DROPOUTS AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTHS: SIDE –EFFECT OF PANDEMIC

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Education is one of the key ingredients for an individual to learn a profession, to get a job and to get experience. In short, it is essential. Today's world is very competitive to the point that sometimes it isn't enough just to have a degree. It is one of human's basic needs. It is one's greatest weapon to compete globally that is why a country's literacy rate is a crucial factor.

The pandemic didn't only attack our health. It has a consequent effect on our country's education. Covid-19 forced our education sector to switch to distance learning to prevent the interruption to learning. The most vulnerable to this change is the underprivileged group of the society.

Distance learning requires certain utilities such as internet connection and a gadget that can accommodate communication applications. These aren't readily available to some of our countrymen due to their status in life. Some of these people are living from pay check to pay check and some hardly earn money. There is no room on their budget to accommodate other expenses. Because of this difficulty, some children were forced to stop schooling.

Dropouts are students who leave school. Underprivileged students tend to quit school for their inability to keep up with high-tech teaching. According to UNICEF Philippines Representative Oyunsaikhan Dendevnorov (August, 2021), the long duration of school closure in the Philippines, resulted to learning loss, mental distress, and increase in dropouts and child labor. The need for extra manpower in the family forced some of

our students to take menial jobs and to stop going to school. This might also result to their disinterest on coming back to school.

The current condition is alarming because even before the pandemic started, our literacy rate is already low and with the pandemic, it became more compromised. There was a study conducted by World Bank last 2020 that showed that we were suffering from "learning poverty". It showed that 9 out of 10 children had inability to read and understand a simple story at age 10 (Aljazeera, 2022). Moreover, last 2017 the out-of-school youths figure was around 3.5 million. According to Gamboa (2021), in his article "Dropouts left by Pandemic", one fifth of elementary and high school students in the Philippines failed to enrol for school year 2020-2021. The threat of pandemic might increase this number even more if certain actions aren't done.

Unicef (2021) encourages the resumption of face-to-face teaching. According to them, positive experience in school will help determine the future of students. Prolonged absence results to more dropouts. Now that we are already slowly returning back to normal, DepEd Is now faced with the challenge of accommodating incoming students with the available facilities and faculties. In addition to these, they are faced with the challenge of rekindling the interest of dropouts and out-of-school youths and executing programs to help them catch up.

We are facing a hard challenge of educating our new generation. It is one of the main problems brought to us by this plague. If not remedied as soon as possible, it will hurt badly our future work forces. We must act now because these young students will be the backbone of our economy and country someday.

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22 September 2022