

Basic Education: *Improving Quality and Quantity*

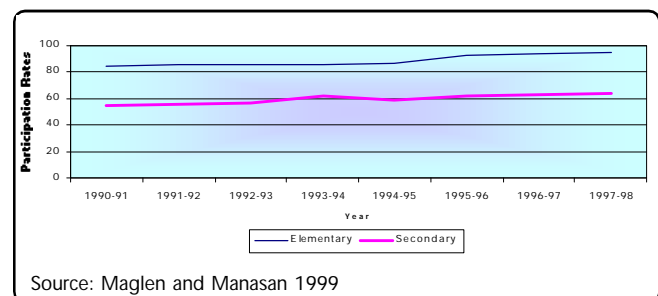
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There is no doubting the value placed on education in the Philippines and the central role it plays in Filipino society. Its importance is enshrined in the Constitution which mandates that the education sector should receive the highest priority in the central government budget.

On the surface, the Philippines has achieved significant gains in the education sector. Enrolment in the elementary school system expanded by 2.5 percent yearly between 1985-1998 while that in the secondary school

system increased by more than 3 percent annually. Clearly, the growth of enrolment in basic education has outpaced that of population growth, not a small feat considering that the Philippine population growth rate remains to be one of the highest in the region. Consequently, the country posted a participation rate¹ of 95 percent at the elementary level and 64 percent at the secondary level in school year (SY) 1997-1998 compared to 85 percent and 55 percent, respectively, in SY 1990-1991 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Participation rates in elementary and secondary schools, 1990/91 - 1997/98



The public sector served the bulk of students at both the elementary and secondary levels (92 percent and 72 percent, respectively) while in contrast, the private sector dominated the tertiary level, accounting for 76 percent.

However, while access to education has been greatly broadened, the quality of basic education continues to

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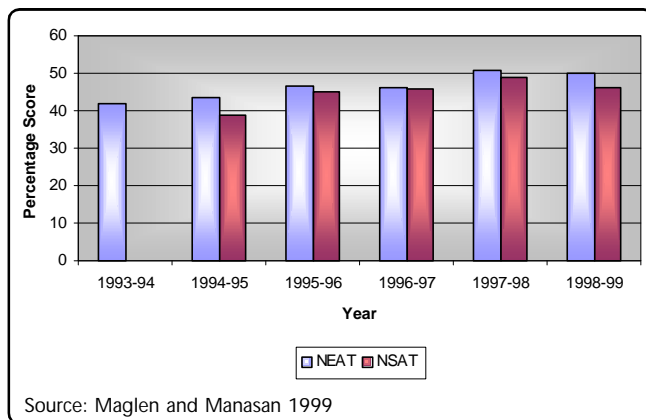
¹Participation rate (or net enrolment rate) is the ratio of the enrolment for the age group corresponding to the official school age of a certain level, to the total population of the official age groups of said level.

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be in question. Although the mean percentage scores (MPS) in both the National Elementary Assessment Test (NEAT) and the National Secondary Assessment Test (NSAT) have shown marked improvements, they persist to be low. In fact, they are significantly lower than the passing rate of 70 percent (Figure 2). Moreover, the country ranked very close to the bottom in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study given in 1996. At the same time, more than 30 percent of students who start first grade never reach sixth grade and slightly less than 30 percent of those who start first year high school do not make it to fourth year. In sum, more than half of those who start grade 1 do not reach the final year of secondary school.

Figure 2. Mean percentage score in NEAT and NSAT



The clamor to improve the quality of basic education is naturally translated to an ever-increasing pressure on government resources given the fact that the Philippine Constitution ordains that basic education should be provided free by the state. The question, then, is how to meet the unrelenting demand for more places in the basic education system (as a result of high population growth) and, at the same time, improve quality within a government budget constraint that is already stretched to the limit. If there were more money to go around, then perhaps the easiest way to simultaneously address the quantity and quality issue in basic education is to assign an even bigger share of the government budget to education. However, there is indeed a fiscal constraint. Thus, the enduring and more important question is not so much

how much money there is but how it is spent.

In this regard, this *Policy Notes* issue looks more closely into the matter of education finance and management, focusing more on the basic education sector.

Management

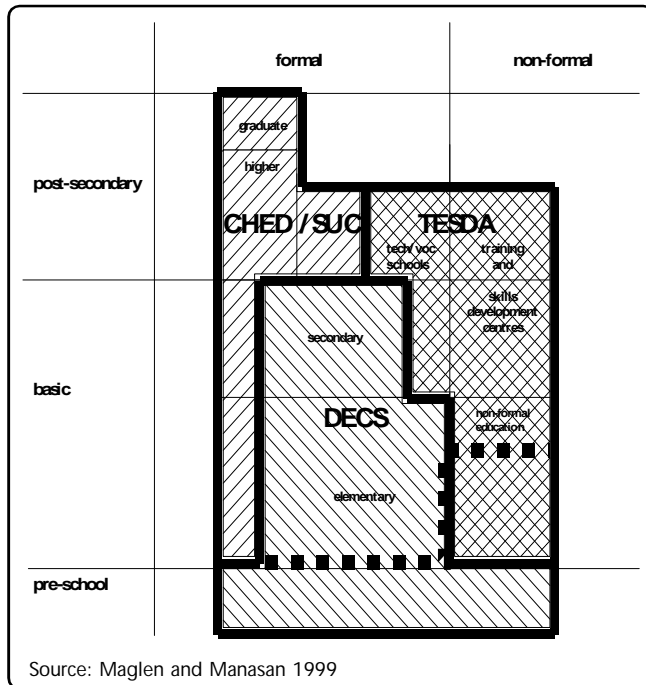
Intrasectoral prioritization. Prior to 1994, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) had the sole responsibility for policy formulation, planning, budgeting, program implementation and coordination in all levels of formal and nonformal education in the Philippines. It also supervised all education institutions in both the public and the private sectors.

During the Aquino administration, Congress created an Education Committee (EDCOM) which recommended the “trifocalization” of the organizational structure in the education sector. Under this policy which took effect in 1994/1995, oversight for the education sector is now provided by three distinct bodies: the DECS for basic education; the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for technical and vocational education and training; and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for higher education (Figure 3).

All three agencies are in charge of policy formulation, planning, programming, coordination, supervision of public and private education institutions, and standard setting in each of their respective subsectors. While the DECS and the TESDA run their own schools and training centers, the CHED has no direct hand in the operation of any state college or university.

The CHED is attached to the Office of the President and composed of full-time commissioners, all appointed by the President of the Philippines. On the other hand, the TESDA took over the functions and responsibilities of the former National Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC), the DECS’ Bureau of Vocational and Technical Education and the former Office of Apprenticeship under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). Organizationally, the TESDA is attached to the DOLE.

Figure 3. Trifocalization of education sector management and budgeting



On the whole, trifocalization is aimed at improving policymaking, planning and programming at the subsector level as each one of the three lead agencies is given the principal responsibility for its respective areas of concern. In particular, the establishment of the CHED and the TESDA has allowed the DECS to concentrate its attention on basic education. Despite this development, Figure 3 highlights the fact that the three agencies are still not focused exclusively on the concerns of their respective subsectors. For instance, the DECS does not only operate and supervise elementary and secondary schools but also continues to operate some vocational schools even as it is engaged in nonformal education. Meanwhile, state universities and colleges provide a disproportionately large percentage of total enrolment at the elementary and secondary levels in their laboratory schools.

Moreover, the gains that have been achieved with the more focused and better-informed management structure at the subsector level have been made at the ex-

pense of intersectoral and intrasectoral coordination. In this regard, it has been noted that the formulation and coordination of policy at the overall sectoral level (as opposed to the subsector level) and the prioritization of the different subsectors in the allocation of resources have deteriorated since the implementation of the trifocalization policy (ADB and World Bank 1999). Poor prioritization of competing demands in the education sector is perhaps best illustrated in the proliferation in the number of state universities and colleges and the increasing budget share of higher education in the 1990s despite the general agreement that basic education should receive the highest priority.

Thus, better coordination amongst the three agencies, with perhaps DECS taking the lead role, is called for in order to address functional overlaps and avoid duplication and/or inconsistency of policies, plans, and programs. However, another agency should be given the principal role in setting budgetary priorities for the entire education sector. Perhaps the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) could take on this role. For one, the NEDA, being at the helm of the development planning function, is knowledgeable about the workings of the education sector and its linkages with the rest of the other sectors. At the same time, not being an integral part of the education sector itself, it can effectively serve as the arbiter in the prioritization of the competing needs of the different subsectors. Lastly, being a member of the Development Budget Coordinating Committee (DBCC), which decides on sectoral budget ceilings, it is in a position to strategically secure the funding support needed by the education sector as a whole.

Management structure at the DECS. In principle, the authority structure at the DECS is hierarchical and highly centralized. All central office bureaus and major field offices (i.e., the regional offices) report directly to the Secretary of Education (CHEG 2000a). The line of authority extends from the DECS central office through the 16 regional offices, to 134 division offices, 2,150 district offices, some 36,000 public elementary schools and almost 4,000 public secondary schools.

"All authority in the department emanates from the Secretary of Education. The Secretary has authority over technical, financial, physical, personnel, tactical and strategic matters affecting public education delivery. He mandates technical standards on curriculum, organization of classes, textbooks, building designs, teachers' items and others. He appoints personnel. He directs instructions on any operational matters" (DAP 1997).

In practice, many of these functions are delegated to the Regional Directors and, more recently, to the Division Superintendents. While decisions on matters related to learning/teaching standards emanate from the DECS central office, most of the decisions on personnel matters are made at the regional and division offices. More specifically, the determination of the total number of days in the school year, the language of instruction for specific subjects, and the maximum class size are made by the DECS central office (CHEG 2000b). On the other hand, the choice of a textbook for each subject is largely a decision of the DECS regional offices with consultations from the division offices and, in some cases, the schools are consulted. Bidding, meanwhile, is managed by the central office but the regional office pays the suppliers. In contrast, the appointment and promotion of teachers/principals, redeployment of teachers, and disciplining of erring teachers/employees are the responsibility of regional and division offices.

Budgeting in the basic education sector (DECS).

Although regional offices of the DECS prepare budget proposals yearly with inputs from the division offices, these are generally trimmed down at the central office. Because of this, there is a tendency for regional offices to inflate their budgetary requests (DAP 1997). Thereupon, the DECS budget that is finally proposed by the central office to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) is many times removed from the proposals of the regional offices and division offices.

On the whole, the allocation of maintenance and operating expenditures (MOOE) to the various DECS regional offices and the individual division offices under

each one follows a simple capitation rule. That is, the DECS central office distributes the MOOE budget to the different operating units in direct proportion to student enrolments. Since all division offices, regardless of size, are mandated to have a uniform organizational and staffing structure, said funding formula is said to work against school divisions with small enrolment since these division offices have to contend with less discretionary resources (CHEG 2000c). This will be discussed in more detail in a later section showing the resource allocation for the input mix. Suffice it to say at this instance that for certain school divisions, per student MOOE has been reduced to half its initial value in real terms between 1993 and 1997.

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Moreover, the deconcentration that was started in the 1980s has hardly reached the level of the division and district, much less the level of the school, particularly with respect to budget execution. Up to 1999, the DBM did not release funds appropriated in the name of the division offices (and the autonomous high schools) under the General Appropriations Act (GAA) directly to these units. Instead, the DBM regional offices released the corresponding allotment advice and cash allocation for the division offices and autonomous high schools to the DECS regional offices which then in turn released sub-allotments and funding checks to the said operating units.

Consequently, a number of Division Superintendents had claimed that the budgets of the division offices, par-

ticularly those portions referring to nonpersonnel expenditure items, were not known to them prior to the actual release of the sub-allotments and funding checks. The division offices did not also maintain separate books of accounts and instead simply operated on a cash advance basis relative to the regional offices. Alternatively, they receive resources "in kind." In instances when cash resources are transferred, meanwhile, the sub-allotments and funding checks come with specific instructions regarding the use of the funds that are available. As such, there is very little room for autonomous decisionmaking at the level of the division.

Starting fiscal year 2000, the DECS, together with the DBM, has started a system whereby funds are released directly to the division offices and the autonomous high schools. However, only those units that have one accountant/bookkeeper and one disbursing officer are deemed eligible to take advantage of this arrangement.

Even with the direct release system now being piloted at the division level, resource allocation decision at the level of the school will continue to be seriously limited. This is so because the allotments for the district offices and the elementary schools, particularly with respect to nonpersonnel cost, remain under the control of the division offices. The CHEG (2000a) report noted that in most divisions, the district offices and the elementary schools receive supplies and materials "in kind" even as the division offices pay for the utility bills of the elementary schools and the travel expenses of district supervisors.

It has been argued that the direct release system which will "bring money lower in the organization" has the advantage of being supportive of the school-based management initiative (CHEG 2000a). In terms of government cash management, it offers the added advantage of reducing the cash float, i.e., the amount of cash which sits unused in the bank account of government agencies. However, the direct release system requires the presence of adequate and competent financial per-

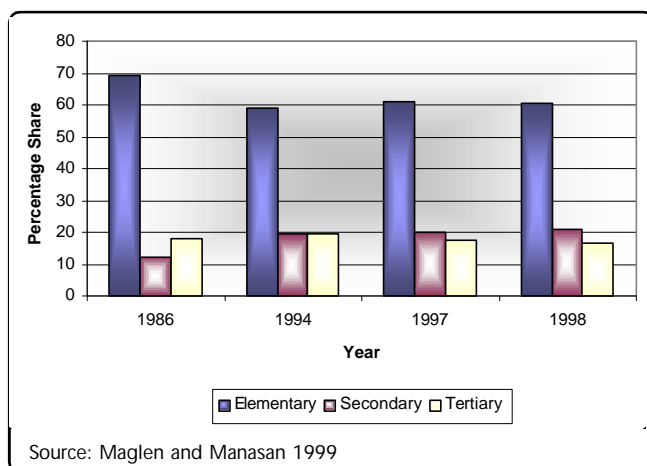
sonnel at the level of the division and schools, and the strengthening of the management information system of the DECS regional offices and central office to enable them to carry out their monitoring and evaluation functions effectively.

In summary, the schools which are at the frontline of the public education system exercise very limited autonomy. This is in sharp contrast to the current worldwide shift towards the school-based management framework where schools are given the primary responsibility in deciding how schools should use scarce resources and how students are taught. At present, initiatives to introduce this more decentralized framework have been started and therefore need to be supported. Under these initiatives, decisionmaking will be brought closer to the school and community.

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Specifically, the division will be assigned budget preparation, procurement of instructional materials, in-service training and project management and implementation. Over time, more responsibilities will be transferred to district offices and, eventually, schools. To prepare the school principals for their more active role, they will be provided with in-service training on school improvement planning and management. It is anticipated that school principals will be involved in a more substantive manner in the hiring of teachers, the selection and purchase of instructional materials, and determination of school size and enrolment. They will also prepare their budgets and receive direct releases from DBM regional

Figure 4. General government spending on education by level (percentage share)



offices.² They are also groomed to provide instructional leadership in schools. Lastly, a School Improvement and Innovation Facility will be established so as to encourage schools and teachers to introduce instruction-related innovations.

Composition of government spending on education: elementary level versus secondary and tertiary levels

Efficiency issue. Between 1986 and 1997, public expenditure on education expanded in areas where the private sector seemed to be thriving, thus effectively undermining the private sector's share in the education market (ADB and World Bank 1999). In particular, the share of the secondary level in total general government spending in education expanded. The same is true in the case of the tertiary level but to a more limited extent (Figure 4).

The expansion of the public sector at the secondary level accompanied the nationalization of barangay

²The legal and organizational requirements for implementing these proposals are the subject of the ADB TA No. 3115-PHI on Decentralization of Basic Education Management. Said TA is also tasked to recommend the phasing in over time of the various proposals.

³However, the share of tertiary education in general government education finance declined somewhat starting in 1997.

high schools and the Constitutional mandate for free secondary education. There is some evidence that public schools are now "crowding out" private schools as the number of students enrolled in private secondary schools actually decreased in absolute terms between 1992 and 1998.

For the budget allocation to the tertiary level, meanwhile, its share in total general government spending stayed fairly constant in the 20 percent range during most of the 1990s despite the fiscal adjustment measures imposed during said period.³ This came about with the surge in the creation of state universities and colleges (SUCs) during this period. The incentive structure that drives the unabated increase in the number of SUCs stems from: (1) the political goodwill that a legislator generates by sponsoring the establishment of a SUC; and (2) the higher salary and status that the staff of a secondary/vocational school derives with its conversion into a SUC.

These developments are inconsistent with what is generally perceived to be the appropriate role of government in the education sector, i.e., greater involvement in basic education since larger positive externalities are associated with elementary level.

Cost effectiveness: private versus public provision.

The public sector consistently underperforms the private sector in terms of student achievement scores, specifically in the NEAT and NSAT. However, in the remarkable improvements exhibited by both sectors in recent years, the rate of improvement in public schools has been greater than that in private schools.

Low quality elementary and secondary education in the public sector is accompanied by high operating unit costs. Table 1 indicates that public schools at both the elementary and secondary levels do not compare favorably with their private counterparts in terms of both internal efficiency indicators (as measured by the cohort survival rate, repetition rate, drop-out rate, and completion rate) and quality of education (as measured by

achievement scores). The relative cost-effectiveness of private elementary and secondary education became more evident in 1997 when the private-public operating unit cost ratios declined to levels that were about 30 percent lower than the private-public ratio of mean percentage scores (MPS) in the NEAT/NSAT. Note that the private-public ratios of the internal efficiency indicators for both elementary and secondary schools exceed that of the operating unit costs by a significantly larger proportion.

Given this finding, the need to shift the emphasis at the secondary level away from the further expansion of public education provision towards greater financial support for private education (in locations where feasible) becomes apparent. In line with this, a means-tested subsidy program aimed at improving the access of poor stu-

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Table 1. Comparative school performance indicators in basic education (ratio of private to public indicators)

Performance Indicators	Elementary		Secondary	
	1994	1997	1994	1997
<i>Internal Efficiency Indicators</i>				
Repetition rate ^a	6.09	5.05	2.40	2.60
Drop-out rate ^a	3.15	1.93	1.48	1.25
Completion rate	1.39	1.39	1.13	1.16
Cohort survival rate	1.40	1.30	1.12	1.19
<i>MPS in NEAT/NSAT</i>	1.30	1.24	1.30	1.21
Operating unit cost	1.24	0.88	1.11	0.89
^a Refers to inverse of the indicator. This conversion ensures that all the performance indicators are such that higher scores refer to better performance. Source: Maglen and Manasan 1999.				

dents to secondary education will be necessary. The Education Service Contracting Scheme (ESC) can be the basis for providing these subsidies. However, the ESC has to be improved. At present, the ESC is not targeted towards the poor and does not differentiate between a student who cannot find a place in a public school and one who chooses a private school for other reasons (ADB

and World Bank 1999). Moreover, the ESC subsidy covers only 68 percent of the average tuition in private schools. This amount appears to be too low to bring the cost of secondary education within the reach of the poor. In addition, on the part of private schools, delays in the processing of claims and the release of payments discourage them from participating in this scheme.

Equity issue. The contraction of the share of the elementary level in total general government expenditure and the concomitant rise in the share of the secondary and tertiary levels is likely to benefit the rich more than the poor. This is so because the participation rate of children from poor households in secondary and tertiary education is lower than that of children from better-off households. That is, while there is a small difference in the participation rates across income groups for grade 1 (97.3 percent of children from the poorest third of households and 99.7 percent of children from the richest third), the gap in the participation rate in sixth grade widens (75 percent for children from the poorest third and 95 percent of children from the richest third of households). By third year high school, the participation rate for children from the poorest third of households drops to 33 percent compared to 75 percent for children coming from the richest third (Filmer and Pritchett 1998).

Input mix: personnel versus nonpersonnel inputs

Allocation of public monies is likewise inefficient in still another area. This refers to the lopsided distribution

of the DECS budget in favor of personal services at the expense of maintenance and other operating expenditures. Without doubt, the underfunding of nonsalary recurrent expenditures contributed to the poor quality of basic education in the public sector.

Teacher remuneration. Personnel services is the single biggest item in the DECS budget, the share of which rose from 74.3 percent in 1990 to 87.7 percent in 1999 (Table 2). The dramatic rise in personnel expenditure is largely attributable to adjustments in the salaries of public school teachers that were implemented by the government in the late 1980s and most of the 1990s. Between 1985 and 1997, the remuneration of government teachers went up by a multiple of 5 in nominal terms and by a multiple of 3 in real terms. In 1997, the entry level salary of a public school teacher was 70 percent higher than his/her private school counterpart (Table 3). Moreover, even by international standards, public school teacher salaries appear to be on the high side. To wit, teacher remuneration as a ratio of GNP per capita in the Philippines was equal to 3.0 in 1997 compared to an "Asian" mean of around 2.5 at the primary level.⁴

Table 2. Percentage distribution of central government expenditures in basic education, 1990-1999

Expenditure Types	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999
Personnel Services	74.34	82.63	79.34	83.96	87.69
MOOE	16.49	15.05	10.12	8.65	8.85
Of which GASTPE	4.34	3.89	2.61	-	1.10
Capital Outlay	9.17	2.31	10.54	7.90	3.47
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Maglen and Manasan 1999.

Given budget constraints, high teacher salaries naturally limit the government's capacity to hire new teachers to cope with ever-expanding enrolments. In basic edu-

⁴The ratio for the Philippines came from Maglen and Manasan (1999) while the ratio for the average Asian country came from Lewin (1997).

Table 3. Nominal and comparative changes in public teacher remuneration, 1985-1997

	Annual Salary of Public School Teachers ^a (P)	Ratio of Public Teacher Salaries to:		
		per Capita GNP	Poverty Threshold (family of 6)	Private Teacher Salaries ^b
1985	20,547	2.02	0.91	
1988	32,910	2.44	1.15	
1991	49,378	2.42	1.13	
1994	62,799	2.42	1.18	
1997	107,017	2.98	1.50	1.66

^aentry level
^bSurvey carried out by the Catholic Education Association of the Philippines, 1997.
 Source: DECS National Statistical Office

cation, the increase in the number of teachers (teachers holding position titles Master Teachers I-II and Teachers I-III) in government schools did not keep pace with the growth of enrolment in the 1990s. At the elementary level, the number of teachers rose by 1.4 percent yearly on the average vis-à-vis a 2.3 percent growth in enrolment. In comparison, the number of public school teachers in the secondary level grew by 4.4 percent yearly compared to a 5.3 percent growth in enrolment. Consequently, the student-teacher ratio in public elementary schools went up from 31 in SY 1981-1982 to 34 in 1996-1997 while in public secondary schools, it increased from 29 to 34.

Teacher deployment. During this period, there was also no commensurate attempt to rationalize the deployment of teachers. Thus, teacher productivity did not appreciably increase in line with salary improvements. This is clearly shown in the wide disparity between the average class size and the average student-teacher ratio in public elementary and secondary schools. In SY 1997-1998, for instance, the average class size in government elementary and secondary schools were 41 and 50, respectively, while the average student-teacher ratios were 35 in public elementary schools and 34 in public secondary schools. These figures imply that while there may be a surplus in the total number of teachers when reckoned on a nationwide basis, some geographical areas

may suffer a teacher shortage because of problems in the deployment of public school teachers. One problem is related to the constraints imposed under the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers with regards to the re-assignment of teachers across geographical borders. Another relates to the current practice of assigning teachers to do administrative/clerical functions (that should otherwise be assigned to lower level positions) at the school and district offices. Officials of the DECS point out that this practice came about because of the difficulty in securing the approval of the DBM for nonteaching positions. Such a practice unnecessarily adds up to costs as clerical salaries are 30 percent lower than teacher salaries in government. The potential saving that would be generated by adopting a “teachers-teaching only” deployment is sizeable – about P2.3 billion per year.

Nonsalary recurrent expenditures. The growth in teacher salaries was accommodated at the expense of maintenance and other operating expenditures (MOOE), i.e., nonpersonnel recurrent expenditures, whose share in the DECS budget was halved from 16.5 percent in 1990 to 8.8 percent in 1999 (Table 2). Because of this, per student MOOE declined in real terms from P510 in 1990 to P175 in 1997 (Figure 5). The squeeze on MOOE has resulted in the short supply of key educational inputs like textbooks, teaching/instructional materials, science laboratory equipment and supplies, and school desks as well as provisions for teacher training and maintenance of school buildings. It is likely that this turn of

events contributed to the poor quality of education services in public schools. It could also partly explain why the achievement scores of students from public schools are lower than those from private schools even if teachers in public schools are better remunerated (and presumably better qualified) than their private sector counterparts, particularly towards the latter part of the 1990s.

In 1998, the textbook/student ratio stood at 1:6 in public elementary schools and 1:8 in public secondary schools, a far cry from the DECS target of 1:1. To reach the target, P6.6 billion would have been required in 1999 but the actual budget was only P480 million, just sufficient for a textbook/student ratio of 1:4.

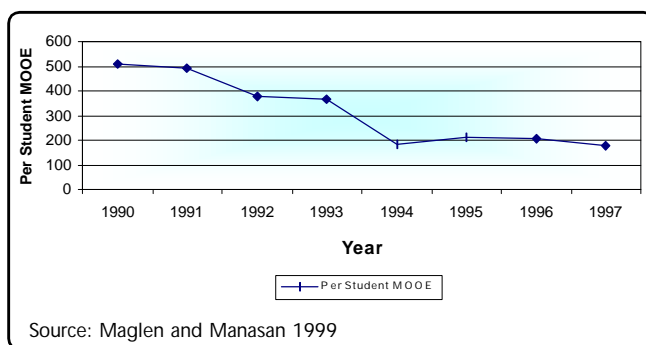
At present, every student at the elementary level is required to have 8 textbooks. In the short term to the medium term, there is a need to consider whether or not all 8 are really necessary. If the number of textbooks needed by each student were cut from 8 to 6, for instance, it is estimated that the 1999 DECS budget would yield a textbook/student ratio of 1:3 instead of 1:4.

Another way of addressing the problem would be to require nonpoor students to buy their own textbooks. The public elementary school system currently provides places to more than 90 percent of total enrolment. Out of this, it is a fact that a substantial portion (around 65 percent) of those enrolled in public schools can afford to purchase their own textbooks. Adopting this approach will thus bring down the budget requirement needed to achieve a 1:1 ratio to P987 million. However, means-tested assistance would be essential for students from low-income families and a community-based approach to means-testing would increase its effectiveness and reduce the associated costs.

Summary and conclusion

The need to improve access to and the quality of education in the country, especially in basic education, has been raised in a number of studies over the years. To address these concerns, this *Policy Notes* recommends the following:

Figure 5. Evolution of per student MOOE in basic education, 1990-1997 (pesos at 1993 prices)



- * better coordination amongst DECS, TESDA and CHED, with perhaps the DECS taking the lead role for purposes of dealing with functional overlaps and duplication and/or inconsistency in policies, plans and programs in the education sector;

- * need for another agency, perhaps the NEDA, to serve as an arbiter in the intrasectoral budget prioritization in the entire education sector;

- * support of current initiatives to strengthen autonomous decisionmaking at the level of the divisions and the schools, particularly in the area of budgeting;

- * shift in public financing towards the elementary education subsector where larger positive externalities exist, away from the secondary and tertiary education subsectors;


- * shift in the emphasis at the secondary level, away from the further expansion of public education provision towards greater financial support for private education in the light of low quality and high unit cost of public secondary schools;

- * redesign of the ESC scheme to function as a means-tested subsidy program aimed at improving the access of poor students to secondary education;

- * improvement of teacher deployment by reviewing the provisions of the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers that relate to the reassignment of teachers to other jurisdictions;

- * improvement of teacher deployment by allowing the DECS to hire needed nonteaching personnel;

- * review of the number of textbooks that are required for each grade level; and

- * charging of fees to nonpoor students for the use of textbooks. 

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