

Transcript of Keynote Speech
at
3rd GAIN National Convention
“The Future Workforce and Graduates for the SMART City Revolution:
Towards Global Competitiveness and Human Capital Development”

delivered by
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Thank you very much for the kind introduction

Chairman Dr. Peter Laurel, President Monette Hamlin, PP Gerry Plana, PP Grace Zata of PMAP, Mr Gerard Sanvictores, Dr. Conrad Inigo, Mr. Rex Tan, other officials of GAIN, fellow resource persons, school officials, LGU officials, attendees, friends, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Let me begin by thanking the organizers of this 3rd GAIN Convention and offering my congratulations to the GAIN Chairman Dr. Peter Laurel, President Ms. Monette Hamlin, and the GAIN directors.

It is remarkable what GAIN has achieved in the past 3 years beginning with English proficiency to strengthen the competitiveness of our workforce in the 1st GAIN conference in 2018. In 2019, GAIN campaigned for digital literacy and the urgent need for harmonized qualification standards.

I am pleased with the continued contributions of GAIN to up-skilling our workforce and understand the urgent need for government, academe and industry to work hand-in-hand to ensure our country is in the forefront of global competitiveness.

This year in 2020, GAIN is focusing on creating partnerships within local contexts. Your theme, highlighting the future workforce takes into account the Country's demographic dividend. As such, there is a need not just for capability building so as to maximize the benefits of the Smart City Revolution but there is also a need for capacity building. The future workforce must be able to adapt to the changes brought about by this revolution as they gain the skills to fully implement such an endeavor.

It is also my honor and pleasure to be here with the nation's best crop of esteemed and passionate educators, as we are all assembled here today to discuss, reflect, and plan our goals and strategy markers as we work towards creating a Filipino workforce that is globally competitive and well-prepared for the SMART City Revolution. After all, an educational system that is globally competitive is first of all, globally and socially relevant, one that has evolved and has been fine-tuned to suit the needs and sensibilities of today's world. As the Chair of the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education, I cannot be more thrilled to be here with you as I share with you our insights and plans in order to improve the state of higher education in the country.

Even before my appointment to the Higher and Technical Education Committee in Congress, it has always been my belief that education is the great equalizer that must always be able to afford our citizens the leverage to escape the throes of poverty and achieve success and accomplishment in their lifetime, regardless of their economic circumstance.

Moreover, education, while harbored on a wealth of history and previous knowledge, must also seek to be current and relevant in today's ever-changing world. In order to remain truly globally competitive, much self-reflection is essential. Teaching is one of the world's oldest and noblest professions, and education is one of the human race's most defining triumphs as a universal institution that is built on a strong yet evolving

foundation of knowledge that continues to grow in the pursuit of a better understanding of our world.

The United Nations recognizes education as a universal right and has adopted quality education for all as one of its goals to achieve sustainable development in 2030. According to the UN, education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty. In addition to improving quality of life, access to inclusive education can help equip our youths with the tools required to develop innovative solutions to the world's greatest problems. Aside from simply adding to the ranks of our industrious work force, it is from our youth where the next generation's leaders and innovators will ascend. We must shape their minds with not only with the knowledge that they ought to learn, but how they view the world so they may look at it with possibility and opportunity.

I have always been a staunch advocate for quality education that is accessible to all, the operative word here being "quality". After all, while we are intent on developments in the creation and sustenance of our human capital, this is not all a degree in one's hand equate to. As much as we are after growing the ranks of the members of our recruitment pool, we are after quality as much as quantity. A strong learning foundation that prizes ingenuity and critical thinking is crucial to stronger nation-building, as it is from our youth's ranks that this nation's future leaders, innovators and change-makers will rise.

Reforms in our education system that foster globally relevant skills and innovation are long overdue — but we shall get to that later. Our work in the committee in Congress allows us to draft, forward, discuss and debate bills and other legislative work and documents that all pertain to the improvement of tertiary education across the nation. Of course, the input and experiences of actual educators from colleges and universities are indispensable, greatly contributing to our own knowledge and awareness on the actual state of affairs, as they are the ones on the ground. That said, in the months since I and the members of the committee have adopted and fulfilled our roles, our eyes have been opened to the nuances and complexities of the dire state of higher education in the Philippines, as we submit ourselves to the day-to-day affairs of creating and forwarding solutions to the systemic inadequacies of our educational system in the country. They all point to one thing: when it comes to global competitiveness and readiness, there is still more work that needs to be done with our country's educational system.

Allow me to discuss with you just some of the realities that face our education system today. In the 21st century where innovation and ingenuity are prized and seen as a necessity, there is much left to be desired in the Philippines. Despite the strides achieved by a handful of universities, (UP and de Salle University) in the Times Higher Education Ranking, the country exhibits a lackluster performance when it comes to the field of STEM and research. Only three universities from the Philippines make it annually in higher education rankings around the world, with the University of Philippines as the best-performing institution in the country ranking 72nd in the QS Asia Ranking.

Across six major countries in the ASEAN, the Philippines has the lowest proportion of its researchers coming from the higher education sector at 36.41 percent in contrast

with Malaysia at 81.56 percent, Indonesia at 54.47 percent, Vietnam at 49.18 percent, and Thailand at 53.76 percent. In 2017, Malaysia published 29,606 indexed-publications compared to just 2,891 from the Philippines.

This is not a problem that plagues our tertiary system alone. A study by CHED shows that the Philippines invested 3.4 percent of its gross domestic product in education. In comparison to our ASEAN neighbors, Vietnam spent 5.7 percent of its GDP in education, Malaysia invested 4.8 percent, Brunei at 4.4 percent, Thailand at 4.1 percent, and Indonesia at 3.6 percent. When it comes to total government expenditure, the Philippines ranks 9th out of 10 countries in the ASEAN with 13.21 percent, only above Brunei whose education budget comprised 9.99 percent of their expenditure.

Given the miniscule amount the country allots to education, it is appalling, but perhaps not shocking, that in the Programme for International Student Assessment by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or PISA, revealed that the Philippines ranked dead last in Reading, and ranked second last in Mathematics and Science, next only to the Dominican Republic. It was the first time the Philippines participated in the PISA, which rated 15-year-old children's abilities to use their reading, mathematics, and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. What does this point to? It shows that the very foundation of critical thinking and problem solving that need to be inculcated in children beginning from the time they start schooling is missing. That while we have always prided ourselves on literacy, there are large gaps in functional literacy: the application of reading, writing, and arithmetic to solve problems, coupled with the ability to follow written and verbal instructions.

Failing in Math and Science is one aspect, yet what hits a sore point is our dismal performance in Reading, an abrupt wake-up call for a nation that has always prided itself in its English proficiency. To date, the Philippine economy's largest contributor is its Services sector, of which the IT-BPO industry, as well as OFW remittances and the Tourism industry comprise. These workforces rely on Filipinos' English proficiency as a key competitive advantage, especially when it comes to our BPO industry. However, as PISA seems to point out, this is an advantage on which we seem to be steadily losing our grip. Our ASEAN neighbors, who once looked up to us on our fluency in English, are now edging out the Philippines, particularly Malaysia and Singapore. Moreover, other ASEAN countries who have exhibited lackluster rankings in English proficiency have established a National English roadmap, further exhibiting that the ability to speak, read, write, and comprehend in English is one that they take seriously as a competitive workforce advantage. While the Philippines still enjoys a robust IT-BPO industry, Malaysia ranks number one in the Shared Services space, higher value jobs in the IT-BPM industry. That could have easily been us.

If this seems like a recent outcome, the truth is that we have already begun to reel from the effects of the decline in our English proficiency not just in the BPO industry, but also in healthcare, of which we export millions of Filipinos abroad. Once highly desired for their competence and fluency in the English language, a September 2017 migration program to the United Kingdom worth roughly P300 million in salary ended up unsuccessful after 90 percent of recruited Filipino nurses failed their English test.

There is so much emphasis on the English language as it is common knowledge that English is the language of global business. Simply put, it only stands to reason that a globally competitive populace must prove to be consistently proficient in English for our workforce to remain highly employable, and for businesses, and in respect our national economy, to thrive.

Yet, our ability to communicate in English is only the tip of the iceberg. We are now in what we currently call the “Fourth Industrial Revolution”. World Economic Forum chairman Klaus Schwab first introduced the concept which refers to the fundamental change in the way we live, work and relate to one another. It is a new chapter in human development, enabled by extraordinary technology advances commensurate with those of the first, second and third industrial revolutions. In short, we are in the midst of a technological revolution. In spite of this, the education system, or what we call the “factory model education” that has largely been in place has remained mostly unchanged since the 19th and 20th century.

As I have earlier discussed, our ability to foster other globally relevant and 21st-century skills such as problem solving and innovation is one that is in dire need. English proficiency, along with computer literacy are but basic competencies that need to be mastered in order to sustain a competitive advantage in the global workforce. In other words, these will soon become mere necessities in the workplace as opposed to being an employee’s best traits. As we settle into the Fourth Industrial Revolution, this signifies that many jobs will be displaced because of technological advancements. The International Labour Organization warns that 56 percent of employment in ASEAN countries Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam is at high risk of displacement due to technology in one to two decades. Soon, routine tasks or assembly line positions that were popularized by the factory model school system from the first and second industrial revolutions will be phased out in favor of automation. Now more than ever, faced with the demands of a rapidly changing and developing world, it is crucial that while our educational pedagogies evolve, that they may do so towards the goal of innovation and critical thinking.

Apple’s Steve Jobs, one of the world’s most renowned innovators, once said that, “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower”. Innovators disrupt conventions and markets by introducing new and revolutionary solutions that have not been thought before, emerging as leaders in their own fields. Educators must constantly strive to deliver education that is relevant to today’s needs and sensibilities and can keep up with the times, in order to fully equip our youths with the competencies they need to navigate the world. This includes providing them the means and capacities to come up with new and innovative solutions that will benefit society at large and shape their surroundings into a better place.

So now, what? Where do we go from here? As you see, there is a lot of work that needs to be done. This is exactly why it is high time that we lift ourselves up by the bootstraps and get to work. While the PISA results were nothing short of an embarrassment, they did set a precedent: the willingness to be externally audited and adhere to comparative standards and international frameworks as set by other countries.

If the PISA rankings are to be taken seriously, this signifies the crucial need to institutionalize higher level skills by being measured against international standards. This could lead to an overhaul of curricula that not only comply with the rigors of global standards, but also include global sensibilities.

It is also high time that we strengthen our international linkages that allow for an interchange of skills and education. From our membership alone in the ASEAN Free Trade Agreements, we are compelled to ensure that we are prepared to participate in the global mobility of talent. This requires our compliance with international education frameworks such as the Bologna Accord, the Washington accord, and the ASEAN Qualifications program. It's simple: global competitiveness is preceded by global connections.

Aside from adhering to international standards and gaining what we can from international linkages, naturally, there are steps we can take in our own backyard, so to speak. The globalization of our workforce after all, is not only geared towards a globally competitive workforce for export, but ones who could also contribute to our shores.

As a member of Congress, allow me to share with you just some of the legislative work we have accomplished in line with this plan. With the vision of fostering a national culture of innovation, alongside achieving the twin goals of national productivity and job creation, has also compelled this representation to author House Bill 4263, known as the Philippine Entrepreneurs Academy Act. HB 4263 aims to establish a specialized institute offering comprehensive and rigorous entrepreneurial education to senior high school, vocational, and college graduates in order to produce highly competent and top-notch entrepreneurs. This academy will train students to look for opportunities where they can create innovation in different fields through a scientific and policy-oriented education, as well as consultations with the private and business sector. It is this representation's hope that through the passage of this bill, this would lead to a revitalization of the economy by training and encouraging a new breed of entrepreneurs who have grown in an age of innovation. It is our hope that they adopt the ability and know-how to think of out-of-the-box yet practical solutions to uplift our lives.

The lone district of Baguio, which I represent, has also commenced the Cordillera State Institute of Technical Education, which this representation authored, signed into law by the President earlier this year under RA 11192. The implementation of the CSITE integrates the TESDA Regional Center in Baguio City, along with the various TESDA provincial training centers in the Cordilleras, and the Baguio City School of Arts and Trades. This realizes the necessity of innovation and ingenuity in order for our technical-vocational schools to become globally competitive, expanding our graduates' worldview and global sensibilities, as we anticipate high-profile partnerships and apprentice trainings with the academe, as well as local and global institutions. The establishment of more institutions such as the CSITE in this country is much welcome.

To quote another writer, William Butler Yeats, "Education should not be the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

This is the crucial role that teachers undoubtedly play. Teachers wield the power and responsibility to shape these young minds and sensibilities during their most formative years. Education is key to nation-building and the advancement of society, with the fundamentals of the first schooling our youths receive as building blocks. As we review the reforms that need to be made in our education paradigms and pedagogies for global competence, let us remember that above all, education must work to help the child be fully equipped for the world he is in.

Education is truly man's greatest investment, and by recognizing these much-needed improvements in our current state of education can we provide a better wealth of opportunities for our Filipino youths, creating a competent pool of a 21st-century workforce for improved human capital and for greater nation-building.

Thank you very much and good morning.