

# The Impact of Social Class Solidification on the Educational Opportunities of the Next Generation in the Philippines and the Barriers to Social Mobility in Primary Education

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## Abstract

This paper explores the impact of social class solidification on the educational opportunities of the next generation in the Philippines, focusing specifically on primary education and the barriers to social mobility faced by children from low-income families. Despite recent economic growth, the Philippines remains deeply stratified, with income inequality and social class divisions reinforcing each other. This entrenched disparity limits access to quality education for disadvantaged students, exacerbating the cycle of poverty. Key barriers include economic constraints, underfunded public schools, language mismatches, and limited access to early childhood education, all of which contribute to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates among poor students. The long-term effects of these barriers perpetuate inequality, hinder the development of a skilled workforce, and contribute to social instability. The paper argues that systemic reforms, such as increased investment in public education, targeted support for disadvantaged students, language and curriculum reforms, and expanded access to early childhood education, are critical to breaking this cycle. By addressing these barriers, the Philippines can create a more equitable education system that enables upward social mobility and promotes long-term social and economic stability.

**Keywords:** social class solidification, social mobility, primary education, early childhood education

## 1. Introduction

The Philippines is a country of stark contrasts, characterized by both rapid economic growth and deep-rooted social inequalities. Over the past few decades, while economic indicators such as GDP growth and infrastructure development have shown progress, the benefits of this growth have not been evenly distributed. Social class divisions, especially between the wealthy and the poor, remain rigid, and in many cases, these disparities have deepened. This phenomenon of social class solidification refers to the entrenchment of social hierarchies, where upward mobility becomes increasingly difficult. In the context of the Philippines, this has meant that the rich continue to enjoy privileges and opportunities, while those from lower-income backgrounds find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty, with little chance of moving up the social ladder. Education is often regarded as the most powerful tool for achieving social mobility, allowing individuals to break free from the limitations of their socioeconomic status and pursue better opportunities. However, in the Philippines, access to quality education is largely determined by one's social class, creating a significant barrier for students from impoverished backgrounds. For children born into poverty, the promise of education as a pathway to a better life is often an illusion, as they face systemic obstacles from the earliest stages of their schooling. This disparity is evident from primary education, where differences in resources, infrastructure, and teaching quality between public and private schools reflect broader social inequities. Social class solidification manifests most visibly in the educational system, where the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. Wealthier families can

afford private education, where their children are provided with state-of-the-art facilities, highly qualified teachers, and a curriculum designed to prepare them for higher education and successful careers. In contrast, students from low-income families, particularly in rural areas, often attend underfunded public schools, where overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, and inadequate infrastructure hinder their learning experience. This early divide sets the stage for future disparities in academic achievement and career prospects, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Primary education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for future learning and development. Children who receive a strong start in school are more likely to excel in later stages of education, opening doors to higher education and improved career opportunities. Conversely, children who start their educational journey with disadvantages often struggle to catch up, leading to higher dropout rates and lower chances of achieving upward mobility. The barriers that exist in the Philippines' primary education system not only affect individual students but also have long-term implications for society as a whole, as the lack of educational equity contributes to broader social and economic instability. The essay explores how social class solidification limits the educational opportunities of disadvantaged students in the Philippines and how this reinforces barriers to social mobility, particularly within primary education. By analyzing the economic, linguistic, and systemic factors that shape educational inequality, the discussion highlights the long-term consequences of these barriers on social mobility and educational equity. Furthermore, it considers potential solutions for addressing these challenges, with the goal of fostering a more inclusive and equitable education system that provides opportunities for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

## 2. Social Class Solidification in the Philippines

Social class solidification refers to the process by which existing social hierarchies become more rigid and difficult to alter, leading to a scenario where upward mobility across socioeconomic classes is severely limited. In the Philippines, this phenomenon is increasingly evident as economic disparities widen between the wealthy elite and the impoverished majority. The gap between these social classes has persisted for decades, and recent economic growth has done little to alleviate the inequality. Rather, the benefits of economic expansion have largely accrued to the upper classes, while the lower-income population continues to face significant barriers to economic and social mobility.

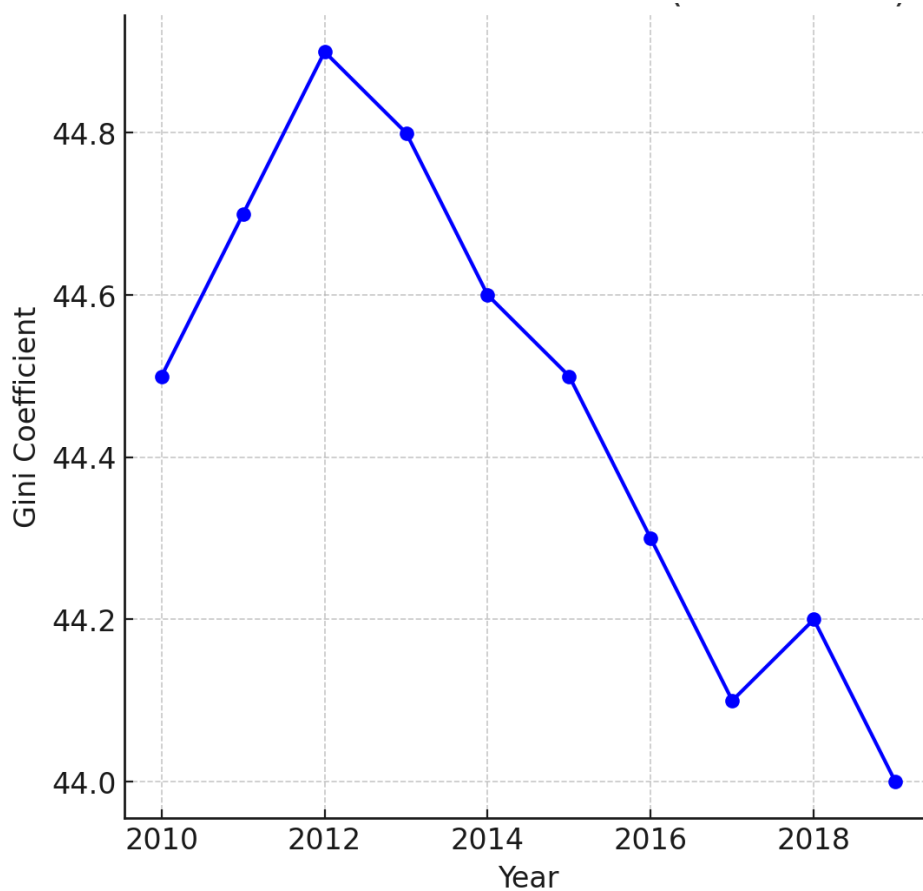


Figure 1. Gini Coefficient Over Time (2010-2019)

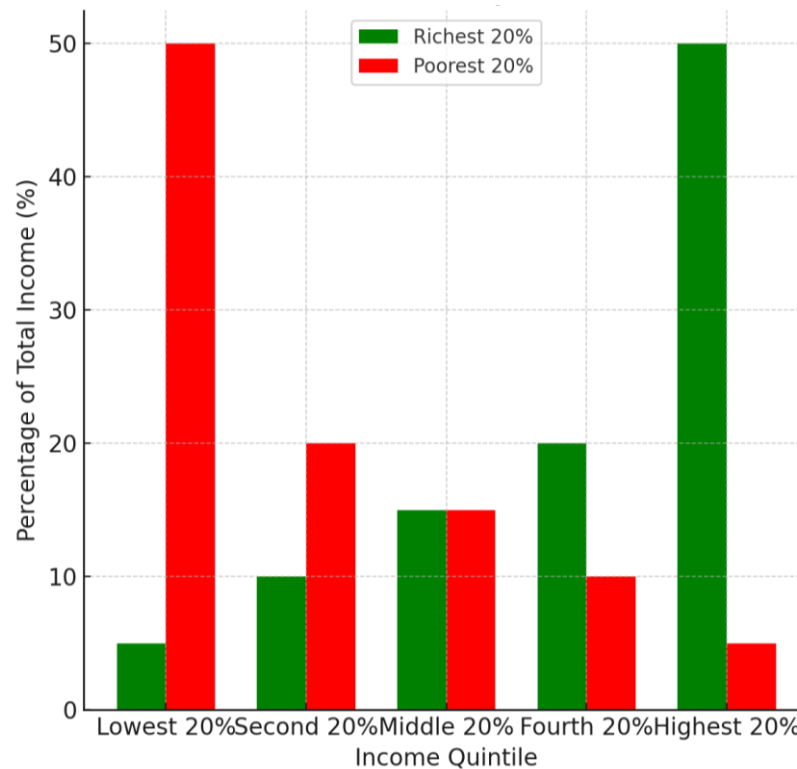


Figure 2. Income Share by Quintile

Income inequality in the Philippines is deeply entrenched, influenced by both historical factors and contemporary economic policies. Colonial legacies, land ownership concentration, and urbanization have contributed to the stratification of Philippine society, where a small fraction of the population controls vast economic resources, while a significant portion struggles with poverty. The income gap is further exacerbated by the growing influence of globalization, which has allowed wealthier families to invest in international markets and expand their businesses, while the working class, particularly those in rural areas, remains trapped in low-wage, labor-intensive jobs.

This income inequality is most apparent in access to quality education, a key determinant of social mobility. For wealthy families, private schooling offers an avenue for their children to receive superior education, characterized by smaller class sizes, advanced curricula, and greater access to technology. These students are also more likely to attend international schools, which provide exposure to global standards of education, and later, prestigious universities both domestically and abroad. In contrast, children from poor families, especially those in rural areas, are left to rely on public schools that are often underfunded, overcrowded, and poorly resourced. These schools face numerous challenges, including outdated textbooks, insufficient teaching materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers.

The urban-rural divide further exacerbates this inequality. Schools in urban areas, particularly in metropolitan regions like Metro Manila, are generally better equipped and offer more academic opportunities than those in rural or remote areas. Rural schools often suffer from a lack of basic infrastructure, such as electricity, internet access, and even adequate classroom space. This disparity means that students in rural areas start their educational journey at a disadvantage, further reinforcing the cycle of poverty and limiting their potential for upward mobility. As a result, social class solidification in the Philippines continues to be a powerful force that restricts access to education and perpetuates the structural inequalities that define the nation's social landscape.

### 3. Barriers to Social Mobility in Primary Education

#### 3.1 Economic Constraints

Although primary education is officially free in the Philippines, hidden costs create significant barriers for many impoverished families. Expenses related to transportation, school supplies, uniforms, and informal contributions to school activities can be overwhelming for low-income households. These costs, while seemingly minor, accumulate and become prohibitive for families struggling to meet their basic needs. As a result, many children from disadvantaged backgrounds either fail to attend school consistently or drop out entirely, especially in rural areas where transportation can be costly and schools are located far from home. Moreover, children from poor

families often need to work to support their households, leaving them little time or energy for education. This dynamic leads to a situation where education, rather than being an avenue for upward mobility, becomes an additional burden on struggling families, reinforcing their economic hardship and limiting future opportunities.

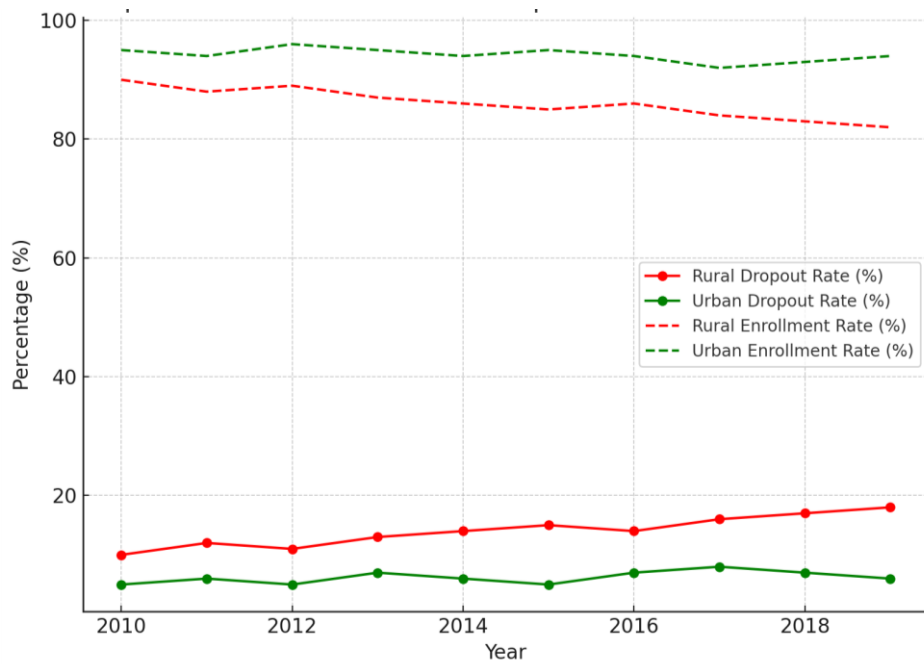


Figure 3. Dropout And Enrollment Rate Comparison: Rural Vs. Urban Areas

### 3.2 Inadequate Resources in Public Schools

Public schools in the Philippines, particularly those in rural or marginalized areas, suffer from significant underfunding, leading to overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, and a lack of basic infrastructure. These resource constraints severely limit the quality of education that can be delivered. Many public schools have insufficient facilities such as libraries, computer labs, and science laboratories, leaving students without access to critical learning tools. Overcrowding is a particularly pressing issue, with some classrooms containing up to 50 or more students, far exceeding the recommended student-to-teacher ratio. Teachers, often overwhelmed by large class sizes and a lack of materials, struggle to provide personalized attention or adequately address the diverse learning needs of their students. The shortage of qualified teachers compounds this problem, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. Many schools face challenges in attracting and retaining trained educators, resulting in a reliance on underqualified or inexperienced teachers. This disparity in teacher quality contributes to the wide achievement gap between students in well-funded private schools and those in under-resourced public institutions, further entrenching social class divisions.

### 3.3 Language Barriers

The Philippines is a linguistically diverse country, with over 170 languages spoken across its islands. However, the language of instruction in schools is predominantly English or Filipino (Tagalog), which is not the first language for many students, particularly in rural and indigenous areas. This linguistic mismatch creates significant challenges for students who are already struggling with other socioeconomic barriers. Learning in a language that is not their mother tongue often results in difficulties in comprehension and communication, leading to poor academic performance and disengagement from school. Students who are unable to keep up with their lessons may become discouraged, increasing the likelihood of dropping out. Moreover, teachers in rural areas may lack the training to effectively bridge the language gap, further disadvantaging students whose native language differs from the language of instruction.

### 3.4 Limited Access to Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is a critical determinant of long-term academic success, but access to quality early education remains limited in the Philippines, particularly for children from low-income families. Many poor families cannot afford to send their children to preschool or daycare, where foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and social development are nurtured. Without this early support, children enter primary school at a disadvantage, struggling to keep up with their peers who had the benefit of early learning opportunities. This

early gap in learning widens over time, leading to lower academic achievement and increased dropout rates among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The lack of access to early childhood education reinforces existing inequalities, as wealthier families can afford to provide their children with a head start, while poorer children fall behind before they even enter the formal education system.

### 3.5 Inequitable Distribution of Educational Opportunities

Scholarships, advanced classes, and enrichment programs that could help students from disadvantaged backgrounds excel are often limited in public schools, particularly in rural areas. These opportunities, which are more accessible to students from wealthier families or those in private schools, offer significant advantages by broadening academic horizons and preparing students for higher education. Public school students, particularly those from lower-income households, are often excluded from such programs due to financial constraints or limited availability. As a result, students from impoverished backgrounds are less likely to compete on equal footing with their peers from private schools, who benefit from better resources and access to advanced learning opportunities. This inequity in the distribution of educational resources reinforces the divide between social classes, making it harder for students from poor families to break out of the cycle of poverty.

## 4. Long-Term Impact of Barriers to Social Mobility on Educational Equity

### 4.1 Perpetuation of Poverty

The barriers to social mobility in primary education have far-reaching implications for the perpetuation of poverty in the Philippines. For children born into impoverished families, access to quality education represents one of the few potential pathways out of poverty. However, when educational opportunities are constrained by economic, linguistic, and systemic factors, the ability to climb the social ladder is significantly hindered. The lack of quality education in underprivileged communities prevents students from acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to access higher education or better-paying jobs, thus trapping them in a cycle of poverty. This inability to transcend their socioeconomic circumstances reinforces class divisions, as wealthier families can afford to provide their children with access to high-quality education and greater opportunities, while poorer families remain marginalized. The entrenchment of poverty due to educational inequity leads to a self-reinforcing cycle. When education is inaccessible or of poor quality, students from low-income families are less likely to complete primary and secondary education, and even less likely to pursue higher education or technical training. Without the necessary qualifications or skills, they are confined to low-wage, unskilled jobs, which offer little chance of economic advancement. This lack of mobility is passed down through generations, as future children of these families face the same barriers, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Over time, the widening gap between social classes exacerbates economic inequality, contributing to a more rigid class system in which upward mobility becomes increasingly rare.

### 4.2 Skills Gap and Economic Development

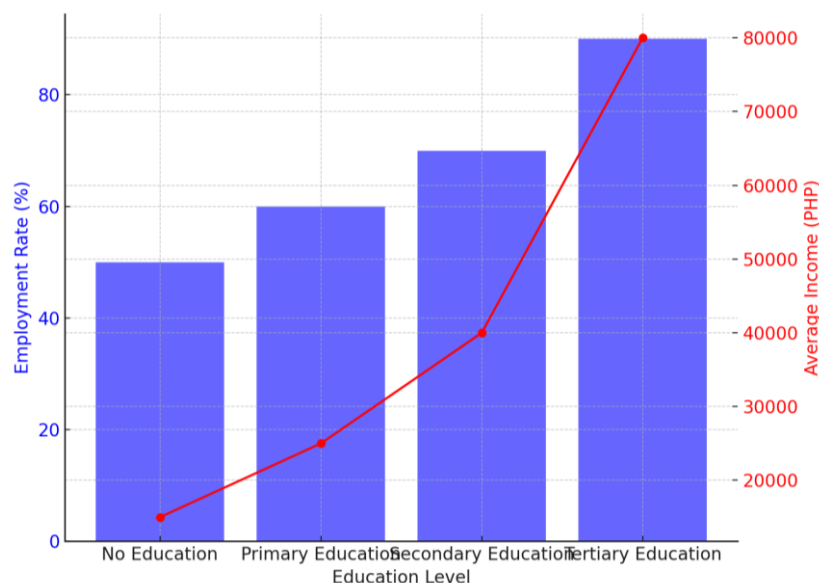


Figure 4. Skill Gap and Income Disparities by Education Level

The educational disparities resulting from social class solidification not only affect individual families but also

have broader implications for the Philippine economy. As the economy continues to evolve, the demand for a skilled and educated workforce increases. However, the growing divide in educational access between wealthy and poor families creates a significant skills gap. Children from low-income families, particularly those in rural or marginalized areas, are less likely to receive the education and training needed to develop the skills that are critical for employment in a modern, knowledge-based economy. This skills gap reduces the overall productivity of the workforce and limits the country's potential for long-term economic growth. In addition, the failure to provide equitable access to education leads to a mismatch between the skills demanded by industries and the capabilities of the labor force. Sectors that require skilled workers, such as information technology, engineering, healthcare, and finance, often face shortages of qualified candidates, while many workers in low-skilled jobs remain stuck in positions with limited growth prospects. This imbalance in the labor market slows down the country's economic development, as industries cannot fully capitalize on available opportunities due to a lack of skilled labor. Furthermore, this persistent gap between high-skilled and low-skilled labor worsens income inequality, as workers with higher education levels tend to earn significantly more than their less-educated counterparts.

#### *4.3 Social Inequality and Instability*

Educational inequality not only has economic consequences but also contributes to broader social instability. When large segments of the population are unable to access quality education and, as a result, are denied opportunities for upward mobility, feelings of frustration, disenfranchisement, and marginalization emerge. This growing divide between the "haves" and "have-nots" can lead to social unrest, as those who are excluded from the benefits of economic growth may become increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo. Disparities in educational access often correlate with other forms of inequality, such as health disparities, access to basic services, and political representation, further exacerbating tensions between different social groups. In the long term, the failure to address educational inequities can undermine social cohesion and lead to political instability. Communities that feel marginalized may begin to distrust public institutions, believing that the system is inherently biased against them. This distrust can manifest in various forms, from reduced civic participation to violent protests and rebellion, as marginalized groups seek to challenge a system that they perceive as unjust. Moreover, educational inequity contributes to the persistence of class-based divisions, preventing the formation of a more inclusive and equitable society. As these divisions deepen, the potential for conflict increases, threatening the country's political and social stability.

#### *4.4 Intergenerational Impact on Educational Equity*

The long-term effects of educational inequality are most acutely felt across generations. Children who are born into poverty and attend under-resourced schools are more likely to have lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and fewer opportunities for higher education or vocational training. As these children grow up and start families of their own, their ability to provide a better educational experience for their children is severely limited, thus perpetuating the cycle of educational disadvantage. This intergenerational transmission of poverty and educational inequity solidifies social class structures, making it increasingly difficult for future generations to achieve upward mobility. In contrast, wealthier families can pass on not only financial resources but also educational and cultural capital, ensuring that their children have access to high-quality education and the social networks needed to secure better opportunities. Over time, this dynamic contributes to the entrenchment of social class divisions, as wealth and educational privilege are concentrated within certain segments of the population, while the majority of disadvantaged families continue to struggle.

The long-term impact of barriers to social mobility in primary education extends beyond individual students and their families, affecting the overall social, economic, and political landscape of the Philippines. Without equitable access to quality education, the cycle of poverty will continue to perpetuate itself, widening the gap between rich and poor and limiting the country's ability to develop a skilled and competitive workforce. Furthermore, educational inequality threatens social cohesion, as it fosters feelings of disenfranchisement and marginalization that can lead to instability. Addressing these barriers is not only essential for creating a fairer society but also crucial for the country's long-term economic and political stability.

### **5. Addressing Barriers to Social Mobility in Education (Developed)**

Addressing the barriers to social mobility in education in the Philippines requires a multifaceted approach that targets the systemic inequalities within the education system. To create a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape, both policy reforms and targeted interventions are necessary. The following are some key strategies that can help reduce the disparities in educational access and quality, providing more opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve upward social mobility.

#### *5.1 Increased Investment in Public Education*

One of the most pressing needs in the Philippine education system is increased government investment,

particularly in public schools. Many public schools, especially in rural and marginalized areas, suffer from underfunding, which leads to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of essential learning materials. By significantly increasing the budget allocated to public education, the government can improve school facilities, provide up-to-date textbooks and technology, and ensure that students have access to the basic resources necessary for effective learning. Increased investment should focus on hiring and retaining well-trained teachers. Many schools in rural areas are staffed by underqualified or overburdened teachers, which negatively affects the quality of education. Providing competitive salaries, professional development opportunities, and incentives for teachers to work in underserved areas would help attract and retain qualified educators. A well-trained, well-supported teaching workforce is crucial for improving student outcomes and ensuring that all children receive a high-quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

### *5.2 Targeted Support for Disadvantaged Students*

To alleviate the economic burden on low-income families, the government should strengthen and expand targeted support programs for disadvantaged students. While primary education is officially free, many families face hidden costs related to school supplies, uniforms, transportation, and extracurricular activities. Financial assistance programs, such as conditional cash transfers (CCTs), can help reduce these costs and encourage families to keep their children in school. CCT programs, which provide financial incentives to families in exchange for meeting specific conditions—such as regular school attendance and health checkups—have been shown to improve school enrollment and retention rates. Expanding the coverage of these programs to more disadvantaged communities, especially in rural areas, can help ensure that children from poor families are able to complete their primary education and pursue further learning opportunities. In addition to financial support, schools can also offer free or subsidized meals, transportation, and school supplies to further alleviate the economic barriers that prevent children from attending school.

### *5.3 Language and Curriculum Reforms*

In a linguistically diverse country like the Philippines, the medium of instruction can significantly impact students' ability to learn and succeed. For many children, particularly those in rural and indigenous communities, English or Filipino (Tagalog) is not their first language, which creates a significant barrier to effective learning. Research has shown that children learn best when they are taught in their mother tongue, particularly in the early years of education. To address this, the government should expand the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which promotes instruction in students' native languages during their formative years. This approach not only improves comprehension and learning outcomes but also fosters a more inclusive education system that respects linguistic diversity. In addition to language reforms, the curriculum itself should be tailored to meet the diverse needs of students. Rural students, for example, may benefit from a curriculum that incorporates locally relevant knowledge and skills, such as agricultural techniques or small business management. This approach would provide students with practical skills that are directly applicable to their communities, increasing their chances of finding employment or creating livelihoods in their local context.

### *5.4 Early Childhood Education Programs*

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for a child's future learning and development. However, access to quality early childhood education remains limited in the Philippines, particularly for children from low-income families. Expanding access to publicly funded preschool programs is essential for leveling the playing field and ensuring that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, enter primary school with a solid foundation in literacy, numeracy, and social skills. Investing in early childhood education has been shown to yield long-term benefits, including higher academic achievement, lower dropout rates, and increased social mobility. Publicly funded preschools can provide children with the cognitive and emotional support they need during their critical early years, helping them succeed in primary education and beyond. The government should prioritize the development and expansion of early childhood education programs, particularly in underserved areas, to ensure that all children have access to the resources they need to thrive.

### *5.5 Promotion of Equity in Educational Opportunities*

To address the disparities in access to scholarships, advanced classes, and enrichment programs, the education system must actively promote equity in educational opportunities. Scholarships and financial aid should be more readily available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring that financial constraints do not prevent talented students from pursuing their academic potential. Additionally, public schools should provide more opportunities for enrichment programs, such as after-school tutoring, extracurricular activities, and leadership development initiatives, which are often limited to private school students. Programs that target gifted students in public schools should be expanded to include advanced courses and special programs designed to challenge and nurture high-potential students. These opportunities can help bridge the gap between public and private

school students, ensuring that talented children from all backgrounds have the chance to excel academically and reach their full potential.

### 5.6 Community and Parental Involvement

Addressing barriers to social mobility in education requires the active involvement of communities and parents. Schools should work closely with parents, especially in disadvantaged areas, to foster a supportive learning environment. Community engagement programs, which educate parents about the importance of education and provide them with tools to support their children's learning, can have a significant impact on student success. Furthermore, local governments, NGOs, and private organizations can collaborate to provide additional resources and support for schools in underserved communities, creating a more equitable educational system.

Addressing the barriers to social mobility in education in the Philippines is a complex but critical endeavor. Through increased investment in public education, targeted support for disadvantaged students, language and curriculum reforms, and expanded early childhood education programs, the country can begin to dismantle the systemic inequalities that limit opportunities for students from low-income families. Promoting equity in educational opportunities and fostering community and parental involvement are essential steps in creating a more inclusive education system that empowers all students to reach their full potential, regardless of their social class.

## 6. Conclusion

The entrenchment of social class divisions in the Philippines has profound implications for the country's education system, particularly with respect to primary education. Social class solidification limits educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds by creating significant barriers to access and quality. Economic constraints, under-resourced public schools, language barriers, and inequitable access to early childhood education prevent many students from low-income families from obtaining the foundational skills and knowledge needed to break out of the cycle of poverty. As a result, social mobility is stifled, and the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. Without systemic reforms, these barriers will continue to perpetuate the inequalities that define Philippine society. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes increased government investment in public education, targeted support for disadvantaged students, and curriculum reforms that cater to the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of the country. Additionally, expanding access to early childhood education, promoting equity in educational opportunities, and fostering community and parental involvement are critical steps toward creating a more inclusive and equitable education system. These reforms are not only essential for improving individual educational outcomes but also for fostering broader social and economic stability. A well-educated population is crucial for the country's economic development, as it provides the skilled workforce necessary to compete in a globalized economy. Moreover, reducing educational inequality can help alleviate social tensions, build trust in public institutions, and promote social cohesion. The Philippines is at a crucial juncture in its development. The time for action is now. By addressing the root causes of educational inequity, the country can create a future where all children, regardless of their social class, have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to a more just and prosperous society.

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