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Policy Notes

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Some issues on low participation rates in basic education

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More than a decade ago, the country committed itself to lofty Education for All (EFA) aims and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that include the attainment of universal primary education (UPE) and gender parity in education. As the 2015 MDG deadline approaches, there is concern (e.g., Caoli-Rodriguez 2007; Maligalig and Albert 2008) that the Philippines faces constraints in achieving UPE and other EFA targets and MDGs on education. Trends in primary school net enrollment rate (NER)¹ and other indicators on UPE do not look promising (Table 1). The 2009 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2008) even identified the Philippines as among a few nations whose NER went down from 1999 to 2006 and which has a considerable magnitude of out-of-school children.

Although many of the country's medium-term plans, including the Philippine Development

Plan 2011–2016, take due note of the importance of education in human development, public resources for education, particularly basic education, however, have been meager as seen in Table 2, with the country spending only around 3 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) for the whole education sector. From 2005–2010, the Department of Education (DepEd) budget ranged only between 1.8 and 2.3 percent of GDP, with real expenditures per

¹ The net enrollment rate, also called participation rate, is the ratio of the enrollment in a school-age range (6–11 years old for primary school), to the total population of that age range.

PIDS Policy Notes are observations/analyses written by PIDS researchers on certain policy issues. The treatise is holistic in approach and aims to provide useful inputs for decisionmaking.

The authors are Senior Research Fellow, Supervising Research Specialist, and Research Specialist, respectively, at the Institute. Many results stated here are part of an ongoing country study on Out-of-School Children, implemented by PIDS with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of PIDS or any of the study's sponsors.

Table 1. Performance of selected Southeast Asian countries on MDG2 (UPE) indicators

Southeast Asia	NER in Primary Education Total (%)			Proportion of Pupils Starting Grade 1 Who Reach Grade 5, Total (%)*			Literacy Rate of 15–24 Year Olds (%)		
	1991	2000	Latest year	1991	2000	Latest year	1990	2000	Latest year
Cambodia	69.5	91.1	88.6 (2008)	...	62.8	54.4 (2007)	...	76.3 ^h	87.5 (2008)
Indonesia	97.3	97.9	98.7 (2008)	83.6	95.3	80.1 (2007)	96.2	...	96.7 (2006)
Malaysia	94.0 ^a	96.9	96.1 (2007)	97.3	87.0 ^d	92.2 (2006)	95.6 ^e	97.2	98.4 (2008)
Philippines	96.5	92.3 ^b	92.1 (2008)	74.0	79.3 ^d	73.2 (2006)	96.6	95.1	94.8 (2008)
Thailand	75.8	...	90.1 (2009)	98.0	98.0	98.1 (2005)
Viet Nam	90.2	95.4	87.8 (2005)	80.0 ^b	85.7	92.1 (2005)	93.7 ^g	93.9 ^b	96.8 (2008)

Notes:

* The revised UN Official List of MDG Indicators, effective as of 15 January 2008, presents the "Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary" as the MDG2, Target 2.A, Indicator 2.2. However, due to lack of baseline data (1990), data were obtained from 1991. a refers to 1990; b, 1999; c, 2003; d, 2001; e, 1991; f, 1995; g, 1989; h, 1998.

Sources: UNSD MDG Indicators. <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx> (accessed 25 June 2011)

UNESCO Data Centre. <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx> (accessed 25 June 2011)

Table 2. Public expenditures on education across selected ASEAN countries

Country	1990	2000	2005	2009
Cambodia	0.8	1.3	1.4	1.4 [*]
Indonesia	1.7	2.5 ^{**}	...	2.8 ^{**}
Malaysia	5.5	5.6	5.1	7.3
Philippines	3.1	3.5	2.4	2.9
Singapore	4.0	3.9	3.2	3.1 [*]
Thailand	2.8	4.0	3.7	4.4

Main data source: Asian Development Bank Key Indicators

Notes: ^{*} 2008 data; ^{**} sourced from UNESCO Institute of Statistics

student of DepEd (in 2000 prices) even decreasing from PHP 6,601 in 1997 to PHP 5,022 in 2005, although spending per student recovered partially and rose to PHP 6,154 in 2009 (Majuca et al. 2011).

By tradition, Filipino society puts a high premium on education. Basic education is even considered as a human right: the Philippine Constitution explicitly mentions UPE and mandates the state to provide free public education in both primary and secondary levels.

But if families and government give a lot of importance to education, why is the Philippines not likely to achieve UPE by 2015?

This *Policy Notes* examines official NER figures and school attendance rates sourced from household surveys, and discusses the issue of out-of-school children and the reported reasons for their nonattendance. Some policy issues are then culled from the discussion.

School participation/attendance rates

When primary school participation rates and public resources for education are seen side by side with each other (Figure 1), it can readily be observed that retrogressions in the primary school participation rates are accompanied by weakening public resources for the whole education sector, including those for basic education. However, the decline in NER in the period after 2000 is also partly because of changes in definitions of the primary school age. From 2001 onwards, the DepEd revised the definition of primary school age NER to refer to children in the age group of 6–11

years.² Thus, the decline in the official NER after 2000 cannot strictly be interpreted to solely signify a worsening of the state of the basic education sector. One would expect diminishing returns to NER if the baseline were high. In addition, it can be observed from the primary school gross enrollment rate (GER)³ data (102.0%, 102.1%, and 100.8% for school years 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010, respectively) that there is a relatively high access for children to primary schools in the Philippines. The gap between the GER and the NER, however, indicates a sizeable number of over-aged primary school enrollees.

² This is on account of change in school-age entry. Before 1995, primary school-age entry was 7, and in 1995, this school-age entry was lowered to 6. The official NER continued to be computed up to the year 2000 for the population between the ages of 7–12, but starting 2001, the reference group changed to 6–11.

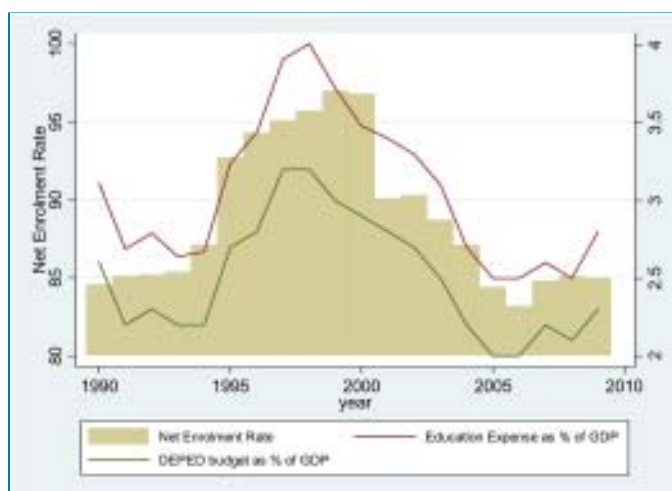
³ Gross enrollment rate refers to total enrollment in a given level of education, say primary, as a percentage of the population, which according to national regulations should be enrolled at this level, i.e., ages 6–11 years old for primary (and 12–15 for secondary).

⁴ The DepEd established BEIS in school year 2002–2003 as a key instrument for the monitoring and evaluation of the basic education sector. The BEIS data include information on education inputs, including the number of teachers, classrooms, other school facilities as well as education performance indicators for assessing access, internal efficiency, and quality.

⁵ Since official school-age entry in primary school is six years old, preprimary-aged, primary-aged, and secondary-aged children therefore refer to five-year-old children, 6 to 11-year-old children, and 12 to 15-year-old children, respectively. School-aged children refer to all those between 5 and 15 years old.

⁶ The NSO conducts the Labor Force Survey (LFS) every quarter. The APIS is conducted during years when the triennial Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) is not conducted while the FLEMMS is generally conducted every five years. The APIS and FLEMMS are riders to the LFS. These surveys have a national coverage and have regions for their sampling domains. At subaggregates below regions such as provinces, there may be very few sample households to base information from. The APIS, FLEMMS, and LFS ask respondents' report on whether or not school-aged members in the household are currently in school.

Figure 1. Trends in net enrollment rate (NER) and public expenditures for education



Sources: BEIS, DepEd; Department of Budget and Management (DBM)

The DepEd's Basic Education Information System (BEIS)⁴ provides a number of useful indicators of performance of the basic education sector, including indirect estimates of the magnitude of out-of-school children from the product of one minus the NER and the population of school-aged⁵ children. Like any data source, though, the BEIS has its limitation: it cannot be used to describe the individual characteristics of children who are not currently in school. Information on such children, including those who have never been to school, can, however, be sourced from household surveys conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO), particularly, the Annual Poverty Indicator Survey (APIS), the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), and the Labor Force Survey (LFS).⁶ Table 3 lists the country's estimated school attendance rates from the 2008 APIS, the 2008 FLEMMS, and the corresponding LFS rounds, together with the official NER figures for 2008–2009. While there are discrepancies in the values of participation rates from these data sources, the differences can be readily explained

Table 3. School participation/attendance rates in 2008 by age and by data source

Age Group	BEIS	APIS	LFS July	FLEMMS	LFS Oct
Preprimary age (5 years old)	39 ^a	60.4	65.9	-	65.9
Primary age (6–11 years old)	88.1 ^b	95.3 (90.8 ^c)	94.8	92.3 (85.2 ^c)	94.8
Secondary age (12–15 years old)	60.7	85.6 (66.2 ^c)	88.9	87.2 (60.1 ^c)	88.9

Sources: BEIS (DepEd); APIS 2008, FLEMMS 2008, LFS July 2008, LFS Oct 2008 (NSO).

Notes: a = public school data only; b = based on new population projections; c = adjusted net attendance rates (ANAR) that discount primary-aged children or older who are still in preprimary level, and secondary-aged children who are still in primary school.

on account of sampling errors and measurement issues.

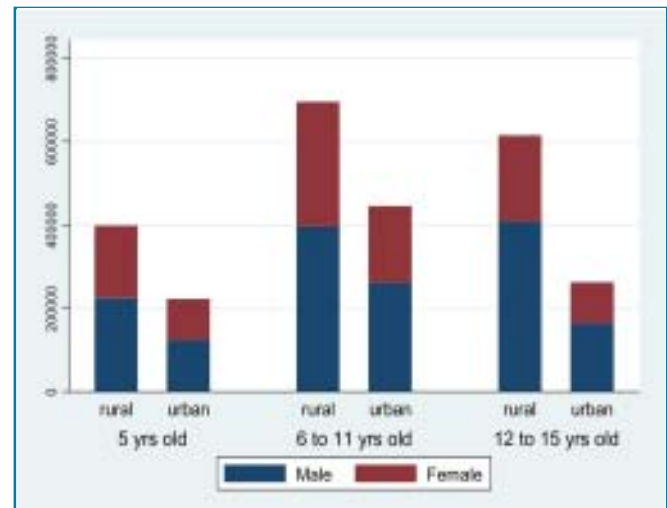
Regardless of what data source to use for participation rates, a considerable number of school-aged children (i.e., between ages of five and fifteen years) in the country are estimated in 2008 not to be in school. Out-of-school population is defined here to include not only the school-aged children who are not in school but also the primary-aged children and older who are still in preprimary school.

Late age entry

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of out-of-school children (OOSC) sourced from the 2008 wave of the APIS. Of an estimated 2.9 million children aged 5–15 years old in 2008 who are out-of-school, about 65 percent reside in rural areas. Among the nearly 3 million OOSC, 690,000 are preprimary aged, 1.27 million are primary aged, and 980,000 are secondary aged.

The incidence of OOSC among children aged 5–15 years in 2008 varies across the regions

Figure 2. Distribution of out-of-school children by location and by sex



Source: Authors' calculations on 2008 APIS (NSO).

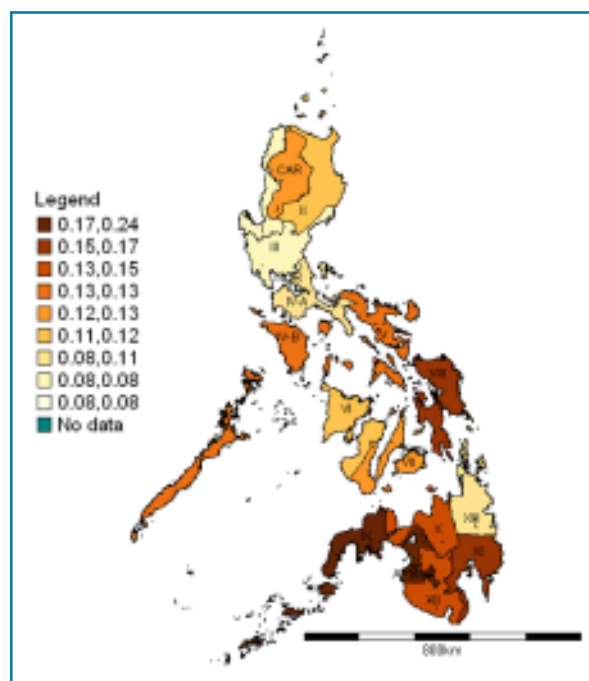
(Figure 3), with about one-fourth (24.2%) found in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) while two other regions—Zamboanga Peninsula (16.5%) and Davao (15.1%)—having incidences of OOSC that are significantly above the national average (11.7%). The incidence in ARMM is very high largely because the proportion of preprimary-aged children who are in school is just around one out of every ten five-year-old children (12.9%) compared with the nationwide rate of three of five (66.1%), and the percentage of primary-aged children attending at least preprimary-aged level (79.0%) is also about 10 percentage points lower than the national rate (90.8%). Aside from 700,000 preprimary-aged (five-year-old) children who are out-of-school, another 800,000 six-year-old children are not in school. As Table 4 indicates, these children are largely viewed as being too young to be in school. Among preprimary-aged children who are not in school, four out of every five are considered as being too young; about one out of twenty is reported to lack interest.

Three out of every five six-year-old children are regarded as being too young to be in school despite the DepEd's school age entry of six years old for primary school. The percentage distribution for the reasons for nonattendance hardly varies between urban and rural areas. The third prominent reason cited for nonattendance by five- and six-year-old children in urban areas is cost of schooling while in rural areas, school accessibility (either schools being too far, no schools within the village, or no regular transportation) is the third prominent reason.

Further evidence of late school entry can be found in the school attendance rates for primary-aged and secondary-aged children (Figure 4). A substantial number of six-year-old children are noticeably either not yet in school (14.5%) or still in preprimary school (25.0%). Even among seven-year-old children, about one in twenty (4.6%) are not in school, and another one in thirty (2.9%) are still in preprimary school. Among secondary-aged boys, a quarter (26.1%) are still in primary school and a fifth (20.5%) of secondary-aged girls are also still in primary school. A large number of these secondary-aged children who are still in primary school are 12-year-old children. But even among 15-year-old children, about one in twenty-five (3.9%) are estimated to be still in primary school.

There is wide acceptance that late enrollees may not be fully maximizing their learning achievements in school and may also be at risk of not completing their schooling. Data from the APIS 2008 suggest that an estimated 3.9 million children aged 7–15 years who are in school are at least

Figure 3. Incidence of OOSC among children aged 5–15 years across regions



Source: APIS 2008 (NSO)

Table 4. Percentage of five- and six-year-old children by reason for nonattendance in school by urban and rural areas (in percent)

Reason for Nonattendance	Five-Year-Old			Six-Year-Old		
	Urban	Rural	All Areas	Urban	Rural	All Areas
Schools are very far	0.28	4.09	2.74	1.27	6.80	5.05
No schools within the barangay	0.80	0.99	0.92	1.49	1.07	1.21
No regular transportation	0.37	0.14	0.22	0.00	1.12	0.77
High cost of education	6.39	2.12	3.62	16.00	4.09	7.86
Illness/Disability	1.47	0.83	1.06	5.61	1.93	3.09
Lack of personal interest	7.44	6.68	6.94	16.46	14.81	15.33
Cannot cope with school work	0.58	1.58	1.22	1.52	2.01	1.86
Problem with birth certificate	0.99	0.48	0.66	4.34	1.06	2.10
Too young to go to school	79.95	80.74	80.46	50.41	64.28	60.03
Others	1.74	2.37	2.15	2.90	2.81	2.70

Source: Authors' calculations on APIS 2008 (NSO)

two years above the official age for their respective grade or year level. Table 5 shows that many 12- to 15-year-old children are over-

aged for their year (23.0%) as compared with primary-aged children who are over-aged for their grade (15.1%).

Early school leavers

On a related issue regarding early school leavers, this *Notes* made use of information on children who have never been in school, new entrants to primary school, number of OOSC, and number of children by single age, and was able to disaggregate OOSC by school exposure (Table 6). Of the 2.2 million primary- and secondary-aged OOSC, about half are likely late entrants (who

are expected to enter before age 15); about nine out of twenty (46%) are found to have dropped out either temporarily or permanently from basic education, and about one in twenty (4.5%) is considered likely to never enter. While among primary-aged OOSC, the biggest share (87%) belongs to the late entrants, for the secondary-aged OOSC, a considerably bigger share consists of early leavers.

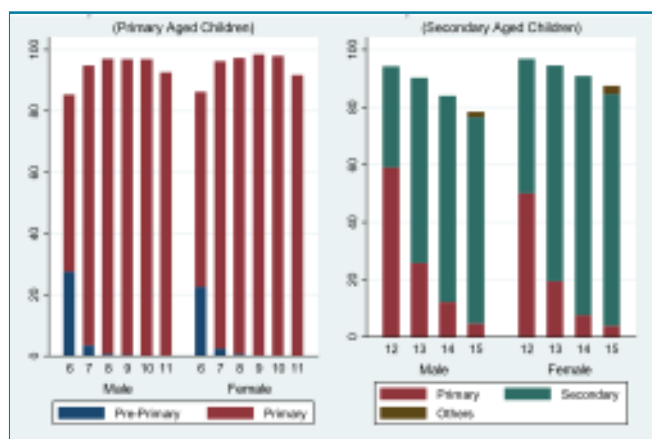
Further information from the APIS 2008 indicates that most of the children who leave early come from poorer families and that boys are more at risk of dropping out of school than girls, especially among the secondary school-aged children.

Gender disparities

The APIS 2008 indicates that the incidence of OOSC is higher among boys (13.5%) than among girls (9.8%). Of an estimated 2.9 million children aged 5–15 years old in 2008 who were not in school, about three-fifths (1.7 million) were boys and the rest were girls. Gender disparities in school participation are observed across the regions (Figure 5), with the disparities appearing to be intertwined with

other factors such as child labor and poverty that influence children's lack of participation in school. The gender disparities are not limited to school participation but also observed in other education statistics. The BEIS estimates that the primary and secondary cohort survival rates in 2008–2009 were at 75.4 percent and 79.7 percent, respectively, suggesting that a quarter of those who started Grade 1 did not complete primary school on time (i.e., within the six-year

Figure 4. School attendance rate among primary-aged and secondary-aged children



Source: Authors' calculations on APIS 2008 (NSO)

Table 5. Distribution of over-aged children by (urban/rural) location of residence and by sex

Location	Primary Aged			Secondary Aged		
	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes
Urban	341,267 (12.9%)	256,347 (10.0%)	597,614 (11.5%)	423,229 (20.9%)	297,847 (14.4%)	721,075 (17.6%)
Rural	686,482 (20.8%)	481,291 (15.3%)	1,167,772 (18.1%)	805,782 (30.1%)	612,232 (23.5%)	1,418,014 (26.8%)
Total	1,027,749 (17.3%)	737,638 (12.9%)	1,765,386 (15.1%)	1,229,011 (26.2%)	910,078 (19.4%)	2,139,089 (22.8%)

Source: Calculations on APIS 2008 (NSO)

Note: Percentages in parentheses are relative to total children of the pertinent age group.

period) while a fifth of those who started first year high school did not complete secondary school on time (within the four-year period). The cohort survival rate in primary school is less for boys than for girls. Males' completion rates are lower by 10 percent in the elementary level and 16 percent in the secondary level than the corresponding rates for females. Maligalig et al. (2010) estimate, from data gathered from the 2002, 2004, and 2007 APIS, and the BEIS, that primary school-aged girls are 1.54 times more likely to be in school than boys, all other things being equal. For the secondary school-aged, the estimate would be 1.34 times more likely for girls to be in school than boys. Various data sources indicate gender disparities not only in education outcomes such as participation and completion but also in achievements, generally in favor of girls. David et al. (2009) point out that recent data on achievement scores show that, on average, boys are also underperforming (compared to girls) in all topics, whether communication skills, numerical literacy, or analytical prowess.

Policy issues

This *Notes* highlighted three issues that deserve attention, namely: (1) lack of school participation is partly due to late school entry, (2) among secondary-aged OOSC, a substantial share are early leavers, and (3) there are gender disparities in participation rates in favor of girls.

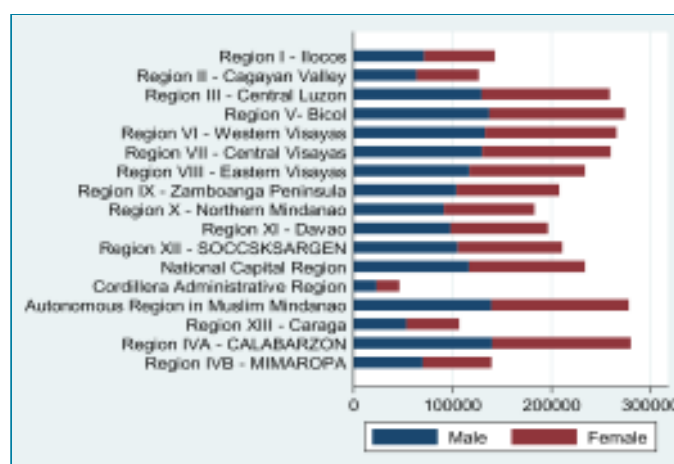
Late age entry may either be due to the lack of knowledge by parents or teachers, or both, about the DepEd official school-age entry in primary school, or to the lack of school readiness. This suggests the need to improve information campaigns regarding the official school-age entry

as well as to reassess the policy on school-age entry, and make changes in said policy, if necessary. Or it implies the need to have more interventions to improve the school readiness of children. With the recent implementation of the K-12 program by DepEd, there may have been improved information campaigns for early entry, but data are currently not available.

Table 6. Distribution (in percentage and magnitude) of OOSC by school exposure and age group

School Exposure Categories of OOSC (%)	Primary-aged	Secondary-aged
Dropped out (% of OOSC)	11.2	91.2
Expected to enter by age 15 (% of OOSC)	86.6	1.4
Expected to never enter (% of OOSC)	2.2	7.4
Total out-of-school children	9.2	10.4
School Exposure Categories of OOSC (population)		
Dropped out	141,451	893,277
Expected to enter by age 15	1,095,560	14,112
Expected to never enter	28,058	72,374
Total out-of-school children	1,265,069	979,763

Figure 5. Distribution of out-of-school children by region and by sex



Source: 2008 APIS (NSO)

Meanwhile, the reason why secondary-aged children leave school early is largely because of child labor and the children's lack of interest to stay in school. If children leave, it may be difficult to bring them back into the school system. DepEd Alternative Delivery Modes such as the Alternative Learning System are promising mechanisms to help these early leavers get their education. This, however, does not address the root of the demand-side issues which make secondary-aged children decide not to finish basic education. The government's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) seeks to offset high opportunity costs of families that decide to put their children to work over completing their education.

At the same time, it has been pointed out that participation rates of boys are lower than girls. There may undoubtedly be demand-side issues (with families possibly having "boys will be boys" attitudes) as well as supply-side issues (with the feminization of basic education wherein 90% of current teachers are female) that need to be addressed. Gender issues seem to have been wrongly equated with female empowerment, but the heart of gender advocacy is achieving gender parity, regardless of what sex is currently at an advantage. Hitherto,

education strategies and policies, including the much-talked about 4Ps, the conditional cash transfer program of government, have yet to take account of gender disparities in basic education. On a final note, many education policies and programs have been on a "business as usual" mode; however, if the Philippines is aiming for UPE, there is a need to understand what the data say, and build evidence-based policies and strategies to achieve the country's education goals. 📄

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