HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES*

A country which had made such a high degree of social and economic commitment to education as the Philippines must at some point reexamine the nature of that commitment very closely. Such a reexamination is called for not only because of the inconsistencies and deficiencies that have developed in the educational system, but also because of the growing recognition that henceforth, there has to be greater planning and rationality in the conduct and orientation of our education industry.

Philippine society for the past twenty years has undergone tremendous change and transformation. Institutions, forces, as well as traditional aspirations have changed and new expectations have emerged. As a result, the educational system must undergo change in its goals, structure, content, and methods to make them relevant to a constantly changing society.

One area of the system where the need for change has been widely recognized is in higher education. The importance of higher education cannot be overlooked, especially by a developing country like the Philippines, for it is this level of education from which the economy expects its scientists, technologists, economists and other specialized professionals to come. A country which has been investing an average of 34.28% or more than 1/3 of its total national budget for education, and which spends approximately 14.3% of its total national expenditure for higher education should be deriving maximum returns in terms of a faster pace of economic development. The unemployment figures, however, give a different impression. An employment survey undertaken by the Department of Labor in 1961 showed some 18.2% of persons with higher education to be jobless and to be looking for work, and from 22 to 49% among graduates of commerce, liberal arts, teaching, law and other college courses remaining unemployed after graduation. Likewise, the labor survey done by the Bureau of the Census and Statistics in 1965 showed some 16.7% of college graduates to be unemployed. This does not imply that the education market is already saturated. Rather, it is suggestive of the imbalances and the unresponsiveness of the educational system to national economic needs. The irony of it is that while the higher education system of the Philippines earns the distinction of being highly developed, second only to the United States, in terms of its provisions, i.e., number of institutions and the proportion of collegiate enrolment to the entire population, Philippine gross national product places it in the category of an underdeveloped country.

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ASSUMPTIONS

The education survey's work began with the assumption that the entire educational enterprise in the Philippines could be treated as an input-output system, broken down to certain subsystems identified as sectors, or aspects of the whole system, of which higher education is one. It was also assumed that, roughly, it would also be possible to establish the linkages between the educational system itself and the rest of the social system, such that performance of education can be gauged in terms of its contribution to the overall national effort, whatever it was.

Furthermore, it was assumed – and this the Special Area Group on Higher Education made its major contention – that overall national goals having shifted as they have toward development, the performance of the higher education sector could only be gauged by how well the sector was so oriented or not to this goal. Development can of course be defined in very broad or narrow terms. Occasionally, it can be expanded in meaning so as to make "universal" standards of excellence an important criterion in measuring performance or output. Nevertheless, national definitions of what is desired would be the peg on which to hang measures of adequacy or inadequacy of the system. This is important if education is to be made a factor in national life: to make it more efficient and less profligate with national resources.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

ENROLMENT

There was a phenomenal increase of institutions of higher learning in the Philippines in the sixties. State universities and other chartered colleges grew in number by over 100%; public vocational colleges and private institutions increased by less than 100%; and private universities and colleges increased by only 40%. Still the latter represent well over 85% of the total.

In terms of enrolment, the private institutions have over 90% of all collegiate students. Of total enrolment, more than 1/3 are in Manila alone. Government efforts are concentrated at the lower two levels of the educational ladder, while private enterprise is predominant at the tertiary level. This is reflected in the share of the budget for education which for Fiscal Year 1968-69 was P799,995,341, of which 90% went to the Bureau of Public Schools and only .26%, or roughly P2,079,987, to the Bureau of Private Schools. Adding some P73,547,000 appropriation for the state-supported colleges and universities, the government's share amounted to 75.5 million pesos. On the other hand, direct private expenditures for higher education, excluding capital outlays, ran to some 200 million pesos in FY 1968-69

The distribution of enrolment is indicative of traditional emphasis, as well as of changing trends. White-collar occupational training is still most popular, i.e., commerce and business, arts and sciences and teacher-training. Teacher-training and commerce and business alone together constituted 60% of total enrolment in School Year 1968. Over a three-year period (SY's 1966-69) certain courses dropped in comparative enrolment: agriculture, chemistry, dentistry, home economics, medicine, nautical science, optometry, pharmacy and teacher-training. On the other hand, engineering, technology, fine arts, arts and sciences, nursing, philosophy and letters and social work were growing in comparative enrolment. Together the technical, technological and professional courses took about 4/5 of the total enrolment for the period of three years, while other courses took only 1/5. The ratio is reversed if we compare technical and technological to professional courses – 1/5 versus 4/5; professional courses were the most populated, with teacher-training taking 44.22% of total enrolment.

Whether rising or dropping enrolment in certain courses reflects social demands or changing occupational structure as a result of changing technology is a subject for further research. Evidently certain occupations are changing in importance as a result of a combination of factors. Pharmacy is perhaps a classic case. The changing technology in the dispensing of drugs and medicine has transformed the traditional role of the pharmacist into a mere sales clerk in drug stores or into an industrial technologist or, perhaps into a manager, as in a large drug factory or sales corporation. Thus, pharmacy has lost its mass appeal but gained in status as a highly technical occupation. Dentistry is another occupation that has been affected by technological advance.

Graduate enrolment – constituting less than 2% of all enrolment, and dropping in relative terms over the three-year period (SY's 1966-69) – indicates that advanced study is still largely a rarity in Philippine higher education; this is indirect proof that collegiate education is strongly oriented to professional fields and to employment soon after the initial degree.

GRADUATES

The distribution of graduates among different fields indicates again that education (or teacher-training) occupies first rank, taking as much as 60.86% of the total for SY 1967-68. Commerce and business gave 14.54%; Liberal Arts accounted for 8.83%; and only 5.3% were in the field of engineering and technology. In 1967-68, there were a total of 81,269 graduates – a figure slightly less than a 100% increase over the number in 1960-61.

Whether the output of the entire educational system is adequate for development purposes or not is an interesting question to pose. This problem is certainly related to others that are endemic to the Philippine educational scene, and cannot therefore be easily answered in simple terms. For instance, while Hunter gives the

figure of 5,600 annual high-level manpower needs of the Philippines based upon job openings requiring particular high-level training the Presidential Economic Staff (PES) estimates a much-higher figure of 33,200 annual manpower needs for the years 1965 to 1970. The question then of numerical adequacy can easily be dismissed; there is in fact an oversupply of sheer output. Figures on graduates from 1960 to 1969 give an average annual output in excess of 50,000. However, it is, as the saying goes, a buyer's market: there is always room for the good engineer, the good teacher, the good lawyer, etc. This is an indication, as Skillman emphasizes, that the outstanding problem of higher education in the Philippines is the problem of quality rather than of quantity.

Central to the question of quality is the parallel question – quality for what? for what purpose or use? and for whose purpose or use? This brings us to the problem of the goals and objectives of higher education in the Philippines, and the logical follow-up: how are these goals and objectives achieved? How well are they being achieved?

PROBLEMS AND DEFECTS

The original difficulty traces itself back to the vagueness in the constitutional provisions for the goals and objectives of education, and for their lack of direction – underscored by the emphasis on individual development with but an indirect reference to the needs of an expanding and modernizing society. In brief, the Philippine Constitution intends to foster the individual's growth, and on this *laissez-faire* basis, assumes that the nation would fare well by itself. Education, to use the words of the economists, is a consumer's good rather than a producer's good. The efforts of the Board of National Education to make the objectives more explicit can not but reflect the same orientation.

SOCIAL DEMANDS VERSUS DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

As a direct input into the development efforts of a nation is by no means the only purpose to which education can be applied. In a developing society with limited resources, however, education must be viewed in this light. The moment a need becomes pressing enough to require the allocation of limited resources toward desired goals, defects become apparent. Viewed in that way, the higher educational enterprise in the Philippines can easily be criticized. We have seen, for example, that it is not the number of graduates that is a problem, but their quality. In terms of social values (social demands) this output answers a definite need of society; some even see a functional benefit from it. But vast numbers of "educated unemployed" may be regarded as a waste. Mitigating this criticism, however, is the view that such a profligate output has the effect of lowering the premium on education or at least of raising the quality of those who find employment. There are indications from

labor market surveys that the employed, especially the women, are sometimes overqualified for their jobs, which means that people are forced to accept employment that under ordinary circumstances is below their training.

Raising the quality of the unskilled worker or the white-collar service employee does not eliminate the need for high-quality trained manpower, especially at managerial or executive levels, but rather enhances it. Thus, it is important that a solution to this waste of manpower resources must consider narrowing the selection and the streaming process, and channelling more resources toward strengthening training at higher levels.

A full-scale reorientation of the higher educational system toward national development goals provides, therefore, the rationale for the following assessments. The imbalance among the fields has already been noted. The engineering, technological, agricultural and other "practical" fields do not get the attention that they ought to get. Also, it is apparent to many that the need for highly sophisticated scientists, engineers and technologists is limited. But industries that are likely to be set up in the immediate future are more likely to need great numbers of trained technicians, as well as service personnel, which will accompany a rise in production in manufacturing. Since this type of training is ideally not done on the job but through formal education, there should be a shift in the direction of training technicians at the middle levels. There are also regional imbalances, with a tremendous concentration in the Greater Manila area, and with only the beginnings of an effort to integrate regional institutions with the development needs of the locality or region. With the proliferation of small private colleges and so-called state universities, which are really mostly agricultural colleges, resources have become thinly spread with the resultant wasteful duplication, uneven standards, and an enormous problem of supervision. As far as quality is concerned, this proliferation is a major source of deterioration; for excellence is not easily achieved and may come about only when a "critical mass" is reached, but which is not possible to achieve in one-room, commercial institutions.

There are other system-goals of Philippine society which require a closer look into the entire philosophy, structure, and contents of the higher educational system. These goals may be treated as dimensions of development. In common with other developing societies, the national development of Philippine society is a multi-factor affair, with one factor easily analyzable as an input into other sectors or subsystems. In brief, if modernization is regarded as a total process involving not only personality but also cultural and societal transformations, then inputs can come from all directions, and the interaction of the whole must be considered.

A closer look into higher education reveals the malaise that has rendered an otherwise vigorous enterprise an object of universal concern for educators and the public alike. As we noted earlier, the characteristics of the system are perhaps best evaluated not in terms of absolute standards of excellence, for these are misleading,

but in relation to the priorities of national goals. However, such goals have not been agreed upon with any degree of consensus; priorities are varied, and thus, the educational system lacks focus. In this respect, any empirical data is not helpful, for they mask the uncertainty. But for those who have had some experience in the system this finding is inescapable.

The uncertainty manifests itself in many ways. We have noted that the schools try to meet social demands rather than deliberately allocate resources and plan toward local, regional or national needs. Planning for institutional development is a rarity, so that staffs are seldom developed in advance but simply drawn out of an open academic market, oftentimes blissfully ignorant of specific qualifications. Thus, faculties of education double as instructors in liberal arts. Our survey reveals that entrance examinations or schemes to limit and stream enrolments are the exception rather than the rule. This permissiveness is underscored by the fact that a universal complaint – the low quality of entrants to the collegiate level, does not arouse any attempt to restrict entry or weed out the unprepared.

Perhaps the most serious defect has relevance to the need to make the content of the educational experience a positive factor in the strengthening of the national identity, and in focusing efforts in accordance with a national ideology of development. Such a defect is not easily documented except through a fairly deep probe of the contents of curricula, textbooks and the attitudinal shifts that can be linked to exposure to a particular academic program. Such probes are proposed for further projects of this or succeeding surveys. But it is fairly clear that, in many instances, the curricula if they do not deliberately inculcate a set of values or attitudes not entirely consistent with expressed goals of society – are at least irrelevant to national or to Asian conditions. In particular, this is most evident in courses in the humanities and social sciences and the professional fields. That this defect is directly relevant to training for manpower needs is underscored by the continuing loss of high-level manpower to the developed countries as a result of the training that stresses professional practice under conditions of opulence, rendering the graduates unfit for practice under conditions of deprivation prevailing in the Philippines. While this situation may be a gain in terms of a world economy, it is a loss in terms of the national development of the Philippines.

Finally, there is an entire set of defects that relates to the teaching-learning process, and which can only be explained on the basis of the financial pressures that subject the schools – the private ones in particular – to increasingly serious stresses and strains. Data on quality of faculty, on teaching loads, on library and other facilities – while not uniform – show definite and serious deficiencies in many institutions. It is interesting to note that the curricula in private as contrasted to public institutions are inflated and require, in many instances, far more units than the public institutions, e.g., the University of the Philippines or the Bureau of Private Schools require. (See, for example, appendix "B".) Reflecting a similar overloading is the average teaching load of both full-time as well as part-time faculty, which the

case of private institutions far exceeds those normal in the state institutions. Aggregate data on the ratio of faculty with higher degrees to minimum degree requirements (see table 2.4.b, appendix "F") show that in most instances, except for the private sectarian schools, Ph.D. degree-holders seldom exceed 5% of the total; in all categories of institutions those with master's degrees are only about 1/4 to 1/5 of the total; and fully 2/3 have only the bachelor's degrees. Similarly, in all schools except the public, about 1/3 of the faculty in all programs are on part-time. This percentage goes up to about 40% in the private non-sectarian institutions. (See table 2.4a, appendix "F".) Our survey data also indicate that there is seldom any institutional planning, or provisions for professional advancement and growth of the faculty.

THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Having stated the obvious defects of the system, it is useful to look at the other side of the coin. For a country whose government spends such a large part of the national income for education in the primary and secondary levels, the private higher education system of the Philippines can be credited with a number of achievements. Because for the most part the government does not give any form of financial assistance to the private-school system, which serves over 90% of the collegiate and post-collegiate enrolment, shortcomings are not unexpected; on the other hand, it may very well be that the solutions to problems are to be found elsewhere, i.e., among the environing conditions of the educational systems.

For instance, student protest actions against inadequate facilities constitute a change in an internal condition that for so long permitted and encouraged a rather lax attitude on the part of the schools in the face of "client" apathy. A source of defect may, therefore, become a source of improvement.

On the other hand, it is plain that pressures will have to be generated external to the system to effect other changes leading to reform. For instance, the mobilization of the higher education system for national development purposes may only be effected through a more positive response by government to the need for change, and cannot be left to the schools themselves. This will call for a more thorough-going integration of all schools into a single scheme than has ever been attempted before. This must be done in line with the imperatives of modernization.

The most pressing need for integration lies in the chasm that has opened over the years between the public and the private systems, particularly at the tertiary and post-collegiate levels. This, as we have noted, is an area where the government has the weakest sanctions available to it, since until recently no government monies were given to private institutions. Thus, the matter of supervision had largely been done through self-policing organizations. These are only in their infancy insofar as positive regulations are concerned.

The next step, therefore, is to establish the conditions by which these functional or regional associations can begin to be effective in enforcing standards. Some type of administrative innovation is needed, which will lend to these private groupings some of the formal powers of the state. It must be recognized that private schools and their associations are doing a job for the state. They must therefore be given some of the means with which to do the job, if not the money.

At the same time integration implies that these schools and associations will be willing to restyle themselves into a more decisive instrument for state purposes, i.e., as secondary socializing agencies for state objectives and goals, as bearers of the state ideology, as agents for national purposes.

To articulate the entire educational enterprise to state goals and national purposes, it will be important to have a policy board at highest levels, which will assist the Department of Education in the continuing task of assessing the input of education into those goals.

To mitigate the production of the unfit, to reduce the tremendous waste that now characterizes higher education, a national system of selecting applicants to higher levels, and streaming the screened to more or less proper vocational and occupational lines, a national entrance examinations system will eventually have to be devised. While the *laissez-faire* policies of the past have achieved some measure of universalization, this must be seriously reexamined in the light of declining resources. Most countries find it necessary to regulate access to higher academic training, while enlarging opportunities for learning of certain skills for gainful employment.

A massive effort to improve the quality of instruction must be concurrent with the attempt to channel recruits to proper occupational lines. This is possible only when the profligacy is reduced, and the emphasis on quantity replaced by stress on quality. When it is feasible to partly subsidize institutions of higher learning, then they will not be so hard-pressed to increase students for the sake of additional income, but instead concentrate on quality education for fewer clients. A system of national scholarships applicable to all schools may be a further reinforcement of the subsidy system.

Attitudes at graduation must change. Not only must the educated, technically proficient young men and women look for employment, but they must also be ready to create employment. At present the universal tendency of the schools is to train people to be employed. What is needed, however, is to train for entrepreneurship. Concededly, this requires a type of training that may not yet be available in academic or professional curricula. New skills are involved, new values and attitudes; the schools will need to acquire a different outlook, one that will instill a more acute awareness of economic and life opportunities. In fact, the entire educational process will need to be reoriented.

The language problem requires a forthright decision. The committee feels that in order to improve the quality of instruction and for other purposes related to nation-building, the use of the national language as a medium of instruction is inevitable. However, the process of conversion is conceivably a matter of diversification, as well as an experimental one. That is, whether or not a particular language is to be used is determined just as much by the nature of the subject-matter as it is by a deliberate policy. Therefore, depending on available facilities and competencies, it is perhaps advisable to maintain an open and experimental attitude to this question, until such time as the widespread use of the national language makes a definite policy practicable.

A *deeper sense of involvement* on the part of the general public toward higher education is badly needed in order to break the vicious circle in which private institutions, especially the non-sectarian ones, find themselves – a circle in which the low ability of the clientele to pay their way through higher education is aggravated by growing pressures to make the educational experience more relevant to contemporary needs and problems of Philippine society. Assistance can ultimately come from two sources: (1) already mentioned, is more massive governmental assistance at the tertiary level; (2) help from the general public, which means either voluntary participation, philanthropy or a specific tax. The movement to transform educational stock corporations into corporate or family foundations deserves more positive encouragement. The grouping together of institutions on some kind of basis, e.g., regional or special purposes such as science programs – or for a better mechanism for accreditation – would serve to reverse the trend toward fragmentation and proliferation of educational programs. The consortium idea is worth exploring more fully. Consortia and regional or special purpose associations would also serve as a better mechanism with which to deal with governmental agencies charged with supervising, regulating, and assisting private education.

We wish to reiterate the need to effect profound reforms in the orientations, the structure, and the content of curricula in order to update them in the light of rapid advances of technology, science and research: in order to imbue them with a national ideology, to steer them in the direction of development, and in order to utilize the rich hoard of materials that the Philippines and the Asian environments offer to give substance and reality to the search for national identity and purpose. Above all, the curricula must be rooted in the need to create a consciousness of kind among Filipinos of all levels, of his involvement in a national community and his responsibilities to it, and of the moral imperatives of participation in the building of such a community. These are matters that must not require legislative action in order to bring the educational effort in line with national programs, but ought to be self-generated by the educational system itself. Therefore, what the system must establish are more dynamic, innovating mechanisms; toward this end, there should be established, for example, an institute for textbook development, which will not only impose order in an otherwise chaotic situation, but also act positively to develop texts and other materials geared toward national development purposes.

Finally, related to the search for identity and relevance, moves toward enlarging the scope of cooperation must be initiated so as to tap the unlimited opportunities that the region of Asia offers to make the educational experience a realistic and relevant one for the Filipino, isolated as he always has been from his cultural environment. Inasmuch as the entire region of Asia is moving massively forward toward modernity, such an organic linkage is not a return to the past, but truly an engagement with the future. The same impulses and the same rationale that make regional and functional collaboration a matter of urgent necessity ought to make the Philippines anticipate closer articulation with the educational systems of neighboring societies, and, whenever possible, with other systems with which the Philippines has had no historic relations.