

## ULTIMATE DISTRACTION: SHOULD SMARTPHONES BE BANNED FROM PHILIPPINE PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOMS?

*by:*

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While smart device proliferation among public school students has increased in recent years, a significant proportion still lack the means of procuring one for personal use. Until the government can provide every enrollee with a phone or tablet, incorporating these gadgets into the educational methodology would be ill-advised and puts an entire cohort of students at a disadvantage.

Make no mistake, smartphones are powerful tools, and the long-term goal is to have them be seamlessly integrated into our schools and teaching methods. Aside from the obvious advantage of readily accessible reference media and teaching apps, the data that our phones collect about our behaviors - travel habits, retail purchases, exercise habits, sites we frequent, the tone of our social media posts - can prove to be more important if we want to have a holistic relationship between students and academic institutions.

The current status quo though remains that if each student cannot be assured of having a smartphone for use in class, then those who have them should be restricted from their use, at least during class, to level the playing field. This can be implemented simply by having a device storage area where students can deposit and claim their phones at the start and end of class, respectively. Since most pupils' distractions - social media, multiplayer games, video streaming - are online, installing cellular signal jammers in classrooms can be done in lieu of device check counters. This approach would be an added expense, however, and will also block

legitimate emergency calls.

A vital but often disregarded corollary to the above is that it is important for teachers to practice what they preach. An instructor who is always visibly distracted whenever a notification pops up on his or her own phone does not cut an exemplary figure, and students are justified to think it unfair that they forfeit their own phone time. If mobile phone use by the teacher cannot be avoided, for example to initiate a presentation or during an emergency, the reason should be made transparent to the students.

The Philippine education system is at a crossroads when it comes to gadgets and education. Although prices have come down significantly, owning a smartphone for exclusive use in school can still be an expensive proposition, especially for indigent families. It isn't always fair, and particularly for students, smartphones tend to broaden the gulf between those who can afford to have them and those who can't. For good or ill, smartphones are here to stay, and it is up to us educators to assimilate all current and emerging technologies into our methods of instruction if we want our students to have a fighting chance on the global stage.

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