

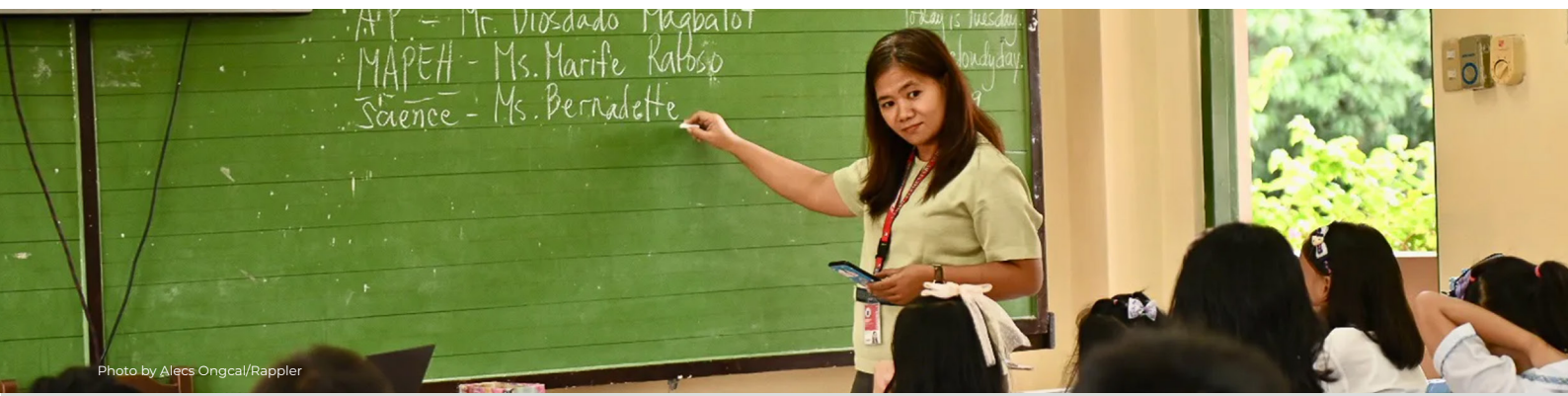


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POLITICAL LAW

The Imperative of a Second Congressional Commission on Education in the Philippines

by Joedel Penaranda

ABSTRACT

The Philippine Education System, amidst global challenges and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, stands at a point necessitating transformative reforms. This article explores the establishment and mandate of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) as a response to these challenges. Drawing parallels with its predecessor, EDCOM I, the paper highlights the distinct objectives, leadership structures, and anticipated impacts of the two commissions. EDCOM II's comprehensive approach, encompassing collaboration with emerging industries and potential legislative changes, underscores its commitment to creating a resilient, future-ready educational framework. The article concludes by emphasizing EDCOM II's potential in redefining Philippine education, aiming for a system that fosters thinkers, innovators, and future leaders.

The Philippine Education System is deeply connected to global realities. It faces numerous challenges, both internally and externally. It's essential to prioritize changes based on the system's capacity and resilience. A fresh approach, rooted in genuine human values and backed by determined political resolve, must be established in line with the principles of transformation. Now is the moment for collective action, from national to personal levels, to strike a meaningful balance between progress and fairness, global perspectives and local relevance, technological advancement and cultural conservation, and personal growth and unity. (De Guzman, 2003)

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a foundational pillar in shaping a nation's socioeconomic and cultural dynamics. The Philippines, with its diverse educational history, is currently in an evaluative phase. The challenges of the 21st century, coupled with the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitate a comprehensive review of its educational systems and practices.

The World Bank's 2022 report on the State of Global Learning Poverty presents data indicating that the Philippines has a learning poverty rate of 90.9% (World Bank Group, 2022). Within the context of the ASEAN region, this rate is only surpassed by Lao PDR's 97.7%, with Brunei opting not to participate in the assessment. This data suggests that a significant proportion of Filipino children, by the age of ten, face challenges in reading proficiency and comprehension.

Further, the 2019 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results provide additional insights into the state of Philippine education. The assessment revealed that 80% of Filipino students did not meet the established global minimum educational proficiency standards. Among the 79 participating countries, the Philippines' performance in areas such as reading, mathematics, and science was positioned towards the lower end of the spectrum.

In light of these findings, EDCOM II has been established as a national initiative, reflecting the Philippines' approach to addressing identified educational challenges and aligning its systems with global standards (Bacelonia, 2022).

This legislative commission aims to provide a structured framework for assessing and enhancing the country's educational landscape in response to both current challenges and future needs.

EDCOM II: CONTEXTUALIZING ITS GENESIS

EDCOM II, established under Republic Act No. 11899 in July 2022, exemplifies the nation's sustained commitment to refining its educational framework. This act is not necessarily novel but a continuation of a series of measures aimed at aligning the country's educational practices with global standards. The First Congressional Commission on Education, or EDCOM I, set the precedent for such initiatives. Instituted by a Joint Resolution of the Eighth Philippine Congress on June 17, 1990, EDCOM I's findings underscored the imperative to render the Philippine Education Sector more responsive, efficient, equitable, competent, and effective.



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The legislative foundation of EDCOM II, endorsed by prominent figures such as Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, underscores the urgency for robust educational reforms. This urgency is accentuated by contemporary global challenges, most notably the pandemic. The mandate of EDCOM II, as delineated by Republic Act 11899, is to conduct a "comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector." The goal is to recommend transformative, concrete, and targeted reforms, aiming to position the Philippines as a global contender in both education and labor markets from 2023 to 2025.

Central to EDCOM II's mission is an in-depth evaluation of the Philippine education sector, a timely initiative given the dynamic shifts in the global educational landscape. The commission seeks to harmonize the nation's educational strategies with international benchmarks, fostering an environment where learners are primed for success in a globally

interconnected milieu. Beyond addressing immediate concerns, EDCOM II is forward-looking, emphasizing the creation of an educational infrastructure that is adaptive and anticipatory, ensuring the nation's educational sector remains on a sustainable and progressive trajectory (Magsambol, 2023).

THE FIRST EDCOM

Understanding the potential impact of EDCOM II requires a look back at its predecessor. The Joint Congressional Commission to Study and Review Philippine Education, commonly referred to as EDCOM, was instituted in 1991. The inaugural EDCOM was given a 12-month mandate to conduct a comprehensive review of the nation's educational system, which marked a significant turning point in the nation's educational journey.

The 1991 EDCOM report unveiled critical challenges, including elevated dropout rates in rural locales, potentially due to the lack of foundational education. Additionally, there was a conspicuous scarcity of Special Education (SPED) programs, attributed to the dearth of specialized educational institutions. The report also identified a discernible decline in educational quality, which was linked to both constrained governmental investment and administrative inefficiencies. The Philippine Congress further pinpointed gaps such as limited educational access for significant population segments and a lack of resources in primary education. There was also a highlighted need for curriculum refinement and a more synergized alignment between academic institutions and the industry, which was leading to job mismatches for graduates.

In response to these findings, EDCOM advanced several strategic recommendations. These included the inception of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to provide oversight for tertiary institutions, curricular enhancements emphasizing core academic subjects, and the introduction of standardized tests like the National Elementary Achievement Test (NEAT) and the National Secondary Achievement Test (NSAT). A focus was also placed on teacher development, with proposals such as the establishment of the National Teachers Board under the Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC) for regular competency evaluations. Moreover, the EDCOM report provided foundational insights that would later influence the K12 program, suggesting an extension in the academic duration at either the elementary or secondary stages.

The first EDCOM's legacy provides valuable insights for EDCOM II, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, evidence-based decision-making, and adaptability. EDCOM II aims to apply these lessons to navigate present complexities and improve the Philippines' educational future.

THE MANDATE OF EDCOM II

EDCOM II's mandate is both expansive and specific. It seeks to address the multifaceted challenges facing the Philippine education sector, ranging from curriculum relevance to issues of access, inclusivity, and quality. The commission's role is not just evaluative but also prescriptive, aiming to provide actionable solutions to identified challenges (Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), 2023).

The research and advisory mechanisms underpinning EDCOM II's operations add depth to its mandate. With the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) as its research arm, the commission ensures that its decisions and recommendations are grounded in empirical evidence. This evidence-based approach is complemented by the insights and expertise provided by the Education, Legislation, and Policy Advisory Council.

However, the journey ahead for EDCOM II is not without challenges. One of the pressing concerns is the country's education funding. Currently, at 3% to 4% of the Gross Domestic Product, it falls short of the global recommendation of 6%. Addressing this gap is crucial, not just for improving educational quality but also for ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

EDCOM II's mission, therefore, is twofold. On one hand, it seeks to enhance the qualitative aspects of education, ensuring that learners receive a holistic and relevant education. On the other, it aims to address the structural and financial challenges that impede the realization of this goal.

PRIORITY AREAS

To ensure a holistic and targeted approach, EDCOM II has identified 28 priority areas spanning various facets of education, from early childhood to higher education and beyond. These priority areas serve as focal points for policy formulation, resource allocation, and strategic interventions.

In the realm of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), there's a pressing need to address challenges in the governance, implementation, and resourcing of health & nutrition programs. The shortage of child development centers, the need for high-quality child development workers, and the provisioning of resources for Early Childhood Education (ECE) are also of concern. Additionally, barriers related to parental perceptions and engagement in ECCD must be analyzed, and efficient financing mechanisms and governance structures need to be established.

For Basic Education, the focus is on enhancing textbook development, production, and distribution. The assessment system should adequately

track learners' progress and inform necessary reforms. There's also a call to address the medium of instruction, validate the K to 12 curriculum, and ensure a conducive learning environment. The Alternative Learning System (ALS) requires improvements in access, delivery, and curriculum content.

In Higher Education, the development of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)'s regulatory framework is paramount. This includes ensuring coordination between the industry and academia, addressing the quality of graduate education, and ensuring infrastructure for digital transformation. The internationalization of higher education, with a focus on addressing constraints and global rankings, is also highlighted.

Teacher Education and Development underscores the need for alignment among CHED, PRC, and DepEd. There are gaps in training and the quality of Teacher Education Institutions that need addressing. The welfare of teachers and their continuous professional development is also a priority.

The Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET) and Lifelong Learning sector emphasizes understanding the current and future workforce needs. The industry's involvement in upskilling, labor market outcomes, and the encouragement of enterprise-based training are crucial. Quality in TVET provision and a framework for recognizing non-formal and informal learning are also highlighted.

In terms of Governance and Finance, a coherent roadmap for the education sector is essential, with a focus on establishing coordination among agencies. The relationship between public and private education needs clarity, and there's a call for an integrated performance management system where funding aligns with student outcomes. The centralized governance structure and the enhancement of stakeholder participation are also areas of focus. Lastly, a Cross-Cutting theme is the connectedness of learner pathways throughout the educational system.

EDCOM I vs. EDCOM II

As can be gleaned, the Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) has been instituted twice, first in 1990 and more recently in 2022. Both incarnations of EDCOM share a foundational objective: the enhancement of the nation's education system. However, they differ markedly in their historical contexts, leadership structures, mandates, functions, and anticipated legacies. EDCOM I, initiated on June 17, 1990, through a joint resolution of the Eighth Philippine Congress, primarily aimed at the trifocalization of the educational system. This restructuring led to the establishment of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to oversee higher education and post-sec-

ondary skills training, respectively.

In contrast, EDCOM II, established on July 23, 2022, under Republic Act No. 11899, is co-chaired by legislators such as Senators Sherwin Gatchalian and Chiz Escudero, alongside Representatives Roman Romulo and Mark Go, with additional representation from the private sector. The committee consists of ten individuals, split evenly with five members from the Senate and five from the House of Representatives.

This recent commission aims for a holistic assessment of the Philippine education sector's performance, with aspirations of global competitiveness in education and labor markets between 2023 and 2025. Its mandate is expansive, encompassing the review of both formal and alternative learning systems, policy harmonization across DepEd, CHED, and TESDA, and collaboration with emergent industries.

While EDCOM I's legacy is firmly established in the trifocalization of the education system, EDCOM II's impact, though still unfolding, is keenly focused on addressing the contemporary educational challenges, many of which have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.



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EDCOM II Through a Legal Lens

The legal framework of EDCOM II provides it with both authority and autonomy. Established under Republic Act No. 11899, the commission is empowered to conduct comprehensive reviews, hold

hearings, and even recommend legislative changes.

This legal autonomy ensures that EDCOM II can operate without undue interference, focusing solely on its mission of educational reform.

The legal perspective also emphasizes the balance between reform and adherence to existing laws and regulations. While EDCOM II has a broad mandate, it operates within the confines of the legal system, ensuring that its recommendations are both innovative and compliant with existing statutes.

One of EDCOM II's distinguishing features is its emphasis on stakeholder collaboration. The commission recognizes that reforms need to be inclusive for them to be effective. By fostering a collaborative environment, EDCOM II ensures that all voices, from educators and learners to policymakers and industry experts, are heard and considered in the reform process.

Simply put, the legal lens is not just about compliance but also about leveraging the law as a tool for positive change. It's about creating an educational system that is not only legally sound but also responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Filipino people.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The establishment of EDCOM II comes at a crucial moment in the nation's educational journey. The challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic have brought to the fore the vulnerabilities and gaps in the current system. EDCOM II's mission is to address these challenges head-on, laying the groundwork for a resilient and future-ready educational system.

Collaboration with emerging industries is one of the unique facets of EDCOM II's approach, as established an Advisory Council to offer expert guidance and recommendations to the Commission. This council consists of renowned specialists from various sectors, including the civil society. By forging partnerships with innovative sectors, the commission aims to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, equipping learners with the skills needed for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and beyond.

Furthermore, EDCOM II's close coordination with lawmakers will play a crucial role in shaping the nation's educational policies. Proposals, such as the potential amendment of the K-12 law, will undergo rigorous scrutiny, ensuring that they are both relevant and effective. As opined by De Guzman (2003), this collaborative approach, which bridges the gap between policy and practice, is instrumental in ensuring that reforms are not just theoretical but also practical and implementable.

CONCLUSION

EDCOM II represents the Philippines' proactive response to the evolving educational challenges of the 21st century. As the commission embarks on its mission, it carries the weight of the nation's hopes and aspirations. The journey ahead is complex, but with a clear vision, unwavering commitment, and collaborative spirit, EDCOM II is poised to redefine the contours of Philippine education. The ultimate goal is to create an educational system that is not just about imparting knowledge but also about nurturing thinkers, innovators, and leaders who will shape the nation's future. Through EDCOM II, the Philippines is evidently taking a decisive step towards realizing this vision, ensuring that its educational legacy is one of excellence, inclusivity, and resilience.

"Now is the time to act. Now is the time we raise the standards (#ItaasAngAntas) of our education system. While we are sometimes struck in awe at the monumental task before us, we take to heart the hopes and dreams of Filipinos invested in education. We share their aspiration for a brighter, more meaningful, and more rewarding education system for each and every Filipino learner." (Yee, 2022)

1 Mr. Penaranda is currently a second year student of the Juris Doctor program at Faculty of Law of SPSPS.

2 De Guzman, A. (2003). The dynamics of educational reforms in the Philippine basic and higher education sectors. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 4(1), 39-50

3 World Bank Group. (2022). *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update*. In World Bank.

4 In the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Philippines ranked last in reading comprehension out of 79 participating nations, as revealed in the results announced on December 3, 2019.

5 Bacsonia, W. (2022). EDCOM II a significant boost in education sector: Gatchalian. *Philippine News Agency*

6 An Act Creating a Second Congressional Commission on Education to Review, Assess, and Evaluate the State of Philippine Education Recommend Innovative and Targeted Policy Reforms in Education, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and for Other Purposes

7 Magsambol, B. (2023). What you need to know about EDCOM II that aims to fix learning crisis

8 EDCOM I led to the "trifocalization" of the educational system, streamlining the mandates and optimizing resource allocation across different educational segments. This strategic division, which saw the creation of CHED and TESDA, ensured that each segment of education, from basic to higher and technical-vocational, received focused attention.

9 Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS). (2023). EDCOM II to kick off this January.

10 https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Philippines/Education_spending

11 <https://edcom2.gov.ph/about-us/priority-areas/>

12 De Guzman, A. (2003). The dynamics of educational reforms in the Philippine basic and higher education sectors. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 4(1), 39-50.

13 EDCOM II Technical Secretariat is headed by the Executive Director Karol Mark Yee.

14 Yee, K. M. (2022). EdCom II and the promise of hope.

