

**RESHAPING EDUCATION AMID CLIMATE EXTREMES: THE
CHALLENGE OF BALANCING CLASSROOM LEARNING WITH
ENVIRONMENTAL REALITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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Philippine education is anchored on its literal environmental state. The monsoons from both north and southwest had long since drenched books, flooded classrooms, and destroyed schools. In previous years, the arrival of June to July signaled the start of the wet season and often prompted the cancelation of classes. Severe weather conditions prohibited the non-teaching and teaching personnel and students from making their way to their schools safely and continuing the routine fashion of education. However, as COVID-19 shifted the old manner of all the systems that carry the world to effective functions, so did the Philippine government take advantage of this change to reset the calendar of the education curriculum.

The long suspension of classes due to COVID-19, the concession of distance learning, and the introduction of online classes paved the way for the Department of Education to change a pivotal aspect of Philippine education. Sara Duterte, the country's vice president and DepEd's former education secretary, ordered that on November 2, 2022, all schools – public and private – must begin the transition to full weekdays of in-person classes. The new school calendar for the year 2022 - 2023, which began on August 22 and ended on July 7, 2023.

The advent of a new school calendar brought forth the arrival of another climate extreme – sweltering heat. The recovery of the country's education from the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic overlooked the changing climate and environmental conditions of the contemporary world. The Philippines is no stranger to the worsening of the global

climate crisis, yet it had not accounted for its impact had the school calendar been subjected to its extremes.

The recent reopening of classes had just returned the forcibly taken space of traditional classroom settings. In the common eye, the four corners of the classroom exist as a venue like any other. Where else can students grow into citizens equipped to service the nation? Where can we hone their leadership and management skills if they are not placed in a setting among their peers? In parallel, where can teachers conduct discussions and apply strategies if not with the guidance and insights of their fellow educators? How can both the teacher and the student manage being a parent and a child at the same time? Beyond the technological equipments that are limited in classrooms, it is also in this setting where interpersonal relationships such as colleagues, circles, and communities are created.

The closure of schools once again, even for only alternative time frames, deprives students and teachers of face-to-face interactions. This depravity, the absence of an avenue to socialize, pushes students to be once again isolated from their peers; a luxury they had just received recently. It dissipates their opportunities to engage in meaningful social interactions where ideas can be exchanged, constructive criticisms can be given, and even where voices can be heard. These are the social dynamics and support systems that are integral to traditional classroom settings that students miss out on.

During the period of extreme heat, power outages and unstable internet connections were more frequent. This highlighted the Philippines' overreliance on technology in distance learning. The months of March to June made it difficult for students to participate in online classes consistently as not all of them have access to necessary technology or reliable internet service. The strain of technical difficulties, and physical and mental challenges posed by extreme weather conditions, hindered the learning process and limited access to education for those who are not tech-savvy or lack resources.

In conclusion, the task to solve the climate crisis does not lie with the education department or solely the Philippine government, of course. It is the responsibility of every country to manage its waste and its negative environmental contributions. However, the task of consistently delivering quality education for the entire learner population of the country lies with the Philippine government and the education department. They must provide support, such as building classrooms that can withstand the two climate extremes our country faces – rooms with better ventilation, supply of electricity, and even prepared school clinics and nurses.

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