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Thai Minister impressed by Philippine education

The Education Minister of Thailand Chinnaworn Boonyakiat has cited the effort of the Philippine government in making quality education accessible to Filipinos despite being hobbled by limited resources.

“We are impressed by how the Philippine education officials optimize limited resources by coming up with innovative schemes to democratize public education,” the visiting Thai education minister said in the sidelights of the 45th South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization Council (SEAMEC) Conference and 5th ASEAN Ministers of Education (ASEM) Meeting held at the Shangri-la Hotel Mactan in Lapu-lapu City, Cebu recently.

In his tour of elementary schools in Cebu, Boonyakiat noted how the Philippine schools can provide inclusive education that helps integrate students with society. With forty-five to fifty students per class and sometimes even more, Boonyakiat has expressed his admiration to Filipino teachers for their capability to teach a large number of students. Class size in Thailand is much smaller than in the Philippines at 30 students per classroom. They are aiming to reduce it to 25.

The Thai minister also revealed that the medium of instruction in Thailand is Thai and English is taught as an elective subject. “This is a big advantage for the Philippines since your students are taught English at an early age.”

He also mentioned that in Thailand fast learners are separated from slow learners as opposed to the Philippines where learners of different learning abilities can be together in one class and learn simultaneously.

After watching students perform ethnic dances, the Thai education minister opined that schools should not only focus on teaching but also in bringing out other talents and skills of students like what he saw in the Philippines. While Thailand’s school system focuses only on academics, the country offers a more holistic learning environment for its young learners.

Similar to the Philippines, Thai students who are unable to enroll in regular schools are being captured in non-formal education that focuses on improving reading skills. In the Philippines, DepEd has its Alternative Learning System where some 1,000 rural mobile teachers combed the Philippine countryside to reach otherwise inaccessible learners and bring education right to their locale.

The minister was also impressed at how technical-vocational education in secondary schools in the Philippines is focused at providing students employable skills by the time they finish high school. Thailand also provides different technical-vocational courses in different places depending on the prevalent industry in the area.

Boonkaiyat posited that in order to meet the targets of Education For All (EFA) by 2015, member countries of the SEAMEO must join forces and exchange best

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educational practices. This may include possible exchanges of students and teachers between and among Southeast Asian countries.

“While our two countries have different strengths, we can share what we do best to make each other stronger,” Boonkaiyat stressed.

Thai education has six years primary (elementary) and six years secondary (high school). Prior to that, a three-year optional kindergarten is also offered.

Schooling in both private and public schools is 100% free in Thailand, including uniforms. In private schools, however, parents will need to pay for extra activities not covered by the government subsidy.

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