

**E-DUKHA-AKSYON:
PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE
SOCIOLOGY OF CURRENT PINOY STUDENTS¹**

BY

DR. CLARENCE M. BATAN²

Website: www.clarencebatan.com

Email: cbatan@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

IF there is one generalization that social researchers (both local and international) tell about us Filipinos, it is our “high education ethic” (Batan, 1998, 2010b; Bustos, 1992; Castillo, 1979; Gonzalez, May 28-29, 1998; Sutaria, September 1992). That is, without fear of contradiction, most Filipinos value formal education. All Filipino parents that I interviewed (Batan, 2010b) place high regard in sending their children to school and perceive its completion as a fulfillment of their shared dream. Likewise, the Pinoy children and youth that were part of my study, also express high desire to study and complete their education. However, placing high value to education is a different matter from the actual completion of studies. This is the unfortunate reality of most Filipino children and youth whom we see, happy and excited, entering the portals of our school every June of every academic year. What we do not see are the other months when some of them exit, one by one. And when graduation comes, we celebrate the victories of those who survived the schooling process. But what happens to those who did not make it? Where have they gone?

E-DUKHA-AKSYON

One nugget of wisdom that we sociologists adhere to, is that, “things are not what they seem” (Berger, 1963). This wisdom appears to capture the state of education in our country. On the one hand, we see thousands of students flock our schools, and statistics continue to count the above average mean years of schooling of Filipinos compared to other countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). But in a world where the universal access to education is at the heart of the development process of all cultures and societies, the Philippines is seen to be failing in achieving this goal (Datamonitor Plc, 2009; Philippine Institute for Development Studies and the United Nations Children's Fund, 2010; UNESCO, 2010; United Nations'Children's Fund, 2011).

¹ Working speech prepared for various seminars and forum at different schools, institutes, colleges & universities.

² Dr. Clarence M. Batan, a Filipino sociologist, is an Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Arts and Letters, a lecturer at the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy and the Graduate School, a research associate of the Research Cluster on Culture, Education and Social Issues (CESI) and web-based course designer and developer of the Educational Technology Center at the University of Santo Tomas (UST) (Manila, Philippines). He authored two books, *TALIM: Mga Kuwento ng Sampung Kabataan (TALIM: Lifestories of Ten Young People)*(Batan, 2000) and *Batong Bahay: Naratibo ng kahirapan at tagumpay ng isang karaniwang pamilyang Pilipino (Stone House: A Filipino family's narrative of poverty and success)*(Batan, 2010a), and at present, he is working on his third book based on his dissertation about inactive youth (out-of-school and out-of-work) locally known in the Philippines as the “istambay”. Recently, he was appointed as technical committee member for Sociology by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

In a recent UNESCO report (2010), *Reaching the Marginalized: Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010*, it documents:

Education indicators for the Philippines are below what might be expected for a country at its income level. There is a real danger that the country will fail to achieve universal primary education by 2015. Household survey data help identify the large pockets of extreme and persistent deprivation that are holding back progress.

The net enrolment ratio was 92% in 2007, which is comparable with countries at far lower levels of average income such as Zambia, and below the levels attained by other countries in the region, such as Indonesia. Around 1 million children are out of school – a slight increase over the level in 1999.

Extreme poverty and regional disparities are at the heart of the mismatch between national wealth and education outcome. The gap separating the poorest 20% from the rest of society is far wider than in most countries... Those aged 17 to 22 in the poorest quintile average about seven years of education – more than four years fewer than in the wealthiest 20%. Data on school attendance provide evidence that current policies are not reaching the poorest. Around 6% of 7-to 16-year-olds from the poorest households are reported as not attending school or to have ever attended. Extreme economic inequalities fuel education inequalities, notably pushing many children out of school and into employment.

From this lucid but unfortunate description, it seems appropriate to use the metaphor, “*e-dukha-syon*” to depict what we fail to see about the current state of our educational system. I first saw this term used as a title in an award-winning student documentary produced by the Tomasian Cable Television (TOMCAT), Education Technology Center at the University of Santo Tomas. This documentary (Tomasian Cable Television (TOMCAT), 2002) tells the story of a street-child named *Nicky*, whose family lives “along the riles” (train tracks) of Manila. Despite poverty, Nicky manages to go to school, attending the afternoon sessions while at night, continuing to beg for his “baon” (school allowance). He is determined to finish his education to help his family. The documentary was produced in 2002.

At present, I do not know where Nicky is. But what I know is that, there are so many like Nicky out there, who believe in the concept of education, hoping to complete their studies. Because our country, compared to other neighbouring states, did not do substantially well in terms of maintaining the quality of our economic life, the quality of our educational system suffered (Datamonitor Plc, 2009; Wallace, February 2008). As such, it may be meaningful to use “*dukha*” or the state of experiencing poverty, as a metaphorical descriptor of the process of “becoming” and “being” students in our country.

POVERTY STORIES: “BECOMING” AND “BEING” PINOY STUDENTS

In my istambay study, I see a strong negative relationship between poverty and going to school. I have listened to stories of how difficult it was to “become” a student. It seems like mimicking the Filipino maxim, *Isang kahig, isang tuka*.

Every year, parents as well as their respective children are anxious as to where to get money for tuition. Unlike other developed countries, our government is not designed to give *generous* welfare support for education. This is one of the reasons why formal education in our country has remained a private-family issue. Thus, if a student was able to enrol, it may be considered a victory on the part of the parent or benefactor. As one of my parent respondents expresses, *Nakaraos na naman, nakagawa ng paraan pang-enrol, nakapangutang. Salamat sa Diyos. (I was able to find a way to enrol (my child), I loaned (from someone). Thanks to God.)*. Indeed, getting into school has become more difficult for Filipino parents nowadays.

But the other process of schooling presents an even more problematic situation for both parents and children. This is the challenge of “being” students. Studying requires resources as every school day means providing educational needs – baon, projects, other curricular requirements, extracurricular needs, etc. For ten months (from June to March), every school day presents anxieties among the parents, students and teachers reflecting the varying levels of economic poverty among them. Being a student in the Philippines is not a simple task but rather a collective endeavour.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

If we agree that persisting economic poverty in our country has impacted negatively the quality of our education, as articulated in the cases of those Pinoy children and youth who find it difficult “to become” and “to be” (remain) students, then, the following preliminary observations might help us further reflect about the current breed of Pinoy students we encounter in colleges and universities. These observations are from multiple data bases from related studies and researches that I conducted over the past 15 years as a youth sociologist.

First, the Filipino youth we encounter in our colleges and universities are a privileged few who made it to tertiary level. They comprise a fraction of those who completed high school. Some of these college students will be able to finish tertiary education while others will fail to do so. Sad but true.

Second, while we see most of the Pinoy youth, particularly college/university students, to have embraced information and communication technologies (ICT) in virtually all aspects of their everyday lives (from the use of cellphones to computer games to other codified and complicated new generations of applications, operating systems and software programs), we also need to underscore that these technologies are tools informing and shaping communications and relationships between parents and children, teachers and students as well as among barkada (group of friends) whether physical or virtual. On the other hand, in some cases (e.g., Batan, 2005; Thiessen, 2006), these digital technologies are found to have actually entrenched social class division rather than overcome digital divide. In thinking about the role that ICT is playing in the lives of Pinoy students nowadays, we might want to look into how we can make use these

technologies as tools for learning (about them and enhancing pedagogy), and as barometers of social stratification in our country.

Third, in every generation, the Filipino youth has a long history of being at the forefront of social issues, from Rizal, Jacinto, Bonifacio and the unnamed countless Filipino women who fought for independence from Spain, to those who fought for independence from the US Americans during and after Second World War, to the First Quarter Storm student heroes against the Marcos dictatorship, to the two EDSA revolutions in 1986 and 2001. The first decade of the new millennium is no exemption. For instance, in the UST-Political Opinion of Youth Surveys (POYS) conducted from 2009 to 2011, it reveals that Thomasian students are consistently aware of the social issues impacting the present Aquino government. These are corruption, poverty, education access and quality, peace and order, inefficient government services, and falling morals. This social awareness indicates how the present breed of Pinoy students may be tapped towards better partnership and governance as they leave the school for the world of work.

**Percentage Distribution of the UST Students’
 Perception of the Most Pressing Issues Affecting the Country**
Data from the UST-Political Opinion of Youth Surveys 2009-2011

Current Issues	POYS 1 (August 2009) (n = 4,923)		POYS 2 (Dec. 2009) (n = 2,147)		POYS 3 (Feb. 2010) (n = 13,594)		POYS 4 (Aug 2010) (n = 8,849)		POYS 5 (Feb 2011) (n = 18,385)	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Corruption in society	87.32	1	87.10	1	81.15	1	87.94	1	85.06	1
Poverty	82.57	2	75.92	2	70.92	2	87.12	2	81.55	2
Education access and quality	67.56	3	74.99	3	67.23	3	70.71	3	60.33	3
Peace and Order (Including crime and drugs)	55.41	4	55.94	4	46.40	4	65.71	4	55.86	4
Inefficient government services	46.57	5	43.78	5	35.69	6	57.57	5	46.39	6
Falling Morals	42.23	6	37.63	6	35.94	5	51.38	6	49.03	5

Relative to my third observation, my fourth point of reflection highlights the two intertwining concerns of Pinoy youth. This is about a significant youth transition issue that we do not seriously pay attention to in the country. This is about the relationship between education and employment.

The *National Assessment: Youth Attributes, Participation and Service Providers (YAPS)* (National Youth Commission, 2004) of the National Youth Commission, where the medium-term development youth program for 2005-2010 was based reports that:

“Access to education and the quality of education are key issues among school-going age groups. The problem is more acute for those who are in the tertiary-level age groups, as universities and colleges are concentrated in more urbanized areas and are not affordable to the low-income groups.

“Employment is mostly a problem of the 18-24-year-olds that enter labor force. However, it is also an issue for 15-17-year-old youth that are employed and vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Employment issues revolve around the need to find decent work and the lack of employability and employment opportunities in the country. This has been underscored by the large numbers of overseas Filipino workers; most of them fall within the youth age brackets. It seems that the Philippine economy just cannot absorb young Filipinos who are entering the labor force.”(National Youth Commission, 2004, p. 15)

My istambay thesis (Batan, 2010b) provide a lengthy, more comprehensive documentation of this Pinoy youth problematic. I argue that the problem for some Filipino college/university students to transition from school to work is not only complicated by the traditional problems of unemployment and underemployment. Rather, the sad reality is that a number of college/university students are joining the long-list of istambays in the country. For social scientists and educators of higher learning, this empirical observation is very troubling and upsetting. Is it too much to admit that the privatization of our higher education in the Philippines has indeed contributed to the widening gap between the rich and the poor in our country? Or, is it the right time to admit that our colleges and universities have been offering list of courses and professions that do not translate to employment? While the mismatch of education and employment may be seen as a government matter, could we also hold our respective colleges and universities accountable for providing training to our students that does not translate into employment? Indeed, running our schools (both private and public) as businesses do not exclude us from asking, where is the social conscience in this educative process?

A CALL TO ACTION: E-DUKHA-AKSYON

My hope for articulating my observations about the situation of our current Pinoy students, by providing a little bit of their sociology, is not to offer any solutions but rather to appeal to both the practitioners of education and policy makers the on-going structural crises of our present educational system. I hope that by providing a sociological view of becoming and being Pinoy students, I am able to demonstrate the values as well as on-going individual tensions that they face interspersing with macro issues such as poverty, corruption, inequality and stratification.

This paper presents just one alternative perspective yet it might help us to think beyond education as more than a process of going to school. As Gat Jose Rizal once wrote in a letter addressed to his nephew, Alfredo:

“Go ahead then; study, study, study and meditate well what you study...on this battlefield, man (and woman) ³ has no better weapon than his(her) intelligence, no other force but his(her) heart. Sharpen, perfect and polish then your mind and fortify and educate your heart.” (Rizal, Online)

³ I inserted “woman” and “her” in parentheses to present the writings of Rizal in a more gender sensitive format.

Thus, it seems that Rizal did not desire us to “just go to school”. Rather, Rizal encourages us to be educated in mind, in heart and in action. *Dahil iba ang nag-aral, sa may pinag-aralan.* (Going to school is different from being educated.)

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