

School-Based Management in Philippine Basic and Higher Education Sectors: Rationale, Practices and Policy Directions

Allan B. de Guzman, Ph.D.

Center for Educational Research and Development
Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas
Philippines

Abstract

This paper describes how school-based management (SBM) as a concept of school restructuring is initiated, operationalized and monitored in a developing country like the Philippines. This paper likewise accounts for various SBM development initiatives over the last decade, highlighting the system's ideal practices, driving and restraining forces that surround decentralization efforts, particularly in formal basic and higher education. Finally, policy options culled from educational studies are presented for purposes of forecasting future directions of SBM-based Philippine education delivery.

Keywords: Driving and Restraining Forces, School-Based Management, SBM policy options

“Decentralization and modernization are the cornerstones on which we hope to establish a new policy environment for educational excellence. But we must do the right things in the right way.”

(Ricardo Gloria, 1996)
Former Education Secretary

Introduction

The year 2001 marked the centennial of Philippine public education, the hundred years of direct contact of which with the Spaniards, Americans and Japanese, have given rise to a spectrum of educational variations, lines of emphasis and issues. Its transformation as a system of education calls for **synoptic interpretation**, which, according to Greene (in Hornedo, 1995) explains the meaning of patterns which become apparent only when obvious facts are placed alongside each other so they can visibly seen together. Further, isolated facts tend to make no sense by themselves, but assume significance only when perceived in relation to other facts. Synoptic interpretation, one of the basic human capabilities, is rooted in the assumption of the relativity of meaning, and on the further assumption that the greater the number of facts seen together, the more reliable the interpretation.

The Philippine educational system cannot be understood apart from its internal and external environments. Situated in a political and bureaucratic set-up, transitions, changes and major shifts both in thinking and practice can be better perceived in the

context of quality and excellence, relevance and responsiveness, access and equity, and efficiency and effectiveness. These four-fold criteria require continuous re-visitation, re-examination, and re-evaluation of educational structures, policies, processes and other mechanisms inherent in the management of schools and school systems.

Systems of education around the world, particularly those of developing and underdeveloped countries, are beset with restraining trends such as low performance of students, recurrent shortages, graft and corruption, unmotivated teachers and principals, myopic view of the system, low accountability level and poor monitoring and evaluation system, among others. With such trends, institutions of learning are challenged to identify for possibilities of how power and authority can be appropriately shared for purposes of facilitating self-management and improved decision-making. As a matter of fact, as early as the 1980s, several major shifts, collectively known as megatrends (Naisbitt, 1982, and Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1990) have been adopted to identify directions toward which education is moving. One of these shifts is characterized by change from *centralization to decentralization*. True enough, this shift is a moving force that has helped shape educational reform efforts in most parts of the globe.

The centrality of and the need to reconcile decision-making with responsibility and accountability has given rise to site-based management. Given several nomenclatures in literature, school or site-based management, as a revolutionary educational construct, has been described as the centerpiece for school restructuring (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Townsend, 1997).

Considering various studies initiated by the Philippine government to assess the performance of its educational system through the years, not to mention the high degree of openness of the country to changes in social, economic, cultural, technological and political milieus, there is need to describe synoptically how school-based management efforts are initiated, operationalized and monitored in a developing country like the Philippines.

Towards Decentralization

The century-old Philippine Education system started to operate when Act No. 74 was first instituted in 1901. This milestone in Philippine history established a highly centralized public school system with all schools and colleges under the direct regulation and supervision of the Bureau of Public Schools and the Bureau of Private Schools. It was only in 1975 when a massive reorganization was implemented in conformity with the Integrated Reorganization Plan of the government. This event signaled the beginning of the Education Department's decentralization. Since then, the Department has undergone a series of changes in structure, management operations and bureaucratic procedures aimed at increasing its effectiveness and efficiency. Operating on the concept of decentralization, the task of responding to the varying needs of the different regions was given to the regional directors exercising line functions. As a result of this move, top officials at the Central Office are given more time for policy making and attending to higher administrative issues. Consistent with the provisions of the Education Act of 1982, Executive Order 117, s. 1987, otherwise known as the Reorganization Act of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, has made it clear that the Ministry, now the **Department of Education**, "shall be primarily responsible for the formulation, planning

and implementation, and the coordination of policies, plans, programs, projects, in formal and non-formal education at all levels and areas including elementary, secondary, technical-vocational and non-formal education, and supervising all educational institutions, public and private, and providing for the establishment and maintenance of a complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the goals of national development”.

Moreover, the passage of Republic Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, expanded the participation of stakeholders in education. Consequently, the Department of Education has gone through several organization moves toward the sharing of authority, power and influence in appropriate levels.

Reform efforts to improve the structural delivery of the Philippine educational system were facilitated through various education studies initiated by the government and other agencies. As an outcome of these studies, the Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) pursued major reform initiatives in the three-tier education system of the country. The EDCOM was tasked to undertake a national review and assessment of the education and manpower training in the country with a view to: (a) enhancing the system’s internal capability to satisfactorily implement the constitutional provisions on education; (b) providing the system with the needed financial and other infrastructure support; strengthening its linkages with all sectors concerned with human resource development; and assisting education in achieving its sectoral goals and targets through strategies consistent with the nation’s development perspectives. The over-all decline in the quality of education, as identified by the study, indicated under-investment in education on the part of the government and poor management of the educational establishment. Significant among the recommendations of EDCOM was the enactment of the policy on *tri-focalization* in the mid-1990s. Prior to this move, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS), had sole responsibility for the formulation, planning, implementation and coordination of all educational efforts in formal and non-formal education in the country, and it supervised all education institutions, both public and private. Following the commission’s recommendation on needed reforms in the education and training concerns of the country, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) was set up in 1994 to oversee tertiary education programs. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), for its part, was created one year later in the same way to supervise technical and vocational degree programs. The newly established tripartite management structure allowed the Department to narrow down its focus and direct its attention exclusively to basic education.

Decentralization Defined

While various educationists and authors have interpreted school-based management as authority and responsibility sharing (Sergiovanni, et al, 1999; Lunenberg and Ornstein, 2000), its potential contribution to educational improvement, quality acceleration and sectoral empowerment are overlooked in countries where the search for positive changes are not only incremental but systemic.

In the Philippines, decentralization of educational governance is rooted in the following principles of shared governance (Republic Act No. 9155):

- (i) Shared governance is a principle which recognizes that every unit in the education bureaucracy has a particular role, task and responsibility inherent in the office and for which it is principally accountable for outcomes;
- (ii) The process of democratic consultation shall be observed in the decision-making process at appropriate levels. Feedback mechanisms shall be established to ensure coordination and open communication of the central office with the regional, division and school levels;
- (iii) The principles of accountability and transparency shall be operationalized in the performance of functions and responsibilities at all levels; and
- (iv) The communication channels of field officers shall be strengthened to facilitate flow of information and expand linkages with other government units and non-governmental organizations for effective governance.

To the Department of Education, decentralization consists of the promotion of school-based management, the transfer of authority and decision-making from the central and regional offices to the school divisions in the provinces and cities; sharing education responsibilities with other stakeholders such as local government units (LGUs) and parent-teacher associations (PTAs); and the devolution of education functions (PESS, 1999).

On the whole, decentralization of education in the Philippines is interpreted in both local and global perspectives. On the one hand, decentralization, from the local perspective, involves the dispersal of power and authority from the center to lower level institutions for greater access to government institutions. Where appropriate, decentralization also means less government in order to enable the private sector and civil society to assume a number of functions conventionally done by the government. The concept of decentralization prompted the Ramos administration (1990-1996) to identify the 5Ds of decentralization, namely: deregulation, decentralization, devolution, democratization and development. On the other hand, decentralization, from the global perspective is a process that enables local government units to become more internationally competitive by providing them opportunities to participate in the international market, thus giving them the opportunity to seriously “think global”, yet continue acting local (Brillantes, 1999).

While there is much opposition to decentralization, the Philippine government strongly believes that such effort is not intended to weaken central authority, but as a process that trims the range of functions in the bureaucracy in order to wield a “bigger stick” with respect to issues relative to quality-control and equity-assurance functions. (PESS, 1998).

Aspects of Decentralization

Decentralization aims at widening decision-making capability while increasing responsibility and accountability, hence, end-users are typically considered as the ultimate beneficiaries. In the school context, areas of concern that call for decentralization efforts are those that closely relate to student welfare. Specifically, these consist of decisions on programs, curriculum, time allocation, and instruction (Candoli, 1995). Common elements in the perspectives of various authorities on School-Based

Management (SBM) are knowledge, technology, power, material, people, time and finance.

Filipinos consider local autonomy as an integral part of a democratic government (Guevara n.d.). This philosophy is clearly perceived with the passage of various laws that call for decentralization or local autonomy, namely: the Local Autonomy Act of 1959, the Barrio Charter Act of 1959, the Decentralization Act of 1967, the 1973 Philippine Constitution, the 1983 Local Government Code and the 1987 Philippine Constitution. All these facilitated the decentralization efforts of the country in all its services.

Decentralization of educational efforts may, however, be not that easy. Brillantes (1999) noted that the Philippine politico-administrative history is replete with examples of conflict between a highly centralized governmental structure and demands for autonomy among the component local units. Apparently, there is imperative need for dominant and assertive leadership for the consolidation and the very survival of a weak state. In another perspective, there is demand among local institutions for autonomy from the central government to enable them to be more responsive to local problem situations and strengthen a weak status. The foregoing tensions are felt in the education and training sector of the country (PESS, 1999).

Decentralization is a management issue (Fiske, 1996). Decentralization may be broad or constrained, depending on how authority is shared and distributed and the extent to which individuals assume responsibility and accountability. Rondinelli, et al (1983), for their part, identified deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization as typologies of decentralization. Table 1 on the following page describes the salient features of these typologies.

Table 1: Decentralization Typologies (Rondinelli, et al., 1983)

Typology	Nature
Deconcentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The handling over of some amount of administrative authority or responsibility to lower levels within central government ministries and agencies • The shifting of workloads from centrally located officials to staff or offices outside of the national capital or center • Giving some discretion to field agents to plan and implement programs and projects, or to adjust central directives to local conditions, within guidelines set by the central ministry or agency headquarters.
Delegation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfers managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions outside the regular bureaucratic structure and which are only indirectly controlled by the central government. • Ultimate responsibility remains with the sovereign authority.

<p style="text-align: center;">Devolution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation or strengthening, financially or legally, of sub-national units of government, the activities of which are substantially outside the direct control of the central government. • Local units of government are autonomous and independent, and their legal status makes them separate or distinct from the central government. • Central authorities frequently exercise only indirect, supervisory control over such units.
<p style="text-align: center;">Privatization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total transfer of authority to private establishments or individuals

In the light of the foregoing decentralization typologies and as indicated by various studies done in the country, the overall management system of basic education operates on the concept of deconcentration. Compared to other government agencies, such as the health and agriculture departments, decisions on overall policies and management standards in education are still the concerns of the Department of Education. The Local Government Code of the Philippines (1996) has made explicit the extent to which local government units in the country can exercise responsibility, which is confined only to the following:

- (i) construction, repair, maintenance of school buildings and other facilities of
- (ii) public elementary and secondary schools;
- (iii) establishment and maintenance of extension classes where necessary; and
- (iv) sports activities at the division, district, municipal, and barangay levels.

The Philippine school system is considered as one of the largest in the world. The education department exercises supervision and regulation over 7,444 private schools in the country, compared to its power to control, regulate and supervise the operations of 40,336 public elementary and secondary schools (DepEd Fact Sheet, 2001). Moreover, the Congressional Commission on Education Study, known as the EDCOM Report, disclosed that enrolment at all school levels was 16.5 million as of 1991. Recent statistics from the Department of Education (DepEd), alone, reveals that as of Curriculum Year 2000-2001, the combined enrolment size in the basic education system was 19,138,635, indicating dramatic increase in and demand for education in the country. Statistical reports from the Commission on Higher education (2001) indicate a total of 363, 640 students enrolled during the School Year 2000-2001. The figures cited by the two agencies infer the need to decentralize the management of the education system in the country.

Though there were efforts to share and distribute authority and responsibility to local education and government units, decentralization has, in fact, permeated areas such as education financing, teacher effectiveness, curriculum development, textbooks and instructional materials, language of instruction, and student assessment.

Decentralization Initiatives in Basic Education

Education Financing

As indicated by the PESS Report (1999), community control over basic education has expanded as parents and local authorities have assumed an increasingly growing financial role. As of 1994, parents and local governments shouldered 52 per cent of the total education cost in the country.

Consistent with the country's budgeting practice, the Congress of the Philippines requires that proposed expenditures be very precisely specified. Once specified and embodied in the General Appropriations Act (GAA), there is little or no room for DECS or for local education authorities to change or redirect expenditures within the budget. For lower education, Congress provides the Department of Education with a budget for every school division, while a separate budget line is set for every school at the secondary level.

In its Master Plan for Basic Education (MPBE), the Department of Education observed that the current system of budgeting and management discourages innovation at this school level, that few schools generated their own funds or had access to discretionary resources, and that few school heads exercised genuine instructional leadership or assumed a financial management role.

The foregoing scenario can be attributed to the following concerns: (i) the system of decision and control of allocations for basic education from the government budget, and (ii) the *Magna Carta for Teachers* (RA 4670), which constrains the way centrally hired public school teachers are deployed in basic education.

The Quality and Equity Issue

Decentralization of the system of education in the country is due to the desire to achieve equity and quality. Equity, as a by-product of decentralization, is gauged in terms of the student participation rate. In the Philippines, the average participation rate is already high. The challenge to education policy makers is to adopt an effective mechanism through which access to education is achieved even by the poorest sectors of society, among whom incidence of non-enrolment and early dropout are highest. The issue of quality education, on the other hand, is measured in terms of the quality of instruction and students' extent and quality of learning achievement. There is no doubt that the former is the predictor of the latter. In fact, this has been substantiated by the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), where the Philippines came up with a dismal performance in both science (40th) and mathematics (39th) examinations. Other national examinations such as the National Elementary Achievement Test (NEAT) and the National Secondary Achievement test (NSAT) also showed the same gloomy situation.

To respond to the foregoing educational dilemma, foreign assistance programs have been initiated through the Official Development Assistance (ODA). From 1992 to the second quarter of 2001, a total of US\$15,191.74 million has been allocated for loans (87%) and grants (13%). To date, Japan is the biggest source of ODA to the Philippines, contributing about 45 percent of the total committed funds. Other major donors include the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the United States, France and Germany (ODA, n.d.). Through a combined loan of US\$ 218.2 million from the World Bank and

the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, the Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP) was launched in 1996.

The Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP) is the government's multi-faceted response to the need to improve the quality of education in public elementary schools. It operates currently in the 22 poorest provinces in the country, as identified in the Social Reform Agenda (SRA) and the Presidential Commission to Fight Poverty (PCFP). The project has a policy and institutional framework (PIF) intended to (i) improve the adequacy, efficiency and equity of sub-sector funding; (ii) ensure that basic inputs are delivered to project schools; (iii) introduce systems and procedures to decentralize selected education functions and corresponding resources; (iv) measure the impact of project interventions on cost and learning; and (v) provide a framework for handling resettlement issues. The project supports the decentralization and modernization thrusts of the Department's ten-year Master Plan for Basic Education (1996-2005). In this project, key functions will be moved from the central and regional levels to the school divisions, city and provincial, to stimulate initiative and creativity at the field level and bring about greater school effectiveness.

Similarly, a seven-year intervention program geographically targeted to the 26 underserved, poverty-stricken Social Reform Agenda (SRA) provinces was implemented. Bearing the title, Secondary Education Development and Improvement Project (SEDIP), this government initiative involves the grassroots, is participatory in approach or bottom-up, as it decentralizes educational management down to the level of the school. Salient in this project is the lead role function of the city and provincial school division offices in the planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating school performance.

Another interesting initiative of the government is the **Adopt-A-School Project** (RA 8525). This project taps the local business sector and external funding bodies for assistance such as building and facilities construction. Through this project, corporations, business establishments, non-government organizations and private individuals have become partners of the government in addressing perennial problems of the educational system such as lack of classrooms, desks and textbooks.

Moreover, the Philippine government has initiated the following policies geared toward improving education access and completion rates of under-served populations. The first policy operates on the twin-concept goal mandating that (i) every barangay should have its own elementary school and (ii) every municipality should have its own secondary school. Exemption from this goal shall apply to very small barangays and municipalities. The second policy relates to the implementation of the Education Service Contracting (ESC) scheme—a policy initiative that gives full scholarships to high school students who cannot be accommodated in public schools and have no choice but to enroll in private schools.

Interestingly, at the dawn of the 21st century, the Department of Education initiated the *Zero Collection Policy*, which bans the collection of contributions and fees during the enrolment period and *Non-Commercialization*, which stopped all official endorsements or accreditation of goods and services as endorsements distort market forces.

Teacher Effectiveness

The 1991 EDCOM report offered vital measures intended to enhance teacher effectiveness. These include providing periodic licensing tests to qualify college graduates to teach and determine promotions; imposing higher admission requirements for pre-service teacher education, establishing centers of excellence for teacher education to attract the best candidates; providing scholarships for teacher education; and improving and expanding teachers' benefits, to include comprehensive dental care and free legal services. On top of these recommendations, are the following recommendations of the PESS (1999):

- (i) make teaching the primary activity of teachers and eliminate various distractions that remove teachers from classrooms on a regular basis. (These include the current practice of assigning teachers to administrative and clerical functions in schools and local district offices, involving teachers in fund-raising activities for the school during school hours, and engaging teachers heavily in the electoral process);
- (ii) expand the mandate of local school boards to include decision-making over teacher deployment, promotions and incentives that hold promise for effecting improvements in the quality of teaching; and
- (iii) provide incentive schemes that will reward teachers for what they know and do, as measured by objective, multi-faceted performance assessments, rather than simply how long they have been in the system. Widening the pay structure within grade levels allows differentiation among teachers by measured competencies and performance.

Though many recommendations offered by education studies are shelved, various strategic reforms as indicated in the 2001 Year-End Report of the Department (PDI, 2001), have been implemented to improve teacher welfare as follows:

- (i) **Checkless Payroll System.** This aims to remove the bottleneck that delays salaries and places the teacher in the vicious cycle of debt and deduction
- (ii) **Loan Restructure.** This aims to make credit sources with low interest rates available to teachers.
- (iii) **Increasing the Take Home Pay.** The DepEd stopped erosions in the salary of teachers by correcting unauthorized deductions by private lending agencies, by providing clothing allowances in cash, by acting against illegal contributions and by stopping excessive X-ray fees.
- (iv) **Increase in Election Per Diem.** Increase from 800 to 900 Php was made and stipulated through a MOA that teachers be paid promptly on election day.
- (v) **Salary Increase.** This aims to make the salary structure realistic and responsive to the economic situation.
- (vi) **Teacher Development Program.** This consists of pre-service and in-service components. The former involves deregulation and re-orientation of programs and studies of teacher education institutions toward specific teaching competencies. The latter, on the other hand, sustains the professional upgrading or development of teachers through revitalization of existing school-based structured learning action cells intended to improve

the teachers' managerial and instructional skills (The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Report).

Curriculum Development

The dismal performance of students in national and international examinations have always been attributed not only to the quality of instruction but also to the kind of curriculum offered to students. Curriculum, at whatever level of education, may or may not have **balance, articulation, sequence, integration and continuity (BASIC)**. The issue of balance often leads to an overcrowded curriculum. In the Philippines, curriculum strengths and weaknesses are frequently the focus of researches in education. As indicated by the report of the Committee on Information Technology, Science, Mathematics Education and other Technologies (ITSMEOT) of the Presidential Commission on Education Reforms, the elementary curriculum is overcrowded, rendering both teachers and students less capable of focusing on the basic skills for current and future academic success. The Secondary Education curriculum, on the other hand, is perceived as an area that needs streamlining to facilitate mastery of skills, depth of conceptual understanding, and appreciation of science and technology as part of daily life (PCER, 2000).

Another contributory factor to the unsatisfactory performance of students is the tendency of educators to adopt the ***cookie-cutter approach*** to educational management (CCSD, n.d.) or the one-size-fits-all approach that makes formal education irrelevant to the diverse contexts of the learners. Curriculum should be less prescriptive and allow a high degree of flexibility for teachers to be free to innovate. Present-day educational realities dictate an interactive process in which delivery structure is two-way in orientation and facilitates both top-bottom and bottom-up thinking processes.

The foregoing observations prompted the government to implement the 2002 Restructured Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC). As an offshoot of intensive studies and consultations with experts and field practitioners, the new curriculum distinct from previous curricula, has the following features: (i) restructuring of the learning areas to five (Filipino, English, Science, Mathematics, and Makabayan); (ii) stronger integration of competencies and values within and across the learning areas; (iii) greater emphasis on the learning process and integrative modes of teaching; and (iv) increased time for tasks to gain mastery of competencies of the basic tool subjects (BEC, 2002). In the new curricular scheme, schools are allowed to design and contextualize the implementation of Makabayan (a subject which integrates the teaching of Social Studies, Technology and Home Economics, Physical Education, Health and Music and Values Education). During the annual Educators' Congress, it was interesting to note the following comments of the students regarding the 2002 Best Practices and Development Areas (Giron, 2002):

Student 1: *"We got more time to interact with our classmates."*

Student 2: *"We have more time to think of more interesting materials, our teachers encourage us to learn, to discover, to explore in very imaginative ways. They learn how to learn themselves to try new things."*

Student 3: *"In the end, we are empowered to learn anywhere even when left to ourselves."*

The newly restructured curriculum, which is in its pilot year, is yet to yield outcomes to speak of the government's efforts to respond to the growing complexities in education, consistent with the needs and problems of the learners.

Textbooks and Other Instructional Materials

Despite the influx of new and sophisticated learning tools, the textbook has always remained the most valuable adjunct of the teacher in the classroom. Throughout the history of Philippine education, various government-initiated programs have been implemented to address the yearly textbook problem. Besides the Filipinization of textbook, an act that encourages the writing of textbooks using Philippine sources thus, conforming with local situations and conditions. The formulation and adoption of policies, guidelines and priorities underlying the development and production of textbooks, supplementary and reference books, and other instructional materials for use in public elementary and secondary schools belong to the Instructional Materials Council Secretariat. Like any other government projects, the procurement of textbooks undergoes public bidding, using the lump-sum appropriation of the department for instructional materials (DECS Service Manual, 2000). Moreover, it is imperative for regional and division offices to ensure that books purchased are based on school needs and preferences and should not, in any way, influence the school selection process. The Department may only transact business with suppliers of goods and services accredited by the Central Office. The application of the “*sunshine principle*” or transparency in bidding procedures has made good governance evident in the Department. In fact, greater confidence in bidding procedures from the private sector has widened the supplier base, and together with the partial implementation of the system’s procurement procedure, a 35% cost reduction in biddings for school furniture and textbooks was realized. The procurement processing has been reduced from 9-12 months to 4 months in 2001. (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2001).

School-Community Dynamics

Cognizant of the cogent role that linkages and collaboration play in ensuring the survival and stability of any school or school system, the Department of Education, through the years, has given much and equal attention to close tie-up with community constituents for purposes of resource sharing. As early as 1989, Presidential Proclamation No. 480 was issued, declaring 1990 to 2000 as the Decade of Education For All (EFA). As a result, subsequent policies, programs and projects were consciously formulated against the backdrop of EFA objectives. Inter-sectoral and inter-agency coordination were achieved through the creation of the National Committee for Education For All (NCEFA). The devolution of basic social services in 1992 in the light of the Local Government Code has made government programs closer to the service communities. As a result of the devolution of central government functions, a number of government programs forged strong school-community dynamics in the country, as shown in Table 2.

*Table 2: New Educational Programs as a Result of Devolution**

Name of Program	Nature of Program
Day Care Centre Program	This program which used to be under the Department of Social Welfare and Development has been relegated to the local government units
Parent Effectiveness Service (PES)	This program provides parents with child development information.

DECS Pre-School Programme	This program which was launched in 1993 aims to provide 5-year old children in disadvantaged areas the stimulating experiences, required in developing their social, motor, and readiness skills prior to their entry to Grade 1.
Community-Based Pre-School	This collective partnership between and among the Non-Government Organization, the Department of Education and the Local Government Unit made possible the provision of early childhood education to pupils in various school divisions.
Pre-School Service Contracting	This alternative delivery system has the Non-Government Organizations, private schools, Local Government Units and the Parent Teachers Associations as service providers. The general arrangement is that DepEd will pay 250 Php per child per month for 6 months while the service providers will organize classes with 20-25 pupils per class as well as provide the salary of qualified classroom teachers, school/classroom facilities, adequate instructional materials and basic school supplies. Funding comes from the Department's regular budget, supplemented by the Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA) from funds raised through the sale of military camps
Alternative System of Education for children of Indigenous communities	This system of education has empowered the Department to develop and institute curriculum support materials that are culture-specific and responsive to the prevailing conditions of the service community.
DECS in the Barangay Programme	This program being implemented at the barangay level with focus on rural communities aims at establishing operational linkages with line agencies, local government units, local development councils and inter-sectoral consultative councils organized in every barangay.

*Data were culled from the EFA 2000 Assessment Country Report of the Philippines made available at http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/philippines/rapport_1_1.html)

Language of Instruction

In the Philippines, a bilingual education policy has been in effect since 1974, requiring English as the medium of instruction in Science and Mathematics, and Filipino in all other subjects. As noted by Ibe (in EDCOM, 1993), only in selective sectarian schools and in quality public schools is English strictly used as a medium of instruction in Science and Mathematics. Sections 6 and 7 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution clearly mandate the following:

The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall further develop and enrich on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages.

For purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English.

Despite the constitutional provision on the use of language, Ibe (in EDCOM 1993) noted that reports from regional consultations reveal that the bilingual policy has made learning difficult. Within schools, curriculum guidelines cannot control the actual language used in the classroom. Students and teachers tend to use the language which they are more competent in or comfortable with, and translate and code-switch whenever necessary.

Though relevant laws and provisions are in place, the long-standing language controversy in the Philippines still persists.

Student Assessment

While there are many arguments surrounding assessment systems in education, student performance was gauged through the National Elementary Achievement Test (NEAT) in 1993 and the National Secondary Achievement Test (NSAT) in 1994. Results of these national examinations were used as diagnostic tools in determining areas in the school system needing equally much attention. Over the last decade, according to Brigham (in PESS, 1999), it was observed that the scope of these two examinations were not reflective of curriculum content, and there were indications of test manipulation by school heads or district supervisors who systematically select students who will sit for the tests.

To date, efforts are being exerted in the Department to establish a clear set of goals and specific standards to facilitate the administration of a national examination in a decentralized and a multi-lingual education system

Decentralization Initiatives in Higher Education

The nine-year old Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines was created by virtue of the Higher Education Act of 1994. As a unit, it reports to the Office of the President and covers both public and private higher education institutions as well as degree granting programs in all post-secondary institutions. Moreover, its task is four-fold in nature. It is expected to (i) develop plans, policies, priorities and programs on higher education and research; (ii) set and enforce minimum standards for programs and institutions; (iii) recommend the allocation of resources to institutions and programs; and (iv) monitor the performance of the higher education system.

Three years after its creation, the Higher Education Modernization Act of 1997 (RA 8292) was enacted for purposes of having a more coordinated and integrated system and improving the effectiveness of internal governance in higher education. Specifically, the act placed the CHED Chairman as the head of all the boards, and specified membership to include congressional and regional technical representation, faculty, students and alumni representatives and two distinguished citizens.

The Philippine Higher education system is perhaps one of the most unique systems in the world. Table 3 below shows the distinguishing characteristics of higher education in the country which call for more decentralized efforts on the part of policy makers:

*Table 3: Distinguishing Features of Philippine Higher Education System**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education in 1998 consisted of 1383 colleges and universities enrolling about 2.4 million students (2nd in the world next to the US). • The Philippines ranked number 24 in the world with 2981 students per 100,000 population in 1995, ahead of Ukraine, Sweden, Switzerland, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia (UNESCO Statistics). • Virtually all students who finish high school go on to some form of higher education (CHED Statistics, 1996-1997). • The transition rate between secondary and higher education is exceptionally high • About 81 per cent of the institutions (1118 out of 1383) are privately owned and managed without subsidies from the government. • As of SY 1996-1997 three fourths of all students are enrolled in private higher education institutions. • Enrolments are concentrated in occupations that are intended to lead directly to employment. (e.g. business administration and accountancy, engineering, teacher training and medicine and nursing). • Undergraduate enrolment predominate in higher education with only 4 percent, and 0.3 percent account for the masters and doctoral programs, respectively. • Most higher education institutions also offer lower levels of education. • It has a functioning accreditation system. • The professional licensing examinations, given in a variety of fields, provide a <i>de facto</i> national “exit” test of system effectiveness. • Differential products are offered as a result of diversity in content, quality and price of higher education.

*Data culled from Philippine Education for the 21st Century. The 1998 Philippines Education Sector Study. *Technical Background Paper No. 3. Higher Education in the Philippines.* Asian Development Bank.

In the light of the foregoing characteristics of higher education in the country, the following table summarizes some of the decentralization initiatives undertaken by the government:

Table 4: Higher Education Decentralization Initiatives

Initiative	Nature
Deregulation of Private Education	This initiative aimed at liberalizing regulations on private education lifted the heretofore existing embargo on the establishment of new private institutions. As a result, the total number of 636 HEIs in 1992 rose to 1019 in 1995.
Principle of Indirect Assistance to Private Education	Though a violation of the constitution, funds were channeled to assist low income students enrolled in private institutions or for upgrading teaching staff through the College Faculty Development Fund (CFDF)

Progressive Deregulation	Private institutions that undergo voluntary accreditation and achieve Level III status are allowed to issue their own degrees without advance confirmation by the government (also known as “special orders”)
Establishment and Development of Centers of Excellence (COEs) and Centers of Development (CODs)	It aims to provide leadership and assistance to other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within their areas of coverage in terms of academic innovations, programs and methodology/curriculum development and other quality upgrading activities
Establishment of the Zonal Research Centers (ZRCs)	This is envisioned to be the extension office of CHED in selected HEIs in the regions to decentralize the research management of the CHED Research Division. It is tasked with, amongst other things, to implement viable strategies to continuously upgrade the research capabilities of HEIs.
Expanded Access to Educational Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expansion and Restructuring of the System of Public Scholarships ▪ Development and Implementation of Student Loan Schemes ▪ Development and Implementation of Socialized Tuition Fee Schemes

Table 4: Higher Education Decentralization Initiatives

Initiative	Nature
Expanded Access to Educational Opportunities	Besides the traditional scholarship programs and student financial assistance programs under Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE), the CHED also administers scholarship grants from the Poverty Alleviation Fund, the Higher Education Development Fund and Congressional Initiative Allocation. These financial assistance programs cater to different sectors of society, ranging from students and tertiary faculty members of cultural communities and rebel returnees.
Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP)	This is an education assessment scheme that recognizes knowledge, skills and prior learning obtained by individuals from non-formal and

	informal educational experiences
Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS)	This was designed to provide improved data gathering and processing for effective decision-making of the Commission through the use of Internet Technology. It was also designed to respond to the challenge of adopting IT in its information management to be eventually shared with other components of the Philippine education system, specifically the DepEd, TESDA, and other institutions concerned

Roadblocks to School-Based Management Initiatives

Basic Education Sector

The overall management system of elementary and secondary education in the Philippines follows the deconcentration form of decentralization. As noted by Fiske (1996), deconcentration is the weakest form of decentralization. Though management responsibilities shift from the central to regional or other levels, the fact still remains that the central office is in control. However, despite the lack of a formal mandate and strategy, some degree of devolution has already taken place. During the last ten years, the department has gradually devolved some of its previously centralized functions to the regional, and to a lesser extent, division levels. Increasingly, community constituents, particularly parents and industry, have been identified as partners of the school in the task of human formation. It should be noted, however, that the way power and authority sharing cascades down to the school level has been very minimal, if not negligible.

There are driving and restraining forces toward the fruition of a complete decentralized system of education. However, the following restraining forces call for an aggressive reform at the national level (PESS, 1999):

- (i) Congress sets the detailed and rigid specification of the budget. With a single-year budgeting system that prohibits the carry-over of unused funds from one year to the next; the under-utilization of the limited allocation for education in the national budget takes place;
- (ii) The *Magna Carta* for teachers restricts local education authorities from deploying the teaching staff to meet local requirements, to re-deploy teachers in response to demographic shifts, and to address teacher performance issues.

Higher Education Sector

In almost all countries in the world, the higher education system is considered as the most crucial area of governance as far as manpower development is concerned. This is a sector in society that helps address the kind of people needed in industry and in the professions. Considering the need to supervise and regulate an ever-increasing number of higher education institutions in the Philippines, the way to decentralization remains a

messianic vision to some, if the following inhibiting factors continue to prevail (PESS, 1999):

- (i) There are local public HEIs over which CHED exercises not even nominal oversight
- (ii) CHED has a degree of budgetary control over CHED-supervised institutions, but in practice, none over the SUCs;
- (iii) The CHED Commissioner who is an ex-officio member of the 1383 HEIs has no effective influence over the system, as a whole.
- (iv) The steady creation of new SUCs has inflated the budget for higher education at the expense of basic education (**n.b.** *The 1987 Philippine Constitution mandates that the highest budgetary allocation belongs to basic education*)
- (v) There is no clear-cut and effective counterforce to uphold higher education standards at par with international practices.

Roadmap to a Responsive School-Based Management System of Education

Today, more than ever, the over-all success of the education system lies on how self-governance may be facilitated without losing sight of issues relative to excellence, quality, responsiveness and equity. The era of intelligence restructuring (University Council 1998, Conceicao and Heitor, 1999 and Graves, 2001) is the place where school-based management efforts may be situated.

With the desire to effect an ideal environment for decentralization efforts, education studies conducted over the last ten years in the country indicated the following policy options (PESS, 1999) to hasten the effort of decentralization in a developing country like the Philippines:

Table 5: Policy Options for a Decentralized Philippine Education System

Basic Education Sector	Higher Education Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing the Powers of the Local School Boards • Rationalization of Teacher Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a small number of State Universities • Increasing the reliance of State Universities on income from fees and other revenue sources • Gradual withdrawal of public funding from other public higher education institutions • Encouraging private institutions to undergo the Expert Panel Validation Process

Conclusion

The Philippine Educational System may be likened to a boat sailing in a sea of changes and challenges. Cognizant of the potential and actual benefits of decentralization as a predictor of the system's over-all success, the system still has to reckon with the reality that the national government continues to dominate the allocation of fiscal resources in the politico-administrative system. The way to empowerment constitutes a long process. In fact, any act or move toward a devolutionized system invites the entry of politics, which in turn, raises the question of values and value systems. With the efforts initiated by the government in partnership with the various units of society, there is need to document the best and even the worst practices of the Education Department. The best practices in the form of success stories, once told, may give valuable insights as to what capability building programs may be instituted, both for individual and institutional purposes in order that local autonomy may be best operationalized. Emanating from the womb of a highly centralized set-up calls for a high degree of transcendence. Uprooting the system's built-in processes and mechanisms requires a definitive scheme for decentralization. The *cookie-cutter approach* of viewing decentralization efforts does not suit the present set-up of education in which educational thinking and practices are physically separated by the geographical locations of the schools. What the present system needs is an aggressive system of decentralization where local empowerment requires the following processes:

- **Envisioning.** Though local units are given the power and autonomy to decide on aspects relative to resource generation, spending authority, hiring, curriculum development, among others, key players in education, both at the national and local school levels, should be constantly involved in charting the direction of education, through open channels of communication.
- **Educating.** While decentralization requires the assumption of managerial responsibility, local officials should be given a well-planned, needs-based and competency-based capacity building program intended to hone their managerial skills and know-how.
- **Eliminating.** The process of decentralization recognizes the inherent capacity of the local unit to decide and get empowered without exercising any form of bias. Delegating responsibility, coupled with power, authority and accountability, should be pursued in an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence.
- **Equipping.** No institution can become a self-managing-self-governing and self-sustaining unit without being given the needed assistance and support from the various sectors of society. A strong partnership between the private and public sectors facilitates the mutual exchange of resources and expertise, both at the conceptual and technical levels.
- **Expressing.** Though given a wide latitude of autonomy, institutions do not operate in isolation from the rest of the system. The system's best decentralization practices are to be shared and communicated, either in oral or written form. It can best speed up the transition of other systems situated in an environment where restraining forces are strongly evident.

- **Evaluating.** Decentralization does not render the entire system a fragmented entity. System's circularity dictates that events and processes are to be assessed in the light of the entire system's objectives. A well-defined rubric of assessment will have to be defined to facilitate continuous improvement of decentralized effort. Systemic evaluation should involve all the key players and generate quantifiable results and documentation.
- **Expecting.** Though decentralization is a process-oriented system of educational restructuring, it is expected to yield quantifiable outcomes that speak of quality, equity, excellence and responsiveness in education as experienced by the school clientele. As the philosophy of change dictates, "gradual enough for the adjustment of the few, but enough momentum so that results may be seen within a given time frame."

On the whole, decentralization is not a panacea to systemic problems inherent in all educational systems. As a means to school empowerment, it calls for collectivity and collegiality. As an end, it requires a high degree of accountability. The Philippine Educational System remains as one of the systems of education in the world that anchors its efforts to school-based management. Though it *may not totally devolve* all its processes, its system of education will *continue to evolve* just like the phenomenon of **change**.

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