THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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For almost half a century, the United States governed the Philippines. As a colonial power, the United States pursued policies which it rightfully believed would promote the social and material wellbeing of the Filipino. One such policy was the introduction of the American system of education, and so pervasive and far-reaching was its impact and influence on the life and culture of the Filipino during and after the colonial period that it is generally regarded as the "greatest contribution" of American colonialism in the Philippines. This article deals with that educational impact.

American Educational System in the Philippines: A Brief History

Shortly after their arrival in the Philippines, the American military forces began to establish schools. They opened the first school in Corregidor when that island fell into their hands in May, 1898. Soon after they occupied Manila on August 13, 1898, they reopened seven schools there. In the ensuing months, the number of schools increased; a school was established in every other town that they had subjugated. These early educational efforts, however, began to meet difficulties when the Philippine-American War broke out on February 4, 1899.

When the military government was replaced by a quasi-civil government, the Americans took an important step towards the establishment of a public school system in the Philippines. In March, 1900, the second Philippine Commission which was the legislative body during the early decades of American rule passed Act No. 74. This Act provided the creation of a department of public instruction which would supervise and control all the schools that had already been established and also the prohibition of the teaching of religious subjects in public schools. Subsequently, several amendments were made to the school organic law in order to make provisions for an expanding educational system and to make public elementary instruction free to Filipino children. The latter amendment resulted, inevitably, in the considerable increase in the number of elementary schools throughout the archipelago.

In 1902, the legislative body also enacted a law which provided for the establishment of a high school in every provincial capital to be supported by the local government. These schools were intended to accommodate Filipino children who wanted to continue their education beyond the elementary level. The Act further provided that due to the poor financial condition of the provincial treasuries "the salaries of teachers should be paid by the central government until the province should be able to bear all the expenses of maintaining the secondary schools." The lack of adequate finances was just one of the several problems that confronted the American educational system in the Philippines during the early years after its inception. There was also the problem of the dearth of teachers who could speak the English language, the adopted medium of instruction in the public schools. The number of American soldiers-turned-teachers was not sufficient and there were only a few Filipinos who knew English. To solve the problem, the colonial authorities decided to import American professional teachers. In 1901, the first batch of this group of teachers, numbering around 600, arrived in the Philippines by the USS Thomas, hence their popular name, Thomasites. They were immediately assigned to teach in the elementary and secondary schools. But, aside from teaching school children, they were also made to train Filipino teachers. These pioneer American teachers, indeed, played a very important role in the development of the Filipino educational system; they are well remembered in the history of Philippine education.

Another step taken by the American authorities to solve the problem of the lack of teachers was the institution of the pensionado program in 1903. Under this program, selected Filipino students were sent as government scholars to the United States for further studies.
Upon their return to the islands, they were made to render government services. Some were given technical jobs in the colonial bureaucracy, but a majority of them were assigned to teach in the public schools. In recognition for their good services in the classrooms, some of them were appointed to responsible positions in the educational system, such as supervisors and division superintendents.

An equally important educational problem in the early years of American rule was the lack of textbooks to be used in the schools. When the early schools were opened, there were no textbooks available for the pupils to use. Hence, the school officials decided to import these materials from the United States. At first, they were translated into Spanish on account of the erroneous belief that the Spanish language was widely understood in the colony. However, when they found out that this was not the case, English textbooks were adopted immediately.

In 1908, the capstone of the public school system was laid when the University of the Philippines was founded. Patterned after the state universities in the United States, the institution was intended for those Filipino high school graduates who wanted to enroll in a first-class university where they could acquire literary, professional, and technical training. It was also aimed at providing a training ground for the future leaders of the Philippines. Owing to its close similarity to American universities, liberal arts graduates of the University were easily admitted to well-known graduate schools in the United States.

As finally established, the American public school system in the Philippines consisted of three levels: a seven-year elementary school, a four-year high school, and a university. Throughout the colonial regime, this school system expanded considerably, especially the elementary level. In 1906, there were only 3,342 elementary schools throughout the archipelago, with an enrollment of 365,530. In 1935, when the Filipino was virtually given self-government with the establishment of the Commonwealth Government, the figures increased to 7,766 elementary schools, with an enrollment of 1,173,587. This expansion of the public school system was due mainly to the enthusiasm on the part of the Filipino parents to send their children to school. Like their American masters, they realized "that the road to a democratic self-government runs through the schoolhouse and the primary function of their system of education has been to facilitate national progress along that road."9

Side by side with the public schools were the private schools which also gave elementary, secondary, and college instruction. Many of these schools started during the Spanish colonial era, but they were allowed to exist after the implantation of American rule in the Islands. Some of them were founded later by American Protestant missionaries. These schools were allowed to operate primarily because there were not enough government schools to accommodate all the Filipino children of school age. In 1970, they were gradually placed under the supervision and control of the Department of Public Instruction. Consequently, they had to conform to the standards and practices of the public schools in such matters as curriculum, course of study, and English as the medium of instruction.

Briefly, this was the development of the American educational system in the Philippines. It began even before the establishment of a colonial civil government. And, for the most part of its existence, the Americans were the ones who "vitalized, guided, and ultimately controlled it."9 Through its instrumentality, American-style education was adopted in the Philippines, resulting in an impact which had affected Philippine life and culture during and after the colonial days.

The Impact of American Education in the Philippines During the Colonial Period

Now I shall discuss the impact of American education in the Philippines during the colonial period. At this time, perhaps, it would be essential to point out what role education was to play in the colonial regime in order to have an idea of its broad impact on the life and culture of the Filipino. As stated by the Philippine Commission in its Report for 1900:

Undoubtedly a well-directed system of education will prove to be one of the most forceful agencies for elevating the Filipinos, materially, socially, and morally, and preparing them for a large participation in the affairs of the government.

Common schools must be established everywhere and, as a minimum standard, every child must be taught arithmetic, and to read and write the English language.10

From what had been quoted, it is, therefore, not hard to explain why English became a common language among the Filipino. This is an impact of American education in the Philippines which was very patent during the American occupation—and still is.
Under the Americans, English was not only taught to every Filipino school child but was adopted as the medium of instruction in all public schools. This was provided by Act No. 74 of the Philippine Commission, the same act which established the American public school system in the Islands. The decision to adopt English as the language of the schools was made from the very beginning and for practical reasons. In the first place, there was the lack of a common language among the Filipino when the Americans arrived in the Islands. The Spanish language was known by only a very small segment of the population and the dialects were just too numerous. Secondly, teachers and textbooks were not available either in Spanish or in the dialects.

Aside from adopting it as the language in the schools, other efforts were made to propagate and learn English effectively as the common language of the population. Its study was emphasized in all intermediate courses. In 1913, it was made the official language of the colony, together with Spanish. When the Service Manual of the Bureau of Education was adopted in 1917, it was expressly provided that the only language approved for use in the school premises and public buildings was English. In 1924, the intermediate curriculum was revised to improve the teaching of the language. Besides grammar and composition, conversational English and phonics were added to the course of study. The subjects were also emphasized in the secondary schools.

English was taught not only to school children but also the adult population. Adult education classes were opened soon after the implantation of American sovereignty in the Philippines, primarily to train the Filipino to become teachers in the public schools. As mentioned earlier, there was a dearth of native teachers who knew English in the early years of American rule. Learning the language was accepted rather enthusiastically in the schools. The Commission Report of 1901 attests to this fact:

The interested efforts of Filipino teachers to teach English to children after they themselves have merely a year of instruction in that language are noteworthy and their zeal and their success in this form of instruction will contribute greatly to the spread of the English language here and the spread of popular education.

Thus, the teaching of English and its adoption as the medium of instruction in the schools made possible the existence of a widespread knowledge of the language among the Filipino during the American period. It has been noted that when the Philippines acquired its political independence in 1946, there were more people who could speak English than any other language, and with few exceptions, English is still the language of instruction in the primary schools.

The impact of American education was also felt in the development of self-government among the Filipino. Certainly, no one can deny the importance of education in the political development of nations. As expressed by James Coleman:

The introduction of a modern educational system in a colonial area had significant political consequences. It was the single most important factor in the rise and spread of nationalistic sentiment and activity. From the modern educational system emerged an indigenous elite which demanded the transfer of political power to itself on the basis of political values of the Western liberal tradition or the ethical imperatives of Christianity, both of which have been learned in the schools.

... Designed essentially to serve only evangelizing or imperial purposes, Western education became a prime contributor to the emergence of new independent nations. Intended not to be a structure for political recruitment, it in fact called forth and activated some of the most upwardly mobile and aggressively ambitious elements of the population—elements most determined to acquire political power, most confident in the rightness of their claim and most convinced of their capacity to govern. The serendipital effects of colonial education are the greatest ironies of the historic encounter between the West and the non-West.

The schools not only trained the Filipino for service in the lower levels of the colonial bureaucracy, but also prepared them for leadership in the campaign for political independence from the United States. The graduates of colleges and universities became the small western educated or elite class which demanded initially greater participation of the Filipino in all levels of the colonial government and, later, self-government. Because of the increased literacy rate and the widespread knowledge of the English language for effective communication, this group was able to carry out political mobilization of a mass following.

Whether by design or not, the schools fostered the further development of Filipino national consciousness. This was made possible not only because of the use of one language in the schools, English, but also because of the nature of the school system and the subject taught to the children. Children coming from the different classes in Philippine society sat side by side in common classrooms and were subjected to the same body of experience. On the school grounds, they grouped and played together,
unmindful of the fact that they came from families of different social backgrounds and economic levels. But, more importantly, they were introduced to Filipino "civic culture" and were taught the lives of their great men whose portraits usually decorated their classrooms.

The impact was equally felt in the social aspect of Philippine colonial life. Education became an instrument of upward social mobility. Many Filipinos who had the chance to acquire higher education, although they belonged to families of modest means, were able to work in the middle and upper echelons of the colonial government. This development led to a general proliferation in the structure of the Filipino elite which, during the Spanish period, was seemingly a closed group composed of principes, caciques, and ilustrados.

With the modification of the social composition of the Philippine elite came a change in the attitude of the people towards the professions and occupations. Although it cannot be denied that "status achievement" was the primary theme in Philippine cultural settings in spite of the introduction of a modern mass educational system, "achievement-oriented" themes characterized the changing nature of elite recruitment in the Philippines. This is shown by the gradual changes in educational and occupational preferences. By the 1930s, the Filipino was aware of the importance of professions which are the imperatives in the national development of the country. These professions were geared towards science, industries, and the development of entrepreneurship.

However, it does not mean that educational attainment alone guaranteed an elite status in Philippine society under the colonial regime. It only means that it was, and remains, one of the important prerequisites toward elite status. The possession of tangible wealth, like vast tracts of lands and business concerns which were managed indirectly through hired talents, undoubtedly seemed to have been the chief characteristic of the Filipino colonial elite. Although education did not provide an automatic passport to elite status, it, however, helped in opening opportunities towards social mobility. The ordinary Filipino realized that with education, he had the chance to improve his life situation from the drudgery of the farm to a small desk in the town hall. The small-town boy who could afford to study in Manila had a better chance of staying in the city to try his luck in the colonial bureaucracy.

The educational system during the American colonial regime, therefore, made possible opportunities for upward social mobility in Philippine society. Although wealth was, and still is, the primary qualification for high social status, educational attainment became the requisite for the strengthening of such status. Moreover, it became an important basis in the recruitment of political leadership.
Filipino cultural values and standards also came under the impact of American education during the colonial period. Through the agency of the schools, reinforced by American example and movies, the American scale of values gradually and imperceptibly entered the mental makeup of the Filipino. As a result, some of them developed a liking for things American to the extent that they would consider anything manufactured in the United States as superior, and anything manufactured locally or elsewhere in Asia as inferior. The average American materialism which finds expression in an inordinate love for material possessions crept into the ordinary Filipino mind. Success was now to be measured in terms of cash and material acquisitions. Perhaps, this may be the reason why a prominent Filipino nationalist would consider the establishment of American education in the Philippines as the start of the education, as well as the miseducation, of the Filipino. In part, he says:

With American education Filipinos started learning not only a new language but also a new way of life, alien to their traditions and yet a caricature of their model. This was the beginning of their education. At the same time, it was the beginning of their miseducation, for they learned no longer as Filipinos but as colonials.13

From the foregoing discussion, one can readily see the impact of American education in the Philippines during the colonial period. In many respects, it can be interpreted as a positive force, for it brought about fundamental changes for the improvement of the material and social life of the colonial Filipino. On the other hand, it can be viewed as a negative force for it created certain problems from which the Filipino is still suffering.

The Impact of American Education in Post-War Philippines

More than thirty years have passed since the granting of Philippine independence and yet the impact of American education is still very potent in the country. This situation is due mainly to the educational exchange program between the United States and the Philippines which has been in existence since the postwar period. Under this program, American professors, scholars, and students have been brought to the Philippines to teach, research, and to undertake field work for a graduate thesis or dissertation. Whether they have come as Fulbrighters, or as grantees of some United States government agencies, or as recipients of grants administered by certain American private foundations, such as Ford and Rockefeller, the fact remains that they have been purveyors of American education in the Philippines. Under the Fulbright Exchange Program alone, some 340 American grantees came to the Philippines during the period 1948 through 1973.16

Other purveyors of American education in the Philippines are the Peace Corps volunteers. These are young Americans, mostly college seniors and fresh graduates who volunteer to perform specific jobs in developing countries like the Philippines, as part of the United States' technical assistance. Usually they serve as teacher-aides in the teaching of certain subject, such as English, mathematics, and the sciences in schools located outside the urban areas. In addition to that task, those volunteers with special abilities and training are assigned to technical types of assistance, appropriate to their maturity, in special activities in the Bureau of Public Schools, the state universities, and elsewhere.

There are also the American technicians who have come to the country as part of the program of technical assistance of the United States to the Philippines in nation-building. These men, usually accompanied by their families, are assigned to specific projects being undertaken jointly by the United States and the recipient country. Because of their expertise, they usually serve as project directors and/or consultants.

The American purveyors of American education in the Philippines after the war have their Filipino counterparts. These are returning Filipino students who have undertaken their graduate studies and training at American colleges and universities in various disciplines and professional lines. Most of them have been recipients of American government scholarships, such as Fulbright-Smith-Mundt and the Fulbright-Hays, or grantees of some American private foundations, such as Ford and Rockefeller. Some are Philippine government pensiados who have been sent abroad for further study and training. A minority in this group have gone to study in the United States on their own finances. Despite the different means by which they have been able to go abroad for further academic studies and practical training, these returned Filipino students and scholars, like their American counterparts, have become agents of American education in their home country. Since they have actually come home for good, so to speak, their role as purveyors of American education in the Philippines is more enduring and, therefore, more significant in the long run than the American agents. This is not to say, however, that all of them will stay permanently in the home country, for a few trek back to the United States for personal, and other, reasons.
Owing to the presence of these elements, it is not hard to explain the continuing impact of American education in postwar Philippines. This impact is found quite naturally in those areas of Philippine life where these people work and exert their daily influence. Since most of them are connected, in one way or another, with the educational system, it is not unnatural to expect that the impact would be most potent in the field of education.

In the present Philippine educational system, one finds various techniques and methods to improve instruction which are traceable to American influence. Language laboratories, educational television, and all kinds of visual aids are no longer regarded as novelties in Philippine schools, especially in the higher levels of learning. They are considered necessities for better and effective teaching and are very much an integral part of the modern educational system of the country. Guidance and counseling offices are found in most schools in order to understand students better psychologically and to help them solve their academic and psychological problems. In-service training, conferences, seminars, and workshops to upgrade teaching competencies of teachers are undertaken; usually American educators and American-trained Filipino education specialists are invited to serve as resource persons. Hence, it is inevitable that American educational ideas and practices are the ones emphasized and, consequently, influence the results of these training activities.

It is in the universities and colleges that the impact of American education in the Philippines is most apparent. Take, for example, the University of the Philippines; in many respects the institution has not yet emancipated itself from its colonial heritage—the curricular offerings and the unit system of earning academic credits for a degree are still the same as they used to be during the occupation period, an overwhelming preponderance of textbooks written by Americans and other western authors remains to be used for instruction, and English is still very much the medium of instruction in the classrooms.

The status of the English language has remained the same as it used to be during the occupation days. The rate of literacy in English has decreased a little because of the increasing use of the national language. But it is still one of the official languages in the country, aside from its being the language of the schools. Section 3, Article XV of the new Philippine Constitution provides: "Until otherwise provided by law, English and Pilipino shall be the official languages." It also continues to be the language of business, the professions, and of diplomacy among the Filipino.

The adoption of English as the language of the schools during the colonial period and up to the present day has brought about salutary effects other than being a common language of the people. It has given to a sufficiently large number an instrument to understand and appreciate the American way of life. As aptly stated by the first American civil governor of the Philippines, William Howard Taft:

A knowledge of English, a consequent familiarity with American literature and American newspapers, will furnish to the people a means of understanding American civilization and American institutions, and will greatly assist in teaching them self-government on Anglo-Saxon lines. 14

It has also afforded the Filipinos an access to the resources of a vast and adequate literature embodying the technical and humanistic traditions of the world, and in this way has contributed to their capacity for material and social development. Moreover, it has made possible the development of a Filipino literature in English. Many talented Filipinos, who have gone through the English language schools, have turned from their native languages to English as a medium of creative expression. Up to the present day, it is still the dominant language of the press and most of the literature, including poetry. As part of the linguistic process in the Philippines, many American words and phrases have been adopted in the national language.

While the use of English as the medium of instruction in the schools has, indeed, given the Filipino certain advantages, it is equally true that it has created some serious problems affecting Philippine society today. For instance, the present language problem of the country is directly traceable to it. Its widespread use in the schools, in the professions, in business, and in government has precluded the rapid development and growth of Pilipino, the national language.

The existence of a language problem in the Philippines was well demonstrated in 1971, when the Constitutional Convention met in order to draft and approve a new constitution of the Philippines. Soon after the body convened, the delegates found themselves divided on the issue of the language that was to be used in the promulgation of the new constitution. Some of them advocated the use of English on practical ground; others, however, wanted to adopt the national language for nationalist reasons. The issue generated so much controversy that it took practically two months to resolve it. Oftentimes, the sessions had to be recessed in order to “cool off”
delegates engaged in heated and acrimonious debates. Finally, a compromise was arrived at which provided that the new fundamental law was to be promulgated in English, in the national language, in Arabic, and other Philippine languages which have more than 50,000 native speakers.19

It is interesting to note the arguments advanced in favor of English as one of the languages to be used in the promulgation of the new constitution: (1) the deliberations on the floor were in English, (2) English was the one language which all the delegates could understand and speak, (3) it was fairer and more just to use English than any other language, which would tend to favor a certain segment of the population, (4) it would save the Convention a lot of time, money, and effort, (5) English had a wealth of jurisprudence and had an abundance of legal, scientific, and technological terminologies.20 From the arguments, it was implicitly accepted that English had an effective unifying influence in the Convention and among the people during the last seventy years. For this important reason, a prominent Filipino academician has advocated the continued use of English as the common language to solve the language problem in the Philippines. In part, he says:

It has been charged that the teaching of English has developed a new educated elite class; but at least that class cuts through the various ethno-linguistic groups. The school system conducted in English produced educated people without distinction as to whether they were Cebuano, Tagalog, Ilocano, Bicolano, Pampangan, or Igorot. English has a unifying role among the various language groups, but the elite class being formed by the present national language movement belongs to only one language group—the Tagalog.21

Aside from his argument of ethnic equality and national solidarity, this consistent and persistent advocate of English points out that English is a more efficient instrument of government than any other language—native or foreign—now in use in the Philippines. Again, to quote him:

The business of government on the higher level is a highly complex and intricate affair requiring the use of precise language for its own efficient functioning. The national legislative bodies, the superior courts, and the higher bureaucratic offices all use specialized language in their own particular areas of business and in their own common undertaking called government. The specialized language of law and jurisprudence, of bureaucracy, of science and technology which government deals with, has had an established tradition and this tradition is found—of all the languages now spoken in the Philippines—only in English.22

He further argues that it is in the interest of Philippine scholarship. The production of first-rate scholars in the country is possible only if the gifted Filipino children are afforded direct access to original sources of information and instruction, whether in the sciences, social sciences, or humanities, in the professions or in technology. And this can be done only in the English language.

Another disadvantage of the widespread use of English in the Philippines is that it has impeded the emergence of a truly national literature. Some jingo Filipino nationalists are of the firm conviction that no compatriot of theirs writing in English or in any other foreign tongue can express or interpret the true essence of Philippine life and culture. Since the 1960s, the number of Filipino writers in Tagalog and in other Philippine languages has grown appreciably; however, there is still in the Philippines today a very large and dominant group of writers in English. As of the present, English has remained the dominant language of both the press and literature in the Philippines.

Through the influence of American Fulbright professors and research scholars, some of the academic disciplines in the higher institutions of learning, such as anthropology, geography, and the sciences, have been raised to the status of respectable disciplines. Research, too, has been emphasized to the extent that the American academic syndrome of publish-or-perish is very much a part of the practices of Philippine colleges and universities.

The impact of American education in the Philippines today is also felt in other aspects of Philippine life. Where those purveyors of American education are found, that impact must necessarily be there. American-trained and American-educated Filipinos who have returned to their home country are found in various occupations and professions—in arts and culture, journalism and mass media, in government service, in labor, etc. Since their American education has nurtured and enriched their professions, it is not hard to explain why their ideas and style of doing things are greatly conditioned, shaped, or modified by what they have learned on American campuses. Thus, in a sense, the total impact of American education today can be interpreted as one of the non-material factors in the Filipino attempt at nation-building.

The impact of American education in the Philippines is still very visible today. But whether it will persist and remain as it is in the years to come is hard to say. The likelihood is that its qualitative and quantitative influence
will diminish because of certain trends and developments in present-day Philippine society. American technological assistance to the country is decreasing; the number of opportunities opened to the Filipino for study in the United States is becoming scarce; but, perhaps, a more significant trend is the growing nationalism among the people which demands the restructuring of the non-material and the material bases of Filipino life and culture.

Today, there is an increasing pressure from Filipino students and intellectuals that English as a medium of instruction in the schools should be abandoned and replaced by Pilipino, the national language. They are demanding that the academic courses offered in the various curricula should be restructured in order to make them relevant to the present needs of the country. This, in effect, will mean the de-emphasizing of western subjects, like American history and politics, and replacing them with those courses which emphasize Philippine and Asian studies. In response to these demands, the Department of Education has adopted the policy of bilingualism in the schools. Too, it has directed school authorities to give priority to textbooks written by Filipino authors.

Conclusion
From the foregoing discussion, it has been noted that the impact of American education has been greatly felt in the Philippines during the colonial period and after the Second World War. Its existence in the former period was inevitable and quite natural, for the Philippines was under American rule. During that period it brought about quantitative and qualitative changes in the life of the Filipino. In the postwar period, it continued to be felt partly due to the persistence of the colonial educational system and partly due to the presence of American educators, coming to the Philippines and Filipinos educated in the United States who act as purveyors of American education in the Philippines. Through them, American education has been, to a certain extent, a factor in nation-building. However, because of the growing nationalism of the people and other trends in Philippine society today, it is expected that this American educational impact will diminish in the years to come.

Footnotes
3Ibid., p. 189.
4Ibid., p. 228.
6Alzona, op. cit., p. 237.
9Ibid., p. 494.
10Philippine Commission Reports, 1900-1903, p. 123.
12Philippine Commission Reports, op. cit., p. 263.