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Why are some Filipino children not in school?

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Filipino families and the Philippine government are known to put a high premium on the education of Filipino children. This is evident in the attention given by Filipino parents on their children's education as well as in the national development plans and country commitments forged by the government relating to education.

The question therefore is: If this is so, then why are some Filipino children not in school?

This *Policy Notes* specifically aims to answer this question and builds on the discussions of a previous *Policy Notes* (PN No. 2011-15) by the same authors. It discusses estimates on the number of children who are not in school, by school exposure, and looks into the reported reasons for their nonattendance. The *Notes* also presents the results of an econometric model which explains the nonparticipation in school. Finally, it looks into some policy issues that arise from the results and discussions.

Out-of-school children

At the outset, it should be pointed out that the Philippines has a considerable number of school-aged children who are not in school. The Basic Education Information System (BEIS) of the Department of Education (DepEd) suggests that in 2008, only about 88 percent of primary-aged children (i.e., those between 6 and 11 years old) were in primary school, and about 60 percent of secondary-aged children (i.e., those between 12 and 15 years old) were in secondary school. Results of the 2008 Annual Poverty Indicator Survey or APIS as conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) indicate that

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.

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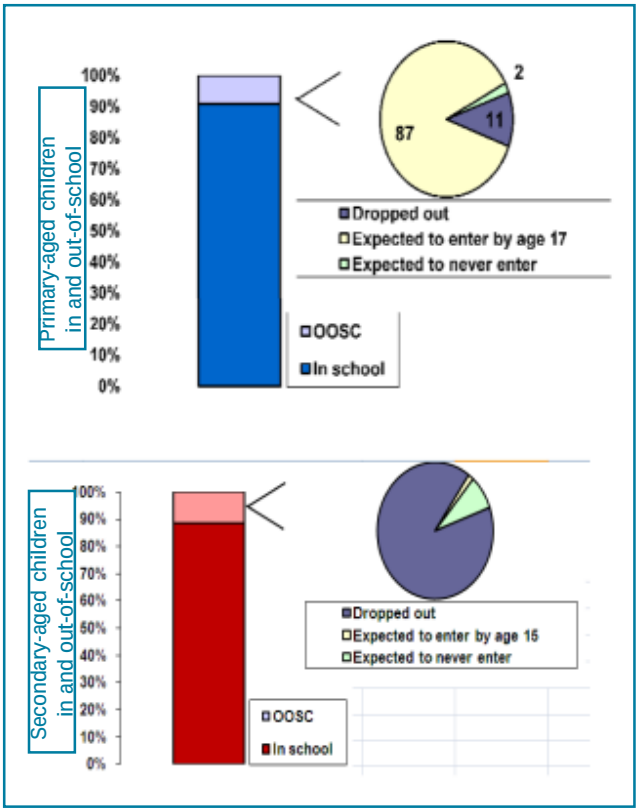
around 2.9 million children aged 5–15 years old were out-of-school.[1] An examination of the trends in the distribution of school-aged children, out-of-school children (OOSC), children who have never been in school, and new entrants to primary school by single age can provide a breakdown of the number of OOSC by degree of exposure to school. Figure 1 illustrates that among an estimated 1.27 million primary-aged OOSC in 2008, about 140,000 (11%) dropped out, about 1.1 million (87%) are expected to enter school by age 15, and the remaining 28,000 (2.2%) are considered likely to never enter school.

Figure 1. Primary-aged and secondary-aged children in and out of school, with breakdown of OOSC by degree of exposure to school in 2008



Note: Calculations on APIS 2008 data using UIS template

In 2008, among an estimated 0.98 million secondary-aged OOSC, 893,000 (91%) dropped out of primary or secondary school either temporarily or permanently, about 14,000 (1%) are expected to enter schooling by age 15, and the remaining 72,000 (7%) are likely to never enter schooling. Although the magnitudes of OOSC are higher for boys than for girls, the percentage distribution of the degrees of exposure to school for primary-aged OOSC and for secondary-aged OOSC does not vary by sex.

One consequence of, and possibly also a reason for, nonparticipation in schools is lower literacy. Results of the 2008 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) reveal that the literacy rates, both simple and functional,[2] for children aged 10–15 years differ between OOSC and the in-school population (Table 1). Gender disparities are also observed in literacy: among OOSC, simple literacy rates for boys are lower than those for girls. For children currently in school, more girls (65.4%) are functionally literate compared to boys (58.7%) while among the OOSC, about a third

[1] Counts of out-of-school children include not only those children who are not in school but also primary-aged children and older who are either in preprimary or nonformal education.

[2] Simple literacy is the ability to read and write. A functionally literate person is one who can read, write, and compute or one who can read, write, compute, and comprehend. Persons who completed high school or a higher level of education are also considered functionally literate. In the FLEMMS, simple and functional literacy rates are estimated for 10–64 years old (http://www.census.gov.ph/data/pressrelease/2010/pr10142tx.html) but in this report, rates are computed for children aged 10–15 years old.

of children, both boys and girls, are functionally literate.

Poverty and labor

A number of factors may be hypothesized as contributing to the lack of school participation. Foremost among these factors is poverty, as confirmed in Table 2. Adjusted school attendance rates[3] are lower among children of poor families. These children tend to have mothers with low levels of education who may not put enough premium on the schooling of their children.

Children from poor families, especially in the secondary school age, may be expected to contribute to family income and often, these children have to sacrifice their schooling when they get into child labor. Among the secondary school-aged children who are not in school, about 420,000 are engaged in economic activities (three-fourths of whom are boys). Even among children aged 5–15 who are currently in school, 680,000 are in child labor and may be at risk of not completing their schooling. Of these children in school who are engaged in child labor, about three-fifths (58.7%) are boys.

[3] Adjusted attendance rates for primary-aged children are ratios of the number of children of the age group attending primary school or higher relative to the total number of children of the age group; adjusted attendance rates for secondary-aged children are ratios of the number of children of the age group attending secondary school or higher relative to the total number of children of the age group.

Table 1. Simple and functional literacy of 10–15 year-old children by sex and by school participation

Sex	School Participation	Simple Literacy	Functional Literacy Rate
Male	In school	98.38	58.73
	OOSC	78.49	30.83
	All males	96.06	55.51
Female	In school	99.24	65.43
	OOSC	82.63	31.67
	All females	98.05	63.00
Both sexes	In school	98.81	62.11
	OOSC	80.02	31.14
	Total	97.03	59.20

Source: Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) 2008, National Statistics Office (NSO)

Table 2. Adjusted school attendance rates of 5–15 year-old children by household per capita income quintile and by mother's educational attainment

	Mother's Highest Educational Attainment						Memo Note: Sample Size of Children	
Per Capita Income Quintile	At Most Preprimary (%)	Some Primary (%)	Some High School (%)	Beyond High School (%)	Unknown (%)	All (%)	Unknown Mother's Educational Attainment	All Children
Poorest	50.2	65.2	78.0	82.8	65.5	69.3	471	15,549
Second	55.4	72.6	82.1	87.3	68.8	77.2	422	12,200
Third	73.7	79.7	85.5	88.2	77.5	83.4	552	9,830
Fourth	73.7	83.3	88.5	89.9	82.9	87.4	495	7,934
Richest	89.4	88.3	90.6	90.5	90.2	90.3	457	6,159
Total	56.1	72.1	83.8	89.1	77.6	79.6	2,397	51,672

Source: Calculations on Annual Poverty Indicator Survey (APIS) 2008, NSO
Note: Percentages are weighted appropriately.

About two-thirds of children engaged in child labor are unpaid family workers. Among out-of-school children in child labor, half are unpaid family workers, and about two in five are working outside the home. Children residing in rural areas and children coming from poor families are observed to have a higher risk of being exposed to child labor (aside from having more risks of being excluded from school). Certain regions such as Northern Mindanao (14.2%), Cordillera Administrative Region (10.8%), and Eastern Visayas (8.2%) also have much higher proportions of children aged 5–15 years old who are in child labor than the national rate (4.5%).

Working deters children from attending school, especially among secondary-aged children. Adjusted school attendance rates of boys engaged in economic activity are also lower (81.1% in primary ages and 29.8% in secondary ages) than those of girls in child labor (87.9% in primary ages and 51.6% in secondary ages).

Meanwhile, for children aged 5–11 years old, only one out of every fifty children (1.5%) of preprimary and primary ages is involved in child labor. Among secondary-aged children, however, the rate becomes much larger: practically one of every ten children (9.6%) is engaged in some labor activity, with the rates twice higher for boys (12.5%) than for girls (6.7%). Child labor thus appears to be more a reason for nonattendance among secondary school-aged children than among primary-aged children. According to both the APIS 2008 and FLEMMS 2008 (Table 3), the major reasons why primary-aged children are not in school are: (a) the children are thought to be too young; (b) the child lacks personal interest; and (c) cost of schooling. Only one in twenty cites school accessibility issues to be a reason. Practically half of the secondary-aged OOSC are reported to lack personal interest (47.3% in APIS and 44.6% in FLEMMS) while one in four (24.9% in APIS and 44.6% in FLEMMS) is not in school due to cost issues, one in ten is employed (8.7% in APIS and 7.3% in FLEMMS) while about one in twenty (4.0% in APIS and 5.4% in FLEMMS) mentions the matter of school accessibility.

Table 3. Percentage of primary-aged and secondary-aged children OOSC in 2007 and 2008 by reason for nonattendance in school, by data source

Reason for Nonattendance	Primary-aged Children		Secondary-aged Children	
	APIS 2008 (%)	FLEMMS 2008 (%)	APIS 2008 (%)	FLEMMS 2008 (%)
Lack of personal interest	31.68	23.78	47.19	44.59
High cost of education	11.52	13.32	24.93	28.81
Too young to go to school	29.21	34.86	0.00	0.07
Illness/Disability	9.48	6.76	6.13	7.51
Lack of nearby schools	7.45	7.66	4.13	5.41
Employment	0.13	0.09	8.69	7.28
Other reasons (incl. school records marriage, housekeeping)	10.53	13.53	8.93	6.33

Source: APIS 2008 and FLEMMS 2008 (NSO)

The primary reason for nonattendance, especially among secondary-aged children, is lack of interest. Undoubtedly, there may be a number of factors that may have

contributed to the lack of personal interest in going to school such as the lack of parental support, low quality of schools available, accessibility of schools, and the need to contribute to family income (Caoli-Rodriguez 2007; Maligalig and Albert 2008). The term "lack of personal interest" could also be a catch-all reason that includes the lack of household financial resources which some respondents may not want to admit as the reason for not attending school (Maligalig and Albert 2008) but the extent of the effect of poverty on lack of children's interest in school deserves some further examination.

Determinants of nonparticipation and lack of interest in school

To investigate deeper into the factors that contribute to nonparticipation in school and to the lack of personal interest of children who do not attend schools, it can also be informative to perform an examination based on econometric models such as a cross-section logistic regression model on the 2008 APIS, supplemented by average pupil to teacher ratios (PTRs) from the regions sourced from the 2008–2009 BEIS. Similar exercises were done by Maligalig et al. (2010). Explanatory variables considered in the logistic regression include (a) individual characteristics such as sex and age of the child; (b) household characteristics such as household per capita expenditure (in logarithmic terms), number of children, adults, and retired persons in the household; household residence (urban/rural) location; age of household head, sex of household head, educational attainment of the child's mother; and (c) average PTR[4] at the region. A separate logistic regression was run for primary-aged and for secondary-aged children, with the latter model including in its list of explanatory variables an indicator on whether or not the child is engaged in labor. The results of the logistic regressions for nonparticipation suggest that assuming all other explanatory variables are the same (*ceteris paribus*), the following statements can be supported:

- Children who come from families that have more per capita expenditure are less likely to be OOSC. For primary-aged children, every one percentage change in per capita expenditure is associated with a 0.50 percent decrease in the odds for not attending school. For secondary-aged children, the decrease in odds for not attending school is 0.87 percent;
- Age contributes to the decision of not attending school. Compared to six-year-old children, children aged 7–11 years old are less likely to be out-of-school. However, secondary-aged children in the age range 13–15 years are more likely to be OOSC than 12-year-old children;
- Boys are more at risk of being out-of-school. Primary school-aged girls are 1.3 times more likely to be in school than their boy counterparts; secondary-aged girls are 1.8 times more likely to be in school than the corresponding aged boys;
- Secondary-aged children residing in urban areas are less at risk of being out-of-school

[4] As pointed out in Maligalig et al. (2010), the PTR serves as a proxy for parental perception of the quality of the school system. Overcrowding, represented by high PTR, is often equated to low quality. A parental perception of overcrowding may influence the decision to attend school.

compared to children residing in rural areas. Urban-rural differentials are not evident for primary-aged children;

- Children belonging to families with many children are more at risk of being out-of-school;
- Compared to children with mothers who have attained at most primary level of education, children with more educated mothers tend to be less prone to being out-of-school;
- Every unit increase in PTR is associated with an increase in the odds of nonattendance in school by 3.5 percent among primary-aged children, and 0.5 percent among secondary-aged children;
- Secondary-aged children who are not engaged in some labor activities are more likely to be in school. Those engaged in child labor are 7.07 times more likely to be out-of-school; and
- Primary-aged as well as secondary-aged children who are part of families where the household head is male tend to be less at risk of being OOSC.

As regards the lack of personal interest, the following statements can be supported, assuming that all other factors are held constant (*ceteris paribus*):

- Per capita expenditure of the household, which proxies for income or wealth of the household, does not appear to be a factor for the lack of personal interest of children;
- Children older than six years old who are out-of-school are more likely to lack personal interest compared to six-year-old children who are not in school;
- Children older than 12 years old who are out-of-school are just as likely as 12-year-olds who are out-of-school to lack personal interest;
- Boys who are not in school are more likely to lack interest than girls who are not in school; primary school-aged girls who are not in school are 1.5 times more likely not to lack interest than their boy counterparts; secondary-aged girls who are not in school are 2.3 times more likely not to lack personal interest than the corresponding boys who are not in school; and
- Children who are not in school but with educated mothers are less likely to lack personal interest than those with less educated mothers.

Policy issues

The discussions in the previous sections suggest that there are both demand and supply side issues facing children out-of-school. Since a considerable proportion of OOSC are said to lack interest, it is important to examine what causes them to lose interest in schooling and to identify education strategies for reversing such attitudes.

The logistic regression results suggest that gender issues and the education of the mother are major factors for lack of personal interest. Aside from poverty, there are also a number of other factors such as location where the child resides that are interlocked with poverty. Such factors increase the likelihood of children not being able to complete their schooling. In rural areas, the proportion of OOSC with mothers who have had at best a primary level of education is much higher (51.5%) compared to the

corresponding rate of OOSC in the urban areas (27.1%). Hitherto, no strategies have been developed regarding the provision of continuing education for parents, particularly mothers, whose educational attainment is a clear determinant of children's lack of school participation and lack of interest in school. In the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), beneficiaries are required to attend family development sessions, but the quality of these sessions may deserve better design.

A huge number of primary school-aged children (chiefly six and seven years old) are also reportedly not in school because these children are too young. As was pointed out in Albert et al. (2011), information campaigns regarding the official school-age entry need improvement. It is also important to reassess the policy on school-age entry and make changes to this policy, if necessary, particularly if many children are found not to be ready for school.

Clearly, there ought to be considerable efforts to be made to assist out-of-school children. There may be difficulties in bringing children currently out-of-school back into the school system although the DepEd's alternative delivery modes (ADMs) such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS) serve as promising strategies. The ALS was meant to target relatively older children who are out-of-school but it currently also assists any child who is out-of-school and who may want to finish his/her schooling by way of completing equivalency examinations. The ALS should thus be given more support and resources. At the same time, though, a better monitoring and evaluation scheme must be in place so that ALS participants can be assisted in garnering suitable equivalency ratings, and in being given more interventions when they do not meet the passing marks.

In terms of labor, meanwhile, there is evidence of children aged 5–11 years old who are at work, albeit quite rare. Moreso, though, among secondary-aged children, practically three out of every twenty children (9.6%) are being engaged in some labor activity, with the rates twice higher for boys (12.5%) than for girls (6.7%). Implementation arrangements by the national government with the local government have to be improved in order to carry out current truancy and child labor laws more effectively. A serious review must also be undertaken on laws on child labor and truancy.

Once children are engaged in economic activity, their propensity to participate in school gets lower. The logistic regression model on nonparticipation in school indicated that, all other factors being equal, working children are 7.07 times more likely not to attend school. Consequently, working during the ages 12–15 years old appears to be the most significant factor for the low participation rates among secondary school-aged children, especially boys. According to the APIS 2008, practically half (47.4%) of the children in labor are in the poorest quintile of the per capita income distribution, which suggests that poverty is a major factor why children start to work at an early age, and likely not to complete their schooling.

Programs such as the 4Ps that compensate families to offset for such opportunity costs are therefore good mechanisms for arresting lack of school participation due to work, and for discouraging children from engaging in child labor. However, the 4Ps should not ignore supply side issues such as the lack of accessibility to schools, especially in rural areas. Aside from socioeconomic characteristics, the logistic regression results also noted that school resources (measured with the PTR) are determinants of nonparticipation in school. However, it is myopic to think that the 4Ps is merely a dole out, and that the resources for the 4Ps are better spent for addressing supply side issues such as more classrooms and more teachers. Interventions should be addressing both demand and supply side issues, and in addition, learning processes.

Final note: other points to consider

Aside from demand and supply side issues, one must also look into the governance of basic education. Even if demand and supply side issues are addressed, there will still be children who will not be going to school, as there is currently a lack of an accountability framework for improving the state of basic education. A teacher with a lot of students in class would hardly have any incentive to encourage children to stay in school. There is therefore clearly more incentive for a teacher to allow students to get into the next grade/year level under such circumstance, even if the student does not deserve to be so.

Ultimately, the issue of interventions is not only to increase school participation but also to make sure that learning outcomes are maximized so that children of today are equipped to get living wages in the future and prepared for their roles as citizens of tomorrow.

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