

# Free Education in the Philippines: The Continuing Saga

“A nation cannot be built without education.” (Taylor-Kamara, 2010)

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**Abstract**— One of the most notable milestones in the Philippine education is when the government actively seeks to expand access and participation in higher education through the ratification of RA 10931 or the “Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act”. Thus, this study aims to examine and assess the effects of the law in our educational system. Providing sufficient funds is not enough; the government must give meaning to the title of the new law, which is the provision of “quality” tertiary education. This program is an investment in the nation’s most precious resource. Quality education empowers people and levels the playing field; it is one of the best tools for poverty alleviation, social equity and inclusive growth. There should be no compromise on the quality of the services provided under RA 10931. Free must not mean substandard. In this study, the researcher used qualitative research method. Qualitative research method was developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena: observe feelings, thoughts, behaviors and the belief of the mass society.

**Keywords**— Free Education, higher education, Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A good education is one of the most important things an individual can pursue. There are many aspects of life that a complete education will affect a person. Having a high education meaning a well-paying job, better opportunities, and a better life. It also makes a person smarter than someone without one. There are many ways in which education can benefit people.

Free education is indeed important to many poor families. In the early years, most of our ancestors received no formal training at all because education during those times was only available to the upper class. Tutors and private academies only trained the few that could afford an education, which increased the value of it. Education played a major role in our history it was one of the major issues that separated the wealthy from the poor.

Hence, August 17, 2018 is another historic for the country when President Rodrigo Roa Duterte signed Republic Act 10931, to wit:

“AN ACT PROMOTING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO QUALITY TERTIARY EDUCATION BY PROVIDING FOR FREE TUITION AND OTHER SCHOOL FEES IN STATE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES, LOCAL UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES AND STATE-RUN TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, ESTABLISHING THE TERTIARY EDUCATION SUBSIDY AND STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM, STRENGTHENING THE UNIFIED STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION, AND APPROPRIATING FUND THEREFOR”

After numerous debates, the Free Tuition Fee Act of 2018 was finally signed into law. RA 10931’s landmark components include:

**1. Free tuition for all required classes during the semester.** These classes must be part of the curriculum and are essential in obtaining a degree. Approved petitioned classes are covered, too, but review or enhancement classes are not covered.

The free tuition law also covers the fees of Filipino learners enrolled in any TESDA-registered TVET program.

**2. Free miscellaneous and other school fees.** The law covers payment for fees for the use of libraries, computers and laboratories, school identification card, athletics, admissions, development, guidance services, handbook, entrance, registration, medical and dental services, and cultural activities.

Should you wish to have another copy of your school identification card, library identification card, and student handbook, you will have to pay extra.

**3. Affirmative action programs for minorities.** The law requires SUCs, LUCs, and TVET program providers to craft programs to make it easier for disadvantaged students to avail of the free tuition law. They may include students who are Lumad, Muslims, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and students from public high schools and depressed areas.

**4. Opt-out mechanism.** Students with the financial capacity can volunteer to opt out of the free higher education provision. SUCs, LUCs, and TVET providers are therefore required to create a system that would enable students to do so.

Students must decide to opt out of the subsidy during the enrollment period of each semester. They will be required to submit a waiver duly notarized by the institution.

The decision is considered final and irrevocable for that particular semester. Students are allowed to change their decision in the next semesters.

**5. Student voluntary contribution mechanism.** The law also allows financially-able students to avail of the free higher education provision but also contribute a specific amount to the higher education institution (HEI). SUCs, LUCs, and TVET providers are required to create a proper system so students can make voluntary contributions for their education.

**6. Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES).** Students and learners may apply to get subsidies to help pay for tuition and fees in private institutions.

Under TES, they may also apply for subsidies to get allowances for books, supplies, transportation, room and board costs, and other expenses. A student with disability will also be given a separate set of allowance. Students whose programs require a professional license or certification will also be given money to fund their application for the first time.

Students and learners, however, must first qualify under the existing admission and retention requirements or other screening and assessment procedures required by the program.

**7. Student Loan Program for Tertiary Education.** The free tuition law IRR also allows enrolled students to avail of an education loan. The UniFAST Board shall implement the loan program through partner banks or similar institutions.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Contrary to misperceptions, the new law has built-in mechanisms that would encourage increased participation in the program from all socioeconomic classes, especially the poor. According to Rep. Joey S. Salceda of the Second District of Albay, Republic Act (RA) 10931 would now give poor students the drive to strive further for self-development through free tertiary and technical-vocational education, the high costs of which had previously demoralized and forced them to settle for low-paying jobs to survive.

The breakthrough legislation of Republic Act 10931 is estimated to cost the government P10.486 billion in tuition and P6 billion in miscellaneous expense for 984,000 students in SUCs in 2018. Budget Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said that funding for the program will either be sourced from within the budget or requested through supplemental budget, since the 2017 appropriations have already been approved.

RA10931 will have the effect of further constraining, if not totally eradicating, whatever latitude administrators of State and local colleges and universities have. With full subsidies not only on tuition but even on specific expenses such as ID and dental and medical fees, and even computer and lab fees, all of the budget needed for operations, and not only personnel services, will be downloaded from the DBM. Some Presidents of SUCs have expressed their misgivings about the serious consequences of this system, for it will surely tie their hands even more.

Has the government considered the fact that no developing country has ever attempted to make public tertiary education totally free, not even in the most developed United States of America.

The huge amount of investment for the implementation of the universal access to quality tertiary education raises several questions. Can the Philippine Government sustain the funding for the said program? Is there an expected output as return of investment from the said program? Will RA 10931 certainly benefit each and every young Filipino who wanted to finish college for the betterment of their living?

The economic managers raised valid points our lawmakers need to consider before the legislation is passed. This issue definitely deserves thorough study since the nation's budget is not that huge and we definitely need to be prudent about our spending priorities. Education is very important, more reason the limited money should go to those who need it most.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Generally, research design means a structure to plan and execute a particular research. Research design is

the crucial part of the research as it includes all the four important considerations: the strategy, the conceptual framework, the identification of whom and what to study on and the tools and procedures to be used for collecting and analyzing data.

The research design basically is divided into several types for example qualitative research and quantitative research.

In this study, the researcher used qualitative research method. Qualitative research method was developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena: observe feelings, thoughts, behaviors and the belief of the mass society. Examples of qualitative methods are action research, case study research and grounded theory. Qualitative data sources include observation and participation observation (field work), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions.

Research methodology is basically a process of how a research is being conducted. It encompasses tools and techniques to conduct a particular research or finding. Research method is a range of tools that are used for different types of enquiry. Therefore, it is important to select an accurate method that suits the research objective. In this section, the researcher will break the components into two: data collection method and also data analysis method.

**Data Collection Method** The researcher applied two methods of data collection techniques. This was done in order to collect adequate and relevant data to address the research objectives of this study. Nonetheless, the researcher used qualitative research method.

**Library Research** is a process of dealing with the analysis of evidences such as historical records and documents. Similarly, it means gathering data from library materials which includes textbooks, both published and unpublished academic documents such as journals, conference proceedings, dissertations and theses. Library research also includes information gathered from internet search.

#### IV. THEORETICAL/ CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As described, the theoretical and conceptual framework explains the path of a research and grounds it firmly in theoretical constructs. The overall aim of the two frameworks is to make research findings more meaningful, acceptable to the theoretical constructs in the research field and ensures generalizability. They assist in stimulating research while ensuring the extension of knowledge by providing both direction and impetus to the research inquiry. They also enhance the empiricism and rigor of a research.

In this research let's take a look at at the three (3) state-run academies here in the Philippines, namely: Philippine Military Academy, Philippine National Police Academy, and Philippine Merchant Marine Academy. Cadets – as they called their students, in these institutions enjoy government subsidies for their training and education. Subsidies provided are not limited to school tuition fees and miscellaneous fees. Perks may include uniforms, board & lodging facilities, food, and/or regular monetary allowances for each cadet. Sounds like a heavy investment, right? However, each of these academies has their own program that can distinctively quantify return of investments for the government. These programs are clearly defined on each of their mandates, as defined by specific Republic Acts that govern the operations of these academies.

The National Defense Act of 1935 provides for the Mandate of the Philippine Military Academy. This Baguio-based institution is tasked to train and educate selected candidates for permanent commission in the regular workforce of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The full subsidies mentioned above are provided to each cadet during their four (4) years of engagement in the Academy. After obtaining their baccalaureate degree, its graduates are obliged to serve the Armed Forces of Philippines. They may be assigned to either of these three (3) branches of the Armed Forces of the Philippines: military, navy, or air force, where they are mandated to serve 20 years, which includes their period of stay in the academy.

The Philippine National Police Academy has a very similar set-up. The graduates' choices of service include engagement in the police force (Philippine National Police), jail management (Bureau of Jail Management and Penology), or fire fighters (Bureau of Fire Protection).

On the other hand, graduates of the Philippine Merchant Marine Academy have both options to opt for government service or commercial engagement. Both of which have quantifiable return of investments that benefits our country. Going for government service may be either for the Philippine Navy or Philippine Coastguard. Pursuing a career with commercial engagement, where they engage as officers or engineers of merchant marine vessels (both local and international shipping) gives them opportunities to contribute indirectly to national treasury through their dollar remittances, which helps to stabilize peso and dollar exchange rates as well.

In view of the examples mentioned above, we can at least quantify that contributions of the graduates from the institutions mentioned have a direct or indirect return of investment to the government that provided

them subsidies, so they may complete their education program and training. However, we are aware that most of the State Universities and Colleges and Local Universities and Colleges do not implement the same mechanism. And as we all know as well; the Philippines is one of the major suppliers of manpower all over the world. The percentage of brain drain, and brawn drain based on the available labor statics is quite high. It only means that talents, skills, and expertise of most of our countrymen are being enjoyed by other countries more than our country enjoys it. Of course, it is part of people's democratic liberty to choose what and where they would like to work, especially if all education and training supports were shouldered by themselves. However, if the same arrangement would be applied for products of the free education law, it would seem that the Philippine government has invested for the future workforce of other countries. If I am working in a human resource department of a company, I would not engage our company staff on any education or training program if I am aware that other companies (specially my competitors) would be the one benefited with the additional knowledge and skills that my staff have acquired. It is quite illogical to invest on someone that has a high probability to leave your organization, in this case our country, thus, free education would not be that beneficial in the long run.

Filipinos believe that education is the key to success. It is the key to improve the quality of our lives. From grade school to secondary to college. We all know that education can help us to achieve our goals in life. Education is also responsible in providing competent human resources that will be able to carry out day-to-day tasks according to the standards that is set by the society. However, due to financial difficulty we tend to set aside the education and work at the very young age. Some of us won't be able to finish school but some have a degree. Most Filipinos are clever and talented. We can compete to other nationality easily.

Across the years our educational system has been rocked by controversies which have remained unabated up to this day. Amidst the welter of issues, two of them have managed to stand out in importance: quality and relevance. The major difficulty in education in the Philippines is the short-sighted policy of sacrificing the quality and quantity of education for reasons of economy. The quality of education at public schools remains poor. Classes are big, teaching material is lacking and teachers are poorly paid.

Most local Filipino children attend public schools, which are funded by the government and free to attend from grade school to college. Education in the Philippines is managed and regulated by the department

of education, commonly referred to as the deed in the country. The Department of Education controls the Philippines education system, including the curriculum used in schools and the allocation of funds. It also regulates the construction of schools and other educational facilities and the recruitment of teachers and staff.

By law, education is compulsory for thirteen years (kindergarten and grades 1–12). These are grouped into three levels: elementary school (kindergarten–grade 6), junior high school (grades 7–10), and senior high school (grades 11–12); they may also be grouped into four key stages: 1st key stage (kindergarten–grade 3), 2nd key stage (grades 4–6), 3rd key stage (grades 7–10) and 4th key stage (grades 11–12). Children enter kindergarten at age 5. For the academic year 2017–2018, about 83% of K–12 students attended public schools and about 17% either attended private schools or were home-schooled.

According to Wikipedia - State universities and colleges (SUCs) refers to any public institution of higher learning that was created by an Act passed by the Congress of the Philippines. These institutions are fully subsidized by the national government, and may be considered as a corporate body. SUCs are fully funded by the national government as determined by the Philippine Congress. The University of the Philippines System, being the "national university", receives the biggest chunk of the budget among the 456 SUCs, and has likewise been strengthened by law through Republic Act 9500. SUCs are confronted by annual budget cutbacks. As a result, these schools impose enrolment quotas and increase fees. In recent years, tuition and miscellaneous fees in the SUCs have seen huge increases.

You may attend technical schools, vocational schools or higher education institutions such as Universities. At the age of 16, if you did well enough during your High School education, you can start working at a higher education, vocational or technical school, but you must be accepted for it first. Courses last between one year and up to as many as seven years. PH education gets the biggest chunk of the national budget. The 2018 budget allocation for government agencies handling education amounts to P672.41 billion. This year's budget is a P10-billion increase from 2017's P543.2 billion.

President Duterte signed RA 10931 in August 2017, while its implementing rules and regulations (IRR) were launched in March 2018.

The law covers the tuition and fees of students enrolled in 112 state universities and colleges (SUCs), 87 accredited local universities and colleges (LUCs), and all technical-vocation education and training (TVET) programs registered under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda).

Table 4.1 as shown below are the state-funded schools, colleges and universities in the Philippines. The list includes national colleges and universities system, region-wide colleges and universities system, province-

wide colleges and universities system, and specialized schools. This list does NOT include locally funded schools, colleges and universities.

Table 4.1

Name	Region
Abra State Institute of Science and Technology	Cordillera AdministrativeRegion
Adiong Memorial Polytechnic State College	ARMM Region
Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology	Caraga
Aklan State University	Western Visayas
Apayao State College	Cordillera AdministrativeRegion
Aurora State College of Technology	Central Luzon
Basilan State College	ARMM Region
Bataan Peninsula State University	Central Luzon
Batanes State College	Cagayan Valley
Batangas State University	CALABARZON
Benguet State University	Cordillera AdministrativeRegion
Bicol State College of Applied Sciences and Technology	Bicol Region
Bicol University	Bicol Region
Bohol Island State University	Central Visayas
Bukidnon State University	Northern Mindanao
Bulacan Agricultural State College	Central Luzon
Bulacan State University	Central Luzon
Cagayan State University	Cagayan Valley
CamarinesNorte State College	Bicol Region
Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges	Bicol Region
Camiguin Polytechnic State College	Northern Mindanao
Capiz State University	Western Visayas
Caraga State University	Caraga
Carlos Hilado Memorial StateCollege	Western Visayas
Catanduanes State University	Bicol Region
Cavite State University	CALABARZON
Cebu Normal University	Central Visayas
Cebu Technological University	Central Visayas
Central Bicol State University of Agriculture	Bicol Region
Central Luzon State University	Central Luzon

Central Mindanao University	Northern Mindanao
Central Philippines State University	Western Visayas
Compostela Valley State College	Davao Region
Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology	SOCCSKSARGEN
Cotabato State University	SOCCSKSARGEN
Davao del Norte State College	Davao Region
Davao Oriental State University	Davao Region
Don Honorio Ventura Technological State University	Central Luzon
Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University	Ilocos Region
Dr. Emilio B. Espinosa Sr. Memorial State College of Agriculture and Technology	Bicol Region
Eastern Samar State University	Eastern Visayas
Eastern Visayas State University	Eastern Visayas
Eulogio "Amang" Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology	NCR and Cavite
Guimaras State College	Western Visayas
Ifugao State University	Cordillera Administrative Region
Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College	Ilocos Region
Iloilo Science and Technology University	Western Visayas
Iloilo State College of Fisheries	Western Visayas
Isabela State University	Cagayan Valley
J.H. Cerilles State College	Zamboanga Peninsula
Jose Rizal Memorial State University	Zamboanga Peninsula
Kalinga State University	Cordillera Administrative Region
Laguna State Polytechnic University	CALABARZON
Leyte Normal University	Eastern Visayas
Mariano Marcos State University	Ilocos Region
Marikina Polytechnic College	NCR
Marinduque State College	MIMAROPA
Mindanao State University	ARMM Region and other locations
Mindanao State University - Buug College	Zamboanga Peninsula
Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology	Northern Mindanao
Mindanao State University – Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography	ARMM Region
Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology	MIMAROPA
Mountain Province State Polytechnic College	Cordillera Administrative Region

Naval State University	Eastern Visayas
Negros Oriental State University	Central Visayas
North Luzon Philippines State College	Ilocos Region
Northern Iloilo Polytechnic State College	Western Visayas
Northern Negros State College of Science and Technology	Western Visayas
Northwest Samar State University	Eastern Visayas
Northwestern Mindanao State College of Science and Technology	Northern Mindanao
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology	Central Luzon
Nueva Vizcaya State University	Cagayan Valley
Occidental Mindoro State College	MIMAROPA
Palawan State University	MIMAROPA
Palompon Polytechnic State University	Eastern Visayas
Pampanga State Agricultural University	Central Luzon
Pangasinan State University	Ilocos Region
Partido State University	Bicol Region
Philippine Merchant Marine Academy	Central Luzon
Philippine Military Academy	Cordillera Administrative Region
Philippine Normal University	NCR and other locations
Philippine State College of Aeronautics	NCR and other locations
Polytechnic University of the Philippines	NCR and other locations
President Ramon Magsaysay State University	Central Luzon
Quirino State University	Cagayan Valley
Rizal Technological University	NCR
Romblon State University	MIMAROPA
Samar State University	Eastern Visayas
Siquijor State College	Central Visayas
Sorsogon State College	Bicol Region
Southern Leyte State University	Eastern Visayas
Southern Luzon State University	CALABARZON
Southern Philippines Agri-Business and Marine and Aquatic School of Technology	Davao Region
Sultan Kudarat State University	SOCCSKSARGEN
Sulu State College	ARMM Region
Surigao del Sur State University	Caraga
Surigao State College of Technology	Caraga

Tarlac Agricultural University	Central Luzon
Tarlac State University	Central Luzon
Tawi-Tawi Regional Agricultural College	ARMM Region
Technological University of the Philippines	NCR and other locations
University of Antique	Western Visayas
University of Eastern Philippines	Eastern Visayas
University of Northern Philippines	Ilocos Region
University of Rizal System	CALABARZON
University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines	Northern Mindanao
University of Southeastern Philippines	Davao Region
University of Southern Mindanao	SOCCSKSARGEN
University of the Philippines	NCR and other locations
Visayas State University	Eastern Visayas
West Visayas State University	Western Visayas
Western Mindanao State University	Zamboanga Peninsula
Western Philippines University	MIMAROPA
Zamboanga City State Polytechnic College	Zamboanga Peninsula
Zamboanga State College of Marine Sciences	Zamboanga Peninsula

Since they're already benefiting from the government, why do students from state-run universities still go against the state?

They are the hope of our nation, those especially studying in state universities who need to maintain an average grade. These are considered as the cream of the crop already. If they are the cream of the crop, they should be the hope of the land.

These youth are given education no less than the government. In state universities, you are given free education by the government and yet they have not graduated and they are already going against the government that gives them free education.

If the students have to learn something, if they have questions or doubts, maybe we can shed light on what a student should learn. Maybe this is also to develop our sense of nationalism and love of country. Comparing it to PMA scholars, where back then they were required to work for the government after their graduation. All cadets get free tuition and even receive salaries all while lodging and eating for free inside the academy's barracks. State university students, meanwhile, have differing levels of grants, with some being forced to take part-time jobs to make do and graduate. All cadets get free tuition and even

receive salaries all while lodging and eating for free inside the academy's barracks. State university students, meanwhile, have differing levels of grants, with some being forced to take part-time jobs to make do and graduate.

I truly believe that the education is the only way our country Philippines will prosper if children are getting a good education. This is the only way things will bring a change for the better to our lives and the better of our Philippine society today. The shortages of classrooms and textbooks are particularly severe. The fact that teachers are paid subsistence wages is only half of their sad story. Their daily bout with dilapidated classrooms, overcrowded classes, and lack of teaching materials, among others, make the teachers hardly rewarded work even more difficult.

In lieu of paying the tuition fees of undergraduate students in state universities and colleges (SUCs), Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia, Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III and Budget Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno recommended the full funding of the Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST). They said it is a "better alternative because it provides a more coherent



and comprehensive framework to address the educational needs of the students and is better designed to ensure a more efficient and effective use of government funds”.

The economic experts cited several reasons, first of which is the fact that only 12 percent of the students in SUCs belong to the bottom 20 percent of the family-income classification. This means that government funding will largely be spent paying for tuition of students who may be able to afford to pay, anyway.

Another reason given was that tuition constitutes only one-third of the annual cost of attending college. Other expenses include living expenses and instructional materials. That said, the poor families would still be unable to send their children to college even if tuition were free, because it would still be difficult to raise the bigger chunk of money (two-thirds) needed to pay for a full college education.

Apart from these important issues, the economic managers are concerned about the possible exodus of students from private higher educational institutions toward the SUCs. This would have an effect on the quality of graduates *and* also affect the government’s budget. “The budgetary support for free tuition will be difficult to sustain,” they said in their position paper. The SUCs would require about P28 billion from the government to cover the tuition of the 1.4 million students currently enrolled. If the enrolments increase in the coming years, this amount would still balloon substantially.

The UniFAST was established in 2014 through Republic Act 10687. Its task is to unify and harmonize all modalities of publicly funded Student Financial Assistance Programs (StuFAPs), like scholarships, grants-in-aid and student loans for tertiary education. The economic experts see it as a wiser, more prudent move to support UniFAST instead so it could do its job efficiently. They all agree that “the UniFAST is better designed to ensure a more efficient and effective use of government funds”.

The economic managers raised valid points our lawmakers need to consider before the legislation is passed. This issue definitely deserves thorough study since the nation’s budget is not that huge and we definitely need to be prudent about our spending priorities. Education is very important, more reason the limited money should go to those who need it most.

I don’t really see our country will overcome its crisis in the next 10 to 20 years. Our country Philippines has fallen behind in in key areas of education. I hope everyone can agree why our education today is wrong on so many levels, so together we can work jointly and help our students and our country succeed.

Looking at the bright side, it would be a big help to our beloved parents. Huge amount of money will be kept. That money can be used for other household purposes.

It is likewise indicated that students from poorer households had a lower chance of getting into SUC’s because of competition and limited slots. To the extent that government surveys typically fail to capture responses from the richest households, the degree of education inequality may actually be larger.

Students has a limited option to choose what course they would like to take advantage with. There were only limited number of students allowed per classrooms. Some students were in doubt because of return of service although it’s the only way to help the university clean.

If financial access were the only problem, then free tuition may help the poor access SUCs more. But this is not the case. Public colleges, unlike public elementary and high schools, almost always screen students using other criteria (e.g., admission tests and high school grades). Hence, perhaps a more important policy issue to address is why the richest students can better access SUCs in the first place, and why they edge out their poorer counterparts. If we don’t help poor but bright students hurdle other aspects of “accessibility”, then free tuitions will do little to help them. In fact, the benefits from free tuitions will only accrue more to the rich than the poor.

## V. FINDINGS

Reports said that as of November 9, only 9 out of 199 public higher education institutions (HEIs) –112 SUCs and 87 LUCs – have been given funds to implement the free tuition law during the first semester, while none has been paid for the second semester.

In order to guarantee success and to feel secured, Philippine government must invest time and money to education. The government has a responsibility to support and fund the programs required to be done to ensure a quality education for every student.

The economic achievement is based on education. I believe that education is the heart of a nation’s success and an aggressive willingness to compete. And that is a fact, no one can argue with that contention.

College is expensive, and the process of applying for and receiving financial is complicated and stressful. Many families do not realize that they will likely pay only a fraction of the sticker price of college. I support the goal of free college. More than ever, a college degree is a ticket to the middle class. The question is how

to get there. College is a financial burden for nearly every family.

The majority of young people who agreed that higher education should be funded by the government and that students should not have to contribute towards the costs of higher education. The main justification for the young people's support of free tuition was in terms of the perceived benefits of widening access. It was felt that the policy helps to encourage more young people to go to university, particularly those young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Young people were proud of this system, not just because, as they noted, they were able to benefit from it, but because it gave people across the Philippines 'equal opportunity' to go to university. Higher education was seen as improving people's life chances and as a means of helping them to become more socially mobile. That this is a universal benefit which treats everyone equally regardless of their background was considered its most important aspect, and interviewees variously described it as 'fair', 'equal' and 'open'. Means testing, or charging students from more affluent backgrounds, was seen as being too complicated to administer by most. Some students from other schools were of the opinion that it would be 'unfair' to charge pupils from richer families.

A frequently expressed argument for universal free tuition was that it was deemed 'fair'. However, students held different understandings of what fairness meant. Those in favour of free tuition tended to describe 'fairness' as everyone treated equally. In contrast, students in favour of targeted contributions tended to hold a view more allied to ideas of social justice and redistribution. Some young people, suggested that it would be 'fairer' if those from richer backgrounds were asked to contribute towards free higher education for the poorest.

The truth is, the poorest students today are edged out in SUCs due to many disadvantages they face in their early years. Rich students usually find themselves being propelled through their education with the full, undivided support of their family, relatives, and community. They are likelier to be enrolled in exclusive schools with top facilities; likelier to be exposed to numerous extracurricular and sports; and likelier to be paired with tutors whenever they encounter difficulties in school.

In contrast, poor students usually find themselves in more challenging situations. They are likelier to be enrolled in public schools with more crowded classrooms and subpar facilities; likelier to take on odd jobs to help in family finances; and likelier to study by themselves without the benefit of expensive tutors.

Such disadvantages are magnified by the relatively poor quality of public education, which has dragged the nation's overall educational quality. Although strides have been made in the past decade, the quality of math and science education in the Philippines still ranks among the worst in the region.

Of course, some public schools are of top-notch quality (e.g., science high schools). But today it is not uncommon to find some very rich families sending their kids to these public schools to boost their chances of admission in the top universities. Even at this level, rich students "crowd out" or compete away slots from poor but bright students.

The inequality extends to college admission preparations: rich parents are usually more aware of college admission processes (forms, fees, schedules) and also enroll their children in specialized review classes where they can take simulated college entrance exams.

In contrast, poor parents in some cases may even be unaware of such admission processes and lack resources to enroll their children in review classes. Without these, poor parents are less able to prepare their children for college the way rich parents can.

We need to address more strongly these disparities between the early lives of rich and poor students. Otherwise, we should not be surprised that rich students are the ones in SUCs, not poor students.

Some programs already aim to bridge such inequalities of opportunity. For instance, this is precisely the rationale behind PantawidPamilya, which incentivizes very poor parents to send their children to school, with the end goal of breaking the transmission of poverty across generations.

The K to 12 program is yet another intervention in basic education, albeit with a slightly different objective: to expand job opportunities and reduce the "education-skills mismatch" in the country. However, K to 12 still suffers from large shortfalls of teachers and facilities, and it will take longer for the program to help students better prepare for college or otherwise.

## VI CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evidence from this research suggests that young people are becoming increasingly focused on the labour market opportunities that a degree can provide. A number of students, felt that tuition fees might eventually deter people from poorer backgrounds to attend university. Research suggests that this is an unrealistic intention. Young people also differed in their attitudes and this had led some to question the value of going to university. The level of understanding of students were generally poor and worse among the

younger students, and is an area which may require further consideration from relevant bodies in the future.

The biggest challenge facing the country's education system is how to improve access to affordable quality education so that the country can maximize its demographic dividend. Some students tend to take education for granted although it's already free. Their parents are glad though. I was hoping that students will take education seriously. Free tuition is really a big help to us. We know that this is the largest fund that government had to released. Being able to attend to class on a daily basis is so so. In terms of quality education some might be able to exceed the quality but some might not.

Recently, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) illustrated the disadvantages of free tuition through infographics. It was based on a policy paper, "Who benefits and loses from an untargeted tuition subsidy for students in SUCs (state universities and colleges)?"

Giving financial assistance is anti-poor because tuition comprises only one third of college education costs. Most students from SUCs were not poor; in fact, rich households are the ones most likely to benefit from a free tuition law. Free tuition will benefit the rich, but freeing educational expenses, such as tuition, gives monumental relief to the poor. Why not distribute the subsidy of free education to other educational institutions? Assuming they are well-managed, the poor will be more qualified for SUCs.

Whether or not free tuition becomes a long-term investment for SUCs, much needs to be done about the government's budget, as well as the implementation of educational policies.

That Philippine's education system is not a bad one. It has plenty of opportunity for students to get an education. The sequence of events is the same for all students and is mandated by law. The law also dictates how many days and years a child spends in school, with it currently being 12 years with 200 days per year in school.

Students raised the issue as to whether a young person 'deserves' to have their higher education paid for by the government. The idea that young people should work hard and not take their learning for granted was espoused. They worried that where higher education tuition is free this would encourage students to study 'for the sake of it', which might possibly lead them to 'waste' government funding. This was seen as particularly likely where young people studied subjects which did not necessarily lead to a particular career. The intrinsic value of learning came secondary to the discourse of employability. Fears about graduate employment

opportunities and led some to question the value of higher education.

It would be fair to say that indeed the Duterte administration has nothing but good intentions only upon enacting into law the RA 10931. However, the government should have been more prepared in doing so. Bear in mind that it is not just a matter of giving away free education but moreover making education accessible to everyone.

The funding concern, however, cannot be ignored. Economic managers have stressed that the war in Marawi and other expenditures in national defense and law enforcement have been a significant drain on public funds. The government is also providing free kindergarten and two more years of basic education under the K to 12 program. Both Malacañang and Congress must make sure there will be enough funds to support the free tertiary education program.

Without any major reforms in the admissions requirements for entry into public universities and colleges, and with matching support to upgrade the quality of basic education, I am afraid that this law will never provide universal access to quality tertiary education.

In the first place, the very presence of competitive entrance exams is already evidence that access is not universal.

And if the system would operate like a free market, then those who have higher levels of competitiveness, like students who graduate from quality high schools, or those from families who can afford review classes, would have the upper hand. There is a big probability that this will crowd out those who are in fact in need of state support, the poor and who are graduates of less competitive schools.

The story of Philippine Education does not end in the signing of RA 10931 and the saga continues as the government tries better its implementation.

## VII. RECOMMENDATION

It would have also been more efficient and could push higher education institutions (HEIs) to enhance their quality had financial assistance been given directly to students, as this will spur HEIs to be more competitive for them to attract students on full scholarships.

But for now, it would be prudent to impose a moratorium on the establishment of SUCs and their local counterparts, and to devise innovative mechanisms to ensure that the quality education which is promised by the law is delivered. It is also imperative to come up with an IRR that will mitigate the law's adverse effects.

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