Open Distance Learning now available in the Philippines

MANILA - The Philippines has passed a law that would give an opportunity for every Filipino to seek higher education - called the Open Distance Learning.

President Aquino has the into law the Open Distance Learning Law (ODL), or Republic Act 10650.

ODL is a mode of delivering flexible education and instruction to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom. It provides access to education when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both.

It may be conveyed to students individually, or via massive online courses, aimed at large-scale interactive participation and open access via the Internet or other network technologies.

And Rep. Roman Romulo has encouraged overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who are high school graduates or college undergraduates to seek higher education through Open Distance Learning, so that they may improve their standard of living.

“We’ve established ODL precisely to help every Filipino, especially OFWs, working students, and persons with disabilities, realize their hopes and dreams of acquiring higher education -- whether a bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degree,” said Romulo, chairman of the House committee on higher and technical education.

“What is great about ODL is that you can obtain a bachelor’s degree from any Philippine university, regardless of your location -- while you are employed as a service crew of McDonald’s in Kuwait, a domestic helper in Riyadh, or a hotel bellhop in Abu Dhabi. You are able to study at your own pace. The mode of study is at your option and convenience,” he said.

Philippine Overseas Employment Administration records show that more than 5,000 Filipinos leave the country every day for contract jobs abroad. Many of them are high school graduates, holders of post-secondary certificate courses, or college undergraduates.

“Technological advances that have made it possible to teach more and more subjects remotely, mainly via computers and the Internet, while our human resources, including OFWs, have to continually retool and upgrade their skills to stay highly competitive,” Romulo said.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been batting for ODL to help developing countries achieve their education system-wide goals.

“As a force contributing to social and economic development, ODL has become an
indispensable part of the mainstream of global educational systems,” UNESCO said.

“This growth has been stimulated in part by the interest among educators and trainers in the use of new, Internet-based and multimedia technologies, and also by the recognition that traditional ways of organizing education need to be reinforced by innovative methods, if the fundamental right of all people to learning is to be realized,” UNESCO added.

Under the new Philippine law, every learner enrolled in an ODL program shall enjoy the same privileges and benefits as a student in the usual classroom, including access to scholarships, grants-in-aid, and loans from government-administered funding sources.

The new law mandates the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to prescribe and enforce the necessary policies, standards, and regulations for the effective implementation of ODL in the country.

The law also tasks the University of the Philippines Open University to assist and provide expertise to the CHED and the TESDA in developing ODL programs. (Mindanao Examiner)

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