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## FREE EDUCATION DOES NOT EXIST

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*"Education is an important element in the struggle to help our children and people rediscover their identity and thereby increase self-respect. Education is our passport to the future."*

*Dr. Malcolm X*

Education is an equalizer that surely opens doors to success in life. The better educated you are, the more likely you are to succeed.

The purpose of education is to prepare our children for higher education. Education produces a generation of individuals who can make greater contributions to society. Unfortunately, education does not start at school. It starts at home. Parents should consider it their responsibility to educate their children as early as possible. Imagine what our country would be like if we were all taught good morals, love, peace, and respect.

However, "In the last nine years, around 1.4 million children have become out of school youth," a lawmaker said. The National Statistics Office reported that 28.9 percent of out-of-school youth did not attend school. They did not finish their studies due to the expensive cost of education. Moreover, 27.5 percent dropped out of school for lack of interest. It was published on August 25, 2012 by the Manila Times.

In an effort to attain success, the government of the Philippines must invest time and money in education. Its main role is to subsidize the programs required to be done in order to provide free education. In connection with this, the government has implemented R.A. 10931. It

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provides students of SUCs, LCUs, and state-run TVIs with free tuition.

According to Prospero de Vera III, Filipino students will benefit from free tuition from 2018 to 2019. A total of P40 billion has been allotted for the initial year of implementation of R.A. No. 10931.

The said law includes the tuition and miscellaneous fees of students enrolled in programs registered under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). All technical-vocational education and training (TVET), local universities and colleges (LUCs), and state universities and colleges (SUCs).

Unfortunately, President Duterte's officials disagreed with his decision and tried to veto the said bill. In addition, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) sees the measure as counterproductive. Then, the Foundation for Economic Freedom put out a paper supporting a veto in the same way.

Based on the reactions of prominent organizations and personalities regarding the said law, they see something objectionable about the idea of having free education. The main concern is the idea that what is popular tends to be right. Everybody pays for anything that appears to be "free." In other words, we can't have something for free. Similarly, there is no such thing as a free education.

Education is an equalizer that opens different opportunities to everyone. It starts from early childhood education to tertiary education. True enough, education is a part and parcel of someone's success.

Based on studies, those who graduate from college are most likely to succeed. That is why those who don't even finish their elementary education fall under the umbrella of poverty and misery. Thus, poor education or no education at all among Filipinos will lead to greater poverty.

According to studies, 12 percent of those who can't afford expensive education are in SUCs. The remaining percent of those who don't have the capacity to attain a college education

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failed to enter a tertiary level. The bill, which is now a law, is meant to get rid of the widespread worry about poverty, which keeps poor Filipinos from acting at a higher level.

"These are some estimates based on data from the Annual Poverty Indicator Survey (APIS) 2014:"

- "49% of students in SUCs are from the lower 50% of the population (tuition + other educational expenses + living allowance) to finish college."
- "Up to 71% of students in SUCs are from families that do not have disposable income, with a monthly family income of around. P29,000 below." These families have difficulties in sending their children to school. "
- "In contrast, only up to 28% of students in SUCs is from families that can comfortably afford to enroll a child in school, with a monthly income of approximately P29,000."
- "Only up to 17% of students in SUCs are from families with a monthly income higher than P40,000."
- "Only up to 7% of students in SUCs are from families with a monthly income of more than P78,000."

Making access to education free of charge is a big relief among poor Filipino families. It's anchored in our Constitution, which states: "The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make it accessible to all (Article 14, Section 1)."

In the Philippines, year 2018 is a life changing year for poor Filipino families who plan to send their son or daughter to college. It's the first time since the Constitution—has been put into action to offer a free education at all levels.

"Poor students will be able to go to college for free if they enroll in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs)," said the people in charge of making

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college education available to everyone.

The government subsidy will be utilized properly if allotted accordingly. Based on the study conducted by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, a college education benefits an individual and society as a whole. This simply means that, with educated people in society, the whole nation will achieve progress. Therefore, if those skilled and talented Filipino youth cannot afford to enroll at tertiary level, the country will waste the pool of pillars who will be involved in the development of the country. The biggest worry right now is about how long free access to higher education will last and how well it will work.

There are four arguments for this. First, the universality of free education has no focus. The program is available to both rich and poor families. The current system of state colleges and universities does not totally go the way of poor Filipino families. Starting with enrollment procedures, they said free access to education should specifically cater to the target prospects. Second, taxes are the life blood of the country. Everyone is obliged to pay tax. This means that, whether or not the family has a son or daughter to enroll, all taxpayers should pay for the subsidy allotted for free access to tertiary education. This instance is a manifestation of user pay principle defiance. There should be efficiency in whatever we pay for. We need to get the most for our money. As a result, those students who pay their tuition fee will most likely take their studies more seriously than those who are entitled to free tuition.

Third, another possible option is to hand the money directly to the students who will enroll in college after screening. With this, the students will be able to choose the school that matches their preferences. This will also lead to healthy competition among colleges and universities. Fourth, the distribution of subsidies directly to state colleges and universities will not improve the quality of education. Four, tuition is only part of the total cost of obtaining a college education. According to PIDS, expenditures on means of living and school supplies compose the biggest part of college expenses, which is not affordable for the poor. Thus, this program will still be anti-poor since it will only provide for the rich families who can afford the expenses aside from the tuition

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fee.

The best possible solution at hand is, "the new Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education or UniFAST (Republic Act No. 10687)". It caters to the majority of students who really need scholarships or loans. Instead of trying to make a new program that will solve the problem in a snap, the Philippine government needs to fully implement the ones they already have.

Free education at the tertiary level is not the solution to augment the country's poverty problem. It will just create a lot of disparities among rich and poor families. The greatest challenge is how to cater to the needs of those who are really in need of assistance from the government's subsidy.

Philippine economists say that this law, "will put a strain on the budget and cause students in private schools to migrate to state schools, which may cause the system to deteriorate. "They also said it would "largely benefit non-poor students who dominate the population of SUCs."

With the implementation of RA 10931, otherwise known as the "Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act," many Filipino citizens are glad that tertiary education will be finally free of charge. The said law includes subsidized miscellaneous fees and all other related fees.

No doubt, the aim of the government is very comprehensible. But, the question is, "Will it serve its purpose accordingly?". Can it provide for all the needs of the masses?

Despite these prevailing concerns, the President has been firm in his decision to implement this law on free access to tertiary education.

Since the major concern is the budget, I will point out our two other major concerns that deal with free access to tertiary education.

The first concern has something to do with the admission requirements. Many state colleges and universities require meticulous processes, which have a fee involved for some payments. This will be taken care of by the government's work to make a better system for

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processing entrance requirements.

The second concern has something to do with high-standard entrance examinations. The entrance examination is an indicator that the universality of free access to education is impossible. As a result, it will only be limited to those who can afford to attend review centers with complete resources to pass the said examination. The government should provide free review materials or review sessions to those who can't afford to pay for them. It is also important for the government to check the student's family situation to see if he or she deserves a free education.

In addition, the government should focus on scrutinizing the law itself. The role of the government is to provide not only subsidies to state colleges and universities, but also an autonomy that enables them to create innovations of their own. Since SUCs are free to make their own decisions, the government can expect a good education. If the DBM's strict auditing doesn't hold them back, the SUCs can make the most of the budget.

With full subsidies of tuition fees and other miscellaneous fees, it is a great concern now about sustainability, efficacy, and practicability. To make sure that the law works, the presidents of state colleges and universities have to deal with this change.

Furthermore, if the government aims for quality education, it needs to consider giving enough support, starting with basic education. The presence of public schools in the whole country is not enough to achieve quality education. It needs to improve not only the buildings but also the teaching materials, which are a big part of how people learn.

The government should also provide for the needs of the teachers who are mainly involved in achieving a quality education. The improvement of technology should be integrated into every classroom. Free access to tertiary education is not easy to get, but the government will reach its goal for the whole country if they work together and are determined.

Thus, to fully achieve the success of free access to tertiary education, the government should put into action the laws that are present at hand that support the universality of tertiary education. It should provide for different cultural backgrounds. It should not see equality as

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treating all students equally. It should see equality as treating the students according to their specific needs based on their diverse cultural backgrounds. "There is no such thing as free education," but there is the freedom to receive a good education.



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