UNDERSTANDING CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION IN A NEOLIBERAL WORLD: 
THE CASE OF THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT
This paper seeks to understand and analyze the roots and dynamics of corruption in Philippine educational system using Marx's theory of education. Specifically, it looks at how neoliberalism affects the educational system of the country with its deep-seated corruption. Methodologically, this paper uses existing peer-reviewed journal articles, published online documents and other pertinent materials as secondary qualitative sources of data. It was found out that endemic corruption within Philippine education sector is traceable to the structural inequalities prevalent in the societal milieu of its semi-feudal, semi-colonial status and continues as the world progresses where countries, like the Philippines, are reorganized to join the trends of neoliberalism. Hence, any meaningful intervention or genuine change, be it educational, institutional or societal, must be directed towards greater understanding of the historical roots and societal dynamics that played its role in entrenching corruption in the nation and furthering the alienated, oppressed and dehumanized conditions of the people.

Keywords: Corruption, Neoliberalism, Philippines, Education, Marxism

INTRODUCTION
Education plays a vital role in the development of the state and its people. The purpose of education is instrumental to serve national economic interest (Furman, 2012). Education, in every sense, is one of the fundamental factors of development. No country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human capital particularly in education (Ozturk, 2001). In most countries, public education is a worthy investment of the government. Immense social and economic benefits are guaranteed in this public expenditure. It is argued that the more the government invests on public education, the lesser the likelihood of the citizens in becoming liabilities to the State (Baker, Cummings & Kintisch, 2008). Hence, the State’s investment on education is far more cost-effective than paying for the social and economic consequences of under-funded, low quality schools.
In the case of the Philippines, The 1987 Constitution mandates that education must be appropriated with the biggest portion of the wealth of the country. The Department of Budget and Management has allocated six hundred seventy-two billion pesos to fund the education sector in the Philippines for year 2018. Provisions in the law are set to appropriate this amount to better deliver quality education to the Filipino people. Unfortunately, corruption is deeply rooted on the education sector of the country. The funds in education sector is undeniably one of the most vulnerable sources of corruption in the country. It is a common view that corruption is one of the major challenges in the Philippines and as mentioned above, the education sector is not an exception to it (Durban and Catalan, 2012; Seth Jones, 2013). Corruption exist in various levels including the Department of Education [DepEd] (Reyes, 2010). While DepEd is the biggest bureaucracy in the Philippines with over half a million people employed (Reyes, 2010), it is considered to be one of the most corrupt national agencies of the country (Carino, Iglesias, & Mendoza, 1998).

The comprehensive study of Bautista, Bernardo and Ocampo (2009) documented the various reform initiatives within the institution but then again have failed to transform the agency. These major issues of corruption and anomalies can have adverse effects on the delivery of quality education. Unfortunately, too many people fail to understand the highly political nature of education (de Saxe, J. G., Bucknovitz, S., & Mahoney-Mosedale, F., 2018). In a study by Reyes (2010) he inquired into the experiences of local implementation actors of DepEd as they navigate through reform efforts within systemic corruption. He concluded that:

"Addressing the gaps and weaknesses in the bureaucracy is a fundamental first step in ensuring that unscrupulous individuals do not exploit these and resort to corrupt clientele networks intent on plundering vulnerable
DepEd resources. Breaking up natural monopolies in the DepEd found in the division offices or at the national office and strengthening current vital sections of DepEd...through manpower and resource inputs is essential. Patron–client linkages could be limited if DepEd can delineate areas in which discretion may be exercised by local leaders." (p. 397)

Even in the Commission on Higher Education (CHEd), the main agency tasked to oversee higher education institutions in the country is not immune to corruption. As part of the public bureaucracy of the country, “it is susceptible to the influence of political dynamics, which fosters corruption, especially at the implementation level, “elite capture”, patronage politics and a long-established culture of informal bureaucratic influence” (Pernia, 2017).

This clearly shows that corruption has been systematically institutionalized, and it has caused serious structural constraints for the improvement of the country. It poses a challenge that requires deeper analysis and understanding into its roots and dynamics, if one has to remove it from our system. Given the massive gap of wealth and income between the rich and poor in a resource-depleted country like the Philippines, which has mainly been due to the neoliberal economic policies of the country, this paper argues that using some key ideas of the political philosopher Karl Marx, one can understand fully well the roots of the corruption, most especially on education, in the country.

METHOD

This paper makes use of published extant literatures and studies that critically engages on Philippine educational system, corruption, neoliberal attacks on education and the Marxist educational theory. Available documents especially Karl Marx’s *A Contribution*
to the *Critique of Political Economy* and the book written (*Philippine Society and Revolution*) by the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) which lashes out on the problem of the country and set out the direction for the future are interrogated to provide the much-needed historical context and political-economic content of the paper.

This paper will be organized in four parts. The first one will discuss about the Marx’s ideas on education i.e. the structure-superstructure debate as the overarching theoretical lens. Second, it will analyze the social and political context to the educational problems of the Philippines. Third, it looks into the discourse of neoliberalism as a new form of social reality that is occurring in the world and how it particularly affects Philippine educational system. The last part will provide the concluding remarks.

**RESULTS**

**A. Marxist ideas on education: the structure-superstructure debate**

In his book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Karl Marx famously exclaimed on the idea human’s actual everyday living is determined by material activity: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.” To Marx, human thought or consciousness was rooted in human activity not the other way around as a number of philosophers felt at the time—a clear attack on the German philosopher Hegel’s idealism. Furthermore, he said that the way we were organized in our daily life was reflected in the way we thought about things and how we see the world we live in.

“The institutions we built, the philosophies we adhered to, the prevailing ideas of the time, the culture of society, were all determined to some extent or another by the economic structure of society.”
Marx maintained that the economic base or infrastructure generated or had built upon it, there is a superstructure that kept it functioning. The education system, as part of the superstructure, therefore, reflected the economic base and served to reproduce it. Thus, whatever the institutions of society, like education, were simply reflections of the world created by human activity and that ideas arose from and reflected the material conditions and circumstances in which they were generated. This mostly reflects the ruling class of society. Eventually this situation becomes very alienating, oppressive and dehumanizing, and must be cast off.

To achieve this, Marx argued that communism, a classless society, becomes an antidote “for the alienation of man-from-man which existed in the capitalist society,” According to Gert Hellerich (1970), in a communist society there will be no state to control and direct the people (base) from the superstructure (government); the opposition between manual and intellectual labor disappears, and true harmony is achieved between theory and practice.

B. Philippines: ‘A semi-feudal, semi-colonial country’

The founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) Jose Maria Sison, wrote (under the pseudonym Amado Guerrero) *Philippine Society and Revolution*, the most comprehensive document which details the standpoint "for every patriot in the land to make further class analysis and social investigation as the basis for concrete and sustained revolutionary action." Generally, the book argued that the Philippines is a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. Feudal due to its agricultural base whose vast tracts of lands are owned by landlords and capitalists and farmers like in Hacienda Luisita suffered in dire and slave-like conditions.
It is a colonial state due to the massive influence of the Western capitalist countries like the United States of America, which together with its collaborator wealthy comprador bourgeois and elites still holds monopoly and control of our assets and resources of the country. In terms of education, Guerrero (1970, 14) unequivocally stated that “U.S. imperialism built up an educational system as a major instrument of colonial control.”

The establishment of an extensive public-school system and the adoption of English as the medium of instruction served not only to enhance the political indoctrination of the Filipinos into subservience to U.S. imperialism but also to encourage local taste for American commodities in general. It also opened the market directly for U.S. educational materials. (Guerrero, 1970: 14)

Together with education, even the colonial culture was characterized by the superimposition of comprador ideology upon the feudal ideology within the superstructure.

The U.S. colonial regime established the University of the Philippines in 1908 to attract mainly the petty bourgeoisie, even as the University of Santo Tomas, together with the convent schools, continued to prefer teaching an exclusive clientele of students from the exploiting classes who could afford to pay exorbitant matriculation fees. U.S. imperialism was bent on recruiting a large number of intellectual agents from the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie in order to raise the level of scientific and technical competence for servitude in an expanding bureaucracy and in the proliferating imperialist corporations. (Guerrero, 1970: 15)
These “educated elites” formed the base of the colonial government of which were indebted to US imperialism and “as that of the entire Filipino people and they were blind to the fact that through them, U.S. imperialism could oppress and exploit the broad masses of the Filipino people, especially the workers and peasants (Guerrero, 1970: 15).” Viewed in this deeply structural manner, it is essential to look into the discourse of neoliberalism transpiring the world over. This is done to have a much broader understanding of its inextricable link to education and society *writ large.*

**C. Flourishing Neoliberalism in the World and the Philippines**

Neoliberalism was the term created by a German scholar named Alexander Rustow which he defined as the priority of the price mechanism, the free enterprise, the system of competition and a strong and impartial State. It is called “neo” or new mainly because there was a considerably old kind of liberalism where neoliberalism has been rooted. Liberalism by a Scottish economist named Adam Smith on his book *Wealth of the Nations* (1776) advocated for the abolition of government intervention on any matters regarding the economy of the State. This means no restrictions on manufacturing, no barriers to commerce, no tariffs, and that free trade was the best way for the development of the nation. It was considered liberal as it takes to the sense of boundlessness.

This application of individualism encouraged "free" enterprise," "free" competition -- which came to mean, free for the capitalists to make huge profits as they wished (Martinez and Garcia, 1997). Though with much resemblance as one came from the other, classical liberalism and neoliberalism are two different entities. It is by differentiating the two that one can fully understand how neoliberalism flourished and has widely been embraced by the government of most of the countries.
For classical liberalism, the power of the State is a negative notion. In classical liberalism, an individual is seen as autonomous from the dictates of the State. It points out the private individual as someone that must be freed absolutely from the “obstructive” powers of the government, such having a control of the government is nonetheless extremely unnecessary and thus creates a clash and is unacceptable for the government. On the other hand, neoliberalism took the role of the government as “instrumental”. Here, the State is the one that creates the market where its power to set conditions, rules and interventions is considered necessary for its operation.

The government is one that creates an individual that is enterprising and competitive (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Therefore, the government is not an impediment to the goals of neoliberalism, and is rather necessary and imperative. Needless to say, this shift of image of neoliberalism has become the reason why it took its splendor in many nations as it profits the government too, most especially the earning capitalists in the government. Moreover, neoliberalism had triumphed in the Philippines as an antidote to the corruption of the government during Marcos regime. The underdevelopment of the country has always been treated as a result of the corruption in the government. Therefore, the government having a bigger position in the economy, even as a regulator, is already regarded with distrust (Bello, 2009). Since the state is reputed to be ineffective, neoliberalism avoids any role for the state in responding to the needs of the public (McCarthy 2007). The discourse of neoliberalism had set its perfect timing as it minimizes the role of the state, and is now devised to cure corruption (not foreseeing the even worse effect of this newly-welcomed political and economic idea).

Neoliberalism is a politically imposed discourse that comprises the hegemonic discourse of western super power states (Olssen and Peters, 2005). It has become a new form
of economic system which is a reflection of capitalist system worldwide. In the words of Rafael Sebastian Vicente (1996), neoliberalism has turned the world into one big mall where women, children, immigrants and workers can be bought and exploited by these super powers. He has referred this to the severe condition of countries like that of Mexico as the powers of neoliberalism started to flourish. According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is a global project to reestablish, renew and expand the conditions given to capitalists to restore power to economic elites. Harvey argues that neoliberalism is highly political where economic elites intentionally seek to increase not only their wealth and income but also their political and economic freedom.

Neoliberalism gives influential control of institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund most particularly to the less-developed countries where incurring loans from these multilateral agencies is considered to be a last resort. The Philippines, including its educational sector, is controlled by the US monopoly capital through loan politics. Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) is one of the conditions where privatization, deregulation and liberalization are set for a loaning country to abide to. International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were seen as the key institutions that translated neoliberalist theory into policy, to a set of practical prescriptions that were applicable to all economies (Bello, 2009). The WB-IMF and the Ford Foundation have tagged $400M for education sector of the country and according to many critics, the substantial infiltration of the WB and IMF loans into the educational system of the country has opened it wide to legitimate and systematize foreign control propagating US and other foreign economic interest while maximizing the efficiency of exploitation of the Philippine natural resources and skilled laborers.
In the Philippines, Professor Jose Maria Sison (2015), the Chairperson of the International League of the People’s Struggle, has also spoken about the ills brought by neoliberalism in the country. For him, the masses are suffering greatly from the terrible status of global depression where exploitation, impoverishment, oppression and all kinds of abuse have been brought by the capitalists whose intention is to control the economy for their personal gain. It is greatly observed in the Philippines how a few number of elites control the resources and businesses in the country allowing the rich to grow richer and the poor to grow poorer, therefore worsening the gap between the two. Neoliberalism exploits natural resources and people most especially in less developed countries, like ours. It forces redistribution of assets from the communal ownership to market enterprise, and agonizes human rights of the public (Brym, 2005; Rodrik, 2006; Tomasevski, 2006).

D. Neoliberalism: Oppression to Education

Sison, in his article entitled APEC’s Neoliberal Offensive and its effect on education (2015), argued that neoliberal school reforms has led to the budget cut in government spending on education as it increases privatization. State universities, colleges, public schools and even non-profit private schools are operated in massive collaboration with big businesses. This will lead to the distortion of the objectivity of the schools when it comes to decision making as it may affect the interest of these businesses and in the spirit of “utang na loob” or indebtedness, schools are now leaning towards distorted academic priorities and biased stance on social issues in order to please its benefactors. Most importantly, the current positions on new policies and reforms as being “socially just” is just a façade. Rather, in veracity, they actually serve to reinforce capitalist society that sees teaching and learning as a means to reproduce inequities instead of regarding it as a high-caliber profession that has
the potential to contribute to a more just, equitable and democratic society (de Saxe, J. G., Bucknovitz, S., & Mahoney-Mosedale, F., 2018).

The superiority of neoliberalism has produced a vital shift in the manner education sectors have drawn their existence and purpose (Olssen and Peters, 2005). The traditional intellectual inquiry has been replaced with a stress on performativity giving emphasis on skills where marketization becomes the new widespread shift commodifying teaching and learning. The Education for All launched in 1990 has been controlled by the interest of the neoliberalists. The United Nations commitment as written in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) which states that by 2015, children will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. This target is defective in a sense that it does not fully address the need for quality education in schools which is supposed to be the main goal in any educational institution. Rather than ensuring quality, schools under neoliberalist society is only focused on supplying the skilled labor needs of the capitalists, focusing not on the delivery of quality education as a social service but instead a marketable commodity (Sison, 2015).

The curriculum and all other changes in the educational setting of the countries in the world are revised to fit the needs of businesses and to feed factories with manpower. Neoliberalism has geared towards the establishment of a new moral order of schools to produce the new students who are appropriate to and appropriated by the neoliberal economy (Davies and Bansel, 2007). Local universities are supposed to give the students better chances to compete globally through sending promising graduates to world-class universities and accepting international students, yet only a handful of them are given this opportunity. The bulk of schools are left as manufacturers of diplomas to oil the skilled labor force of the capitalist countries.
Sison (2015) also believes that the implementation of the K-12 program basic education system is a clear example of neoliberal school reform. Though it has been publicized to be done in order “catch up with globalization”, there is a better yet honest reason behind this and that is to compete with underdeveloped countries in its race in producing a huge reserve of supply for skilled labor force to the world market and to particularly keep down wages in Asia Pacific. The last two years of K-12 focuses on specialized and technical skills, as such example seen on the so-called Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) where students undergo learning modules like house-keeping, plumbing, welding, caregiving, carpentry, cosmetology, pastry, among others.

By default, the rich will not be expected much on this strand of the Senior High School program. This only becomes convincing to the poor masses as it promises to “help” them get employed locally and most especially, overseas. Thus, instead of undergoing intensive and comprehensive basic education, students are now expected to prepare themselves as mere commodity, simple workers (maids, caregivers, cleaners, waiters and carpenters of the world)—a clear evidence of advancing neoliberalism through education. For Sison (2015), following the dictates of the US in education will not solve the unemployment in the country. This must be taken down to its roots from its fundamental problems of the underdevelopment of the Philippines, absence of industrialization and land reform, and only by a collective effort of the people that we can transform the Philippines into a country for the masses, not for the few elites.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this study are comparable to what Magun (2011), Saunders (2010) and Cornell (2013) did in Russia, United States of America and Australia, respectively. By tracing the ‘neoliberal transformation’ that has transpired in Russia, it was found out that it
has not achieved many great results because it was hindered by the conservative post-Soviet establishment, which has successfully prevented a serious reform of the Soviet university throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Magun, 2011).

Also, as neoliberal policies, practices, and ideas developed in the United States, a parallel process of neoliberal development occurred in U.S. public higher education which have substantially altered the conditions in which these roles can be actualized, creating a system of higher education that is better understood as an accentuation of the previous model of higher education, which has always served the interests of capital and the ruling class (Saunders, 2010).

Moreover, due to neoliberalism, access to education has been commodified. This is seen in the Australian case where schools and universities are redefined as firms and the striking revival of competitive testing, as well as the expansion of public funding of private schools. Also, even the knowledge base of education is impacted, with mechanization of professional knowledge and a growth of cultural fakery around education (Cornell, 2013).

This study was also able to highlight how neoliberalism not only altered economic agendas throughout the world but has also transformed politics, restructured social relations, and produced an array of reality narratives and disciplinary measures that normalize its perverted view of citizenship, the state, and the supremacy of market relations or what Giroux (2009, p. 570-571) calls as the ‘crisis of free-market fundamentalism’ which are as much educational issues as they are economic and political problems. This neoliberal “Great Experiment” has only produced a quarter century of misleading analyses and failed policies (Klees, 2008).

In like manner, due to a liberal market-driven focus, it has actually veered away from a jurisdictional emphasis (with a potential focus on fairness) to forms of veridiction
(neoliberal truth regimes) that legitimatize intervention into all aspects of society, even into the physical individual bodies of human beings as well as the more-than-human (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg, 2017).

However, consistent with neoliberalism’s pro-market orientation, the relationship between neoliberalism and political corruption, which this paper attempts to make a persuasive argument contradicts what Gerring and Thacker (2005) noted that market-oriented policies in particular on the impact of trade and investment policies, regulatory policy and the overall size of the public sector are associated with lower levels of political corruption. As shown from the results above, corruption has been a longstanding and perennial problem in the Philippines and specifically in the educational system.

CONCLUSION

Using Marx’s theory of education, which based on his ideas of structure-superstructure, argues education is thought to serve as a mechanism for reproducing the class structure of society, thereby reproducing the privileges of the dominant class. Education has also been used to advance neoliberalism in the country where changes made in the curriculum, the teaching methods and materials, grading and testing systems are suited not to create intellectuals but mainly to produce more skilled labor force needed in the dominating global capitalism. This paper was able to argue that the endemic corruption within Philippine education sector is traceable to the structural inequalities prevalent in the societal milieu of its semi-feudal, semi-colonial status and continues as the world progresses where countries, like the Philippines, are reorganized to join the trends of neoliberalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Any meaningful intervention or genuine change, be it educational, institutional or societal, must be directed towards greater understanding of the historical roots and societal dynamics that played its role in entrenching corruption in the nation and furthering the alienated, oppressed and dehumanized people conditions.

For future research, it is recommended to include personal narratives from affected teachers for their lived experience using focus group discussion (FGD) or key informant interviews (KII) to provide more enriching data on the extent of neoliberalism on the individual level. Also, it would be interesting to look into the examining possible ways and means on how to counter neoliberalism in the manner of ‘reclaiming public education, internationally, by generating knowledge about this sociopolitical agenda’ (Mullen etc., 2013, p. 184), or confronting it via ‘militant pedagogy of empowered citizenship’ (Giardina and Denzin, 2013).

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