THE DEPED COMPUTERIZATION PROGRAM: MILESTONES TO A FUTURE-PROOF TECHNOLOGY IN PHILIPPINE EDUCATION

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The Department of Computerization Program (DCP) of the DepEd invites Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the Philippine public school system to enhance the much-needed educational improvements. It also aims to create an advanced learning opportunity through a step that tackles the widening gap of schools entering the digital age and prepares Filipino learners to respond for skills needed as we respond to a mobilizing world and knowledge-based economy. Much of that progress has been hard-fought and remains around the work of that agency, but if the program is to reach its fullest possible potential, we need new consideration at its national level — across the country.

Historically, the DepEd Computerization Program (DCP) started by bringing computer packages to public high schools and later expanded to elementary and even kindergarten schools. These packages now also have projectors, laptops, desktop computers, and other digital tools that accommodate various learning activities and increase learners' skills in technology. In addition, the coverage has also expanded to ICT equipment that was relevant to the learning strands at the time of implementation of K–12 curriculum, particularly for science, math and technology and livelihood education (TLE) areas. Integration of technology into the curriculum provides support for learning at all levels. DepED has partnered with private companies and organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to equip more schools with the tools and expertise that they need for digital learning. These have provided vulnerable

communities with more resources and helped in teacher training when done collaboratively.

For digital learning and ICT training for teachers and learners, a few ICT learning centers have been established. These centers aim to reduce the technology divide by providing additional learning materials and by encouraging digital literacy. In addition, the pandemic also drove DepED to make more effort in providing technology for blended and distance learning. The department has imposed devices for learners who struggled to avail of online classes, especially those residing in rural areas to reach and provide access, aimed not to hinder educating the Filipino learners.

However, regularly encountering such obstacles causes schools to be faced with the challenge of keeping devices maintained, maintaining software updates, and obtaining technical assistance — all of which affect the performance and longevity of the technology. The lack of repair infrastructure to replace or repair broken gadgets in a very short duration, is especially difficult for schools in rural places, leaving them with yet another issue to be addressed quickly. The teachers may also not feel very confident on using the technology in class if they do not have time and resources to properly digital train. Also, the program is not quite helpful if some teachers and learners are unable to fully use the digital collaboration tools or the online materials because of a poor internet connection. This ever-changing nature of technology necessitates the updating of software and the development of new content quite frequently, resulting in a heavy cost. The schools rarely have the most recent software, limiting them to the most recent teaching sources and methodologies.

To further harness the resilience and impact of the DepEd Computerization Program, the following strategies might be considered:

1. Strengthening collaboration with private organizations and LGUs, which can fill the gaps in funding, provide technical support, and install ICT maintenance centers in

places where accessibility is a concern to minimize the equipment breakdown through frequent and scheduled preventive maintenance. Support for ongoing professional development of teachers in ICT by joining or enrolling them in the various NGO and NGA-initiated training and seminars shall also be included;

2. Cloud-based learning management systems (LMS) help pool resources and make information easier to find. Depending on cloud-based services lets schools get information right away and depend less on any kind of storage on site;

3. Schools can take advantage of the use of these ICT resources more effectively when there is poor internet connectivity by strategically combining digital and face-to-face teaching. The saved contents and off-line resources used allow the teachers to continue their digital classes without necessarily requiring a live internet connection;

4. A scheduled program of digital skills for teachers would make them less nervous about technology. Giving full ICT training to teachers-including managing their digital classrooms, on the other hand, using multimedia, and repairing devices-would have enabled teachers to use these tools better; and

5. Appointing special staff members to act as school ICT coordinators or offering incentives for working in that line could guarantee systematic fixing and testing of equipment. It would minimize waiting times and make things better for teachers and learners;

6. The program would reduce its dependency on expensive software by promoting open-source teaching resources and technologies. OERs enhance better access to resources since they present flexible content that can be accessed offline; and

7. Formed Support Network. The network is formed when parents and the communities help in understanding and promoting the use of technology in schools,

especially on issues to do with funding and maintenance. They can demand resources locally and know how vital technology is for education through workshops and meetings.

The DepEd Computerization Program has helped education regarding the use of technology in the Philippines. With this program, the schools will be able to acquire, manage, and use digital resources very effectively for the betterment of the next generation of Filipino learners. It can even close gaps, ensure teacher training, and fashion strong partnerships to reach the aim of providing all children with the tools and resources they need to succeed in an increasingly digital world. Let us constantly support the untiring endeavors of the DepEd down to its school grassroots as they continuously nurture our Filipino learners.

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