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To cite this article:

Adebayo, S. (2020) A Critical Review of School Choice and Egalitarian Justice with Special Reference to the Philippines, *Cambridge Educational Research e-Journal*, Volume 7, pp. 70-85. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.58328>



Published online: 1st November 2020



Link to Apollo



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A Critical Review of School Choice and Egalitarian Justice with Special Reference to the Philippines

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Abstract

The complexities of many societies in the world today, coupled with the dire need to achieve quality education and social justice in every society, makes the issue of school choice and justice topical at national and international levels. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030, has established that quality education for all can significantly contribute to sustainable societal development. This paper employed a critical review of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and Harry Brighouse's (2000) work on school choice and social justice. The paper applies this examination to the Philippines case, paying close attention to the relationship between school choice and egalitarian justice within the Philippines education sector. This article considers egalitarian justice as a theoretical framework relevant to its discussion on school choice in the Philippines within the context of the SDG 4 – Education 2030 agenda. Findings from this review show that many Filipino parents want the best education and future for their children, and this drives their decision on school choice. Where the public system fails to provide quality education for their children, parents tend to choose other school options to enrol their children, and they remain loyal to affordable schools. The Government of the Philippines provides educational vouchers for private schooling to ensure accessible, equitable and quality education for all. Consequently, private schools are developed at the cost of public schools, while many Filipino children still attend public schools. This creates unintended inequalities within society. This paper concludes that realising egalitarian justice in a society under the school choice system will be quite problematic. Although school choice could help in making education available to some, it could spell doom for others. This review paper is relevant because, with less than 11 years left to achieve SDG 4, challenges historically inherent in many education systems and current problems being faced by educational actors on achieving the SDG 4 are worthy of our attention. Therefore, the paper calls for more research to be done on school choice and egalitarian justice in different socio-political contexts.

Resumen

Las complejidades de muchas sociedades del mundo actual, aunadas a la necesidad de alcanzar educación de calidad y justicia social en toda sociedad hacen del problema de elección de escuela y la justicia un tema de actualidad a nivel nacional e internacional. El Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) 4: Garantizar una educación inclusiva, equitativa y de calidad y promover oportunidades de aprendizaje durante toda la vida para todos para el 2030, ha establecido que la educación de calidad para todos puede contribuir significativamente al desarrollo sostenible de las sociedades. Este artículo utilizó una revisión crítica de la Teoría de la Justicia (1971) de John Rawls y de la obra de Harry Brighouse (2000) sobre la elección de escuela y la justicia social. El artículo aplica esta revisión al caso filipino, poniendo particular atención a la relación entre elección de escuela y justicia igualitaria en el sector educativo de Filipinas. Este artículo considera la justicia igualitaria como un marco teórico relevante para la discusión acerca de la elección de escuela en Filipinas dentro del contexto de los ODS4 – Agenda 2030 en educación. Los resultados de esta revisión muestran que muchos padres filipinos quieren la mejor educación y futuro para sus hijos, y esto dirige sus decisiones en cuanto a la elección de escuela. Cuando el sistema público falla en proveer educación de calidad para sus hijos, los padres tienden a elegir otras opciones de escuela para matricular a sus hijos, y se mantienen leales a escuelas asequibles. El Gobierno de Filipinas proporciona bonos para las escuelas privadas para garantizar educación accesible, equitativa y de calidad para todos. Consecuentemente, las escuelas privadas se desarrollan a costa de las escuelas públicas, en tanto que muchos niños filipinos todavía asisten a escuelas públicas.

Article History

Submitted: 30th

March 2020

Accepted: 13th

August 2020

Keywords

School Choice,
 Egalitarian Justice,
 Quality Education,
 Education Reforms,
 The Philippines

Palabras Clave

Elección de escuela,
 justicia igualitaria,
 educación de
 calidad, reformas
 educativas, Filipinas

Esto, crea desigualdades imprevistas dentro de la sociedad. El artículo concluye que lograr la justicia igualitaria en una sociedad bajo el sistema de elección escolar será bastante problemático. Aunque la elección de escuela puede ayudar a que la educación esté disponible para algunos, podría ser la ruina para otros. Este artículo es relevante puesto que, con menos de 11 años para lograr el ODS 4, los desafíos históricamente inherentes a muchos sistemas educativos y los problemas actuales que enfrentan los actores educativos para alcanzar el ODS 4 merecen nuestra atención. Por lo tanto, el documento llama a realizar más investigación sobre la elección de escuelas y la justicia igualitaria en diferentes contextos sociopolíticos.

ملخص:

إن أوجه التعقيدات للعديد من المجتمعات في العالم اليوم، مجتمعة مع الحاجة الملحة لتحقيق التعليم ذو النوعية الجيدة والعدالة الاجتماعية في كل مجتمع يجعلان من مسألة اختيار المدرسة والعدالة الاجتماعية آنية على المستويات المحلية والدولية. الهدف الرابع من أهداف التنمية المستدامة: الذي يؤكد على جودة التعليم المتكافئ والشامل ويدعم فرص التعلم مدى الحياة للجميع بحلول عام 2030، ويثبت بأن توفر التعليم ذو النوعية الجيدة للجميع بإمكانه أن يساهم إلى حد كبير في التنمية الاجتماعية المستدامة. هذه الدراسة وظفت تقييم نقدي لـ "نظرية العدالة" (1971) لـ John Rawls وعمل Harry Brighouse's (2000) الذي يسلط الضوء على موضوعي اختيار المدرسة والعدالة الاجتماعية. هذا البحث يطبق هذه الدراسة على الحالة الفلبينية، مع إيلاء اهتمام شديد إلى العلاقة بين اختيار المدرسة والعدالة المتكافئة ضمن قطاع التعليم الفلبيني. هذه المقالة تعتبر العدالة القائمة على المساواة كإطار نظري وثيق الصلة لبحثها في موضوع اختيار المدرسة في الفلبين ضمن إطار هدف التنمية المستدامة الرابع (SDG4) في خطة التعليم لعام 2030. النتائج المستخلصة من هذا التقييم تظهر بأن العديد من الآباء الفلبينيين يريدون تعليم ومستقبل أفضل لأبنائهم، وهذا ما يفوق قرارهم في اختيار المدرسة. وبما أن النظام العام يفشل في أن يؤمن تعليم ذو نوعية جيدة لأبنائهم، يميل الآباء لاختيار خيارات مدارس أخرى لإلحاق أبنائهم فيها، وأيضاً يميلون للمدارس ذات التكلفة المعقولة. الحكومة الفلبينية تؤمن قسائم تعليمية للالتحاق بالتعليم الخاص لتكفل تعليم ذو نوعية جيدة متاح ومنصف للجميع. و بناء على ذلك، فإن المدارس الخاصة تتطور لتصبح بتكلفة المدارس العامة في حين أن العديد من الأطفال الفلبينيين لا يزالون يلتحقون بالمدارس العامة. وهذا يخلق أوجه عدم مساواة غير متعمد ضمن المجتمع. هذا البحث يستخلص بأن تحقيق العدل المتسم بالمساواة في مجتمع تحت نظام اختيار المدرسة سيكون إشكالي وصعب للغاية. على الرغم من أن اختيار المدرسة بإستطاعته أن يجعل التعليم متاح للجميع، إلا أنه من الممكن أن يضع حداً ونهاية لتعليم آخرين. هذه المراجعة ذات صلة لأن، مع أقل من 11 سنة متبقية لتحقيق الهدف الرابع للتنمية المستدامة، التحديات المتأصلة تاريخياً في العديد من أنظمة التعليم والمشاكل الحالية التي تتم مواجهتها من قبل الأطراف الفاعلة في قطاعات التعليم المعنية في تحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة جديرة باهتمامنا. ومن أجل ذلك، يدعو هذا البحث لإجراء المزيد من الأبحاث في اختيار المدرسة والعدالة المتسمة بالمساواة في أطر سياسية اجتماعية مختلفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية
اختيار المدرسة،
العدالة المتسمة
بالمساواة، التعليم ذو
النوعية الجيدة،
إصلاحات التعليم،
الفلبين

Introduction

The lack of equitable, quality and accessible education continues to remain a challenge for many countries, especially developing countries, and this hinders their socio-economic development (Adebayo, 2019; UNESCO, 2017). The recent global educational goal, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030*, has evolved as a solid basis for the increasing global use of other alternatives to public education system such as educational privatisation to provide 'equitable, quality and accessible education for all' (Verger & Moschetti, 2016).

Furthermore, the challenges embedded in the public education systems of many developing countries have over the years led to increasing parental demand and choice for private education, especially at the primary level (Tooley & Longfield, 2015). These challenges include the inability of the public education systems to provide accessible, equitable and quality education for all. It is important to note that public education is provided by state governments through public education systems, while private education is provided by non-state actors (Tooley & Longfield, 2015). Specifically, in the Global South, parents are often seeking alternatives to the public-school system; it has been observed that private education or low fee private schooling is a leading option for parents to enrol their children (Tooley & Longfield, 2015). Highlighting the challenges inherent in public education systems in developing countries, Tooley (2007) has argued that the increasing parental demands for private schooling do not in any way negate the principles of social justice and equality.

Scholars have argued that the inability of public systems to deliver access to quality education in many societies have given leverage to the expansion of private education service providers in developing countries (Alderman et al., 2001; Macpherson et al., 2014; Phillipson, 2008; Tooley, 2007; Verger & Moschetti, 2016). According to Alderman et al. (2001), there is gross mismanagement of public education resources, lack of quality school infrastructures, a high number of unqualified and underpaid teachers in developing countries. Furthermore, this situation has made private education and school choice indispensable in these countries. On the other hand, Watkins (2004) argues that educational privatisation in developing countries could only make things worse because societal inequalities cannot be addressed with the private education system. He further posits that fixing public education systems can guarantee free quality, equitable and accessible education for all as against the education privatisation alternative.

Against the backdrop of debates around what type of education system, either private or public, that can ensure an equitable education for all. Brighouse (2000) in his book titled *School Choice and Social Justice* opines that a well-established mainstream public or private school choice plan, in line with his principles of social justice, can achieve equal educational opportunities for all. However, Foster (2002), in response to Brighouse's book, highlights that "Brighouse is overly confident about the egalitarian potential of school choice. He seems to be defending a policy for what it could be, rather than looking at school choice for what it is: a flawed educational reform that makes things worse in terms of social justice" (p. 292). In other words, Brighouse (2000) was not seeing the unintended consequences of encouraging school choice as a justification for educational reform. According to Foster (2000), school choice as an educational reform would only make situations worse, and that Brighouse fails to acknowledge this reality in his book.

From the foregoing, this article seeks to provide critical analysis of school choice and egalitarian justice, with special reference to the Philippines. Therefore, this review is guided by the research question: What is the state of school choice in the Philippines through the

theoretical lens of egalitarian justice? This article considers egalitarian justice as a theoretical framework relevant to its discussion on school choice in the Philippines within the context of the SDG 4 – Education 2030 agenda. This review paper is relevant because, with less than 11 years left to achieve SDG 4, challenges historically inherent in many education systems and current problems being faced by educational actors on achieving the SDG 4 are worthy of our attention.

The paper starts with interrogating what a fair or just education system is, then presents the normative and empirical divide between school choice and egalitarian justice. The paper explores the debates around parental choice between private or public education, and then briefly explores school choice in other contexts. Afterwards, the paper examines the principles of egalitarian justice as well as counterarguments against egalitarian justice. The paper concludes by examining the Philippines' education system and the state of school choice and egalitarian justice in Filipino society. A final reflection of the major arguments in the paper is presented.

What is a Just Educational System?

In academia, it has been perplexing to have a consensus on what a typical just or fair educational system should look like. And this has become problematic in the study of school choice for justice (Van Parijs, 2004).

Van Parijs (2004), in his article, titled *What is a Just Educational System?* gave a succinct explanation to the dilemma of defining a just educational system:

For a utilitarian, there cannot be a normatively relevant notion of a fair educational system, as opposed to an efficient one, i.e. one that helps a society achieve the highest possible level of aggregate welfare. And such an efficient system may well be one that, for example, systematically filters out those with both a poor capacity and a weak desire to become educated by virtue of their poor social background. For a libertarian, on the other hand, there is no normatively relevant notion of a fair educational system apart from whether it respects duly defined property rights (p. 2).

From the above quotation, it can be argued that the utilitarian and libertarian have different perspectives on what a just educational system should like. Drawing points from the two above schools of thought, a possible definition of a just educational system, can be one that is seen as just by the collective beneficiaries of the system (Van Parijs, 2004).

School Choice and Egalitarian Justice: Normative and Empirical Divide

The debates around the purpose of school choice have been highly contested in literature (Carnoy, 2000). Historically, it can be argued that school choice has aimed to address issues with educational access, and as a response to schools' inability to meet the demands of all learners (Carnoy, 2000). According to Goldhaber (1999), school choice can be described as "any policy that is designed to reduce the constraints that current school configurations place on schools and students" (p. 16), and this is the case with school choice in many contexts. Carnoy (2000) notes that the arguments around school choice have gradually moved towards equity issues within education systems. For this review, school choice is simply defined as parental autonomy to choose what schools their children will attend, be it private or public (Abdulkadiroğlu & Tayfun, 2003).

The concept of school choice can also be strictly linked to the idea of institutional design (Foster, 2002). Institutional design is a known action to create new rules or change pre-existing ones to affect and influence behaviour in a society. Brighouse (2000) argues that applying his theory of social justice is crucial in shaping the way our educational institutions are designed. It has been argued that the concept of school choice is an institutional design that encourages social justice, in as much as it promotes democracy, values of autonomy and educational equality (Brighouse, 2000; Foster 2002). One of the assumptions of research in institutional design is that the behaviour of individuals is significant to available opportunities and incentives in society. Such opportunities and incentives may be purposefully designed as an institution to influence behaviour. Another assumption is that some pattern of particular individual behaviour in a society may be more desirable than others (Goodin & Le Grand, 1987). On the other hand, egalitarianism is defined as a situation in which a society achieves equality, and every member has the same favourable outcomes in policy formulation and implementation (Rawls, 1971; Sandel, 1998).

For a better understanding of how institutional design affects school choice, it will be useful to examine what makes some parents choose to send their children to private schools instead of public schools, which in most cases are free (Howe, 2006). In the analysis below, several factors are identified as having a significant influence on parents' decision-making process on school enrolment for their children (Howe, 2006).

Parental Choice between Public or Private Education

Brighouse (2000) citing Gintis (1995) pushes the idea on how school choice can prove "that social justice in education allows a good deal of scope for having parents choose among schools for their children" (p. 206). Brighouse (2000) argues that parents being free to decide what school, either public or private, to enrol their children promote the ideal principle of social justice in a society. In addition, he argues that society should ensure that relevant information and platforms are made available to parents to enable them to make "informed decisions about

the effectiveness of schools" (Brighouse, 2000, p. 187). It is a valid argument that making information about school choice options available to parents allow them to make an informed judgement in choosing between schools.

Over the years, there has been a great divide among scholars between the normative principles and empirical conditions of school choice and social justice (Brighouse, 2000; Foster, 2002; Giesinger, 2009). According to Giesinger, "a normative assessment of school choice policies is always guided, at least implicitly, by a conception of (educational) justice." Giesinger (2009) argues that it is essential to "distinguish the normative objectives that are defined by such a conception from the empirical conditions necessary to reach them" (p. 2). In other words, the analysis of school choice from the normative perspective must be ultimately geared towards achieving educational justice in the same vein taking cognisance of necessary empirical conditions. The normative perspective on school choice highlights that the end goal of the normative divide is to achieve educational justice and not necessarily to be 'empirical'. In support of this argument, Brighouse (2000) claims that empirical knowledge is not essential when applying normative principles to social situations and justice should remain the big picture when applying normative principles in a social context. Brighouse has been heavily criticised for seeing empirical knowledge or data as 'beside the point' (Giesinger, 2009).

On the other hand, Foster (2002, p. 302) who belongs to the empirical divide on school choice argues that recent scientific findings have counterfeited Brighouse (2000) positions on school choice. "Evidence is mounting to confirm that choice schemes are 'making things worse' for social justice by exacerbating stratification along the lines of class, race and special needs." In other words, school choice does not contribute to realising an egalitarian society.

Moreover, Howe (2006) believes that "empirical research on school choice has entered a phase resembling what Thomas Kuhn called normal science" (p. 259). Research on school choice is going towards normative perspectives. With education as a fundamental human right firmly established in SDG 4, it is crucial to have the above debate as the world aims to achieve the targets of the SDG 4 by 2030. A brief overview of school choice in other contexts is presented in the following section.

An Overview of School Choice in Other Contexts

The Charter School model is known to be the principal leaders of the school choice movement in the United States (US), according to Foster (2002) the model has been perceived to encourage social stratification in the US. There are instances of apparent 'skimming' practices and clustering of students in charter schools, negating the claims of choice promoters that charter schools significantly boost equality of opportunities and social integration (Foster, 2002).

The New Zealand educational reform of 1989 saw compulsory education policy established nationwide, under the plan called 'Tomorrow's Schools'. In this reform, the national Department of Education was replaced with a smaller Ministry of Education to see to policy recommendations and a locally elected board of trustees to be in charge of the nation's primary and secondary schools (Foster, 2002). Some of the consequences of this reform after some years include changes in community enrolments of students. Many students were easily de-enrolled from schools with parents now having the right to send their children to any school of their choice. This situation created a struggle and unhealthy competition between schools for students in order to keep functioning (Foster, 2002).

Howe (2006) in his study *On The (In) Feasibility of School Choice for Social Justice* argues that “school choice policy was nurtured and grew in anti-egalitarian soil; the nutrients it took up through its roots have now become part of its tissue. It is difficult to see how school choice can promote social justice” (p. 264). In other words, it will be challenging to achieve egalitarian justice under the school choice model in any society. The following critically explores the principle of egalitarian justice.

The Principle of Egalitarian Justice

Rawls (1971), in his book *A Theory of Justice*, identified two principles of justice: liberty of principle and a principle on the distribution of opportunities and resources. Rawls (1971) attempts to describe the way a society can be well-ordered and achieve egalitarianism. He argues that his principles of justice can create equality of opportunities for every member of society, and societies founded on his principles of justice will have less issues with inequality. Rawls (1971) posits that the equal distribution of resources and opportunities to members of a society can create an egalitarian society. Other research has found Rawls's theory of justice to be a valid mechanism to create the necessary pathway for any society to attain an egalitarian status (Brighouse, 2000; Fabre, 2011).

Rawls (1971) ideas confronted the traditional philosophical thinkers on social structures and processes. He was against the notion that policies should be accepted irrespective of their outcomes. In particular, Rawls disapproves utilitarianism for positing that society should always strive for what is best for the common good, giving less consideration to individuals in a society. It was against the beliefs of utilitarianism that Rawls developed his theory of justice (Sandel, 2009).

Furthermore, Rawls supports the principles of morality and social contract approach in creating a just society. According to Rawls (1971), a society needs a contract; a form of agreement where there is a commitment to the good of individuals equally. Rawls argument on social contract can be seen as useful when it is understood in the light of nation-building in many developing countries, especially countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Many countries in

SSA were not a product of social contract but were colonial creations. Today, inequalities are prevalent in many societies in SSA (Leonard et al., 2011).

Rawls's theory of justice highlights the need for "justice as fairness." He argues that social structures are primarily responsible for ensuring justice in a society, and every society is responsible for promoting fairness. It was after Rawls observed how relevant his theoretical propositions over utilitarianism and institutionalism that he proposed his two principles of justice. Rawls argues that his theory of justice is the best way a society can be egalitarian with the worse off in a society adequately recognised. In other words, Rawls delivers his egalitarian conception of justice on the ideological deficiencies of utilitarianism and institutionalism (Sandel, 2009).

However, Brighouse (2000) argues that Rawls fails to clearly identify how the principles can be effectively implemented in different social contexts. According to Brighouse (2000), for one to implement the principles for social justice, there has to be an exceptional understanding of the "current configuration of institutions, how they work, which transition mechanisms work and what costs are involved" (p. 2). Basically, it is crucial to interrogate existing social institutions and how they operate, and the place of understanding context specificities is essential when applying Rawls's theory of justice.

It can be argued that Rawls's work shows an obligation to the normative school of thought; his aim was not to define the pattern of existing societies, but how a just society should be constructed. Also, Rawls (1971) stoutly maintains that if his principles of justice were to be applied to any society, such society would be just and attain equality of opportunities (Fabre, 2011). Earlier in this paper, it was pointed out that Rawls was against utilitarian perspective on justice. According to Rawls (1971), the utilitarianism school of thought subscribes to individual rights being violated or trampled upon in the process of ensuring equal opportunities for all. Additionally, utilitarianism presents that the individual in a society is expected to make the most of the individual welfare and society is expected to make the most of the social utility. Rawls does not agree with this point of view (Fabre, 2011).

Rawls's principles of justice have been seen as egalitarian which rests on the premise that "each individual is self-interested, has projects to pursue and goals to implement, and cannot be asked to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the greatest number" (Fabre, 2011, p. 8). Basically, fulfilling the interest of an individual in a society should take priority over the interest of a larger group of members of society.

In his argument against the utilitarian school of thought, Rawls (1971) classically writes:

utilitarians have an understanding of the good, that is, of what it is good to achieve, and that is the maximisation of individual and collective welfare. The right action – that is, the action which we must perform - is the action which

promotes the good: so for utilitarians, what is right is defined in relation to what is good, and what is right is instrumental to the good. In other words, once we have defined the good – maximising individual and collective welfare – we know what the right thing to do is (pp. 27–28).

The above quote shows Rawls's strong position against utilitarianism, founded on his belief that with the social contract approach, society is the primary means of achieving justice and equality for all. Rawls's principles of justice advocates for individuals in a society to have the same equal right as others in enjoying fundamental liberties, in addition to accepting social and economic inequalities as long as it benefits the worse off in a society, including attainment of positions and offices made available to all. The next section examines major criticisms against the principle of egalitarian justice.

Counterarguments Against the Principle of Egalitarian Justice

John Rawls's theory of justice has suffered heavy criticisms from other schools of thought. For example, in a critique of Rawls's principles of justice, Sen (1980) argues that ensuring equal distribution of resources or income does not guarantee the type of equality that is needful for a society. Sen (1980) instead suggests that resources should be distributed to individuals in a society to improve their capacities to live a fulfilled social and political life.

Sandel (1998) criticises Rawls's theory as lacking the right understanding of the self, and the relationship between the individual and community. Also, the expected functions of justice and right in society (Fabre, 2011). Walzer (1983), in his critique of Rawlsian liberalism, focused on "how to think about justice and how to distribute goods" (Walzer 1983 cited in Fabre, 2011, p. 9). Walzer (1983) posits that treating members of society according to some universal principles does not make such a society just because "a given society is just if its substantive life is lived in a certain way – that is, in a way faithful to the shared understanding of its members" (p. 313). Additionally, "justice is rooted in the distinct understandings of places, honours, jobs, things of all sorts that constitute a shared way of life. To override those understandings is always to act unjustly" (Walzer, 1983, p. 314). Walzer (1983) criticism of the Rawlsian theory of justice is the 'assumed' belief that justice in a society can only be achieved by an individual laid down principles and not beliefs commonly founded on the shared beliefs of members of society.

In summary of the above discussion, Rawls's principles of justice and its criticisms are needed to explore the relationship between school choice and egalitarian/social justice properly. Also, in examining how school choice contributes to egalitarianism in a society. The next section applies the above philosophical debates to the Philippines's education system.

A Country Study of the Philippines

The Philippines educational system is a product of many years of colonialism and imperialism, and its historical background reflects setbacks and struggles (Durban & Catalan, 2012). From the Spanish who contributed less to seeing the Filipinos educated to the Americans who use education as a means of enforcing their hegemony and promoting imperialism. Further, the Japanese aside occupying the Philippines destroyed its education system. This background has led to the public education system's inability to provide accessible, equitable and quality education to all Filipinos (Durban & Catalan, 2012).

Under the first Spanish colonial rule (1565-1599), the natives were merely seen as slaves to the master, so there was no need for the natives to be educated. The second phase of Spanish colonisation (1762-1896) saw a period of 'awakening' that eventually led to a revolution. The revolution led by General Martin Delgado on December 25, 1898, saw the Spanish exiting the Philippines. However, not too long after came the Americans, and this marked the beginning of a new era of colonisation. The Americans were able to soothe the grieving indigenous people with education. The Filipinos were taught American culture, geography, English language, how to read and write. Education was made available to all irrespective of social classifications. This certainly was a useful tool for social mobilisation and development for the Filipinos (Durban & Catalan, 2012).

According to Durban and Catalan (2012), "the educational system established by the Americans was not solely for giving the Filipinos the gift of literacy, but more so for their economic and political purposes" (p. 63). In other words, it is argued that the Philippines's educational system established by the Americans was designed to protect their interests of neoliberalism, that is, the flow of free-market capitalism.

The Japanese invasion of Asia (1941-1945) included the Philippines occupied by the Japanese and its public educational system destroyed, and this led to the breakdown of social values. The Philippines fought alongside their American 'brothers' in the war against the Japanese, and this established that America was highly successful in influencing the Filipinos culture and values with its cultural values. The post-war era saw the Philippines transition politically and educationally. The Americans helped in rebuilding the Philippines's political and social systems (Durban & Catalan, 2012). However, the harsh reality of the political instability of the newly independent nation-state caused some damages to the public education system. Moreover, over the years, the Philippines has experienced different educational challenges as well as reforms targeted at addressing the challenges with little success. Challenges such as inadequate resources and poor facilities, low institutional capacity and an absence of quality education (Camphuijsen, 2016; Durban & Catalan, 2012).

In regards to the state of the nation's educational system, Durban and Catalan (2012, p. 67) highlight that "the educational system does not receive much budget from the government."

The lack of adequate government's investment in the education system has resulted in many public schools being under-resourced. Consequently, the public education system in the Philippines is plagued with challenges that hinder the system from providing accessible, equitable and quality education for all. The next section presents an analysis of school choice and egalitarian justice in the Philippines.

School Choice and Egalitarian Justice in the Philippines

On school choice in the Philippines, research shows that Filipino parents are very interested in knowing how to make quality decisions with regards to their children's education (de Guzman et al., 2008; Termes, Edwards, & Verger, 2020). Besides, parents are actively involved in choosing between different school options (de Guzman et al., 2008). Within the context of the Philippines's education system, school choice is a rigorous process of reflection, thought, assessment and positive goal-oriented decision-making (de Guzman et al., 2008). Reflecting on parents/guardians' active involvement on school choice in the Philippines, it can be argued that egalitarian justice can be challenging to achieve in the society as parents who are unable to enrol their children in 'good' private schools are forced to have their children remain in the low-quality public schools (de Guzman et al., 2008).

Furthermore, useful school indicators and parental concerns have been observed to affect school choice in the Philippines. Parents tend to choose from public schools, elite schools, religious schools and low-cost schools to enrol their children (Johnson, 1998). Additionally, some factors that influence school choice in the Philippines include, "affordability, school environment, the people in the school, the equipment used, the programs offered and how involved parents are in their children's education" (de Guzman et al., 2008, p. 111).

According to a quantitative study on school choice in the Philippines by de Guzman et al. (2008), they analysed the relationship between Filipino parents' profile and how it influences their school choice and school loyalty. The findings of this study demonstrate that school choice in the Philippines is premised on the fact that parents want the best education and future for their children. Moreover, a scenario where the public education system fails to provide quality education for their children, parents alternatively choose other school options to enrol their children. They often stay loyal to schools that are affordable and continuously meet their needs. Nevertheless, the low-income family, who cannot afford to send their children to private schools, ultimately send their children to public schools. Public schools in the Philippines struggle to accommodate every student due to limited infrastructures and capacities, so in a bid to address this problem, the government invests in private education in the form of educational vouchers and education tax credit (Camphuijsen, 2016; de Guzman et al., 2008). However, this educational intervention by the Government of the Philippines (GoP) has not been very successful (Termes, Edwards, & Verger, 2020).

The study concludes that:

With the proliferation of schools that offer a wide array of educational opportunities and meaningful learning structures, most Filipino parents seem to look for other alternatives that would best satisfy the educational needs of their children. This trend of parents' tendency of patronising schools other than their alma mater challenges educational institutions to commit themselves to continuous improvement (de Guzman et al., 2008, pp. 120–121).

The above study's conclusion is quite instructive as it demonstrates how the search for quality education in the Philippines has made parents very involved in choosing between schools and making schools accountable to render quality education. This situation to an extent validates Brighthouse's (2000) argument that some degree of school choice is inevitable and unavoidable to provide accessible, equitable and quality education for all, and ultimately achieving social justice. On the other hand, it is also instructive to point out the dangers of encouraging school competition and marketisation, which in many cases have been chaotic to promoting equal educational opportunities for students and egalitarian justice (Foster, 2002; Howe, 2006).

In a more recent study, Termes et al. (2020), present that private education is becoming unaffordable for many families, even with the provision of educational vouchers by the GoP. Furthermore, Termes et al., confirm that the intention of the GoP introducing the vouchers was to address the inequalities inherent within the public education system. The GoP aimed to provide alternatives for Filipino parents that are unable to access public schools for their children. However, Termes et al. (2020) in their study, find that the introduction of the educational vouchers has not led to accessible, equitable and quality education for all, particularly for the poor.

Rawls's (1971) idea of equal distribution of social resources to members of a society for justice can be seen in the Philippines' example. Within its failed education system, the GoP retorted to providing education vouchers and promote educational privatisation to enable parents that are unable to find a place for their children in public schools to enrol their children in private schools (Camphuijsen, 2016; de Guzman et al., 2008). However, studies confirm that this educational reform by the GoP has been unsuccessful in providing equitable education for all learners (Camphuijsen, 2016; Termes et al., 2020). The reform has not benefited the worse off in the Filipino's society and egalitarianism unattained in the Philippines. Furthermore, one of the consequences of the educational reform is that private schools are being developed at the expense of the public schools and many Filipino children still attend public schools. In other words, educational vouchers are provided for private schooling at the cost of the public education system. This creates inequalities in society and the government suffering from a potential debt crisis (de Guzman et al., 2008).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to provide an analysis of school choice and egalitarian justice, with special reference to the Philippines. Much insight was drawn from Rawls's (1971) theory of justice, and various debates on school choice and egalitarianism were also presented. In the case of the Philippines, this paper argues that school choice in no way has contributed to produce a just society. The GoP introduced educational vouchers for private schooling in order to respond to the equity need for quality education for all Filipinos. This education reform allows the GoP to distribute social resources to members of the society, which conforms to Rawls's (1971) egalitarian justice. However, education privatisation has been observed to negate the tenets of equal educational opportunities for students and egalitarian justice in society (Termes et al. 2020). The current state of school choice in the Philippines confirms the arguments of utilitarianism that a social system can always strive for what is 'best' for the common good, giving less consideration to individuals' expectations within society. In other words, under utilitarianism education systems in normative terms cannot be just or fair but works toward the common good of the society.

Furthermore, the possibility of Filipino parents to choose what schools their children will attend using the educational vouchers is in line with Brighouse (2000) postulations on school choice and social justice. Concerning the quantitative study by de Guzman et al. (2008) on the relationship between Filipino parents' profile and how it influences their school choice and loyalty, this article agrees with the finding that parents in the Philippines want the best education and future for their children, and this ultimately influences their school choice. To close, it will be challenging to realise egalitarian justice in a society under the school choice system. Although school choice could help in making education available to some, it could spell doom for others. More research still needs to be done on school choice and egalitarian justice in different socio-political contexts.

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