

## **ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

### **Introduction**

My name is Maita Chan Gonzaga. I'm with the Ateneo Law School and I will be your moderator for today's event. We are happy to welcome you, of course, to this year's JVO Lecture. This event is co-organized by the Jaime V. Ongpin Center for Business and Government, the Ateneo School of Government, and the Office of the University Development and Alumni Affairs, as well. The JVO Annual Memorial Lecture was inaugurated in 2001 to help raise the awareness of the Filipino people about pressing national development issues in order to empower them to actively engage in nation building, delivered by business leaders, senior government officials, and leading academics.

The lectures have tackled critically important themes in the nexus of democracy and development including climate change, corruption, education, federalism, globalization, health and equity, poverty and national leadership. In order to keep alive the spirit with which Jaime V. Ongpin lived his life to willingness to risk comfort, safety, wealth and personal security for the sake of freedom and democracy and thus, the greater good of our people and country. The lecture series hopes to bring together business and government leaders and Filipinos from all walks of life in continuing national conversation of the present situation and the future direction of the country.

So now on its 22nd year, the lecture will focus on the country's education system. The need for a higher education budget to increase teacher's basic pay, more classrooms and functional facilities, teacher's education support, personnel, and sufficient instructional and educational materials. We would like to acknowledge the presence of individuals from the Department of Education, teachers from public and private schools, and universities, the Ongpin family and the administrators of the Ateneo de Manila University as well. We would also like to greet our online audience, alumni, friends, and colleagues who are tuning in today via the livestream on Ateneo's YouTube channel. So, before we proceed to today's discussion, may I invite Dr. Randy Tuano, Dean of Ateneo School of Government to deliver the welcome remarks and introduce our keynote speaker.

### **Welcoming Remarks**

We are gathered here today for the 22nd Jaime V. Ongpin Annual Memorial Lecture, an event that serves as a platform for intellectual discourse on pressing issues in our society. Today's lecture entitled "Paghihinalo ng Edukasyon: Sintomas, Sakit at Reseta" deals in to the critical examination of the public education system in the Philippines.

The Jaime V. Ongpin Memorial Lecture has been a testament to our commitment, the University's commitment to fostering dialogue and understanding on matters of national significance. Inaugurated in 2001, this lecture aims to raise awareness of Filipino people about pressing national development issues in order to empower them to actively engage in nation building.

This afternoon, I am pleased to introduce to you our main speaker for our discussion today to tackle various complex issues regarding our current educational system that we offer. Joining us is Mr. Vladimir Quetua, the National President of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, a vast organization of educators and professionals serving our schools and universities.

Mr. Quetua will speak about several challenges that affect the Philippine education system. Some of these challenges include the issue of inadequate funding, as you know, insufficient budget allocation for education has led to many incidents of overcrowding, outdated learning materials and a shortage of qualified teachers. The disparities in educational opportunities between urban and rural areas remain also a present concern. We all know schools often lack resources, infrastructure necessary for quality education, contributing to the alarming education divide.

We are also very much aware of the precarious situation of our educators, from inadequate compensation to the lack of job security, teachers in the Philippines face numerous challenges that impact the quality of education that they can provide. The relevance of the curriculum is also an important issue as the landscape of global education evolves, meaning, to discuss a curriculum that adapts to the demands of the 21st century. A curriculum that fosters critical thinking, creativity and practical skills is essential to preparing students for the challenges of the modern world. Lastly, the Philippines grapples with the perennial issue of accessibility. Many students particularly from the marginalized sectors face bears to accessing education due to financial constraints, geographical challenges, or socio-economic factors. Therefore, there's a need to emphasize the importance of inclusive policies that ensure every Filipino has every opportunity to receive a quality education.

Mr. Quetua's speech aims to deepen our dialogue and actions, fostering understanding among us as we collectively work towards an equitable, open, and suitable educational system for our country. Let's listen to his perspective and recommendations this afternoon as we delve into the more intricate issues in our country's educational system.

Vladimir Quetua is the current lead and national chairperson of the alliance of concerned teachers of the Philippines, the largest teachers' union in the country. He is a public-school teacher with over 20 years of experience teaching in public schools in Metro Manila. He is a strong advocate of the rights of the teachers and has led acts in many of the advocacies for the institution of policies such as the higher budget for education and also strengthening the implementation of the K to 12 program.

He is a respected leader among teachers and students alike, and he is known for his commitment to social justice and his dedication to fight for quality education for all Filipinos. Some of his important advocacies and this is also mirrored in the advocacies of his group - increasing the salary of public school teachers to a minimum of P33,000 per month, lobbying for the full implementation of the Magna Carta for public school teachers which provides for the welfare and benefits of public school teachers, and expose the corruption and anomalies in the Department of Education.

Following Mr Quetua's lecture, we are honored to have a panel of presenters who will share their perspectives on vast aspects of education in the Philippines. These esteemed individuals include Ms. Perlita C. Rana, National President of all UP Academic Employees Union, followed by Dr. Gary Devilles, President of the Ateneo de Manila Faculty Association, Dr. David Michael San Juan, Convener of the People's Education Commission, and Dr. Vicente Paqueo, visiting fellow of the Philippine Institute of Development Studies.

As we engage in this electoral exposition, let us keep in mind the words and insights of our distinguished speakers and the reactors who bring their wealth experience and expertise towards the discussion. Together, let us contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in our education system. I now turn the floor over to our keynote speaker, Mr. Quetua, to commence the lecture.

## **Talk Proper**

### **Mr. Vladimer Quetua**

I am Teacher Vlad, you often see me on television, being included in the "red tag." I am the National President of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, the largest union which is very vocal in education issues. As a teacher in the public school, we are extremely grateful for allowing us to provide perspectives and analysis in our ailing education system.

Let's begin by revisiting the mandate of our government as stated in the Article 14, Section 1 of the Constitution, that the state must protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and should take appropriate steps to achieve such education.

In Section 2, it is clear that the state should establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education that is suitable for the needs of society. This is the primary mandate that should be fulfilled by the Department of Education, particularly the Commission on Higher Education.

In the Republic Act 4670, also known as the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, it is declared that there should be efforts to improve the socio-economic status of public-school teachers, their standard of living, working conditions, employment terms, parity with other professions, and opportunities to attract and retain more qualified individuals to serve as educators. In fact, the progress of education is recognized to depend on these qualifications, the capacity of the employee, the quality of teaching, and education's crucial role in the growth of our country's economy.

Using these guidelines, let's illustrate the manifestations or what we call the symptoms of our ailing education. For SY 2023-2024, the total number of public schools is 47,678, encompassing elementary, high school, and kindergarten. The number of enrollees is currently at 96 million, and there are 879 teaching personnel, excluding non-teaching staff.

In Vice President Sara's recent "*Matatag*" report, she mentioned the state of education in the country indicating the government's very minimal efforts. The total number of school buildings is 300, the government's own data shows that only 32% of these buildings are in good condition. The plans for construction of new school buildings were stalled due to the pandemic. In the actual data, you'll see how conservative the government's plans are regarding classroom infrastructure.

Now, if we focus on the issue of classrooms, it's not surprising that during the opening of the school year 2023-2024, headlines showed instances in Pampanga where teachers conducted classes in so-called "Section 3" or basketball courts. When we talk about Section 3, they were teaching under the mango trees. They tolerated these classrooms or basketball court sections because, somehow, those were in better condition.

At Paoay Elementary School in Abra, which was hit by earthquake in 2022, up to now they are still using makeshift classrooms. The condition of these classrooms, aside from being unfinished, are also not enough for the student population. In Cebu, they hold classes in corridors and pathways. In one of the schools in Cavite, students are already using the classrooms that are still under construction. Thus, the shortage of classrooms is evident.

According to international standards, there should be 35 students per teacher, but the government data shows a shortage of 159,000 classrooms and about 150,000 teachers. We used to have a seat/desk sets, but now, the students are squeezing themselves into cramped spaces due to a shortage of classrooms and teachers. And because of the shortage of education support personnel, teachers are also the ones measuring the height and weight of the students, feeding them, and all related tasks. Thus, we're not only DEPED, we're also DILG running a student government, managing canteens, and even acting as security guards, DOH, every government agency, Red Cross included, we do it all.

That's the situation inside the schools, truly miserable. It's as if we didn't go through a crisis. In other countries, the government funded the deficiencies because of the pandemic.

About the shortage of teachers, it used to be a joke among us that because of lack of teachers, classrooms are like sardines, but that's not the case anymore. It's now more like "Maling" and by "Maling" I mean there's really no space.

I visited Batasan National High School, they have 80 students in a classroom. I just came from a class with 66 students. Imagine, we're talking now after the pandemic, still the issue remains, lack of classrooms and facilities. During the summer months of April and May, most schools lack clinics, and even if there is one, there are no nurses. And apart from that, teachers are already overworked. As you can see, this is a classic joke; we used to call teachers "octopus" because of their workload. Like any other regular teacher, aside from teaching, they prepare lesson plans even on weekends. They manage administrative tasks, coordinate other activities, and they do not already care how do they look like. During the recent barangay elections, someone asked me if we had time to attend All Saint's Day. We said we don't need Halloween costumes because we already look like zombies with our tired faces. We're also the election watchers. Teachers do a lot. But despite all these, what is the government's plan for the teachers?

During the pandemic, many teachers left the service not because of sickness, but because of additional expenses. According to the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, two months' worth of teacher's salary went to "advances." We bought green backgrounds for online classes, we bought ring lights, we bought a laptop. The laptops you heard about in the news, only a few received them. Teachers buy everything. As our joke goes, teachers are the only profession that brings their home materials to school. When a child is hungry and has no fare, we're the ones providing. We even buy our own chalks and whiteboard markers. Aside from the advances from our own pockets, the teachers do not receive enough benefits.

During the pandemic, we dedicated 77 days and yet we have not been paid until now. The teachers' benefits, aside from insufficient and being delayed, are slowly disappearing. There is no support for development - personal or professional. The salary is meager, and the benefits are insufficient.

What are the manifestations that the teachers are underpaid? The salary amount mentioned earlier is really a challenge for a teacher to make paydays meet. The family living wage still seems conservative because based on the NEDA report in 2018 and that of IBON [Foundation], in reality, teachers' salaries should be at PHP40,000 level. But for the sake of discussion, it ranges from P35,000 to P42,000. The non-teaching personnel only receives PHP13,000. As for us teachers, it's at PHP27,000. No mistake, it's really PHP27,000. In 1989, teachers earned PHP3,102; during GMA's time (Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo), it was PHP9,939. Now, in the final tranche of the Salary Standardization Law, but we are not expecting any increase in salary. If there's a budget for salary adjustment, it's minuscule, and that would be a huge gap to catch up on, especially for our colleagues in state colleges and universities, they cannot keep up. There's one school in Camotes Island where half of the teachers is already in Australia and Canada. As for my school in Carlos Albert, three of our P.E. faculty members are already in Australia and Phuket, Thailand. Why? Because the salary here in the Philippines is very low. We have a teacher who became a Grab driver, one who looks after a canteen, and another who does welding because their salary is not enough.

Based on the Magna Carta, the teacher's salary has really been left behind, unlike those of the nurses who won their case in the Supreme Court, and the soldiers and police personnel who were favored with an increase in salary and benefits during President Duterte's time. It states that the salary of teachers shall compare favorably with those paid in other occupations, and they shall be such to ensure teachers have a reasonable standard of life, but that is not the reality.

The teachers are also "under attack" aside from being underpaid. These are just a few examples of our teacher leaders who advocate for the education sector. Teacher Lai who's now residing abroad; Teacher Opel who is

now dismissed, Teacher Diane in Cebu, our leader in Region 3 who was kidnapped at the Cebu Pier in broad daylight; and Teacher Florante in Region 1. The union of teachers in Regions 1 and 5 are also “under attack.” Imagine, the collective negotiation agreement is a document by the rebels, as they say. Where else would you see that?

So, if you look at where all these are coming from, it's the overall pain that originates from the liberal education that is dominating our education system. What do we mean by liberal education? It's the neglected education sector wherein the funds are not really a priority. Even if we look at the constitution, education is not a priority. In fact, the budget for education is continuously decreasing, not only in the Basic Education but also in Higher Education.

So, what's our remedy? We have seven requests. We took our oath on June 30, the president and vice president did too. On July 13, we went to the Department of Education (DepEd) and handed over the seven remedies, but until now, DepEd hasn't engaged with us.

What are they?

1. Increase the salaries of teachers and non-teaching personnel.
2. Add and improve benefits for teachers and staff.
3. Address the severe shortages to resolve the learning crisis
4. Scrap the confidential and intelligence funds, and redirect the budget to the immediate needs of the department
5. Double the education budget and make it equivalent to 6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
6. Recognize and respect union rights instead of red-tagging
7. Promote patriotic, progressive, and free education.

#### **Ms. Perlita Rana**

As a representative from UP, I also represent the state universities and colleges. In UP, because we're government personnel, we have the Salary Standardization Law, wherein a law has to be created before we get an increase in our salary. The salary increases started in 2020 and ended this year, 2023. The lowest salary in UP is PHP13,000 for what we call a “regular item” and covers about 1,000 people out of 14,000 total number of employees. But around 2,000 employees are in Salary Grades 1, 2, and 3, or below the minimum wage.

As a union, we have a Collective Negotiation Agreement (CNA) and a rice allowance of PHP2350, which now can't buy a decent rice at Php54 per kilo. We also used to have an Annual Incentive Grant (AIG), grocery allowance, at CNA incentive, but there hasn't been any increase since 2020 because it's now prohibited by the law. Negotiation for any increases in these kinds of benefits are not allowed anymore.

Contractualization in other companies takes only 6 months, but here in UP, it's like forever, so forever is real. So, every year, around December, people who are under contract get nervous because they don't know if they will still have a job the following year. Contractual employees do not have benefits, no work-no pay, so when they implement long vacations, they do not get paid.

We also compete for promotions because they only allocate a very minimal budget for this, so even if you're qualified for a promotion, you still might not get it. For government employees, you will become a “regular” if there's an item, but we see a regression in this policy because even if you could be regularized now, they keep you as a perpetual contractual employee. Another benefit that is now no longer being observed, when there's a SONA (State of the Nation Address) and the UP Diliman campus gets heavy traffic, they used to suspend class and work, but now they would ask us to “Work from Home.” Or during storms, they would say 'have online classes,' as if there's no storm in Pasig or Marikina, or wherever.

We now also have commercialization of spaces. Some buildings hit by fire were replaced by commercial spaces. So, they thought that we'd be happy with Starbucks, that it is good news for us, but of course not, because our salaries can't afford Starbucks.

We have new buildings in the Diliman campus that were from donations. However, we feel that these donations were put to waste because they didn't make sense for us, it didn't really help. We got viewing decks with no view, a bridge with no river. Perhaps those donations could have been allocated elsewhere, because the employees are really in need and lacking. Instead of moving forward, so to speak, we are stuck when it comes to our salaries, benefits, and rights.

So, why is our situation like this? From the CHED's data:

1. More than 50% of the 4.1M college students in 2022 are enrolled in public universities
2. Dramatic increase in enrolment in SUCs and LUCs since the passing of Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (UAQTE) in 2017
3. SUCs and LUCs are stretched to their limits
4. 59% of college-aged Filipino youth are out-of-school
5. 4 in every 10 who enroll in college eventually drop out and do not graduate

The need for sufficient budget allocation for SUCs is evident. Budget preparations are now ongoing, but what is it for next year?

The budget allocation for Education seem to increase when you look at it, but that amount isn't keeping up with the rising prices. For the 2024 budget, our president said that 20% of the national budget for SUCs will go to UP, but you see, the budget now is in the negative, it's not increasing as it should. And congratulations to us, we're now ranked number 1 among the SUCs with budget cuts; we were reduced by 2.9 billion. Instead of proposing an increase in budget for SUCs, it's going negative; there's a decrease.

And where's the budget cut? Someone explained this on TV, that it seems like what was actually cut or decreased is the capital outlay. But the problem is when the request is more than 50,000, you charge it from the capital outlay and not from maintenance. Like for repairs or any construction, prices have gone up due to the pandemic, so there's really a need to increase the capital outlay.

In UP, we usually charge to the MOOE (Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses) the budget for printers or computers which costs are below Php50,000, and this is also where we get funds for the contractual employees. If this fund would be reduced, it could lead to a reduction in our contractual employees. Even the Philippine General Hospital (PGH), their MOOE also decreased, thus some medical services might not be available, and facilities will worsen if they aren't maintained.

Why is the budget insufficient? It's because the secret funds are ballooning. If they cut the budget for SUCs, there's additional funding for the confidential and intelligence funds. They're also increasing the budget for their "red-tagging" activities.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), the agency in charge of our National IDs, have an increase in their budget, but we still don't have our National IDs. The funds are mainly going towards paying interest on debts.

So, when we look at the total picture and truly examine it, we'll find out that we are not the priority of this government. So, what's the solution? We should unite and campaign for the following:

1. A higher budget for state colleges and universities
2. A higher budget for education and social services
3. Abolish confidential and intelligence funds
4. Fight for a truly pro-people 2024 budget.

### **Dr. Gary Devilles**

What's happening to Ateneo, particularly in its Loyola Schools or Higher Education? When we speak of symptomatic reading, we're always trying to figure out where the problem lies, leading to a diagnosis that we hope will alleviate the situation.

Now, what are these concerns? Firstly, there's the issue of regularizing teachers in basic and higher education. It's evident that the criteria for teacher regularization are different from other fields. In other areas, it might take six months with a good evaluation for regularization, but for teachers, it usually takes three years in basic education, and you have to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET).

In higher education, completing a Master's degree is essential. However, finishing a Master's in three years is not the reality, and a good evaluation is imperative. For someone at the instructor level, before becoming an instructor, they need to pursue further studies after graduating from a Bachelor of Arts or Science program, requiring them to obtain a Master's degree. It's already evident that the perception of teaching as a labor force isn't fair. There's an additional burden placed on teachers before they become regular, and this is the cause of many problems. Not everyone is fortunate; as mentioned, to complete a Master's in three years. Many studying for a Master's degree work part-time because they need the income to support their studies. It's not just tuition fees; they also have to buy books, conduct fieldwork, and sometimes taking on part-time teaching at various universities, like Ateneo, De La Salle, or UP. Consequently, they end up teaching five to six classes a day, then studying from 6 PM to 9 PM. My MA students are like this - they sometimes arrive late for classes because they are teaching from 8 AM to 5 PM. The cycle continues, and becoming a regular teacher in three years becomes a challenge, given the comprehensive exams, thesis writing, and their full schedules.

While this system favors private schools or universities as part-timers usually receive minimal benefits, it has an adverse effect on any department or faculty. When I was the head of the Filipino department, this was a significant problem since almost half of our faculty were part-time. You can't rely on them because part-time teachers cannot be expected to work beyond their teaching hours. Consequently, organizing departmental activities or seminars becomes challenging because these are usually attended by the junior faculty who are more active, but most of them are part-time. The senior faculty members, who are regular, find it difficult to participate in the said activities.

It's always disheartening, as a chair, to have to bid farewell and thank them for their service, and express that we look forward to their return because part-timers are only needed based on enrollment numbers. We usually receive enrollment data in June or July, and the chair's first task is to allocate the workload to the full-time faculty. Then, we determine the number of part-time hires required based on the remaining workload.

During the two-month summer break and they do not have teaching loads, and they need to finish their studies, where will they get money for their tuition fees? In Ateneo, teachers need to teach 30 units per year, dividing it into 12 units per semester, and 6 units for the summer. Sometimes, I ask our full-time faculty if they can secure grants for summer or, if not, I have to redistribute the teaching load to someone who needs it. Occasionally, I ask them to do 15 units per semester, and no load during the summer term but retaining their full-time salary. I do this because I prefer to give the teaching load to a part-time faculty. Sometimes, they agree, but it's never enough as there will always be more part-time employees who need such teaching load of 6 units.

Another issue is the change in curriculum. In our case, the change in the Filipino curriculum reduced the teaching load from 9 units of core or general subjects to just 6 units. This curriculum revision has significantly affected us. We've had to reduce the number of teachers, coupled with the need to increase our major subjects at the same time. Due to the high tuition fees in private universities, fewer students are opting for Humanities courses, especially Filipino literature, where we only have one or two students taking these courses every year.

This kind of system creates cyclical problems to the point that it's the part-timers themselves who decide not to become full-time faculty because they will lose the freedom to work part-time at other universities.

The second concern is - what happens after they complete their MA and become permanent? Will their income suffice? As mentioned in the report by the Ibon Foundation, a family with three children requires PHP1,187 per day for basic needs like food, clothing, electricity, and water. So, even with the minimum wage raised to PHP610, it is still insufficient for the daily basic expenses.

A teacher who completed his MA with a good evaluation and became a full-time instructor at Ateneo earns PHP35,000 per month as an entry-level instructor, or PHP30,000 net of tax, meaning, the take home is PHP1,000 per day. This amount is insufficient to support a family, hence, having a family or a love life is not feasible. If we equate this to teaching four classes with 25 students each, each student effectively pays the instructor PHP10 per class. This teaching scenario shows an inadequate pay scale. Each day, the instructor sees only a potential earning of PHP250, and if he spent PHP250 for a taxi fare going to Ateneo, then the PHP250 is gone easily and the class has not even started yet. This supports Karl Marx' notion that "all that solid melts into air."

On the other hand, an Ateneo instructor can endure a bit of sacrifice and needs to excel to get promoted. However, for promotion, say to an assistant professor level, he needs to finish his doctorate studies. It is not just an MA; a doctorate usually takes five years of full-time study, necessitating the teacher to take a leave from work. In other cases, you need a grant, especially if you're pursuing your doctorate abroad. Some of us take our PhD either in Ateneo or in UP, but even then, it's unlikely to finish it in five years. For part-time students, it may take six to eight years. Similar to the MA, a comprehensive exam and a dissertation are required, often published as articles or books. An instructor's life in the academy involves continuous publication of their research, teaching, and engagement with the academic community.

These are probably the three main concerns, especially for those in assistant and associate professor levels, reaching the full professor level becomes increasingly challenging, and many retire at the associate professor level. With these grievances in the private universities, what is the diagnosis or possible remedy? As mentioned earlier, if you're doing symptomatic reading – and me as a teacher of literature, I always teach this – and I will use Chapter 19 of "Noli Me Tangere". Wherein the school teacher in the said chapter clearly discussed the problems in education, and that any reform or change in education can only happen if supported by the government and the people.

It should also be noted that teachers are part of the country's labor force. When assigned as election officers, they also face hunger and need to be compensated for the hours spent in the election process. If salaries have increased for other professionals such as soldiers, police, and nurses, then the educational sector should likewise see a similar increase. In the private universities, the demand for competitive salaries remains, especially in top universities. If we have indicators of excellence from various university rankings worldwide, at least the faculty salaries in our higher institutions should not lag behind. We take pride in our university rankings, primarily because of our faculty, and this can only be achieved if we listen to one another.

Just like Crisostomo Ibarra, who listened to the teacher in the "Noli Me Tangere" which was published almost a hundred years ago, but until now, that remains our problem. We boast of Rizal who studied in Ateneo. I hope we can also see and understand his perspective on education reform, and not just regard his work as a novel only.

### **Dr. David Michael San Juan**

From "Noli Me Tangere", I will be discussing "El Filibusterism," or Amado Hernandez's "Mga Ibong Mandaragit." because the latter is the logical continuation of the "El Fili" where the socio-economic problems of the Philippines are more thoroughly discussed, and of course, the ultimate solution offered by the National Artist for Literature, Amado V. Hernandez, is a system change. But before arriving at the point of changing the system, we could focus first on small changes like those in education. Since I'm also a doctor, not a medical doctor but a Ph.D., I will also prescribe something; I'll start with just three prescriptions because I agree with all the seven prescriptions of Sir Vlad.

But I know that the situation in the Philippines is very complicated, with various groups and factions. I think there are three prescriptions where we can find agreement with, regardless of where we come from - left, right, or center of the political spectrum, rich, poor, or middle class. And I think among these three, we can find common ground. The seven prescriptions contain many demands, and of course, those in the government don't want to remove the confidential funds. I temporarily set that aside, even though I agree that it should be removed. So, that's the aim of my brief reaction to what's being discussed today, which is why I call this "Three Simple Prescriptions to the Educational Problems in the Philippines."

One of our basic problems today is the quality of education in the Philippines. Looking at the slides, we see the data on learning poverty or, in simpler terms, the percentage of students who should be able to read but can't comprehend properly. In other words, they have poor reading comprehension. The focus of the learning poverty data from the World Bank in 2022 is the Basic Education.

Of course, Singapore, being a developed country, is a given. But the surprising stories here are Vietnam and China. Vietnam, because in the 1960s, they went through a bloody civil war, yet they managed to recover economically, financially, and in terms of education. Vietnam is advancing because they are doing things that we could emulate, including giving adequate budget allocation for education and showing genuine concern for teachers.

The success story of China is because of their large population size. So, it's a proof that an overly large population isn't a barrier to having a proper education system as long as you properly allocate the budget and maintain a smaller teacher-student ratio. In the Philippines, having a ratio of 1:66 or 1:80 is really tough. In our private schools, there are not many problems with the teacher-student ratio, but we all know that in public universities and public elementary and secondary schools, it's a basic problem that needs to be addressed. It's sad that we are second to last among Asia-Pacific countries in this World Bank report on learning poverty. So essentially, the meaning of a 90.9 learning poverty rate is that 91 out of every 100 elementary students we have are unable to read or comprehend what they are reading.

However, a bit of good news is the language used for assessing the learning poverty is English. So, as a Filipino teacher and as an advocate of mother tongue-based multilingual education, too, I assert that if the language used in assessing reading comprehension is Filipino and other Philippine languages, our scores wouldn't be that shameful. I think we would have the same score as Thailand's, 23.4, which isn't bad, considering Thailand is also in political turmoil right now. I remember in the 1990s, when I was a grade 6 student, in our HEKASI class, they discussed that Thailand and the Philippines are the tiger economies of Southeast Asia. Well, that was in the 1990s. Thailand progressed despite its political problems, while the Philippines, still a poor country, seemed like we were left behind. We're a kitten economy, not a tiger economy.

Of course, it's expected that Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar would be at the bottom because they have fewer resources. But Philippines has no reason to be at the bottom. There are many talented Filipino teachers, so we shouldn't be at the bottom. We have the best and brightest Filipinos around the world - technicians, engineers, doctors, nurses, name any country, and you'll find Filipinos working there as professionals or workers. Even foreigners are delighted with us, because Filipinos are skilled, as long as they are trained and given proper education. This 90.9% learning poverty rate can still be solved, especially if we consider using non-English languages, we can achieve a high score.

The PISA 2018 report measures reading and understanding concepts in science and math. It has also stated our problem and possible solutions. Let us wait for the PISA 2022 which will be released this December 2023. Just today, Vice President Sara Duterte admitted that they're not expecting good news for PISA 2022. She said that more budget for DepEd is maybe necessary. According to the PISA 2018 report, some 94% of 15-year-old students in the Philippines speak at home a language other than the test language, which is English.

This was the second-highest percentage of all among PISA-participating countries/economies. The PISA 2018 committee said that the Philippines had scoring issues because we forced children to take the test in English when it could have been administered in Filipino or other languages. Students could have scored higher if taken in Filipino and other Filipino languages, because even other developed countries like South Korea and China take the test in non-English languages.

We have long been telling DepEd that the medium of instruction and assessment for Basic Education should be Filipino and other Filipino languages. In the World Bank and UNESCO State of Global Poverty report released in 2022, they stated the same and this is true for all countries they reviewed that have problematic education systems. They stated that children should be taught in the language they use and understand, which is often not the case, like in the Philippines.

So, the problem in the education system is that students are taught not in the language they understand but in a language they do not comprehend. In our case, English. The medium of instruction for Math and Science starting Grade 4 onwards in the Philippines is English. How can they understand photosynthesis, chemical equations, and all scientific and mathematical concepts? They can't understand or solve mathematical equations because the discussions are in English. Even some La Sallian professors say that when their students struggle in difficult subjects like Chemistry, Math, and Accounting, they shift to Filipino or Taglish and the students understand better. This is from DLSU where we assume that the majority of students are English-proficient, etc., but it turns out they now prefer Filipino or at least a combination of Filipino and English.

Here's further evidence from the National Achievement Test 2017 results, this is the latest as there is no publicly available data from 2018 onwards that the scores in Filipino are always higher than in English. So, we have data supporting that Filipino should be used as a medium of instruction. It's obvious that television series are appreciated in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, for instance, Carlo Dalisay was on television for 8 years, and now shows like Eat Bulaga and Showtime are all in Filipino. This means Filipino is being used in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The data also tells us that Filipino is an easier medium of instruction because the mean percentage score or the average score of our students is higher in Filipino than in English. And it's noticeable that scores in Math and Science are lower because the medium of instruction for Math and Science is English.

Here's another issue: the budget. The PISA 2018 country report combines the issue of budget and mean reading performance. The Philippines is found at the farthest end of the line which means that the budget allocation by the government per student or the cumulative expenditure per student ages 6 to 15 is very small. The Dominican Republic is second to the last, but it's embarrassing because the Dominican Republic is a poorer country compared to us, yet they allocate more education budget per student.

It is evident in the trend that the higher the budget, the higher the score is. The solution is the budget allocation. We can all agree that unless the budget per student is increased, our education system won't be fixed. Another issue is how to spend the additional budget. Of course, we all know—more books, increase in teacher salaries and everything the teachers need.

This is what Sir Vlad mentioned earlier, the entry-level salary for teachers here is PHP27,000. In some small private and Basic Education schools, it's even lower—around PHP13,000, PHP15,000 monthly based on our past surveys. Alright, granted, for the sake of argument, the teachers have a salary of PHP27,000 in the Philippines, this is still insufficient because among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the lowest entry-level salary is PHP67,000. These are OECD-developed countries, so their standards are high. But if you ask me, for us to progress, maybe half of that or around PHP40,000 would suffice. Because there should be international benchmarking, and that's what is being done to us, whether it's higher education or basic education, the government, as our employers, always requires us to benchmark internationally, so we should also benchmark the salaries.

There are some proposed laws from the Progressive Partylist about that, the House Bill 203. And we also have the Magna Carta for Private School Teachers (House Bill 546), but unfortunately, both bills don't have many co-authors in Congress, so our campaign continues.

The three prescriptions for education—bare minimum—but I think we can now all agree, at least on these three. These are what we should push for, regardless of where we stand in the political spectrum:

1. Use the Filipino language as the medium of instruction at all levels and subjects.
2. Allocate sufficient budget for education to address all deficiencies in teaching materials, facilities (aside from classrooms), and libraries—which are very important. We conducted a survey and found that some schools do not have libraries. How can students learn to read without them, right? Similarly, some lack clinics and proper handwashing facilities.
3. Increase teachers' salaries and improve the benefits. Even if not exorbitantly high, just make it somewhat comparable to other professions. PHP27,000 is an insult; it's too low. It's time for an increase.

#### **Dr. Vicente Paqueo**

I'm going to talk about challenging conventional solutions. I'm going to raise issues & questions about the GO-TO solutions which adoption is often triggered by a pressure induced by so-called crisis thinking. It pressures politicians & leaders to adopt so-called familiar GO-TO solutions which might actually prove to be not effective.

The Philippines actually is a super achiever when it comes to the number of years schooling, as shown in the graph. We're doing better than those countries with better income than us. However, the learning proficiency levels



achieved by most of our students in Basic Education is really very poor, which was reflected earlier as learning poverty. Even by DEPED's own standard, only about 2% meets the minimum learning proficiency standards. If you include even those that are nearly proficient, it's only about 20%. It's not too bad if you have this low proficiency level but if you are progressing very fast, for me, that's so bad. But unfortunately, when you look at the NAT scores over time, it's not making a lot of progress, it's kind of stagnant.

So, when you try to analyze the number of years of schooling spent versus the actual amount of learning that the child learns in school, you'll see that there's a gap - it used to be 4.5 years but updated 5.5 years, which means that there is huge, wasted children's precious time in school.

Failure to achieve much higher, faster & sustained progress in student learning achievements is arguably not due to lack of effort, because -

- Past administrations have adopted all kinds of reform, ambitious policies, and projects to ramp up improvements in basic education
- Plenty of innovative & cutting-edge education initiatives were tried
- There have been many attempts to scale up pilot projects.
- For some reasons, those attempts failed to take root & transform the Philippine basic education system into high performance system.

So naturally, you will ask, why? What happened? Remarkably, the core of the education improvement efforts, relied upon by government, on conventional solutions like the following:

- Increasing salaries of public education teachers across the board (now way beyond the average salary of private school teachers), supposedly to motivate them to teach better. We have seen that even if salaries have actually been going up in real terms over time, there have been no progress in the learning achievement test scores of children. Don't get me wrong, I come from a family of teachers, but facts are facts.
- Hiring more teachers per student to enable them to have more time to teach an individual student. That's fine, theoretically, but we'll see later that it does not correlate with learning achievement scores using PISA. - Building more public schools & classrooms to reduce class size. Because class size is the key, but there is no correlation neither, unless you go down from 40 or 60 to less than 20 class size, but that is a very expensive solution.
- Improving public school teacher qualifications & certification. You require master's degree, you have all kinds of certification etc, but as you will see later, it's also dubious in terms of relationship with actual student outcomes. Look at this problem from the student point of view on how it is correlating with outcomes that we care about.
- Increasing per student subsidy of public schools to achieve universal to education without adequate countermeasures to prevent crowding out of private schools. The student subsidy or the government expenditures per student has actually been rising over time, but again, no improvements.

Working hypotheses on why conventional Go-To solutions did not work well in getting the Philippines basic education system out of a low learning achievement path:

1. Imbalance between massification & learning achievement goals. Massification is essentially providing education for all. Learning achievement goal is different. Massification has been overwhelmingly the focus of government effort & policy in education, and not so much on the learning outcomes or what children actually learn in school. There is no compliance with minimum proficiency standards for promoting students to the next grade level due to pressure from school authorities, concern about high student failure rate, and lack of extra compensation for teachers doing remedial classes to help failing students.

2. Ineffective & inefficient use of public school resources.

- The use of teacher & student time on activities that are unrelated to student learning as well as "curriculum congestion" or too many topics. The tendency of the teacher is to go from one topic to the next without the student having absorbed the subject matter. By the way, the K-12 reform was supposed to decongest, but instead, they added actually more.
- Lack of significant correlation between student learning & increase school inputs, including teacher's credentials.
- Shortages in educational materials, which is a significant factor in public school student learning but not the private school students. The private schools have the capability of finding ways to cover the shortage.
- Failure to strengthen performance incentives & accountability of public school authorities & teachers in regard student learning to complement past reforms. In other words, yes, it is true na medyo kulang at inadequate ang resources, pero merely increasing the resources to the schools, merely improving, or increasing the salary of teachers without doing something about the incentive structure, relating this inputs

& teachers benefits & salaries to performance in terms of actual learning achievement of students, then it will not be going to work that much.

3. Failure to capitalize on the strengths of the private education sector, which we find to be on average relatively more effective and efficient.
  - Crowding out of private education is indicated by its decline share in student enrollment resulting from government policies favor and overwhelmingly rely on public schools.
  - Migration of teachers from private to public schools due to widening teacher salary differential, undermining efficiency of the Philippine education system taken as a whole.

We did an analysis on the effects of the quality of teachers, teaching materials, class size, and below are the findings:

1. The public school students are significantly adversely affected by educational materials shortage.
2. Coefficients of % school teachers with master's degree significantly positive among private but not public school students
3. Coefficients of % school teachers fully certified significantly positive among private but not public school students.
4. Class size and student-teacher ratio are uncorrelated with student test scores in both private and public schools.

## Questions

Question 1 - Jomar Christian, alumnus of Philippine Normal University

Besides the points you've mentioned about the current status of our Philippine education system, we have two more challenges to face in the upcoming years of 2024 to 2025. The first challenge is the implementation of the MATATAG CURRICULUM, and the second is the proposed Educational Pathways Act, the K+10+2.

For Sir Vlad - how are the pilot implementors of the MATATAG CURRICULUM doing?

For Sir Michael David San Juan: I noticed in your presentation that while the scores were high in Filipino, they were low in AP (Araling Panlipunan) in the 2017 National Achievement Test. Does this have any connection to the removal of Philippine history from the curriculum? In January 2024, the Philippine History High School Movement will reconvene. Is there any evidence or strong argument that could support reinstating Philippine history in high school?

Question 2 – from the Council of Teachers and Staff in Colleges and Universities (representing private school teachers and non-academic personnel)

For Dr. Paqueo – You said there's a correlation between the certification of private school teachers and student performance, but that is not true in public schools, so how would you explain that?

Question 3 – Vicky from NGO

It seems that the issue of hunger and malnutrition in brain development during the early stages wasn't addressed; it might be a factor why those in private schools, who are probably more well-off, tend to have healthier brain development.

And as for Sir David's point, I agree about using the national language, Filipino, in PISA, but I hope we won't forget English as well. What we're also seeing is how can we focus on the national language when most of our books are in English? It might be difficult if we purely adopt Filipino; we might lose our proficiency in English, which is very crucial in our international relations.

Question 4 - Ricky Jacinto

I heard everybody loud and clear: money is always the issue. From the press release of the DBM, it says that the 2023 budget of DEPED shall increase from 633B in 2022 to 711B in 2023. It's an 8.2% increase, the highest budgetary priority. So, I don't know what else we can do as a nation. Secondly, we're actually teaching kids to prepare for the 20th century, how about teaching them to prepare for the 21st? Right? Are we fighting the last war when the new war is coming?

Question 5 - Dr. Encarnacion, Graduate School of Business

My question is about the formation of our youth, among the students who want to become teachers but have this bias that there's no money in teaching. When students interview me about topics in psychology, as a psychologist, they always ask me afterward, 'Doc, is there money in psychology?' And I tell them that perhaps they're asking the wrong question because our job isn't about making money. Our job is to become the best teachers, psychologists, accountants, economists, architects – whatever we aspire to be. If we're good at what we do, like teaching leadership, in Ikigai, we love what we do, we're paid for what we do, and we're meeting the

world's needs, we can be happy. Money will come as incidental but necessary. I just want to get a reality check from the teachers - How did we learn to like being teachers and if what I'm saying makes sense?

## **Answers/Final Comments**

### **1st Reactor - Dr. Paqueo - Dr. Paqueo**

Thank you, certainly I agree about the nutrition effect on education in early childhood, and yes, I did not cover that. In relation to the explanation of why the private school students are doing better, yes, it is determined by socio-economic status but we controlled for it, and even controlling for that it still comes out they are ahead, so it cannot be explained by the difference in socio-economic status.

The explanation for the difference in the performance of public and private students is the productivity, you know there's correlation efficiency of productivity. Private schools have to do well with their students because they have to have a good reputation, that they are providing well, that children are learning, otherwise, they will not survive, they'll go out of business.

The teachers are also supervised because they have to perform better. So, there is a linkage between outcomes and their performance as teachers, like taking care of the school ambiance so that there is not much bullying, etc. Unlike for private school teachers, the salaries of public school teachers & their welfare are not really dependent on the learning outcomes of the children. The government has to pay attention to the incentives structure and the linkage between increasing teachers' salaries and ensure that the giving of taxpayer's money is really utilized.

All I'm asking for is a commensurate improvement in the learning outcomes in the Basic Education because one cannot have the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills without the ability to read, write, communicate, and do simple arithmetic. The 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution is driven by knowledge and advances in science & technology. One may not be able to predict the needs of the market because of this revolution but we need to have children who can adapt, who were able to learn on their own, learn to learn, and have the socio-emotional skills like grit, patience, diligence, curiosity - the fundamental traits that need to be developed in basic education and we are not doing that.

### **2nd reactor - Mr. San Juan**

I would like to emphasize about raising teachers' salaries, even if there's no accountability related to outcomes at present, let's increase their salaries first. Even if they've already been raised from past decades, don't government officials understand that they're still insufficient? Bureaucrats have huge salaries, like those at the Central Bank earning around P3 million, right? But does our economy function? No, right? But if you give such substantial salaries to the teachers, we might be able to fix everything tomorrow. Of course, jokes are half-meant. Look at the education system of the developed countries, their teachers have high salaries. Teachers have dignity, and they're more motivated in their work if we increase their salaries. The PHP27,000 salary is low; that's why you can't blame them if they seek other jobs where the salary is higher. They have no time for professional development because they need to find additional sources of income – 'raket' refers to other income sources, selling everything, etc. Even I, not to boast, my salary is quite substantial now, so I don't complain much about it, I complain more about taxes. But in public schools, isn't PHP27,000 insufficient? That's one reason why I can't teach in public schools; our family couldn't manage if I taught there.

So, teachers' salaries need to be increased, not just to PHP30,000 but to around PHP40,000 plus, and this is possible, as long as we remove the excess fat in bureaucracy and other secret government funds.

Hunger and malnutrition are given problems, and probably we didn't mention them because we're all aware of it already. And to be fair with the government, they are doing something about it through feeding programs, though it's not good enough. One solution would be to increase the families' income so that people have food for their families, and no need for food subsidy from the government.

And yes, we won't forget about the importance of English. I'm a product of a bilingual education system, where we improve in English and Filipino separately. I can write and speak well in both languages. We also attend conferences in other countries where we speak English. If given the chance, there's still room for improvement. Our students can do it, too, if we re-introduce the bilingual education policy. In this policy, Social Sciences are taught in Filipino from Basic Education up, while English is used as a medium of instruction for Science and Math.

We can improve in both languages, but the common problem is that the teaching of English in the Philippines is weak due to lack of textbooks, ebooks, laptops, computers, and so on. That's why we haven't yet reached the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution. The Philippines isn't even industrialized yet; that's why we have to go back to the basics. We don't have textbooks yet to teach kids how to use gadgets like Kindle. We need to have all those essentials before we can move forward into the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution. Also, Filipino and English shouldn't be pitted against each other. Both languages are important.

We need to bring back Philippine history; I agree to continue the campaign against disinformation and historical distortion. Then, the increase in the budget mentioned earlier should not be nominal. Even if the Department of Budget and Management boasts a large budget of 700 billion, it's not good enough. It's far from sufficient and should be assessed versus the needs.

For instance, in state colleges and universities, they present proposals for 2024, but they do not approve all the requests. It's only a propaganda by the DBM, claiming it's a significant amount. However, if you measure it as a percentage of the GDP, we never exceed 4% for education. The global standard is 6%, so the 700 billion isn't good enough. What's enough is if it can provide for an increase in teachers' salaries, supply of books, provide laptops, Kindles, ebooks to all schools, and reduce class sizes. There are too many demands but those are the basics. Where can we agree on? Maybe (1) we need good governance because without it, the government won't allocate sufficient funds for education, and (2) provide sufficient funds for education, and a corruption-free or limited corruption in government so that the budget won't be wasted.

Actually, that's the main point emphasized by Dr. Paqueo, that when there's money, public resources should be well spent. It's true that years ago when the DepEd purchased textbooks, the textbooks arrived with numerous errors because the contract was given to a friend or something like that, resulting to a 30% cut. I think that's something we can all agree on. In the upcoming elections, we should elect a good government because we know the current administration isn't that. Their record has been proven decades ago.

### **3rd Reactor - Mr. Devilles**

I'd like to address what was asked about. In Ateneo, there's this so-called "MAGIS", or the "MORE" but sometimes it conflicts with what we want to do more. There's no problem with that, you know, there should also be something that meets our needs; our salary should meet the basic cost of living. If our salary doesn't meet that, even if we say we want to do more, it's going to be difficult. Okay, I know teaching is a vocation, but part of that is justice; what you do should sustain you with your salary. So that's also important and should be addressed. I know it's important to address "teaching as a vocation", teaching as "Magis",

### **4th Reactor - Mrs. Rana**

I'll just add to the part about those who want to teach but seem to serve without much financial stability, something like that. In UP School of Health Sciences, there are doctors who teach in the barrios or rural areas, with teaching load of up to 70 units, they do clinicals, discussions, everything. But you can see that they still have a happy aura even when they are super tired and exhausted. But we still need to address their complaints—is it right to have teaching load of 70 units? Why 70? Because there aren't enough people attracted to that vocation. Many would like to become teachers but they don't last long because of the current situation - low salaries, no benefits. But they are there because they want to serve. So, to prevent this pool of those willing to serve from dwindling, we need to improve the state of our education system.

### **5th Reactor - Teacher Vlad**

Earlier, it was mentioned about the K10 plus 2. This isn't a formula; it's the new development in Congress that is now making senior high school mandatory. Former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the main promoter, stated that the K to 12 program is a failure. Nevertheless, the K10 plus 2 aims to modify the optional senior high school.

About the MATATAG Curriculum, unless there's a democratic consultation, I hope they do not subject the public-school system into an experiment. Let's not make it a guinea pig. Remember, any curriculum, if there's no allocated budget, it won't be powerful and effective. As Renato Constantino said: "it's still fish sauce, only in a new bottle."

Regarding the budget, it's true there is an increase, but the significant question is, is it enough to address the shortage according to international standards? We should assess how much increase there is in other agencies that weren't utilized by the government. During the pandemic, the Department of Health had no hospitals and doctors; and the budget for Marikina River was bigger than the allocation for more doctors in PGH.

Regarding the issue of teachers, yes, there was a slight decrease in the number of teachers in some universities, but many still want to become teachers. The role of a teacher is very crucial, especially amidst intense misinformation and historical revision in this era. So, in conclusion, please join the public schools, state colleges, and universities, our colleagues. Let's all campaign together to increase the budget for education. And the call for salaries has only one context—it should be a source of sustenance.

### **Closing Remarks - Mrs. Maribel Ongpin**

There are solutions to this education crisis, but they have to be selectively applied. I do believe Mr. San Juan that we should remain bilingual. I can see that you have to teach in the language that they know but we should be bilingual – that's important. Of course, salaries have to be raised to meet living standards or else teachers will be thinking of something else. Okay and then another thing that I think is very important is that we must not, in a way, subject private schools to difficulties because we're solving the problems of the public schools, because

private schools are very vital to our education. We have a huge student population and public schools are here but private schools have to be here. Finally, it's also something to think about - that you have to learn how to learn. See, that is the important part. If you learn how to learn, grade school, high school, you know how to learn in grade school, high school, you can do it. College will be a piece of cake for you because you know how to do it.

Now this is my formal message: that teachers are the backbone of any society, we all know that. However, it seems that in this society they are taken for granted: they are expected to be multitaskers sometimes beyond physical capacity and worse not sufficiently compensated in both a dignified and honored place in society. There has been attention to their needs to be up to par and we cannot go on having obliviousness to how much they do because they do a lot. It is time to reverse that. If we want to be a healthier society, teachers must be in good health both physically, financially, and psychologically. We have heard our lecturer and our panel elaborate on what the state of our teachers is and what should be done - let's do it. For them and for us, for our society and for our country.