

FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES: ARE WE READY?

by:

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Is the Philippines ready for the full implementation of face-to-face classes? Does everyone feel secure if this shall be implemented? What are the evidences which could show that we are ready for face-to-face classes? If not, then when we could be and what would be the negative effects if we continue with the distance learning modality?

Research found that the cognitive level, metacognitive level, social relationships and mental health of the students had been negatively affected due to distance learning modality; these problems might get worse if distance learning should be continued. There were several factors which had contributed to this problems. The Department of Education had stated that only through normalization or holding face-to-face classes, we could address this issue.

Covid-19 pandemic had changed the lifestyle of everyone, even the delivery of instruction of all school levels around the globe was affected especially the Philippines. We could hardly deny the fact that the Philippines was one of the few countries which had a slow response in this crisis. In addition, the Philippines had just recently started, in the first quarter of 2022, the transition from distance learning to face-to-face learning modality where Covid-19 vaccination is not a requirement.

The Department of Education had received a budget of 631.77 billion pesos or 12.58% of the total National budget for 2022. The Alliance for Concerned Teachers (ACT) had claimed that this isn't enough for the safe reopening of classes. This budget isn't

enough for the provision of computers, gadgets and internet allowances to the teachers as well as for the health care and protection of students and school personnel.

Schools which had passed the minimum requirement of Covid-19 Inter-Agency Task Force in the conduct of the limited face-to-face learning modality had welcomed their students with open arms. Students and teachers had posted their sentiments in their social media accounts. Everyone felt happy and had positive feedback for having the limited face-to-face learning environment. Meanwhile, other were fearful not just for themselves but for their love ones who were not yet vaccinated.

Reports showed that the Philippines had not yet attained the 100% population to receive the vaccine. Also, there was no available vaccine for children below 4 years old. Experts said that a fully vaccinated individuals would only feel minor symptoms which isn't life threatening if contacted by the disease; undeniably, they were carriers of the virus. We could not neglect the probability that these patients could be students who happened to have siblings who were below 4 years old which could endanger their siblings at home.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Philippine education had been suffering for having lack of classrooms and teachers. Classrooms were overcrowded where 40 to 50 students would occupy a classroom. Teachers would even give lessons simultaneously to two (2) different grade levels in a classroom. This incidences showed that their learning environment was not conducive. To make things worse, these could be the very same problems that we are going to have in the full implementation of the face-to-face classes amidst the pandemic.

The government had already spent large amount of time and money in technological procurement and maintenance, and skill training and capability building of school personnel and teachers in the conduct of distance learning. Limited face-to-face classes may also be considered in some schools; though there's a need to secure the

quality of education and that school personnel and teachers were properly compensated as provided by the law.

The full implementation of face-to-face learning should be studied carefully through gathering of statistical information. The teacher, students and classroom ratios should be taken into account. The government should also address the vaccination of children below 4 years old and also strengthen its campaign for Covid-19 vaccination program.

The government cannot do this alone, especially that the Philippines is suffering from economic crisis due to inflation resulting to the decline of purchasing power of the Philippine pesos. Everyone should work hand-in-hand in order to address the issues underlying the full implementation of face-to-face classes. The community played an important role in the education of the students.

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