

*The Economics And Politics Of The Shift From K To 10 To K To 12:
The Philippine Experience*

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Abstract

After several years of hesitation the Philippine government finally adopted a 12-year basic education program in 2013 with the signing of Republic Act No. 10533 known as the K to 12 law. The law was in response to the perception of substandard quality in Philippine education which resulted in Philippine graduates being discriminated in the global workplace. The law was implemented in academic year 2014-2015. Before the passage of the law Philippine basic education was only up to ten years. With the implementation of the law two more years were added thus making basic education from Kindergarten to the end of secondary education to 12 years. Despite the political unpopularity of the K to 12 law it had to be passed to keep the Philippines at par with the rest of the world in terms of education. With the country dependent on incomes sent by overseas Filipino workers and rising standards in the Philippines, the K to 12 law had to be passed. This paper examines the logistics needed to implement the K to 12 law and the creation of a new pedagogy towards creating a 21st century-ready graduate. The paper also examines the human cost in terms of teacher dislocation and unemployment and what the Philippine government has done to address this problem.

Keywords: K to 12, K to 12, economics, politics, problems, solutions

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Introduction

The Philippines is one of the world's major labor-exporting countries. Beginning in the early 1970s the country began sending workers overseas on a massive level. Traditionally the destination of foreign-bound workers would be the United States and Europe. However with the construction boom in the Middle East in the 1970s the region became the favored destination of many Filipino overseas workers. Of great demand by employers were skilled workers doing professional and technical jobs such as those in the health sector such as physicians, nurses and medical technicians; in the construction sector such as engineers, architects, welders, draftsmen and electricians. Teachers and seamen also form part of the skilled manpower force. Even for jobs like domestic helpers employers prefer those that had some level of education. (Pe, et. Al, 1)

The Philippines on its own cannot readily absorb the number of workers it produces. At least a million new graduates from the country's universities and colleges join the work force. The alternative was to facilitate the deployment of Filipino workers abroad. Fortunately there is a demand for workers overseas especially skilled workers. The ability of the Filipinos to speak English which is the language preferred by many foreign employers and the reputation of the Filipinos as good workers abroad gave them an added edge over other foreign workers. There are about 10.2 million overseas Filipinos and about 52% of them are overseas workers. Their remittances to the Philippines amounted to billions of dollars. In 2017 the amount reached \$26.92 billion. (Gmanetwork.com)

The effect of the billions of dollars of remittances from the earnings of overseas Filipino workers can be seen in the countryside. Their homes are now improved from the traditional wood and palm leaf structures they can now afford to build concrete and stone houses. The families of overseas Filipino workers or OFWs as they are now called, can now own appliances like the latest televisions, refrigerators and gadgets which were only dreamed a few decades ago. OFWs also send their family members to study in colleges and universities whereas before only a few select family members can do so if they were fortunate enough. OFW families were also able to start their own businesses. (Felongco)

The great value of the OFWs was demonstrated when the Philippines weathered the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 which caused the near-collapse of the economies of countries in Southeast Asia. It is for these reasons the Philippine government called the Overseas Filipino Workers as the Bagong Bayani or the new heroes of the Philippines. (Dumlao, 16)

The Need for Educational Reform

However a serious challenge faced Filipino workers. Since the recognition of Philippine independence by the United States in 1946, education for most Philippine graduates lasted for only 10 years from Grade 1 to Fourth high school. These consist of ten years basic education from Grade 1 to Grade 6 which is the elementary level in

the Philippines while high school or secondary education lasts for four years. College education on the other hand lasts for four years, thus giving a total of 14 years. With the addition of kindergarten that would make a total of eleven years. Philippine basic education therefore was called K 10 or kindergarten plus 10 years of elementary and high school education.

On the other hand most countries of the world had more years in their basic education. Most western countries have adopted a K to 12 or a twelve year basic education curriculum plus kindergarten. Lacking two years in the education of its graduates, Philippine graduates were considered as substandard in terms of academic experience. They were subjected to discrimination by employers and there were threats to remove them from their jobs because their education was considered substandard. For example an engineer trained in the Philippines cannot be accepted as an engineer in the Middle East because of a two-year deficiency in his education. Such an engineer can only be accepted for an inferior job such as technician. Likewise Filipino architects can be only accepted as draftsmen. They will be able to qualify for the work they agreed to take further studies. Countries which used to hire Filipino workers began to warn the Philippine government that unless reforms were undertaken they will be forced to lay off their workers.

Not only overseas Filipino workers were affected by the lack of two years of education. Even students applying for higher education in other countries such as Canada, and in European countries were affected. For example a student trying to enter a master's program in Canada cannot be accepted in a Canadian university because his high school transcript shows a deficiency of two years. In the basic education, a graduate of a master's program in the Philippines cannot enter the doctoral or Ph.D. program because he is just considered a college graduate. (Abueva, 1)

Reforms in Philippine education were therefore considered as necessary and urgent. To refuse to do so will isolate the Philippines from the rest of the world. Before the adoption of K to 12, only the Philippines and Botswana were still having the K to 10 program. For a country that relies on the income of its overseas labor keeping the educational standards at par with the rest of the world became imperative.

But to implement K to 12 would be a politically unpopular act. Previous administrations already considered implementing a 12-year plus kindergarten program however it was resisted by various groups. Among them were parents, college teachers and professors, student and militant groups. For parents K to 12 is a financial added burden. It means shelling out at least P65,000 for tuition fee per year. Not included are funds for allowance, uniforms, books, school supplies, transportation and meals. To maintain a student in a private school would cost at least triple the amount of tuition fees. Multiply the total costs by two years and education could cause a mind-boggling amount of at least P300,000.

College teachers and professors for their part fear, dislocation in their jobs during the adjustment period to K to 12. There would be no freshman college students when the

country starts to offer Grade 11 or the additional year after secondary school. There would be no second year or sophomore students when Grade 12 or the second additional year is offered. This dislocation will affect the third and fourth year of college where there would be no enrolment for those levels.

For the students it would mean being delayed for graduation by two years. They would not be able to help their parents or their families if they stayed in school for those two years. Militant groups such as the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (New Nationalist Alliance or NPA) criticized the government for bowing to international pressure. It called instead, on the government to increase job opportunities for graduates.

Another reason by the opponents was the doubt that the government may not have the funds to implement the program. It would mean hiring new teachers, provision of new school buildings and classrooms. The needed amount for the implementation of K to 12 will run into billions of pesos.

The Passage of the K to 12 Law

To ensure compliance into the adoption of educational reforms it was best that such reforms must be backed by the force of law. Since 2003 the Philippine Congress conducted hearings on educational reforms. There was stiff opposition from many lawmakers who saw extending basic education as unpopular with voters. Yet the feedback they received from resource persons was grim- Philippine graduates would be shunned as substandard and with the Philippines heavily dependent on its labor exports. After several years of consultations Congress passed a bill that that became Republic Act No. 10533. It was presented to President Benigno S. Aquino, III for his signature on May 15, 2013.



President Benigno Aquino (center) with Speaker Feliciano Belmonte and Senate President Edgardo Angara with students at the signing ceremony of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 held on May 15, 2013.

The law which is called the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 but popularly known as the K to 12 law extended basic education in the Philippines from 10 to 12 years. With the inclusion of kindergarten, basic education in the Philippines is now 13 years thus the terms K + 12 or K plus 12 or simply K to 12. The law created the senior high school. This was where the additional two years were added. The senior high school is different from the junior high school. The former will mark the transition from basic education to college or vocational courses.

It was the decision then of the lawmakers to add the two years to basic education instead of adding two additional years in college so that more students will be included. It was based on the findings of the Education Committee that about 60% of high school graduates would elect to enter college. Thus the two additional years were added to the old high school which was renamed junior high school. It was envisioned that the graduate of the senior high school will be employable after finishing the two year curriculum.



Image showing students being led to better education under K to 12 (DepEd website)

The Department of Education (DepEd) was mandated to supervise K to 12. Even before the passage of the K to 12 law, the DepEd has been revising the curriculum. The high school levels were not anymore called first year, second year, third year and fourth year but are continuation of the elementary grades such as Grade 7 which is the former first year, Grade 8, second year, Grade 9, third year and Grade 10, fourth year. The grades under the senior high school would be called Grade 11 and Grade 12. K to 12 did not only add two years to Philippine basic education but it is actually a complete overhaul of the system. The courses have been revised and the pedagogy has been changed. Instead of the traditional lecture method, the DepEd adopted the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) Approach in teaching the course.

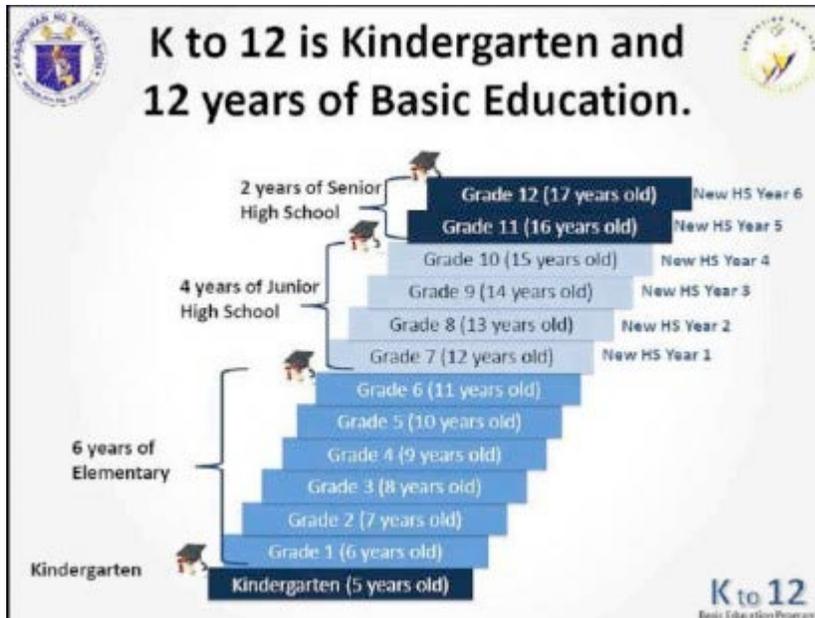


Diagram of the new K to 12 Program provided by the Department of Education

Through the outcomes based approach, the students are required to come out with concrete evidences of their learning. These include the writing of papers of their own authorships, concepts and audio-visual materials and intellectual works that are solely by the students. The courses in the basic education were also changed and it placed emphasis on research and individual thinking and analysis rather than memorization of lessons. The curriculum from Grade 1 to Grade 12 was revised and it added more subjects that were formerly taught in college such as calculus, taxation, Philippine government, methods of research.

K to 12 actually began not in 2013 but ten years before in 2003 when the first batch of students entered Grade 1. Teachers were given training and seminars to prepare themselves to the new program. By 2013 the year marked the full implementation of K to 12 with the rollout of Grade 11 nationwide.

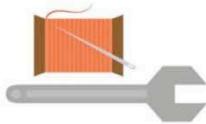
According to Nelson Cainghog , a political analyst from the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman, said the K to 12 – one of the "game changer" reforms in basic education – not only brings the Philippines at par with most countries in the world, but also prepares students for their preferred careers. (Geronimo)

There are eight strands in the Philippine senior high school system: the first is the Academic strand which is intended for students intending to enter college. The academic strand has the following tracks (Department of Education, 1)

K to 12 Senior High School Curriculum



ACADEMIC*



TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL-
LIVELIHOOD



SPORTS



ARTS & DESIGN

Senior high school curriculum showing the various strands or specializations

Academic Strand

a. General Academic Strand (GAS) – This track is intended for students who are still undecided which specialization to take. They may choose elective courses from the different academic strands such as the humanities, social sciences, applied economics, organization and management and disaster preparedness.

b. The Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) - The HUMSS is designed for those interested to take up journalism, communication arts, liberal arts, education, and other social science-related courses in college. If a student takes this strand he could train in college to be a teacher, a psychologist, a lawyer, a writer, a social worker, a reporter, even a priest or nun someday.

c. The Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) strand – This track is geared towards the sciences. Under this track the student may look forward to becoming a pilot, an architect, an astrophysicist, a biologist, a chemist, an engineer, a dentist, a nutritionist, a nurse, a doctor, marine engineer and a lot more.

d. The Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM) track – This track focuses on the basic concepts of financial management, business management, corporate operations, and all things that are accounted for. An ABM graduate can study to enter college and eventually becoming managers, human resources, marketing director, project officer, bookkeeper, accounting clerk, internal auditor, and a lot more.

Technology, Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) Strand

The Technology, Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) strand This strand is geared towards technology and the vocational arts.

a. Livelihood strand - Under this track are agri-fishery, Home Economics. industry. TVL involves the technical vocational curriculum and graduates may move on to become industrial and mechanical engineers or installers and construction workers.

b. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) strand. – This track under the TVL strand is intended for students who are computer savvy. The student can learn writing computer programs, illustrating, and designing websites.

c. Visual and Media Arts The last track under the TVL strand is the Visual and Media Arts. If the student has an inclination to animation and design, he can be prepared to enter a career in of multimedia production, advertising, corporate communications, graphic designing, filmmaking, photography, and desktop publishing.

The Sports Strand

There is also the Sports track which aims to give an understanding of the basic principles with regards to physical education and recreation. Graduates of this course may become fitness trainers, game officials, tournament manager, recreation attendant, masseur, or gym instructor. Part of the curriculum includes track safety and first aid. Another area for this strand is physical therapy. The student will have the chance to help people recover from their injuries and sicknesses.

Arts and Design Strand

Arts and Design Track - Under this strand are tracks that prepare the student for a life of design, performance and creative arts. It exposes the student to various types of media architecture, interior design, industrial design, graphic design, animation, painting, fashion design, photography, and film. Included under the arts and design track are the Performative Arts. The student may learn to become a singer, song writer, or scriptwriter. He can also make his own studio for making furniture, jewelry, costumes, and set design.

Preparing for K to 12: Logistics



Logo of the Commission on Higher Education.

The Department of Education (DepED) anticipated that its present facilities will not be able to accommodate the estimated 1.5 million students who will graduate from fourth year high school in 2013. In 2012 it proposed its biggest budget in its history. For its 2013 budget it allotted P118.8 billion or \$2.4 billion to be used for the construction of new classrooms, the repair of existing ones and acquiring basic educational needs. Included here are 47,492 classrooms and 66,492 sets of school seats for the K-12 program. The DepEd will also purchase 55 million textbooks and instructional materials as well as equipment for science and mathematics for 5,449 schools. (Ibid, 1)

The DepEd also initiated partnerships with private institutions to deliver basic education. This means government will now subsidize private education. Students that cannot be accommodated in public schools will be accommodated in private schools. Under the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE) will receive P35.8 billion or (\$722.95 million as assistance grants to over 2.6 million beneficiaries. (Ibid, 2)

Opposition to K to 12



Opposition Senator Senator Antonio Trillanes: Government has no resources for K to 12.

There was serious opposition to K to 12. The oppositors called K to 12 *pahirap* (burden). They filed at least 6 petitions questioning its constitutionality and seeking its suspension. The issue reached the Supreme Court where it was left pending as of this writing.¹ Critics say that the program did not undergo an experimental or pilot stage. This was because there was simply no time for pilot testing as the fate of the country's graduates wishing to be deployed for overseas employment was at stake.

The oppositors also noted that the DepEd does not have the facilities to accommodate the number of students entering the Senior High School. Though the DepEd already made preparations to give vouchers to private schools so they can accommodate students who could not be handled in the private schools, the oppositors especially those aligned with leftist groups branded the voucher program as privatization of education. (Geronimo, No Senior Student Left Behind)

¹ On November 12, 2018, the Philippine Supreme Court ruled with finality on the constitutionality of K to 12 and It also ruled that Filipino courses need not be repeated in college.



High school students protesting the adoption of K to 12 program: Their relatives call it another burden on the Filipinos.

There was also an observable increase in dropout rates compared to the students under K to 10. Two years into the program opposition Senator Antonio Trillanes IV warned that dropout rates will soar because of the additional expenses that come with two more years of high school. Estimates from opponents say that K to 12 added P20,000 for two years but the left-leaning Kabataan party placed the expenses could go over P100,000. (Geronimo, *ibid.*)



Graduates of the University of the Philippines protesting educational reforms among other issues.

Another characteristic of K to 12 is that it seeks to tap the tech-savvy of today's youth. It was assumed that K to 12 graduates in the Philippines are knowledgeable with computers and information technology. There are courses that require students to do their lessons online. Some parents began to complain as their children were required to purchase their own laptops or read their lessons through e-books which

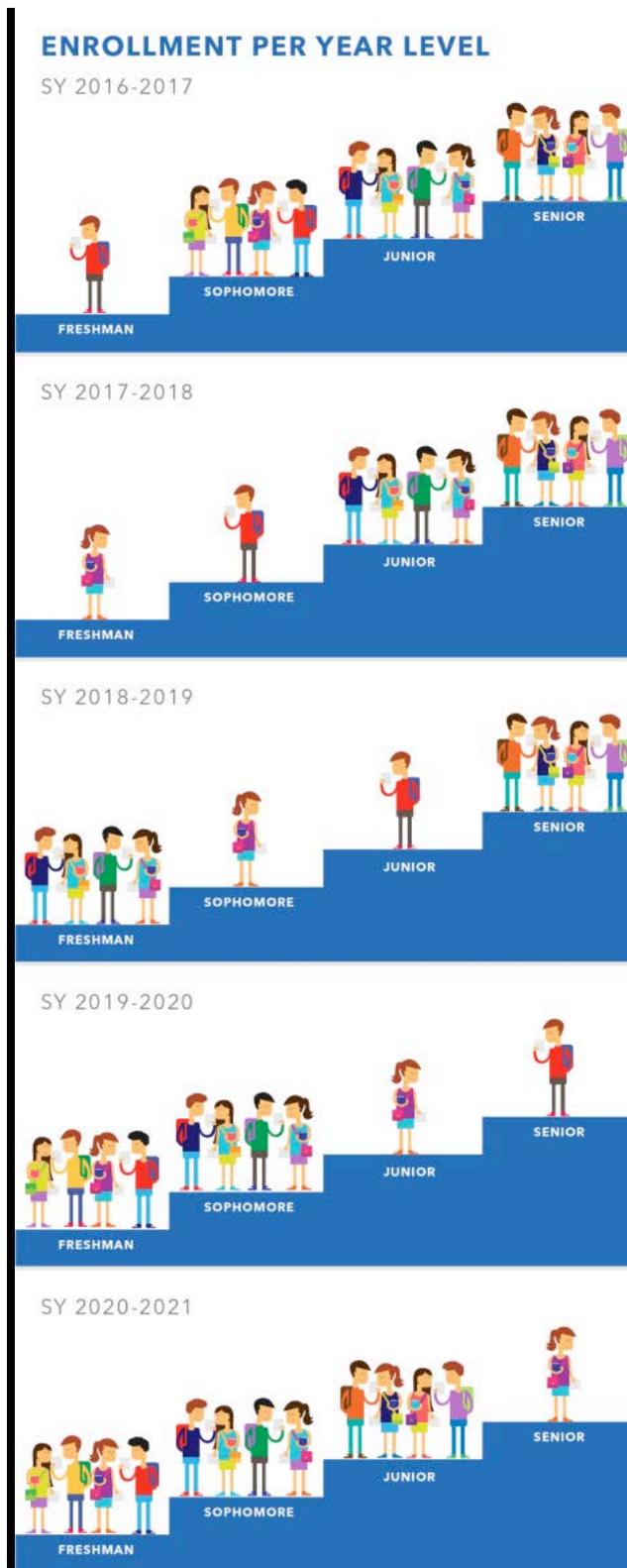
had to be bought. The costs are simply beyond the means of the ordinary Filipino student.



Students crossing a river on a makeshift raft to go to school (Rappler photograph)

The Role of the Commission on Higher Education

The other government agency in charge of implementing the K to 12 reforms was the Commission on Higher Education which had jurisdiction over post-secondary education. Aware about the impact of



A graphic projection by the Commission on Higher Education on the enrolment in college during K to 12 transition. (Commission on Higher Education website) <https://ched.gov.ph/k-12-project-management-unit/> [accessed September 20, 2018]

K to 12 to college professors and instructors, the Commission launched various programs to assist affected educators. These are: (Commission on Higher Education, 8-26)

a. Offering of scholarships - Displaced college faculty are encouraged to avail of scholarships in which they can study for their masters and Ph.D. in any university. Government subsidy includes the payment of payment of tuition fees, book allowance, (subject to availability) insurance. A total of P700 million pesos was allotted for scholarships. With the expected applications for scholarships there is a cap of P25,000 tuition fee per successful applicant .

b. Thesis and dissertation or capstone project – College instructors and professors who are about to write their theses and dissertation may avail of this government grant. The research must be finished within one year of the grant.

c. Graduate studies abroad – Displaced faculty members may do their graduate studies abroad in cooperation of international partner institutions. Government support is usually partial assistance.

d. Stand up grants – In cooperation with partners in the academe and industry the college professors may avail of grants involving research and development of educational materials.

There could be research grants from food production and security, environmental climate change and disaster risk reduction.

e. Creative arts grants - These will be in partnership with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts in which they may do research on culture and heritage.

f. Immersion – The displaced college professors may implement research through immersion in the communities as part of a commissioned grant or as an extension activity.

g. Post doctoral study grants - these will be given to holders of doctoral degrees who may do their postdoctoral work overseas or locally in partnership with other agencies.

h. Senior High School – College professors may opt to teach at the senior high school and the high school will waive its requirement for the teacher to have licensure status for the first five years teaching. .

i. Teaching materials development – the displaced faculty in cooperation with the Department of Education or the Commission on Higher Education may do activities to make instructional teaching materials.

j. Possible financial support – It was contemplated that displaced colleges teachers may avail of P25,000 monthly for the duration of his displacement but this was not followed.

As for funding to assist the affected college professors and instructors, the bulk of the budget of the Commission on Higher Education was intended to assist these personnel. In its budget proposal for 2016, it requested P10.54 billion or \$225.63 million a huge jump from 3.4 billion or 72.85 million budget in 2015.

Out of the P10 billion plus budget, P8.28 billion or \$177.42 million will be allocated for the transition program for affected personnel under the K to 12 transition program. These are: (Commission on Higher Education)

Scholarships	3,286,293	5,909 Masters and PhD scholarships
Senior high school training	245,400	1,227 teaching staff
Faculty development grants	3,516,308	9,365 faculty
Staff development grants	727,020	4,241 staff
Innovation grants for higher education institutions	500,000	100 institutions
Source: Commission on Higher Education, K to 12 Transition unit.		

According to CHED findings a total of 13,634 teaching staff and 11,456 non-teaching personnel will be displaced. Already college professors feared massive retrenchments due to K to 12. These personnel will have no teaching load at certain times during the implementation of K to 12 in college form 2013 to 2021 As a result many colleges and universities offered early retirement schemes for their affected personnel. Higher education institutions expect a drop in their freshman enrolment because of the full implementation of senior high school under K to 12.



Projection by the Commission on Higher Education on the abnormal enrolment from 2013 to 2021. (Commission on Higher Education)

Shortcomings of the K to 12

Since the Senior High School under the K to 12 program is quite new, there were birth pains on its introduction. Many schools were just feeling their way on how to offer the additional two years of basic education. Shortages of classrooms and school materials like textbooks were common. These were also the same problems felt in the Junior High School and the elementary grades. There is also the digital divide among rich and poor students. The rich students can easily acquire the needed software and hardware for their classes involving information technology but not the poor students who had to make do with what they have.

Though Senior High School graduates were said to be employable because they already had the skills needed for jobs, they were not well regarded as the college graduates. They were also subject to exploitation by employers.

The role of the Commission on Higher Education was to cushion the impact of K to 12. Its programs were not totally successful in their implementation. The main problem was the funds were not enough to accommodate all the affected college academic personnel. Scholarship support was limited to P25,000 or \$US500 a semester. The amount maybe good for enrolling in a provincial college but it not enough for a college or university in cities like Manila or Cebu. Adding to the problem were the bureaucratic problems which cause the slow release of scholarship funds. Many scholars could not continue their studies because the funds were not released by the Commission.

There were few takers for foreign scholarships because the counterpart of the Philippine government was not enough. There was senior high school training and training for the new courses under the K to 12 program. But these were stopped after the second batch of trainees were trained as the funds intended for K to 12 support were diverted to the free college program of the government.

In the present school year, the K to 12 had its first graduates. As expected many wished to enter college. It was expected that the graduates of the said strands will continue on to the college or school of their specialization. However the Department of Education decided that Senior High School graduate of any strand and track may enter any college of his choice. This directive defeats the purpose of having the strands in the Senior High School. The student should have been required to undergo a bridging course if his training was not related to the university he would like to enter. However this requirement was made optional and bridging courses were implemented only upon the discretion of the administration of the university or college.



It was envisioned that K to 12 will tap the computer-saviness of today's students

Conclusions

The adoption of the K to 12 program is the response of the Philippine government to be at par with global standards. Since it is dependent on remittances of overseas Filipino workers, such workers should be at par with the rising standards otherwise they would be left behind. They would either be treated as underemployed or as unskilled workers

It took a long time for the Philippine government to implement K to 12 because it was politically unpopular. It was considered an added burden for parents, students, and a threat to the jobs of affected teachers and other school personnel.

The alternative of not reforming the Philippine basic educational system is to endanger the status of the Philippines as a labor-exporting country. The Philippines

will also be left behind academically. It would mean isolation of the Philippines in the field of international labor and in education. Where other administrations hesitated in implementing K to 12, credit belongs to the Aquino administration which showed ample political will.

On the other hand the adoption of K to 12 was an opportunity to overhaul and reform the basic education system of the Philippines. It gave an opportunity to start a student-centered and outcomes based education. Since the program adds two more years to the curriculum, the graduates of 12 year basic education will certainly be more mature and more capable in meeting the challenges of the 21st century world. It also harnesses the technology of the times which enables the students and faculty to use the latest information and communication technology.

The Philippine government took steps to help the affected sectors. Budgets of both the Department of Education which handles basic education and the Commission on Higher Education which was in charge of college were increased to historic levels. These increases were meant to implement K TO 12 and to provide safety nets for those who are adversely affected. However these measures were hampered by inadequate funds, slow bureaucracy and the demand to give free college education which sapped the money intended for K to 12. Further training and scholarships are now left to the individual schools, colleges and universities. Finally, there were no clear cut policies on where the graduates of students should continue their education. The order to allow senior high school graduates to enroll in any course destroyed the purpose of the education strands and tracks.

As the first graduates of K to 12 now enter college, we can now observe a different kind of student. One who is more mature, more serious in his or her education and more experienced in the rigors of school work.

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