

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE ARMM

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The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created by Republic Act 6734, otherwise known as "An Act Providing for an Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao." It was signed into law on August 1, 1989 by Her Excellency, President Corazon C. Aquino. However, out of the 13 provinces and 9 cities envisioned by the Act as well as by the Tripoli Agreement, only 4 provinces ratified it. Thus, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is composed only of the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi.

It is claimed by some sectors that one of the reasons why RA 6734 was not ratified by most provinces and cities in the proposed areas of autonomy is that the Regional Consultative Commission (RCC) draft was revised substantially by Congress and the approved Act does not reflect what the people in the area want. This claim might be true in some sections of the Act. But I am happy to inform you that the RCC draft on educational provisions was not revised/changed by Congress. There was a very minimal revision and I think the revision made by Congress on the educational provisions has sort of strengthened it as well as jibed well with the basic national educational policies.

The Objectives of Regional Education

Section 2, Art. XV of RA 6734 states that the kind of education that will be established in Muslim Mindanao shall be committed to the total spiritual, intellectual, social, cultural, scientific and physical development of man, thus making him a God-fearing, peace-loving and work-oriented citizen of the nation. In addition, it shall inculcate patriotism and nationalism, appreciation of the role of national and regional heroes in the historical development of the country and the region, foster love of humanity, respect for human rights, and shall teach the rights and duties of citizenship, and the culture of the Muslim, Christian and tribal people in the Region to develop, promote and enhance unity in diversity. Likewise, it shall develop consciousness and appreciation of one's ethnic identity and shall provide a better understanding of each other's cultural heritage for the attainment of national unity and harmony.

It was the vision of the framers of the Act that the kind of education in the ARMM should emphasize the development of man and enshrine him with a nationalistic outlook without losing his regional and ethnic identity. As a whole, he should be trained, first and foremost, to be a contributing citizen of his nation and secondarily a dynamic resident of the region. He shall be aware of his own ethno-cultural identity while appreciating others' cultural heritage. As such, he should be educated to become an exponent of unity in diversity and an agent for regional and national harmony.

The Regional DECS

There is a bill pending in the Regional Legislative Assembly providing for the creation of a Regional Department of Education, Culture and Sports (RDECS). I think this bill is no longer necessary considering that President Aquino devolved recently the DECS in the area of autonomy. This means that the existing DECS setup, including its personnel, properties, programs and budget has been transferred to the management

and supervision of the ARMM. With this devolution, the RDECS becomes one of the regional executive departments and it will be headed by a Regional Secretary of Education, Culture and Sports. The secretary shall report directly to the Regional Governor of the ARMM. The appointment of a DECS secretary, like any other Regional secretary, should be confirmed by the Commission on Appointments of the Regional Legislative Assembly.

It is the duty of the RDECS secretary to set up the structure and framework of a regional system of education that will be able to carry out the objectives of education in the ARMM as provided for in Section 2, Art. XV of RA 6734. Initial steps have been done along this line. The secretary and undersecretary of the RDECS have been designated but they are yet to be confirmed by the CA in the RLA. At the moment, they are secretary-designate and undersecretary-designate. Recently, the RDECS held a 3-day orientation conference among Marawi City and Lanao del Sur DECS teachers and officials to orient them on the thrusts of the RDECS. There were attempts to discuss in forums the madrasah educational system and how it can be best integrated into the Philippine educational system.

Innovative Educational Scheme

Section 2 (9) of RA 6734 provides for the implementation in the ARMM of a 4-year primary and 3-year intermediate education; a 2-2 year secondary education; and a 4-year or more college education in schools within the Region. This provision shall be understood as mandating the restoration of Grade VII and the retention of the existing curricular levels in the tertiary. However, a system of streaming is proposed in the secondary level. This is a 2-2 year plan.

The 2-2 year secondary education plan proposes to divide the 4-year high school into 2 years of general secondary education as implemented by the 1989 secondary program, and

the remaining 2 years shall be devoted to specialization, starting at third year. A scheme shall be adopted to channel third year entrants into either of the three educational streams, namely: humanities, sciences, and vocational. Students found fitted for social science after two years of high school education shall be encouraged to enroll, in their year, in the humanities curriculum while those found strong in natural sciences and mathematics shall be encouraged to enroll in the science curriculum. Those with high aptitude for vocational education or want to have a gainful employment after high school shall enroll in the vocational curriculum.

The 3-stream educational scheme is just like putting up a trade/educational school, a science high school and a college preparatory high school in one school.

The streaming may likewise be used as a guide in choosing collegiate degrees. This means that a graduate in a humanities curriculum shall be encouraged or given incentives to pursue a degree in the Liberal Arts while those from the science curriculum shall be guided to pursue degrees in natural sciences and applied/ technological fields. Those in the vocational curriculum shall join the labor force after graduation or may pursue college courses in agriculture/trade/technical fields.

The streaming in the high school is proposed to be implemented in the regional system of education to realign manpower supply to the needs of the region and to improve the quality of manpower available to industries in the area. Career choice is properly guided at an early stage, starting at third year high school. With this scheme, relevant graduates to the manpower needs are assured.

The Higher and Advanced Education

RA 6734 has minimal provisions on tertiary and higher education. Firstly, it guarantees academic freedom among tertiary educational institutions in the ARMM and maintains fiscal autonomy of state universities and colleges (SUC) in the area. The Act does not mention much about higher and advanced education. However, educational provisions on higher and advanced education in the national system of education are still applicable in the ARMM.

In the proposed organizational setup made by the Committee on Education of the RCC, there is a Regional Board of Education which shall serve as a policymaking body for the RDECS. An RLA bill to create this Board was filed by Assemblywoman Pangarungan of the First District of Lanao del Sur. There is also a proposed Regional Bureau of Tertiary Education which shall take charge of the affairs of tertiary education including higher and advanced education. All these are yet to be created through legislation.

Presently, there is only one state university in the ARMM. This is the Mindanao State University System.

Mindanao State University is the logical choice to implement programs on regional education in the ARMM. MSU has three autonomous collegiate campuses in the ARMM. These are MSU-Maguindanao, MSU-Sulu and MSU-Tawi-tawi. We have also several community high school in Lanao del Sur and a Fisheries and Agricultural extension unit in Malabang.

MSU-Maguindanao or MSU-Marawi is expected to become the Regional Teachers Training Center and the site of various proposed regional institutes on higher studies such as the Regional Institute for Peace Studies, the Regional Institute for Health Education and the Regional Language Academy.

The prospects of higher and advanced education in the ARMM are very good. Once the proposed regional institutes on

higher studies will be created by legislation, there is a need for qualified educational administrators and researchers to man these institutes. Masteral and doctoral degree holders will be needed especially those in educational management, peace studies, health education, madrasah education and Arabic language education. The ARMM also plans to regionalize all textbooks for use in its schools by writing new books and/or re-writing existing books to suit regional needs and sensibilities. People who are in higher and advanced education will be needed along this line.

Curriculum experts will also be needed since the RDECS will revise all curricula in school in the area to suit regional needs. Values education and Arabic language will be taught in all schools in the area. The 3-stream high school curriculum will also be written and tested. All these need highly qualified educators and researchers.

The Mindanao State University Graduate School will play a big role in supplying qualified manpower to organize and implement all the proposed educational plans in the ARMM. We are in a better position to assist the ARMM considering that our University is a regional University and we have existing programs similar to what are proposed in the ARMM. We have an Arabic/Islamic studies program, a peace education program, a health education program, educational management program and others needed by the ARMM.