

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Neoliberal Restructuring of Education in the Philippines: Dependency, Labor, Privatization, Critical Pedagogy, and the K to 12 System

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**Abstract:** The neoliberal onslaught on the peripheries shows no sign of abating even as neoliberalism's tenets—privatization, deregulation, corporatization, exploitation, austerity, destruction of labor power, developed countries' dominance, developing countries' dependence—are increasingly becoming unpopular or at least exposed as bankrupt by their clear failure to resolve the 2008 crisis. In the Philippines, the K to 12 scheme represents a clear neoliberal restructuring of the education system attuned to the core countries' attempt to manage the crisis. Using Dependency Theory and critical discourses on neoliberalism as tools of analysis, this research is aimed at mapping the contours of this restructuring through contextualizing its link to dependency, privatization, contractualization, technicalization of education, and other aspects of the neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, the current study will shed light on how K to 12 complements the Philippines' 30-year old Labor Export Policy.

**Keywords:** Critical Pedagogy, Dependency, ASEAN, K to 12, Neoliberalism, Labor Export Policy

The latest global crisis that smashed the neoliberal world myth into smithereens in 2008 remains technically unresolved as proven by a plethora of current statistics and events: 1) current average unemployment rates in leading capitalist economies—4.9% in United States and 8.9% in the European Union (EU) member-countries—are still higher than the pre-crisis levels of 4.6% and 7.2% in 2007 (Eurostat, 2016; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016); 2) austerity measures aimed at

resolving the crisis but instead brought nothing but more economic turmoil are still in place (Elliott, 2016; Krugman, 2015; Quaglio, Karapiperis, Woensel, Arnold, & McDaid, 2013; Stiglitz, 2015; Marans, 2016); 3) global economic growth is anemic (World Bank, 2016a); 4) right-wing parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the French Front National (FN), and the Italian Lega Nord (Northern League) have strengthened their electoral bases (Gutteridge, 2015) through anti-immigrant

propaganda that wrongly blames immigrants for high unemployment rates—brought by the 2008 crisis—that are now decimating the Eurozone middle class, and similarly anti-immigrant and ultranationalist groups are now able to conduct big rallies in many European cities; 5) the rhetorically anti-austerity and anti-neoliberal left-wing party Greek Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás/SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) leads the governing coalition in the most austerity-stricken Eurozone country, and its sister-party, the Spanish PODEMOS (literally, “We Can”) has become one of the most dominant factions in their country’s politics (Jaramillo, 2015), while in the United Kingdom, the Scottish National Party (SNP) gained massive majorities—by opposing austerity—in the most recent parliamentary election, almost wiping out the UK-wide mainstream parties in Scotland (Davidson, 2015), and the UK Labour Party shocked the establishment by electing the life-long leftist Jeremy Corbyn as leader shortly after it lost the general elections to the Conservatives (Mason, 2015); 6) Capital-rich countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) pooled resources to form the New Development Bank that will rival the neoliberal World Bank in the developing countries (Wildau, 2015), in an effort parallel to what similar formations such as the Latin American financial consortium Banco del Sur (Bank of the South) and China’s Asian Infrastructure Development Bank attempt to achieve; 7) Pope Francis—to the glee of radicals everywhere—emphasizes that the current global economic set-up is untenable and must be radically transformed, devoting huge segments of his first apostolic exhortation (2013), to expound on why the faithful should say “no to an economy of exclusion,” “no to the new idolatry of money,” “no to a financial system which rules rather than serves,” and “no to the inequality which spawns violence” (par. 53-59); 8) sundry groups from pacifist ones like Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States (Calhoun, 2013) to armed revolutionary movements such as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) provide a similar critique on the unjust status quo (Central Committee of the CPP, 2015); 9) in the United States, growing numbers of citizens support the radical and anti-Wall Street presidential

candidacy of self-described democratic socialist and independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, exceeding expectations and defying mainstream media’s predictions (Abramson, 2016) steering the country from the center to the Left, at least in a number of aspects; 10) poverty and inequality rates remain scandalously high in many countries (Africa, 2011; Piketty, 2013; Subramanian, 2015; Hardoon, Ayele, & Fuentes-Nieva, 2016; Mangahas, 2016).

Surprisingly, the neoliberal onslaught on the peripheries shows no sign of abating even as neoliberalism’s tenets—privatization, deregulation, corporatization, exploitation, austerity, destruction of labor power, developed countries’ dominance, developing countries’ dependence—are increasingly becoming unpopular or at least exposed as bankrupt by their clear failure to lift billions of people out of hunger and poverty (Haque, 2008; Gupta, 2009; Stein, 2014; Odutayo, 2015; Hickel, 2016) despite rehashed promises of inclusive development. In the Philippines—an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member with around 20-40 million poor citizens as per official government and World Bank (2015a & 2015b) statistics, and used to be above China, Thailand, Indonesia, and Mongolia in the Human Development Index (HDI)—the Benigno Aquino III administration intends to intensify the export of semi-skilled laborers and professionals to developed economies (San Juan, 2014) by aligning its education system to the Bologna Process applied in the 47-country European Higher Education Area and the Washington Accord for professional engineering academic degrees that allow cross-country mobility (Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office, 2015). The Philippine government intends to add two more years of secondary schooling (“senior high school”) to the pre-university education of its citizens, pointing out that such set-up called K to 12 (Kindergarten to 12 Years of Pre-University Education) will permit its citizens to gain enough skills to work abroad even without college degrees. On top of these, mirroring the global trend, this neoliberal restructuring of Philippine education will also lead to the massive privatization of secondary education and adjunctivization or contractualization of the teaching and non-teaching

personnel in universities. Furthermore, the curriculum for the said education restructuring involves the abolition of subjects—such as Philippine History in high school, and Filipino Language, Literature and Philippine Government & Constitution in college—vital to critical pedagogy in a post-colonial or neocolonial set-up.

Within this context and using Dependency Theory and critical discourses on neoliberalism as tools of analysis, this research is primarily aimed at mapping the contours of the aforementioned restructuring of education through contextualizing its link to dependency, privatization, contractualization, and technicalization of education and other aspects of the neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, the current study will shed light on how K to 12 complements the Philippines' 30-year old Labor Export Policy. This endeavor will also help citizens everywhere understand and possibly reverse the continuing neoliberal restructuring of education, towards seeking alternative people-centered educational and social reform in a world where, as Amin (2014) asserted, people "...construct an autonomous national system based on the establishment of self-sustaining industry combined with the renewal of agriculture organized around food sovereignty" (par. 47) and contribute to "...the development of a second wave of awakening for the peoples of the South who could then link their struggles with those of peoples of the North, who are also victims of a savage capitalism in crisis and for which the emergence of a globalized production system offers nothing" (par. 47). The construction of such autonomous economic systems is impossible without developing equally autonomous education systems aligned with the requirements of public good rather than private profit, and informed by a vision for a better world of equal opportunities, rather than the status quo of glaring inequalities.

### **Dependency Theory and Critical Discourses on Neoliberalism**

In the past decades, Dependency Theory or Teoría de la Dependencia became popular in many developing countries. Dos Santos (1970), one of

Dependency Theory's eminent scholars, defined dependency as a "...situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected," (p. 231) categorized as colonial dependency or financial-industrial dependency. Dos Santos noted that aside from influencing the international affairs of the subordinated country, dependency also covers "their internal structures: the orientation of production, the forms of capital accumulation, the reproduction of the economy, and, simultaneously, their social and political structure" (p. 232). Simply put, Dependency Theory scholars assert that industrialized countries exploit poor countries through economic and political neocolonialism which perpetuate the latter's pre-industrial or semi-industrial status—majority of which are former colonies of developed countries.

In a speech at a plenary session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1964) summarized Dependency Theory's critique of the global status quo: "The inflow of capital from the developed countries is the prerequisite for the establishment of economic dependence. This inflow takes various forms: loans granted on onerous terms; investments that place a given country in the power of the investors; almost total technological subordination of the dependent country to the developed country; control of a country's foreign trade by the big international monopolies; and in extreme cases, the use of force as an economic weapon in support of the other forms of exploitation" (par. 30). In relation to Guevara's declaration, Amin (1976) described the world as an entity divided into "developed and underdeveloped countries" whose disparity "...has not become less pronounced...the gap between them continues to grow larger and has brought about the first crises of a capitalist system that had only just begun to be a world system" (p. 9). Such crises are evident in actual disparities in human development between developed and underdeveloped countries documented throughout the decades by the United Nation's annual Human Development Report. Amin (1976) also shed light on the "mechanisms of dependence" that expose the "process of development and underdevelopment,"

through which “(t)he underdeveloped economy is made up of sectors, of firms that are juxtaposed and not highly integrated among themselves, but are each of them strongly integrated into entities the centers of gravity which lie in the center of the capitalist world. What we have here is not a nation, in the economic sense of the word, with an integrated internal market. Depending on its geographical size and the variety of its exports, the underdeveloped economy may appear as being made up of several *atoms* of this type...” (p. 238). These “atoms” refer to industries and businesses which prop-up the import-dependent, export-oriented economy of many developing countries, designed to suit the needs of developed and/or capital-rich countries.

Such description of developing countries mirrors the Philippine situation: the economy is composed of atoms of industries of semi-manufactured goods and service-oriented businesses (malls, fastfood chains, call centers) that trap it into being one of the world’s “repositories of cheap labor” (Ferraro, 2008), and subject it to “other forms of exploitation” (Guevara, 1964). Amin (1976) explained why such economic disparity perpetuates “asymmetry in international relations” by pointing out that

(i)t is the center, (the advanced capitalist countries in the West, or the First World) that takes the initiative in trading relations — the center that imposes upon the periphery the particular forms its specialization assumes. This asymmetry, which reflects the commercial dependence of the periphery (the developing countries, or the Third World) is shown in the anteriority of the center’s exports in relation to its imports (the exports of the periphery, which has submitted to the forms of specialization required by the center). The periphery’s commercial dependence is aggravated by its financial dependence. The basic reason for this is that investments of foreign capital in the underdeveloped countries automatically engender a reverse flow of profit transfers. At the average rates of reward of capital, which range between 15 and 20 percent, the backflow of profits does not take long to become bigger than the inflow of capital investment, and, after a certain level

has been reached, the balance of external payments tips. (p. 258)

Statistics from the Central Bank of the Philippines (2016) and World Bank (2016b) showed how low reinvested Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) earnings are, as a percentage of the primary income on FDI in the Philippines—averaging a mere 17.78% only in 2006–2014—proving that Amin’s analysis remains relevant as ever.

Factors that worsen developing countries’ dependency on the developed countries include:

(1) urban development, together with inadequate increase in agricultural production of foodstuffs, which make necessary increasing imports of basic food products (wheat, rice, etc.); (2) increase in administrative expenditure, out of proportion with the possibilities of the local economy; (3) change in the structures of income distribution, with ‘Europeanization’ of the way of life and consumer habits of the privileged strata (demonstration effects); and (4) inadequate industrial development and disequilibrium in the industrial structures (excessive predominance of consumer-goods industries), which necessitate imports of production goods and intermediate goods. The combined working of these forces renders the underdeveloped countries dependent on external aid, which tends to become permanent. (Amin, 1976, p. 259)

Thus, the Philippines remains poor or underdeveloped because its imports remain high while the government fails to strengthen the domestic market through industrialization, especially when remittances from citizens working overseas provide enough dollars to help keep the national economy afloat (San Juan, 2014). From 1999-2014, as OFW remittances steadily increased each year from US\$ 6,021,219,000 to US\$ 24,628,058,000, the Philippines consistently registered a negative balance of payments, and the country’s manufacturing sector is only 22.81% of the GDP, on the average—peaking at 25% in 2002-2003 and sliding to 20% in 2013—clearly revealing how economic dependency and labor export go hand in hand too (Central Bank of

the Philippines, 2016; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016; and World Bank, 2016c). Comparable with the Philippine context is Nepal's remittance-driven economy, in contrast with the economies of a number of industrialized or semi-industrialized countries in Asia, as shown in Table 1.

Under this economic set-up, capital, debt, and machinery/technology, high-value products form the bulk of Philippine imports, while workers/professionals, raw materials, semi-manufactured goods, and profits are among the Philippines' exports. Such Dependency Theory analysis fits the current reality as the Philippine Statistics Authority (2015) included electronic products; mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials; transport equipment; industrial machinery and equipment; plastics in primary and non-primary forms; iron and steel; miscellaneous manufactured articles; and telecommunication equipment among the country's top imports, while electronic products (mostly semiconductors—which should be categorized as a semi-manufactured good); woodcrafts and furniture; other mineral products (mostly unprocessed, mineral ore); ignition wiring set and other wiring sets used in vehicles; articles of apparel; metal components; and coconut oil are listed as among the country's top exports. Using the lens of Dependency Theory, San Juan (2014) emphasized that this economic system is more favorable to developed/capital-rich countries because 1) developed nations' investments in developing countries earn profits which the former typically repatriate, rather than reinvest in the latter; 2) developed countries control multilateral financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and even the biggest private banks that

are capable of bankrolling or frustrating any effort towards industrialization contemplated by progressive developing countries' governments; 3) technology transfers on a massive scale seldom happens, hence developed countries tend to retain a monopoly on innovations vital to the growth of the manufacturing sector; 4) the bulk price of the developing countries' main exports (raw materials and semi-manufactured goods) is lower than the bulk price of their typical imports from developed countries (technology/machinery and high-value products); 5) the migration of workers and professionals from developing countries to the developed countries depletes the former's human resources which they need to free themselves from poverty and dependency; and 6) the education system of developing countries is aligned with the needs of developed/capital-rich countries which are also typical destinations of migrant workers from the developing nations.

The link between Dependency Theory and neoliberalism is evident in the way a number of developing countries' administrations uncritically mimic or are compelled to mimic the policies of neoliberal bastions in the developed countries, to the detriment of their own countries' economies (Lichauro, 1973; Castro, 2000; Hart-Landsberg, 2006; Soto, 2007; Peet, 2009; Muhammad, 2015). Neoliberalism's tenets include "(l)arge-scale privatization, liberalization and deregulation in the global economy" (Scholte, 2005, p. 1) – the very same policies pursued by contemporary Philippine governments, against the interest of the poor majority and for the welfare of few elite clans and corporations that monopolize the country's land, financial, and

**Table 1** *Manufacturing and Remittances as Percent of the GDP in Selected Asian Countries (2009-2014)*

Country	Manufacturing as Percent of the GDP						Remittance as Percent of the GDP					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Philippines	21	21	21	21	20	21	11.9	10.8	10.3	9.8	9.8	10
South Korea	28	30	31	31	31	30	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Malaysia	24	25	23	23	23	23	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5
China	32	32	40	38	37	36	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Nepal	7	7	6	7	7	7	23.1	21.7	22.3	25.4	29.0	29.2

*Source: Statistics from the World Bank (2016c and 2016d).*



economic resources, and that typically serve as partners of transnational corporations and their local subsidiaries (Stauffer, 1973; Anderson, 1988; Scipes, 1999; Bello, de Guzman, Malig & Docena, 2005; Lichauco, 2005; Simbulan, 2005; Tadem, 2014; Ibon International, 2015). The same mutually lucrative partnership form the firm foundation of the neoliberal educational restructuring in the Philippines through the implementation of K to 12.

### **Core Countries' and Big Business Support for K to 12 and Race to the Bottom**

Core countries (San Juan, 2013a) and big corporations (Torrevillas, 2015; Philippine Business for Education, 2012) are very supportive of K to 12. Official documents from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2013), the national office of the Department of Education (2014), and the Department of Education Regional Office VI (2013) highlighted the major role of the Australian-listed firm Cardno in the management and implementation of K to 12 in the Philippines, on top of the Australian Agency for International Development's (AusAID) involvement as one of the scheme's financiers. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank also provide funding for K to 12 (San Juan, 2015). As early as 2010, the Business Processing Association of the Philippines (BPAP), Chamber of Commerce of the Philippine Islands (CCPI), Employers' Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), Makati Business Club (MBC), Philippine Business for Education (PBE), Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), Semiconductor and Electronics Industries of the Philippines (SEIPI), and the Joint Foreign Chambers of the Philippines, consisting of American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Australian-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Philippines, Korean Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, and Philippine Association of Multinational Companies Regional

Headquarters signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Education (DepEd), in support of K to 12 (Cruz, 2016).

Core countries and big corporations stand to gain from K to 12, as this educational restructuring can help these entities find a solution to falling profit rates exacerbated by unimpressive global trade growth rate. Considering that citizens of developed countries have relatively higher wage rates and stronger labor unions (Stahl & Mulvad, 2015), they do not typically easily accept rock-bottom wages common in the developing countries. Hence, for capitalists in the developed countries, desperate for highly-skilled (because of their K to 12 education) migrant workers—from developing countries—who accept lower wage rates than citizens from the developed nations are like manna from heaven. Predictably, “wage dumping” incidents involving Filipino citizens who are either willing or compelled by their dire financial situation to work at wages lower than typical developed country rates abound (Tober, 2013; Tomlinson, 2014; National Union of Road Hauliers from Romania, 2015). Complying with the labor requirements of core countries and trapping workers into perpetual dependency and entry-level wage rates with no promise of economic mobility, the neoliberal Philippine regime devised a highly technicalized education system that churns out employable drones suitable to low-paying, contractual (or zero-hours) jobs that college graduates do not usually (or wholeheartedly) accept. As Marx (1867) explained, capitalism's “directing motive... is to extract the greatest possible amount of surplus value, and consequently to exploit labor-power to the greatest possible extent” (par. 19). Hence, creating an army of desperate senior high school finishers/non-university graduates, at a time when the average salary of college graduates is commonsensically higher than that of non-college graduates (World Bank, 2012a, p.28), is always desirable to both local and international capitalists and core countries that invest in developing nations, especially in countries such as the Philippines where no adequate protection for entry-level workers—such as anti-contractualization legislation or security of tenure laws and tougher laws on the minimum wage—are currently available (Briones, 2015).

In a symposium of the ECOP on wage hikes in the Philippines in 2013, the director of Department of Labor and Employment-National Capital Region (DOLE-NCR) Alex Avila admitted that “We want our minimum wage to entice foreign investments in order to create jobs” (ECOP, 2013, par. 11). ECOP President Edgardo Lacson is also straightforward in declaring “Wage should be market-driven” (Campos, 2014). In a separate report, ECOP directly blamed the annual, though really negligible (Solidum-Protacio, 2015), wage hikes in the Philippines for allegedly discouraging foreign investors to come to this ASEAN-member country (Osorio, 2010). Essentially, capitalists and the neoliberal regime consider the Philippines’ low wage rate as the country’s comparative advantage, more especially that its mineral resources are nearing depletion due to increasing mining activities all throughout the country. In his last State of the Nation Address, President Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” Cojuangco Aquino III (2015b) explicitly admitted that “low wage” is one of the country’s “advantages.” Thus, the Philippines’ K to 12 scheme is part and parcel of the race-to-the-bottom globalization plaguing the world today (Davies & Vadlamannati, 2013), especially in other K to 12 countries such as China and Vietnam where large-scale labor exploitation is blatantly common (Aguilar, 2015). In euphemistic terms, big business groups in the Philippines reiterated their support for K to 12 by saying that it “...will foster the development of competent graduates who will join the workforce and contribute to national competitiveness” (Remo, 2015, par. 2). By “competitiveness,” big business groups mean “low wages” as explained by a senior economist at the University of Asia and the Pacific—which was co-founded by a former long-term trustee of a big business group in the country (Makati Business Club, 2016)—by claiming that “Across different skill levels, however, our wages appear high and therefore less competitive” (Octaviano, 2014, p. 4).

### **Intensification of the Labor Export Policy (LEP) in the Developing Countries for Developed Nations’ Needs**

Aside from bananas, minerals, and microchips (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015), humans are the Philippines’ best known (and most exploited) resources, with Filipino migrants’ remittances consistently composing around 10% of the GDP in recent years (Chandran, 2015). The country’s manufacturing sector has almost stagnated in recent years, while remittances from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) remain ever-increasing. As per World Bank data (2015c), the Philippine manufacturing sector contributed only 21% to the GDP from 2010-2012 and 2014, and a percentage point lower in 2013, compared with an average of 25.2% from 1980-1984 (few years after the Labor Export Policy was adopted). According to World Bank data (2015d), remittances’ contribution to the GDP averaged 10.14% from 2010-2014—a certain leap from an average of 2.52% from 1980-1984. The Philippines has been stuck within such economic dependency since the United States “granted” it independence in 1946 because of its failure to achieve industrialization (Lichauco, 2005), in contrast with the relative success of some Asian countries such as Japan, China, South Korea, and Taiwan which sought industrialization outside the ambit of the neoliberal framework (Chang, 2007). The country’s perennially negative balance of trade in goods is also a proof of the lopsided nature of the Philippines’ import-dependent, export-oriented economy evident in its status as a supplier of migrant labor, semi-manufactures, and raw materials. Within this context, exporting workers remains a top priority for Philippine policymakers.

The track-based, technicalized curriculum for the two-year senior high school (Grades 11 at 12) in the Philippines is clearly focused on the specific needs of mostly foreign capitalist firms and their local partners. A detailed analysis of the needs of developed countries/territories among the top 10 destinations of migrant Filipinos (Commission on

Filipinos Overseas, 2009) vis-a-vis the proposed technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) tracks or courses in Philippine senior high school, prove that countries such as US, Saudi Arabia, Canada, United Arab Emirates, Australia, Malaysia, Japan, UK, Hong Kong, and Singapore will benefit from the current neoliberal restructuring of Philippine education. Many courses in the country's senior high school program (Department of Education, 2015a)—such as Housekeeping, Household Services, Welding, Slaughtering Operation, Food and Beverage Services, and Caregiving are shockingly suitable only to overseas jobs, and/or beneficial only to foreign businesses—such as Medical Transcription and Contact Center Services, to name just a few examples (See APPENDIX A/Table A1).

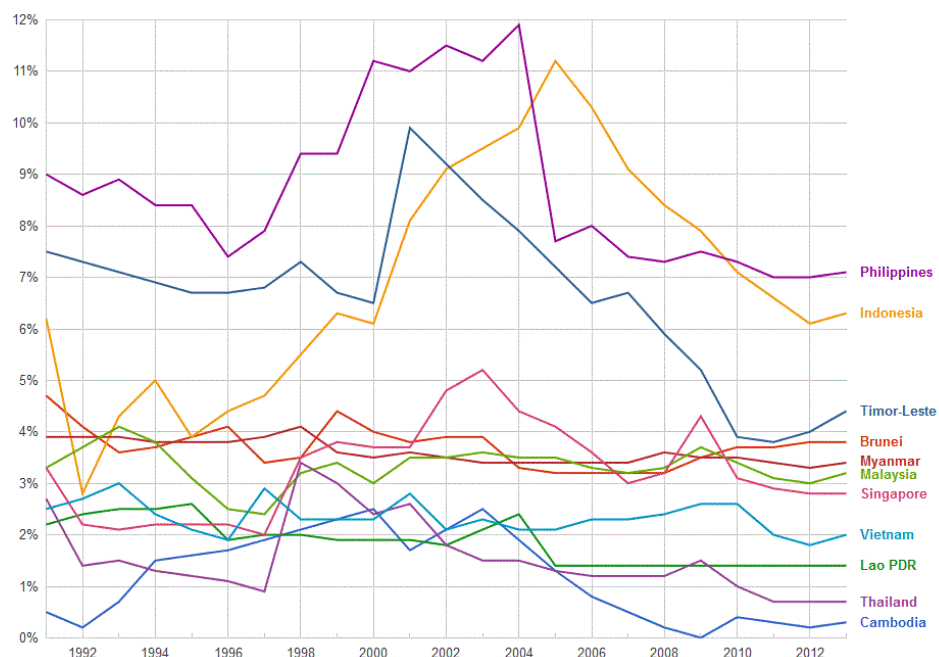
The labor export-orientation of the Philippine K to 12 program has been clear since its inception and is continuously reiterated as a policy. In 2012, under interpellation from then Kabataan Partylist Representative Raymond Palatino, then Rep. Rosenda Ann Ocampo—the congressional sponsor of the legislative piece on K to 12—declared that “...the identification of the course offering under the K to 12 program is dictated upon the need, and also upon the job markets as they exist. Definitely, the industrialized and richer countries have an aging population that need to be cared for, and that is the reason we offer caregiving courses” (San Juan, 2013b, p. 13). Furthermore, Ocampo straightforwardly disclosed that “...one of the main objectives of K to 12 is to make our students graduate with employable skills. If the end result is that our graduates end up getting jobs abroad, who are we to say that aspiring to land a job abroad is not something that many families in our country today aspire for? If the end result of K to 12 gives them the skills to land that job, then we are addressing a need and we are equipping our people (San Juan, 2013b, p. 13). Reiterating his solid support for K to 12 and rejecting snowballing calls for the program to be suspended or scrapped, President Aquino (2015a, 2015b) in two speeches both delivered in 2015, raised concerns that the credentials of Philippine graduates would no longer be recognized abroad and hence supposedly affect their overseas employment prospects, claiming

in his last State of the Nation Address that some OFWs have been demoted because of the country's old non-K to 12 system. Curiously, even prior to the implementation of the K to 12 scheme in the Philippines, it is Southeast Asia's biggest remittance receiver—second only to China in the Asia-Pacific region (World Bank, 2016e). The Philippines ranks worst in Southeast Asia with regard to net migration, consistently registering a negative net migration value, which means more people leaving than entering the country, from the early 1960s until 2012 (World Bank, 2016f). It must be noted that every country in these regions is already K to 12-compliant. Hence, based on the Philippine government's persistent declaration that K to 12 and labor export complement each other, the country's economy will further be reliant on remittances from OFWs once this educational restructuring is fully implemented. Historically, the Philippines has consistently topped Southeast Asia (except for a few years) in terms of unemployment, as shown by Figure 1, but some K to 12-compliant Southeast Asian countries such as Laos, Timor Leste, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, have more vulnerable workers (“unpaid family workers and own-account workers”) than the Philippines (World Bank, 2016h). Hence, it will not be possible to say that K to 12 is good to over-all employment.

### **Privatization Via Voucher System: A Setback for the Right to Education**

Because of the K to 12 scheme's hasty implementation in the Philippines, the Benigno Aquino III administration admits that only 60-70% of prospective senior high school students will be accommodated by public schools, while the remaining 30-40% of students will be compelled to enroll in private schools (Department of Education, 2015b) via an American-style voucher system which subsidizes private education, instead of expanding public education. From inception, the voucher system is a clear setback for the Filipino people's right to free primary and secondary education enshrined in the 1987 post-dictatorship Constitution. Students who will enroll in private senior high schools will





**Fig. 1** Unemployment rate of Southeast Asian countries (1991-2013). Source: World Bank (2016g).

only receive 8,750–22,500 pesos<sup>1</sup> of annual subsidy, while annual tuition rates for private senior high schools range from 24,850 pesos (advertised rate of APEC Schools, a consortium of the capitalist clan Ayala and multinational educational corporation giant Pearson) to 32,500 pesos (rate in the for-profit school chain STI) and 70,000 pesos (rate in the Philippine subsidiary of Singapore-listed Informatics Group). Thus, on top of incidental expenses, students and/or their parents will have to shell out money beyond the inadequate government subsidy. The voucher system for senior high school is actually an expansion of an earlier program (established in 1996) that subsidizes private education, called Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE). Euphemistically labeled “Education Service Contracting (ESC) Program,” a 2011 World Bank study recommended its expansion. The said World Bank research states that the Philippine government spent more than 13 billion pesos from 1996 to 2009 for this mega-subsidy to private educational institutions. Hence, this scheme is part of what Tadem (2014) has viewed as an ideological continuity of successive technocrat-run Philippine

governments that “...basically pursued the same economic policy liberalization as during the martial law period with an emphasis on privatization and deregulation” (p. 345).

GASTPE is a form of de-facto privatization of the education sector because it provides massive public funding for private schools, instead of building new public schools and/or expanding old ones. The Alliance of Concerned Teachers-Philippines/ACT Philippines (2015), the biggest teachers’ organization in the country, disclosed that the government allotted a total of Php15,784,343,000 for GASTPE in 2014 and for 2015. Citing the Department of Education, Malipot (2015) noted that in 2016, Php9.005 billion has been allotted for the GASTPE. The program’s critics point out that “2,700 out of 5,400 or half of the country’s private high schools participate in the GASTPE” and “(i)n Metro Manila, 70 percent of ESC-accredited private schools have more ESC-grantees as enrollees than non-ESC students,” leading them to assert “...that private schools are exploiting the GASTPE to ensure profits, and for many schools, it’s becoming their primary source of income,” and predicting “...that the SHS voucher program will end up like GASTPE, and is even specifically designed

to ensure profits” (Kabataan Partylist, 2015, par. 15).

The Philippine government’s public-private partnership in education through K to 12 is logically aligned with the goals of private capital, as elucidated in Riep’s case study (2015a) on “corporatised education in the Philippines” which exposed how the Pearson-Ayala Corporation tie-up established a “chain of private secondary schools in Metro Manila...to (re) produce the human capital required for a growing BPO industry in the Philippines.” It is not surprising that the Ayalas co-founded and still co-lead the National Industry-Academe Council (NIAC) which “threw their weight behind the shift to the K-12 basic education system” (Lucas, 2014), in the same year the APEC Schools chain was founded. Interestingly, a top official of the ruling Liberal Party (Garchitorea, n. d.) that shepherded the legislation of K to 12 in the Philippines, also served as an Ayala Corporation consultant in 2013 when the K to 12 Law was passed. Aside from Pearson, Informatics Group, and Ayala Corporation, other stock market-listed firms engaged in senior high schools are PHINMA, Centro Escolar University/CEU, iPeople (part of the Yuchengco Group of Companies that controls Mapua Institute of Technology and Malayan High School of Science, both senior high school-offering entities), ANSCOR (that partly owns Enderun Colleges which also offers senior high school), Far Eastern University and STI, based on Department of Education statistics (2016) and online data from the Philippine Stock Exchange. Another big private investor in senior high school education is the AMA Group which owns a large chain of schools composed of AMA, ABE, and St. Augustine Schools. In its website, the AMA Basic Education Unit directly invites would-be investors by boasting that the firm “...is open for franchising.” For 2016, private senior high schools stand to gain 11.183 billion pesos as assistance from the national government, on top of 1 billion pesos for students’ vouchers (Malipot, 2015).

The Philippine government’s de-facto privatization of education through K to 12 is further highlighted in the Asian Development Bank-funded project (2011) dubbed “Education Improvement Sector Development Program” (EISDP) which is implemented “...to increase the role of the **private sector** in education:

revised **ESC** (Education Service Contracting), classroom/school construction through infrastructure **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**, **private** management of public schools, and other innovative delivery mechanisms” (emphasis supplied). The EISDP was initiated in 2011 and is expected to deliver outcomes that include “policy changes required to implement the K to 12 reform.” Among these policy changes is the adoption of the abovementioned voucher system for public junior high school students who will be compelled to transfer to private senior high schools. Based on available statistics from the Department of Education’s website (2016), of around 7,748 public secondary schools, only 5,902 will offer senior high school programs.

The extensiveness of the voucher system under K to 12 has been recently revealed by statistics culled from the Department of Education’s website (2016), pegging the number of private senior high schools in Metro Manila at 78% of the total. Nationally, the number of private senior high schools stands at 44% of the total. Quoting Department of Education sources, Malipot (2015, par. 16) revealed that “877,937 or 66.7 % of the total number of registrants – will go to public senior high schools (SHS)” while a total of 437,668 SHS or 33.3% of the registrants are expected to enroll in private SHS. Thus, many public school students will be forced to transfer to private senior high schools, as DepEd’s K to 12 Basic Education Midterm Report to Congress (2015b) pegs the number of public secondary high school students at 5,928,042 (81% of the total) and the number of private secondary high school students at 1,353,320 (19% of the total) in 2014.

Similar public fund-for-private-schools schemes have been proven as failures in countries such as the United States and Sweden, where it led to the massive privatization of the education system, defunding of public schools, and general decline in the quality of education. Lipman (2011) and Foster (2011) have written extensively with regard to the failure of the American voucher system. Lipman (2011, par. 17) explained how America’s voucher system and their own publicly-funded private schools called charter schools complete the pattern of “disinvestment, privatization, and gentrification,”

detailing experiences of communities where “(t)he board has replaced neighborhood schools with charter schools or selective enrollment schools that most neighborhood children are unable to attend,” leading to school closings that “...have resulted in increased mobility, spikes in violence, and neighborhood instability as children are transferred to schools out of their neighborhoods.” More recent reports compiled a list of charter schools’ failures from underperformance relative to public schools (Buchheit, 2015, par. 5-8), to “high teacher turnover” (Ravitch, 2015, par. 2) and even instances of “corruption and misuse of funds” (Dean, 2015, par. 8). In relation to performance, Watkins (2012, par. 29) pointed out that “the only national-scale study, conducted by Stanford University, reported that only 17 per cent of charter schools out-perform matched neighborhood public schools.” Discussing longitudinal data from various American states, Foster (2011, par. 60) concluded that “...according to its own narrow standards of schooling, as measured by standardized tests, the charter school movement has been less than successful.” Meanwhile, Fisman (2014) discussed the parallel failure of the Swedish voucher system, concluding that it partly contributed to Sweden’s “nosedive” in recent international test rankings, by remarking that:

If parents value high test scores, you can compete for voucher dollars by hiring better teachers and providing a better education—or by going easy in grading national tests. Competition was also meant to discipline government schools by forcing them to up their game to maintain their enrollments, but it may have instead led to a race to the bottom as they too started grading generously to keep their students. (par. 11)

The American and Swedish experiences on privatized education is very relevant to the Philippine situation considering that Pearson—Ayala Corporation’s partner in the Philippines’ APEC Schools—owns the Connections Academy business that operates charter schools in 21 states (Connections Academy, 2011), while the Swedish website of Pearson Assessment (<http://www.pearsonassessment.se/>) declared that it is the “market leader in Scandinavia.” Pearson’s record in its Omega Schools in Ghana should further make the Philippines think twice about jumping into the privatization bandwagon, as a case study has documented how those schools “...employ unqualified teachers and pay them severely low wages” as a “principal strategy for cutting costs and increasing profit margins” (Riep, 2015b, p. 3).

**Anti-Tertiary Education Mantra: Cheap Labor for Local and Transnational Capital, Permanent Poverty for Everyone**

### **Anti-Tertiary Education Mantra: Cheap Labor for Local and Transnational Capital, Permanent Poverty for Everyone**

In the Philippine case, defunding both public senior high schools and state universities and colleges (SUCs) is an end-goal of the K to 12 scheme which has been described as having an anti-tertiary education mantra (San Juan, 2013a). The link between defunding the public education system and providing public funds for private schools has been revealed in the origins of the voucher system in the United States where

(i)n the 1980s, a powerful conservative political coalition, led by corporate interests, was organized against the public schools. Ronald Reagan sought to institute school vouchers, while frequently indicating his desire to abolish the U.S. Department of Education... The Reagan administration, which initiated a huge Cold War military buildup while cutting taxes on the wealthy and corporations, used the rhetoric of reducing the skyrocketing federal deficit to justify jettisoning federal support for schools—including a 50 percent cut in federal Title I funding for schools in low-income districts. (Foster, 2011, par. 29-30)

In the Philippines, defunding the public education system and public funding for private schools through the voucher system go hand in hand, relative to the Philippine government’s anti-tertiary education rhetoric. If the Philippine government succeeds in discouraging students from enrolling in college and just settle for senior high school education, public

funding for tertiary education will certainly decrease, even as it has been almost stagnant or dismal in the past years, especially if compared with other Asia-Pacific countries (World Bank East Asia and Pacific, 2012).

The Commission on Higher Education, Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges, and the Department of Budget and Management (2012) in the Roadmap for Public Higher Education Reform (RPHER), have in fact linked defunding of public tertiary institutions and K to 12 by declaring that

(i) it is generally recognized that compared to higher education, basic education yields greater social returns and its provision is the more fundamental duty of the state. As the present Administration gears up to implement the K-12 program in order to make the country's basic education internationally comparable and enable it to adequately prepare secondary school graduates for higher education or for the world of work, scarce government resources will understandably have to be prioritized for basic education... in a market-based context, the robust private education subsector which has historically contributed significantly to the delivery of higher education, shall continue to do so... (p. 3)

One of RPHER's explicit "...objective is to enable SUCs (state universities and colleges) to become more self-reliant financially and less dependent on government subsidy" through encouraging and assisting them in implementing "business or development plans that would make use of idle lands and assets, and to engage in income-generating projects in partnership with the private sector, if feasible" (p. 7). The K to 12 scheme is logically complementary to the Philippine government's neoliberal-oriented Roadmap for Public Higher Education Reform (RPHER) which intends to implement the amalgamation/merging of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) that will result to the reduction of the number of such state-funded higher educational institutions, thereby further making tertiary education "inaccessible" to poor citizens (Umil, 2014). The high opportunity cost

of university education may in fact make the government's declared goal of discouraging poor students from aspiring for higher education degrees and compelling them to just take up TVL tracks in senior high school succeed. As cited by Hernandez (2015, par. 10), Tullao, Cabuay, Garcia, Ang, and Sayo in a 2015 study entitled "Costing and Financing Philippine Higher Education" pegged the annual "... opportunity cost of higher education, or the foregone income of an individual who had gone to college rather than worked after high school..." at 49,537.87 pesos, an amount "...at par with the average tuition in private higher education institutions (HEIs)..." and "...may thus further deter parents and students from seeking tertiary education."

Official documents on K to 12 such as the "K TO 12 TOOLKIT: Reference Guide for Teacher Educators, School Administrators, and Teachers" published by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology/SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2012), DepEd's (2010) "Briefer on the Enhanced K to 12 Basic Education Program," and the World Bank's (2012b) Philippines Quarterly Update "From Stability to Prosperity for All" emphasized how the scheme will supposedly benefit poor families by giving them "employable" senior high school graduates, minimizing if not obliterating any aspiration towards completing a university degree. Roughly 50% of public senior high schools will offer non-academic, technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) tracks aimed at encouraging—if not compelling—poor students to work immediately after graduating from secondary education, rather than aspire for higher education through academic tracks. The looming educational apartheid has been exposed in Suspend K to 12 Alliance's Supreme Court petition (Tinio et al., 2015) where urban poor community leaders joined as petitioners, revealing that public senior high schools in their area will offer only work-oriented TVL tracks. Recent online statistics from the Department of Education (2016) peg the number of TVL-offering DepEd schools at 4,435 and the number of General Academic Strand (GAS)-offering DepEd schools at 3,981. Only 252 DepEd schools are capable of offering all academic strands (GAS; A Accountancy, Business and



Management/ABM; Humanities and Social Sciences/HUMSS; and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics/STEM). The chairperson of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Patricia Licuanan, has in fact deliberately mentioned that the graduates of senior high school “...would be presumably better equipped for the jobs out there. So, they would not have to go to college anymore” (Department of Filipino Language and Philippine Literature and All UP Academic Employees’ Union, 2014, 0:24-0:31). In a more recent report, Licuanan has been quoted as emphatically saying, in relation to K to 12, that

We don’t think that every student really should go to college. There are very good programs in the technical and vocational areas or in the area of middle-level skills, and you get jobs when you finish these programs... That option...is attractive, but in our culture, we have that notion that everyone should get a college diploma. I don’t think that’s necessary. (Bencito, 2015, par. 2-3)

For neoliberal governments in the developing countries, tertiary education is a cost, rather than an investment, which is no longer necessary to produce docile workers for low-paying contractual jobs, considering that senior high school will do the trick cheaply and more efficiently (at least in

terms of the number of years of pre-employment education). As per the logic of neoliberalism, college education should not be the aspiration of citizens of developing countries because the unjust global division of labor has relegated them to the status of semi-skilled workers with no hope for social mobility nor redemption in a world obsessed with cutbacks in badly needed social services such as education, health care, and housing. The moral bankruptcy of this neoliberal education system in the Philippines is further exposed by the fact that the average salary of college graduates in the country is way above the average salary of non-college graduates, across all working age groups (World Bank, 2012a, p.28).

The Philippine neoliberal regime’s obsession with non-academic, technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) tracks, and mantra of discouraging poor students from entering college is directly opposite to what developed countries are doing—encouraging citizens to finish university education. Figure 2 shows that developed countries’ entry rates in tertiary education range from Australia’s more than 85% and Israel’s 60%, in contrast with the Philippines’ measly gross tertiary level enrollment rate pegged at 28.20% in 2009 as per data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015). Hence, it is evident that K to 12 in the Philippines is just another ploy to perpetuate the country’s economic dependency as a supplier of semi-skilled workers to leading world economies. Majority of OECD

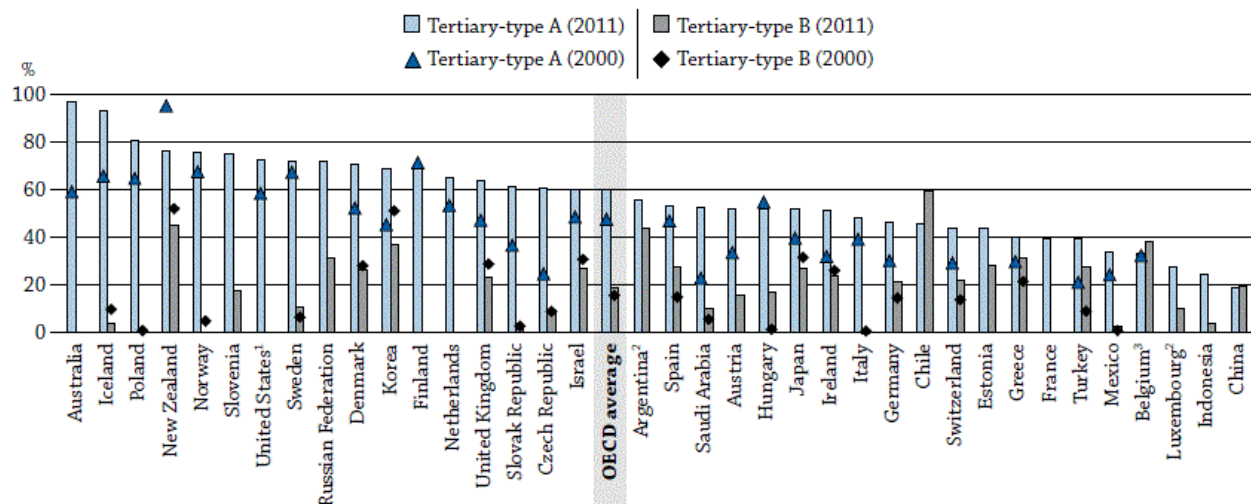
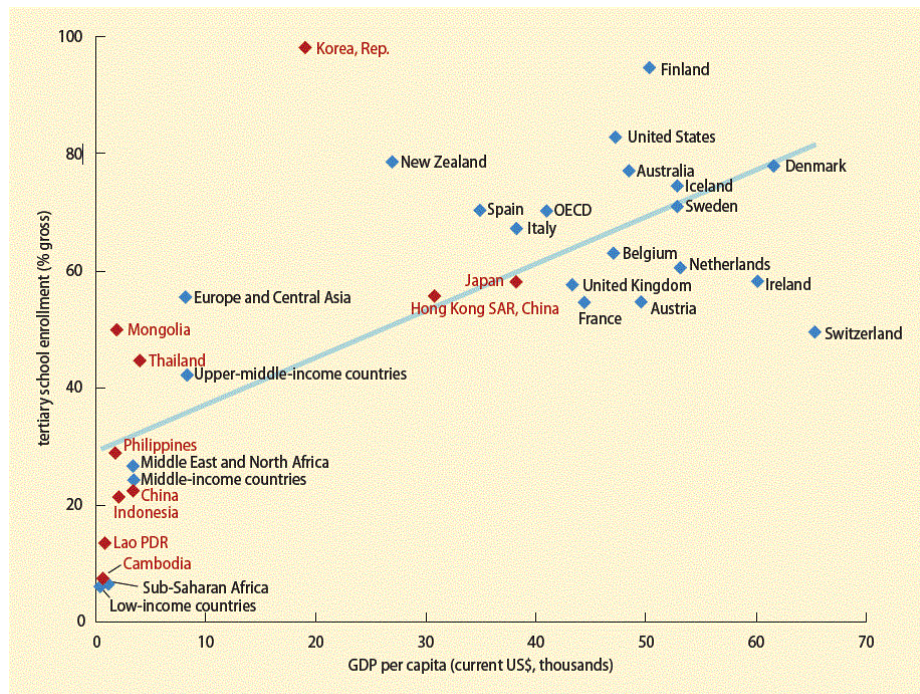


Fig. 2 Entry rates into tertiary-type A and B education (2000, 2011) of OECD Countries. Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2013).



Source: EdStats database.

**Fig. 3** *Tertiary enrollment and per capita GDP, 2008.*  
 Source: *World Bank-East Asia and Pacific Regional Report (2012).*

countries are typical destinations of OFWs and other migrants from developing countries.

Figure 3 shows a strong positive relationship between high tertiary enrollment and per capita GDP, thus the Philippine government's anti-tertiary education mantra can only be interpreted as its way of cementing the country's current role in the bottom and mid-level rungs of the international division of labor, rather than aspiring for genuine and autonomous development.

As per the United Nations Development Programme's (2015, 2016) Human Development Index (HDI) Report 2014, there are 70 countries poorer than the Philippines. Only two of those 70 countries (Angola and Djibouti) are non-K to 12 countries. In other words, 68 K to 12-compliant countries are more underdeveloped (or poorer) than the Philippines. One may not necessarily agree with the exiled Philippine communist leader Jose Maria Sison's (2015, par. 33) politics, but he is right to point out that "many countries have been on K-12 for decades yet remain grossly underdeveloped and

fare even worse than the Philippines on educational indicators." Evidently, peripheral countries need more than just superficial educational reforms to achieve genuine economic development. Judging from the experiences of industrialized countries where college enrollment rates are relatively higher, discouraging citizens from achieving higher education will not enable a peripheral country to liberate itself from poverty, dependency, and underdevelopment.

### **Adjunctivization of Teachers and Non Teaching Personnel: Smashing Labor Power**

Worse, the neoliberal restructuring of Philippine education will also displace around 25,000 (DepEd, 2015b) to 80,000 (DepEd et al., 2015) professors and non-teaching personnel in both private and public colleges and universities, due to the new college curriculum under the K to 12 scheme which reduced the number of units for general education subjects from 51-63 units to merely 36 units,

parallel to neoliberal Anglo-American schemes of de-emphasizing the humanities—the so-called “war against the humanities” (Nisen, 2013; Preston, 2015). The government claims that the displaced professors and non-teaching personnel can instead transfer to senior high schools (Aquino, 2015a), but swapping levels in teaching is never a smooth process as formerly tenured professors will have to undergo typically rigorous application process just to start from scratch as probationary (and even part-time, contractual) entry-level senior high school teachers. Such policy is of course anti-labor, as it will unjustly decrease the income and increase the work load of many college/university professors who will be forced to transfer to public senior high schools. For example, in the National Capital Region (NCR), as per the government’s own data (DepEd et al., 2015), the mean salary of full-time faculty in state-funded higher education institutions, local government-funded universities and colleges, private non-sectarian, and private sectarian tertiary level institutions are as follows: 36,168 pesos; 29,475 pesos; 21,062 pesos; and 40,955 pesos. Such mean salary rates are definitely higher than the entry-level pay for Teacher II position—that will be granted to professors who will transfer to public senior high schools—which is merely 19,940 pesos. Moreover, it must be emphasized that workloads in NCR tertiary level institutions are relatively lighter than workloads in public elementary and high schools. For example, the full teaching load of teachers in some NCR colleges and universities is only 12–18 hours per week, while in public elementary and high schools, the full teaching load is 30 hours per week. Simply put, teachers are told to accept pay cuts AND work harder.

In March 2015, a case has been filed in the Philippine Supreme Court, challenging the constitutionality of the K to 12 Law, pointing out that schools have been using the scheme to compel education sector workers to accept early retirement schemes, while at the same time promising them that they can be rehired soon as contractuels (Merueñas, 2015). In a separate Supreme Court petition to stop the K to 12 Program filed on May 2015, petitioners disclosed that in the University of Santo Tomas (UST)—one

of the biggest universities in the country—contracts for full-time “fixed-term” faculty members explicitly state that they will not be rehired come 2016 because of the K to 12 program (Tinio et al., 2015). Some of these faculty members could have become permanent by 2016 as they have served for at least three school years, but they were not considered probationary employees because of the anticipated impact of K to 12. The same petition reveals that some schools, such as Saint Louis University (SLU)—one of the biggest universities in Northern Philippines—have released documents detailing “projections for faculty requirements” in connection with K to 12, implying that even full-time faculty members will be displaced as early as the second semester of School Year 2016-2017, with more displacements projected for School Year 2017-2018.

Hence, the massive adjunctivization of tertiary institutions’ employees now apparent in the United States (Saunders, 2008; Kendzior, 2013; Chomsky, 2014) will be the imminent fate of professors and other education sector workers too in its former colony, the Philippines, under a neoliberal restructuring that favors only big business and developed countries’ economies. The adjunctivization of both teaching and non-teaching personnel in universities will certainly further weaken the already anemic education sector unionism in the Philippines. While the destruction of labor power relative to capital’s dominance is of course a global trend now, it must be noted that in the Philippines, unions have never been powerful in much of the country’s recent history, as proven by the lack of even just a strong pro-welfare state movement in the country, not to mention a robust and broad and ever-expanding movement towards socialism, in contrast with nations where unions have successfully compelled governments and capitalists to accept a welfare statist model as in Scandinavia, or have helped elect socialist-oriented or at least redistributive administrations as in much of Latin America. The Philippines’ unionization rates—8.5% in the private sector and 14.9% in the public sector (Philippine Bureau of Labor Relations, 2012)—are anemic compared with that of Sweden: 71%; Norway: 52%; Denmark: 67%; and Finland: 74% (European Worker Participation Competence Centre/EWPCC,



2013). Dragging developing countries' professors into relative job insecurity will certainly affect their ability to organize themselves for sectoral reforms and to contribute to general and multisectoral endeavors for the country's sweeping social transformation, unless if they consider their adjunctivization as a tipping point, a single spark that can light the prairie fire, so to speak.

### **Trimming Down General Education: Wiping Out Academic Space for Critical Pedagogy**

To complete the neoliberal restructuring of Philippine education, its architects instituted technicalization and apparent dehumanization in the core curriculum for the senior high school/junior college level by wiping out academic space for a number of vital Humanities and Social Sciences subjects which were formerly mandatory. Subjects vital to critical pedagogy—such as Philippine History—where Filipino students have the chance to free their minds from what Renato Constantino (1970) labeled as “miseducation” wrought by centuries of colonial rule, and consequently realize that learning history is imperative “...to synthesize the experience of the past, in order to obtain a concrete vision of the future” (Constantino, 1975, p. 404) towards the total liberation of society's marginalized or oppressed; Filipino—the national language which is also the language of social movements in the country (Gimenez Maceda, 1993); Literature—an obvious venue for Freireian conscientization, as Philippine literature has a strong socially conscious/realist tradition (Ordoñez, 1996); and Philippine Government & Constitution (a course emphasizing the constitutional rights and duties of citizens)—have been either abolished in junior high school, not included in senior high school, or wiped out in the college curriculum. Ironically, the Philippines' mandatory minimum General Education units under K to 12—36 units (down from 51-63 units before K to 12 was implemented)—is less than what many universities in Asia and the United States prescribe, ranging from 39 to 108 units (<https://www.facebook.com/>

TANGGOLWIK/photos/pb.1417236865230877.-2207520000.1460095262./1659495577671670/?type=3&theater).

High school and college education have been reduced to the mere learning of technical skills for immediate employment, as the K to 12 scheme seemingly aims to “...create a new generation of children who will not have the ability to think or create or listen...,” as Mr. Glenn Holland, a music teacher in the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus* (Cort & Herek, 1995, 5:12-5:18) uttered in warning against the death of General Education/Liberal Arts subjects in the USA. Imagine a world where “...kids aren't going to have anything to read or write about...” as per Mr. Holland's prophecy (Cort & Herek, 1995, 3:50-3:52). Radicals cannot help but also remember Mr. Chipping's eloquent remark on contemporary education in the film *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (Saville, Wood & Franklin, 1939, 1:22:23-1:22:39): “I know the world's changing. I see old traditions dying one by one. Grace, dignity, feeling for the past. All that matters today is a fat banking account. You're trying to run the school like a factory for turning out moneymaking snobs.”

Instead of Paulo Freire's “pedagogy of liberation” suitable to the country's post-colonial/neocolonial context, Philippine authorities are institutionalizing a “pedagogy of the oppressed” that will perpetuate oppression and all the dehumanizing realities of human wretchedness under neoliberal capitalism such as the horrendous existence of outrageous wealth for a tiny minority vis-a-vis global hunger, precarious employment, zero hours contracts, and starvation wages, aligned with what Epstein (2012) described as a “serious subtraction,” an education bereft of intangible values, without which “we shall no longer have a segment of the population that has a proper standard with which to judge true intellectual achievement. Without it, no one can have a genuine notion of what constitutes an educated man or woman, or why one work of art is superior to another, or what in life is serious and what is trivial...,” and in a world of wrongs where “...a nation might wake up living in the worst, and never notice” (par. 51) As Eric Fromm (1955) chillingly expounded, it is a world of automaton-like men “who make machines which act



like men and produce men who act like machines,” where man is equipped with the “...greatest material power without the wisdom to use it...” (p. 360). Simply put, because it obliterated academic spaces for critical pedagogy, K to 12 in the Philippines will churn out docile laborers—almost powerless cogs of the neoliberal world order where a tiny elite controls everything as almost everyone is a slave.

### **Alternatives to K to 12 in the Philippines**

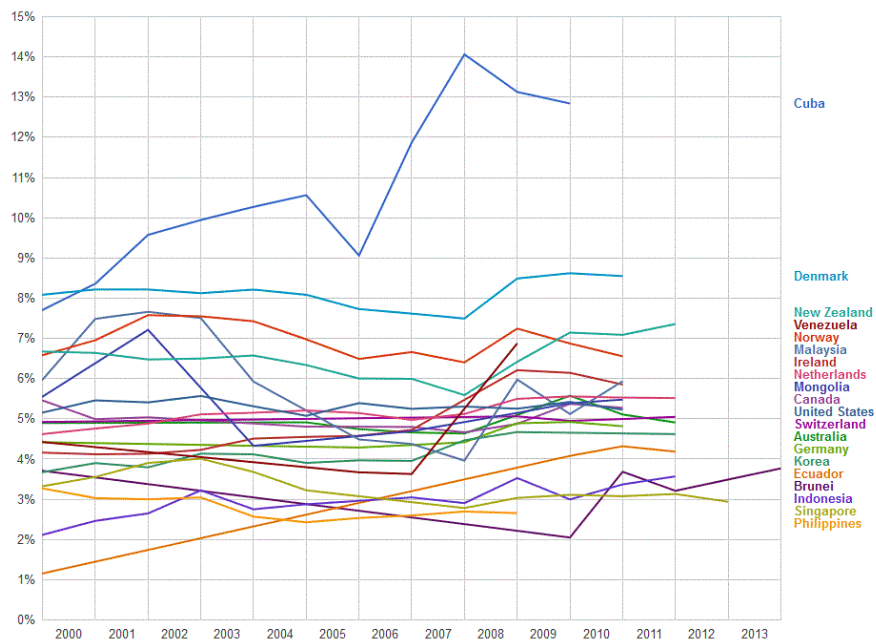
In general, instead of immediately implementing the K to 12 scheme, the current 11-year Basic Education cycle (Kindergarten, Grades 1 to 6 at Grades 7 to 10) must be improved or overhauled, and additional investments for state colleges and universities and to the whole education sector must be provided. Allotting sufficient budget for education is the first step to improve the 11-year Basic Education cycle. Currently, the Philippines is an outlier when it comes to the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) allotted to education (see Figures 4 and 5). As per the standards of the United Nations (UN), at least 6% of the GDP must be allotted to education.

The additional budget that would be allotted to the K to 12 scheme will be better spent for improving the current 11-year Basic Education cycle first. Debates on whether to add 2 more years in high school should start once the 11-year Basic Education cycle from Kindergarten to Grade 10 is perfected. The only quantitative research (Felipe & Porio, 2008, p.12-15) on this matter cautions against adopting a 12-year Basic Education Cycle and points out a more practical alternative: “(t)here is no clear empirical basis in TIMSS to justify a proposal for the Philippines to lengthen its education cycle...There is no basis to expect that lengthening the educational cycle calendar-wise, will improve the quality of education...” Felipe and Porio (2008) further emphasized that:

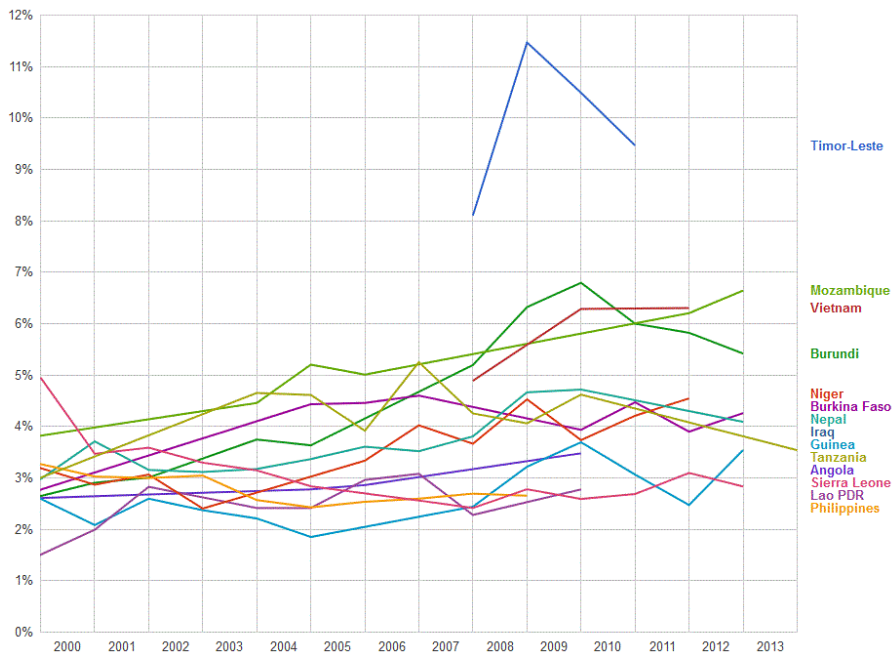
The value of the 12-year cycle is ultimately a matter of weighing the large and certain costs against the uncertain gains in lengthening the education cycle. However, one can adopt a

guideline in weighing these costs and gains. One such guideline may be that individuals who are inconvenienced by non-standardised cycles should be the ones to bear the costs of reducing those inconveniences. People in the farms and small barangays should be spared the burden of a system that will not benefit them. The government could help those interested in foreign studies and work placement by supporting an appropriate system of assessment, rather than tinker with the whole cycle length. This solution addresses the alleged problem in a more focused way and does not indiscriminately impose on every Filipino the costs of meeting the needs of a few. (pp. 15-16)

Additional investments in the tertiary level, more especially in the fields of research and development (R&D) are also important. The Philippines lags behind many Asia-Pacific countries when it comes to R&D expenditures, hence the country is also weak in innovation and modernization of technologies in education and other fields (World Bank East Asia and Pacific, 2012). Additional budget for the tertiary level is important in ensuring that more students will finish their schooling. It has been proven that the “rate of return” of investment in studying in college and beyond is huge—higher than the rates of return for every pre-tertiary level of education (Di Gropello, Tan, & Tandon, 2010). Moreover, “(t)ertiary education is to a large extent a prerequisite for high-paid occupations” (Luo & Terada, 2009, p. 14). Finally, it must be emphasized the average salary of college graduates is higher than that of non-college graduates (World Bank, 2012a, p. 28). The anti-college education mantra of the K to 12 advocates will not be beneficial to the country in the long run and hence, it must be reversed. Instead of encouraging students not to study in college under the K to 12 scheme, the government must maximize investments in tertiary education so as to attract more students to enroll and finish their college degrees. This is one of the keys to progress, as proven by developed nations. A country with highly educated citizens would certainly enjoy high levels of sustainable growth in the long run.



**Fig. 4** Public spending on education as % of the GDP, 2000-2013.  
 (Philippines and selected countries that outrank it in the Human Development Index 2014).  
 Source: World Bank (2016i)



**Fig. 5** Public spending on education as % of the GDP, 2000-2013.  
 (Philippines and selected countries that it outranks in the Human Development Index 2014).  
 Source: World Bank (2016i).

## Freeing the Economy and the Education System From the Shackles of Dependency

Any additional budget for education will be useless unless the education and economic systems of the country are not reoriented. Constantino's old prescriptions (1970) remain as relevant as ever:

The education of the Filipino must be a Filipino education. It must be based on the needs of the nation and the goals of the nation. The object is not merely to produce men and women who can read and write or who can add and subtract. The primary object is to produce a citizenry that appreciates and is conscious of its nationhood and has national goals for the betterment of the community, and not an anarchic mass of people who know how to take care of themselves only. (p. 12)

In this context, vital subjects that were abolished by K to 12—Philippine History, Filipino Language, Literature and Philippine Government & Constitution—must be revived and even expanded. In the Philippines, these subjects are vital in molding citizens with critical thinking skills and liberated social consciousness that will allow them to reverse exploitation and gross inequality, beyond the mere utilitarian, work-based and technicalized curriculum under K to 12. Consequently, the country's labor export policy must be reviewed if not scrapped, including the related policy that treats schools in the Philippines as mere manufacturers of workers and professionals for export.

To complement such endeavors, job opportunities within the country must be broadened through implementing a comprehensive economic plan that focuses on self-reliance or self-dependence—what Amin (2014) called as the establishment of “autonomous national systems.” This can be done through national/nationalist industrialization, agrarian reform, and modernization of agriculture, progressive policies which have been tackled and discussed in detail by many Filipino thinkers and social movements throughout the country's recent history (Recto, 1959; Hernandez, 1982; Lichauco, 1986, 2005; Constantino, 1995; Salgado, 1997; Amado V.

Hernandez Resource Center & College Editors' Guild of the Philippines, 1998; Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas/KMP, 2009; Bagong Alyansang Makabayan/BAYAN, 2011). Agrarian reform will strengthen the financial capability of the country's peasant majority—and consequently expand the domestic market while supplying it with basic raw materials too. Thus, agrarian reform will complement any industrialization endeavor. The role of the education system in transforming the country into a developed archipelago should be obvious by now: innovations in agriculture and industry—expectedly accelerated by schools, universities, and research centers aligned with the country's development objectives—will enable the country to swiftly achieve national and sustainable development, based on the common good rather than corporate profit. The requisite perfection of K to 10, and the revival of vital subjects abolished by K to 12, should at least be pursued, if a genuinely progressive and national development-oriented education system will be achieved. Essentially, these programs are anchored on the Philippines' capability to utilize its resources for its own citizens' progress, and not merely as exports to other countries. The Philippines has all natural and human resources needed by a country to become developed and a net contributor to the global struggle against inequality and exploitation. As Sison points out,

(t)heoretically, a K-12 program, properly oriented, planned and managed, could lead to genuine reforms that will truly benefit the Filipino people and youth in the realm of education. A truly patriotic, mass-oriented, and scientific educational system will be able to train millions of youth, help empower the people and build their nation through heightened social consciousness, scientific knowledge and technical skills—while also contributing to the general advance of human knowledge and development worldwide. (2015, par. 46)

## Revitalizing the Global Movement Against Neoliberal Attacks on Education

With regard to K to 12, the Philippines is not alone in battling neoliberal attacks on education, hence a

broad international movement against neoliberalism is needed to effectively overcome the dark forces of capital ever-ready to gobble up the last bastions of the commons such as education (Bowers, 2006). Opposing and reversing the neoliberal restructuring of education to suit corporate interests is a must, if peoples of the world are to have a chance to turn the tide against the untenable economic status quo that benefits only the richest and most powerful citizens of the world. Who controls the education system can certainly control the whole socio-economic infrastructure in the long run. From the United States to peripheral countries, policies such as massive privatization of education, adjunctivization of teaching and non-teaching personnel, smashing labor power, trimming down of subjects vital to critical pedagogy (mostly, Humanities and Social Sciences subjects), are being carried out by neoliberal regimes beholden to corporate interests and core powers. Connecting the struggles against these initially seemingly unrelated neoliberal policies, as carried out in this paper, must be accomplished at both national and international levels. A global fightback is imperative, and it can only be feasible if broad-based movements against neoliberalism within both core and peripheral countries carry on with their triple tasks of arousing, organizing, and mobilizing peoples in ever-expanding, ever-deepening networks of resistance that will not only smash the neoliberal order into smithereens but will also pave the way for the restoration of public control over the world's resources, education, economy, and its hopefully bright future, where the greatest dream is realized: the elimination of man's exploitation of man. In the case of the Philippines, as this paper has proven, defeating the neoliberal K to 12 is step one towards freeing itself and its people from economic dependency, and hopefully a springboard for the country's potential role as a developing country showcase against the still dominant neoliberal perspective.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All amounts in this study are in Philippine pesos unless otherwise stated. As of this writing, 45 pesos = 1 US dollar.

<sup>2</sup> Data from Australian Government-Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2014), Mas (2014), Peng and Weber U.S. Immigration Lawyers (2015), UK Government (2014), Wright (2013), and Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)-Welfare and Employment Office-Employment Branch (2010).

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## Appendix A

**Table A1** *In-Demand Skills and/or Professions<sup>2</sup> in Top 10 Destinations of Migrant Filipinos Vis-a-vis Senior High School Courses in the Philippines*

<b>Destination</b>	<b>In-Demand Skills and/or Hard-to-Fill Professions</b>	<b>Related Senior High School Course in the Philippines</b>
USA	Nursing	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
USA	Physical Therapist	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
USA	Electrical and Electronics Repairer	Consumer Electronics Servicing (NC II) Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II) STEM Strand
USA	Electrical at Electronics Engineering Technicians	Consumer Electronics Servicing (NC II) Electrical Installation and Maintenance STEM Strand
USA	Electricians	Consumer Electronics Servicing (NC II) Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II) STEM Strand
USA	Maintenance Workers, Machinery	Automotive Servicing (NC I)
USA	Welders	Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC I) Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC II)
USA	Chemical Technician	STEM Strand
Saudi Arabia	Housekeeping and Restaurant Services Workers (Housekeeper; Domestic Helper; Household Worker; High Rise Cleaner; Service Crew; Bartender; Waiter/Waitress)	Household Services (NC II) Housekeeping (NC II) Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	IT Programmer	Computer Programming (NC IV)
Saudi Arabia	Engineer	STEM Strand
Saudi Arabia	Nurse	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Electrical Motor Technician	Automotive Servicing (NC I) Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Cold Storage Technician	Refrigeration and Airconditioning Servicing (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Draftsman	Technical Drafting (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Auto CAD Operator	Technical Drafting (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Graphic Designer	Illustration (NC II) Arts and Design Track Technical Drafting (NC II)



Table 1A continued...

Saudi Arabia	Bookkeeper, Cashier, and Related Workers	Front Office Services (NC II) ABM Strand
Saudi Arabia	Caregiver	Caregiving (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Aerobic Instructor	Sports Track
Saudi Arabia	Electronic Technician	Consumer Electronics Servicing (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Aircon Technician	Refrigeration and Airconditioning Servicing (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Electrician	Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Plumbers and Pipe Fitters	Plumbing (NC I) Plumbing (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Tile Setter	Tile Setting (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Carpenter	Carpentry (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Mechanic Motor-Vehicle	Automotive Servicing (NC I)
Saudi Arabia	Tailor and Dressmakers	Dressmaking (NC II) Tailoring (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Welder	Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC I) Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Cook and Related Workers (Culinary Industry)	Bread and Pastry Production (NC II) Cookery (NC II) Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Refrigeration Technician	Refrigeration and Airconditioning Servicing (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Mason	Masonry (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Agronomist	Agri-Fishery Arts Track
Saudi Arabia	Chemist	STEM Strand
Saudi Arabia	Accountant	ABM Strand
Saudi Arabia	Computer Technician	Computer Hardware Servicing (NC II)
Saudi Arabia	Photoshop Operator Technician	Arts and Design
Saudi Arabia	Cake Designer	Bread and Pastry Production (NC II)
Canada	Service Crew	Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
Canada	Accountant	ABM Strand
Canada	Engineer	STEM Strand
Canada	Computer Programmer	Computer Programming (NC IV)
Canada	Electrical and Electronics Engineering Technologists and Technicians	STEM Strand Consumer Electronics Servicing (NC II) Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
Canada	Nurse	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
Canada	Industrial, Electrical and Construction Trades	Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
Canada	Technical Jobs in Natural Resources, Agriculture and Related Production	Agri-Fishery Arts Track
Canada	Chefs and Cooks	Cookery (NC II) Food and Beverage Services (NC II)

Table 1A continued...

Canada	Butchers and Bakers	Slaughtering Operation (NC II) Bread and Pastry Production (NC II)
UAE	Accounting Staff	ABM Strand
UAE	Aircon Technician	Refrigeration and Airconditioning Servicing (NC II)
UAE	Auto CAD Operator	Technical Drafting (NC II)
UAE	Automotive Industry Worker	Automotive Servicing (NC I)
UAE	Engineer	STEM Strand
UAE	Culinary Industry Personnel	Bread and Pastry Production (NC II) Cookery (NC II) Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
UAE	Draftsman	
UAE	Electrician	Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
UAE	Hospitality Industry Personnel	Housekeeping (NC II)
UAE	Housekeeper	Household Services (NC II) Housekeeping (NC II)
UAE	Industrial Electrician	Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
UAE	Instrument Pipe Fitter	Plumbing (NC I) Plumbing (NC II)
UAE	Pest Control Technician	Pest Management (NC II)
UAE	Skilled Carpenter	Carpentry (NC II)
UAE	Skilled Welder	Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC I) Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC II)
UAE	Waiter/Waitress	Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
UAE	Electrical Engineering Technician	STEM Strand Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
UAE	Irrigation Supervisor	Agri-Fishery Arts Track
UAE	Welder	Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC I) Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC II)
UAE	Mechanic Motor-Vehicle (Automotive)	Automotive Servicing (NC I)
Australia	Butcher	Slaughtering Operation (NC II)
	Welder	Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC I) Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC II)
Australia	Electrical Engineering Technician	STEM Strand Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
Australia	Engineer	STEM Strand
Australia	Nurse	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
Australia	Midwife	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
Australia	Accountant	ABM Strand
Australia	Agricultural Consultant	Agri-Fishery Arts Track

Table 1A continued...

Australia	Veterinarian	STEM Strand Agri-Fishery Arts Track
Australia	Chiropractor	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II) Wellness Massage (NC II)
Australia	Developer Programmer	Computer Programming (NC IV)
Australia	Motor Mechanic (General)	Automotive Servicing (NC I)
Australia	Stonemason	Masonry (NC II)
Australia	Carpenter	Carpentry (NC II)
Australia	Plumber (General)	Plumbing (NC I) Plumbing (NC II)
Australia	Electrician (General)	Electrical Installation and Maintenance (NC II)
Australia	Chef	Cookery (NC II) Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
Malaysia	Domestic Helper	Household Services (NC II) Housekeeping (NC II)
Japan	Nurse	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
United Kingdom	Engineer	STEM Strand
United Kingdom	Programmers and Software Development Professionals	Computer Programming (NC IV)
United Kingdom	Nurse	STEM Strand Caregiving (NC II)
United Kingdom	Animator in Visual Effects	Animation (NC II)
United Kingdom	Graphic Designers	Illustration (NC II) Arts and Design Track Technical Drafting (NC II)
United Kingdom	Welder	Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC I) Shielded Metal Arc Welding (NC II)
United Kingdom	Chef	Cookery (NC II) Food and Beverage Services (NC II)
Hong Kong	Housekeeper	Household Services (NC II) Housekeeping (NC II)
Singapore	Chemical Engineer	STEM Strand
Singapore	Mechanical Engineer	STEM Strand
Singapore	IT Programmer	Computer Programming (NC IV)