

STATEMENT OF THE NAKEM CONFERENCES ON THE PROPOSAL OF OTHER PRESSURE GROUPS TO MAKE MANDATORY THE TEACHING OF FILIPINO IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Nakem Conferences Philippines and Nakem Conferences International, a consortium of academics, advocates, colleges, universities, and a local government unit are issuing this statement in opposition to the proposal of some groups to make mandatory the teaching of Filipino in higher education. The consortium is also an advocacy group for cultural diversity, linguistic justice, heritage and first language learning, and emancipatory education in the Philippines and elsewhere.

Nakem Conferences has been in the forefront of the struggle for what makes sense in Philippine education. It has sponsored and hosted eight international conferences in the Philippines and the United States, conferences that looked into the issues of language education, the diversity of cultures and heritage, and mother tongue-based multilingual education. In all these conferences, the consortium has come to understand of the need to recognize that one of the most effective and efficient ways to announce freedom in education is through a mother tongue-mediated educational process. The use of the students' native language opens up a world for them, a world that is intimate, liberatory, and self-affirming.

We welcome the enactment into law of the recent government initiative to address head-on these issues in basic education through Republic Act 10533 (An Act Enhancing The Philippine Basic Education System By Strengthening Its Curriculum And Increasing The Number Of Years For Basic Education, Appropriating Funds Therefor And For Other Purposes); through the response of the Department of Education by way of its K-12 initiative and its implementation of that initiative; and through the well-thought out CMO 20 series of 2013 (General Education: Holistic Understandings, Intellectual and Civic Competencies) of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) redefining what general education (GE) is in higher education.

CMO 20 series of 2013 finds its pedagogical context in the adjustment of the years allotted to basic education, and thus the need to adjust as well the general education curriculum in higher education. The GE is a curriculum "common to all undergraduate students regardless of their major" and that "exposes them to various domains of knowledge and ways of comprehending social and natural realities." It is a curriculum that in the end will equip them with (1) "intellectual capacities such as critical, analytical and creative thinking, and multiple forms of expression" and (2) "civic capacities demanded of membership in the community, country, and the world." In this aforesaid CMO, there is the iteration of the civic and cultural citizenship of the students and the need for them to be equipped with the skills needed in the local, the national, and international communities. There is the constancy in the iteration of the need for students to become more human and humane via the general education curriculum.

Thus, the move of CHED to consider the mandatory imposition of 9 units of Filipino as the medium of instruction in three of 12 GE courses, with these units eating up 25 per cent of the total GE units, is not only contradictory to the avowed aims of GE but also a disservice to the need to offer alternatives to students to get hold of their own local ethos and knowledge in a more synthesized way. The imposition of 9 units of Filipino effectively deprives them of their right to own up, understand, and make good use of the heritage of their own people. The same is antithetical to the pursuit of diversity in human knowledge, to the respect for multiplicity in the various linguistic and cultural expressions of the peoples of the Philippines, and to the attainment of a truly 'glocalized' form of education, an education that is just and fair as it addresses the key issues of social equity in the public act of cultivating the minds of students.

We, therefore ask the CHED to pay attention to the needs and wishes of other marginalized ethnolinguistic communities, and offer them the same privilege accorded to Filipino to prove that it is serious in pursuing the stated aims of GE. These ethnolinguistic communities have been deprived of their right to their languages. We must understand that these languages serve as the lens through which students could better understand themselves, other peoples and communities, their nation and other nations, and the world. We must not forget as well that language rights are inalienable rights; it is the sum of linguistic rights and human rights.

We wish to express in no uncertain terms that there is no place for the 9 units of mandatory Filipino in higher education. Thus, we wish to register our strong objection to the proposal to consider the teaching of Filipino in higher education.

Today, there is the urgent need to offer productive and epistemologically liberating alternatives in the course delivery of the GE curriculum. Part of the concept of course delivery—and part as well of academic freedom—is the opportunity given to the members of the instructional faculty and the higher education institution in the locality to choose the language they deem most pedagogically effective in their classrooms.

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