutionalize a National System for ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development) that is comprehensive, integrative and sustainable, that involves multisectoral and interagency collaboration at the national and local levels among government; among service providers, families and communities, and among the public and private sectors, nongovernment organizations; professional associations and academic institutions (Barera ed., 2013). The Philippine State shall:

[...] promote the rights of children to survival, development and special protection with full recognition of the nature of childhood and as well as the need to provide developmentally appropriate experiences to address their needs; and to support parents in their roles as primary caregivers and as their children's first teachers. Further, the State hereby recognizes the age from zero (0) to eight (8) years as the first crucial stage of educational development of which the age from zero (0) to four (4) years shall be the responsibility of the Early Childhood Care and Development or ECCD Council. Therefore, the responsibility to help develop children in the formative years between age five (5) to eight (8) years shall be with the Department of Education or DepED.¹³

RA (Republic Act) 10157, or shall be known as the "Kindergarten Education Act", which aims to provide equal opportunities for all children to avail of accessible mandatory and compulsory kindergarten education that effectively promotes physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and skills stimulation and values formation to sufficiently prepare them for formal elementary schooling. This law makes preschool or kindergarten as the first stage of compulsory and mandatory formal education. Thus, kindergarten is an

¹³See "RA 10410, Official Gazette of the Philippines, March 26, 2013". Available online at: <http://www.gov.ph/2013/03/26/republic-act-no-10410/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

integral part of the basic education system (Orbeta, 2014). As state in the declaration of policy, kindergarten education is:

[...] vital to the academic and technical development of the Filipino child for it is the period when the young mind's absorptive capacity for learning is at its sharpest. It is also the policy of the State to make education learner-oriented and responsive to the needs, cognitive and cultural capacity, the circumstances and diversity of learners, schools and communities through the appropriate languages of teaching and learning.¹⁴

With this accomplishment of the 16th Philippine Congress, I hope for a modest development or improvement in the quality of education in the country. Senate President Franklin Drilon pointed out that through the enactment of these laws, we will remove the traditional barriers to the effective access to public education, such as poverty, distance and age requirements.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

The 16th Congress of the Philippines was not remiss of its main function to initiate policies and pass critical laws that will widen access to education. There were many House bills that were submitted to strengthen the curricula, support existing educational institutions, improved the facilities, enhance the delivery of teaching-learning, promote the rights of both teachers and students, incentivise education, provide mechanism for maximum participation of various stakeholders, and democratise and make education inclusive in all sectors of Philippine society. There are crucial laws passed by Congress during the administration of Pnoy Aquino, which I believed are instrumental to improve the quality of education in the country.

¹⁴See "RA 10157, Official Gazette of the Philippines, January 20, 2012". Available online at: <http://www.gov.ph/2012/01/20/republic-act-no-10157/> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

¹⁵See also, for comparison, "Senate Report Card. (December 30, 2015): Drilon Says 16th Congress Marked by Landmark Laws, Vows Election Fever Won't Distract Senate Work". Press Release, Senate of the Philippines. Available online also at: https://www.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2015/1230_drilon1.asp [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017]; and "House Bills and Resolutions of 16th Congress". Available online at: <http://www.congress.gov.ph/download/?d=billstext> [accessed in Manila, Philippines: November 24, 2017].

I hope that these laws will be effectively implemented by concerned government agencies, so that we could translate it into economic development and social progress. The current Duterte administration will have its option to pursue the education reforms that were instituted by PNoy Aquino's leadership or President Duterte will enhance/modify some to suit its own education agenda as the 16th President of the Republic of the Philippines.¹⁶

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¹⁶**Statement:** This is to certify that the manuscript is an original work by me based on research. I have duly acknowledged the work(s) of others I used in writing this article/manuscript. I have duly cited all such work(s) in the text as well in the list of the References, and that I have presented within quotes all the original sentences and phrases, etc. taken from the sources, which I have consulted in writing this article/manuscript. I, further, declare that the paper has not been previously published, is not currently submitted for reviews to any other journal/magazine or periodicals, and will not be submitted elsewhere.

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