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NEOLIBERALISM AND CULTURE INDUSTRY: IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ACCESS TO QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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This paper critically examines the growing influence of neoliberalism in Philippine higher education, particularly its marketization and commodification of knowledge, which disproportionately undermines Indigenous Peoples' access to quality and inclusive education. While existing literature addresses the commodification of Indigenous knowledge, there is limited scholarship on how these processes specifically marginalize Indigenous communities. Using a decolonial epistemic perspective as both method and framework, the study explores the experiences of underrepresented groups and reveals how mainstream educational policies reproduce the "culture industry," perpetuating inequality and exclusion. It further evaluates whether initiatives to integrate Indigenous studies into curricula genuinely empower Indigenous Peoples or merely serve as superficial compliance with neoliberal standards.

Keywords: culture industry, higher education institutions, indigenous peoples, Neoliberalism, philosophy

INTRODUCTION

> Education is a fundamental human right for everyone, whether non-indigenous or indigenous, mainstream or non-mainstream. Education system allows for the development of every person. This gives everyone the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. Through education, individuals learn the skills needed to play their roles in society effectively and efficiently (Blanco 2024, 530).

These lines highlight that education and the system have a sacred duty to develop and enhance every individual by providing them with a healthy and inclusive environment where they can reach their full potential. Education is not just about learning basic survival skills, but more about the capacity to transform individuals, foster personal growth that transcends the confines of the classroom to become more efficient and effective later in their activities and contributions to social affairs. Thus, in the context of

the Indigenous Community, “education has now come to be seen as a key arena in which Indigenous Peoples can reclaim and revalue their languages and cultures, and in doing so, improve the educational success of indigenous students (530).”

Today’s educational systems run under a neoliberal scheme (Santilan 2018, 111-146). “Neoliberalism, the driving ideology of today's global capitalism, influences the social mind. Eventually, it changes the mode of governance, resulting in policies strengthening trade and industry liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and denationalization (114).” With these sweeping changes, it is important to recognize that neoliberalism is no longer a new concept; its impact on education has become increasingly pronounced. Garo et al. (2025, 167) cite Santone in their discussion. Santone (2024, 15) argues that the neoliberal orientation of education is inherently grounded in inequality because it adopts a free-market framework that enables dominant groups within social structures to use their positional power to advance profit-driven interests. As a result of this paradigm shift, higher education institutions now feature extensive systems of authoritative control, standardization, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits, and penalties. Furthermore, the processes of corporatization, marketization, innovation, and entrepreneurial cultures have managed to transform and reduce higher education institutions to businesses of knowledge production (Mbembe 2016, 29-45).

By analyzing how the current educational systems work today, one can easily determine the pervasive influence of neoliberalism in educational institutions. Since neoliberalism has become the driving force of globalization, it has significantly influenced reforms and public services, especially education. Evidently, this impact is widespread in various countries such as the United States, Canada, Singapore, including the Philippines, where educational institutions and their policies have increasingly prioritized market-driven strategies, at the expense of education's intrinsic value and meaning. In the United States, the consequences of neoliberal policies extend beyond the marginalized people to impact higher education institutions. Similarly, in Canada, neoliberalism has facilitated collaboration with higher education institutions, including the private sector, aimed at enhancing the delivery of public services to settle immigrants (Santillan 2018, 112). In contrast, Singapore presented a different scenario; while the system may not mimic a free market approach, it resembles a controlled or quasi-market approach. This model presents its own set of challenges, as promoting such a quasi-market threatens to exacerbate the disparities among schools regarding educational outcomes and the existing inequalities within the educational system (Lim and Tan 1999, 339-351).

Historically speaking, Philippine education, according to Jose Marie Sison, "is a legacy founded and influenced by the imperial agenda of the United States, a legacy that continues to impact even up to this day. Unfortunately, the system has been degenerating since its inception (Santillan 2025, 111)." A careful examination of the current trends, culture, economy, and politics in the educational landscape will reveal an undeniable resemblance or even worsening influences of the neoliberal approach to higher education institutions. These institutions, specifically higher education institutions, continually adapt to such patterns: an operational framework that effectively streamlines their programs while integrating a neoliberal policy backed by the World Bank's education policy (Mundy and Verger 2015, 9-10). Moreover, the

emergence of internationalization, the demands of world rankings, and the obsession with Scopus metrics within higher education institutions render the assertions and arguments presented in this paper more visible and substantiated.

Sannadan and Lang-ay (2021) argue that the reproduction and influence of neoliberal education in the Philippines manifest most clearly through the implementation of the K to 12 program, particularly in its emphasis on technical-vocational tracks. They contend that "this restructuring sidelines the humanities and critical pedagogy, reducing education to a mechanism for labor export and capitalist reproduction. On the other hand, the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), with its emphasis on standardized competencies, further entrenches this orientation by aligning learning outcomes with industry needs, privileging efficiency and accountability over reflection and democratic values" (p. 357). Such a critique underscores the perpetual influences of neoliberalism and capitalism in the Philippine education content where learning and growth of the individual is being reduced to instrumental utility for future marketability in the global market. Other scholars echo this concern: San Juan (2016) warns that the K to 12 program entrenches dependency and privatization, aligning Philippine education with neoliberal globalization while undermining critical pedagogy (95). Similarly, Radiamoda (2021) highlights how neoliberalism manifests through privatization and austerity, exacerbating inequality and neglecting democratic values (25). Taken together, these perspectives situate Philippine education within a global neoliberal framework that privileges market efficiency and labor export over democratic participation, cultural identity, and humanistic learning. From a critical pedagogical standpoint, this orientation risks hollowing out education's transformative mission, reducing schools to workforce pipelines rather than spaces for reflection, civic engagement, and social justice.

To further understand the magnitude of this transformation, it becomes essential to explore the origins of this substantial influence of neoliberalism and its persistent promotion within the global market. Lim and Tan (1999***)*** identify a key motivating factor driving global marketization of education: the belief that academic standards in education have declined. They argue that this decline stems directly from the increasing centralization and bureaucratization of education. To solve this problem, the educational systems underscore the emergence of the marketization of education, emphasizing that schools should be run along with free market principles so that schools compete and only the school that satisfies the clientele will survive. In the Explanatory Notes for House Bill 04565, the legislator who introduced the bill underscored the need to address the demands of globalization by substantiating the Philippine higher education system:

> In the age of globalization, there is a need to adapt to continually evolving international trends and standards. The methods and institutions that are the giants of the industries will eventually falter if they will not be able to keep up with the ever-changing demands of the world (House Bill No. 4565, 2016, p. 1).[1]

As a result, education is described as a consumer product where parents are encouraged to shop around for the best schools (Lim and Tan 1999, 339-351). Other

scholars affirmed that marketization and commercialization of education contribute positively to students and academic institutions. In the study of Stefanović and Stanković (2017), they both argued that internationalization, marketization, and commercialization have become inevitable factors in contemporary education. Knowledge and education are regarded as a "good" (commodity) within international trade. Like the orientation in business enterprises, consumers buy education and knowledge from a multinational corporation or higher education institutions that operate as entrepreneurial organizations (Stefanović and Milica Stanković 2017, 855-872). However, it is vital to recognize that not all that is deemed inevitable and necessary must be accepted without reservation.

The study employs a decolonial epistemic perspective as a critical lens to "disrupt, question, displace, rattle, and unsettle the conventional research methodologies – qualitative, quantitative, triangulation (Tendayi 2016a, 107-130)." According to Denscombe (2025), decoloniality as a research methodology has the following aims (231-240):

(a) To critically examine the ways in which the legacy of colonial systems of thought serves to preserve the power and interests of some groups (specifically White people and nation states in the West or Global North) at the expense of 'Other' groups (specifically non-Whites, Indigenous peoples and those living in the Global South);
(b) promoting the interests of those who are disadvantaged by the colonial legacy by exposing the unfairness and injustices of the system;
(c) highlighting the intrinsic value of cultures and knowledge associated with Indigenous peoples and the ways these stand as an alternative to colonial ways of seeing the world;
(d) replacing the hegemony of Western unitary ways of thinking with more heterogenous systems of understanding the world.

This framework is helpful in the study to critique the concerning and on-going influence of the neoliberal approach to education using the same patterns of the exploitative impacts of marketization, and commodification of knowledge and education in higher education institutions. This framework allows the researcher to analyze how these educational practices disadvantage the indigenous community regarding their access to quality and inclusive education. In response, decolonization calls for an alternative approach to provide an avenue for the Indigenous voices, forms of knowledge, and their socio-cultural positions to be recognized and not violated.

Transitioning from this critical perspective on neoliberalism, it is essential to contextualize the status of Indigenous peoples globally. As of 2023, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (IDWIP) estimates that there are 476 million Indigenous peoples living in 90 nations (Aseron et al. 2013, 417-420). Indigenous peoples (IPs) are well-known for their richness in terms of indigenous knowledge systems, shared values and practices, innovations, and practices of their own that are being transmitted from one generation to the next. These characteristics became the

indigenous peoples' ultimate foundation, allowing them to become resilient, sustainable, self-determined, even in the face of various struggles they have encountered, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, or even discrimination (Biangalen-Magata et al. 2020, 3). The estimated population is between 10% and 20% of 100,981,437, or around 15 million in 2019 (4).

The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) paves the way for creating a legal framework to recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights while laying the foundation for establishing Indigenous schools. However, despite such legislation, relatively few schools have been built in the country, resulting in significant disproportion regarding access to education compared to the privileges enjoyed by mainstream, formal, and religious education (Abejuela III, 418).

The researcher confidently declares the use of supporting applications like Grammarly when writing and analyzing the content of the research study. Using such an application facilitates the researcher in ensuring logical coherence and grammatical accuracy throughout the paper. Thus, the researcher affirms that this study was not generated by artificial intelligence and has adhered to all ethical standards throughout the writing process.

MARKETIZATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In their article *Jiddu Krishnamurti's Concept of Holistic Education: Challenging the Dominance of World Rankings and Internationalization in Higher Education Institutions*, Garo et al. (2025, 168) cite Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016, 27–45), who underscores that the emergence of neoliberal rationality has produced highly Westernized corporate higher education institutions, marked by an obsession with wealth accumulation and a culture of consumerism rather than the generation of substantial and critical knowledge. Thus, this period can be perfectly described as the commodification and marketization of education and knowledge, where it encourages the creation of a curriculum that is rooted in economic textbooks, utilizing key terms such as "undeveloped" and "developed countries, which champion Western industrialization and marginalize indigenous and cultural perspectives (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016, 27-45)."

One noticeable trace or manifestation of neoliberal education in the Philippines includes a pronounced emphasis on the development of a highly technical education system, which ultimately produces corporate slaves and drone-like employees suitable only for low-paying jobs. Concurrently, this approach only encourages the exploitation of contractualization, reducing employees to disposable commodities (San Juan 2016, 80-110). The prevailing neoliberal ideology in the Philippines, which underscores non-academic, technical-vocational-livelihood (TVL) tracks and discourages the economically disadvantaged from entering higher education, only perpetuates poverty, encourages people to become dependent, and leads to underdevelopment, which is precisely the opposite of what developed countries are doing: encouraging students to finish collegiate programs (San Juan 2016, 92).

Building on these observations, it becomes evident that the commercialization and commodification of higher education represent the agenda promoted initially by Bretton Woods Institutions, which gradually gained popularity alongside the triumph of neoliberal socioeconomic discourse. The major problem associated with the commercialization and commodification of higher education is that it can seriously affect or, worse, jeopardize the future of in-depth research, high-quality scholarship, and holistic learning (Methula 2017, a4585). The neoliberal approach constantly transforms knowledge and education into a commodity that can be quantified, involving financial transactions and economic viability. In effect, individuals are also treated as commodities, with students viewed as interested clients trained to face the same cycle of entrepreneurial schemes. Teachers also find themselves vulnerable to the exploitative and endless cycle of contractualization or casualization (Mamdani 2007), which lacks security and support. Such practices to become successful make higher education institutions profit-driven by emulating business entities. As such, the knowledge and information they provide becomes shallow, seemingly contextualized, and utterly lacks theoretical depth and substance. Hence, students suffer from high tuition fees, operating under the false belief that they can acquire a quality education, when in fact, they may be receiving a diluted version that fails to prepare them for the complexities of contemporary society.

The reductionist mode of thinking, which constrains education to its purely instrumental value and parallels Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the Culture Industry (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944, 94–137), often informs the analysis of challenges in higher education institutions and, in doing so, obscures the broader ethical and emancipatory purposes of education. In this framework, the true essence of education—critical thinking and intellectual growth—is commodified. When higher education institutions operate like business enterprises, the primary motivations are profit and marketability at the expense of delivering quality education. Thus, such an approach completely undermines the transformative capacity of higher education and compromises the foundational values that nurture learning and personal development. Higher education institutions are continuously expanding, where their influence focuses primarily on certain *telos* or end-specific economic interests rather than fostering critical thinking and human development. It often reinforces the 'culture industry' in alignment with broader capitalist interests by consistently offering standardized systems, sacrificing the profundity of the academic experience, and utilizing an exploitative technique.

NEOLIBERALISM AND CULTURE INDUSTRY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

With the growing influence of neoliberalism in higher education institutions, education is also increasingly viewed as a commodity in different ways. Just as Adorno (2017, 405-424) posited:

> Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself, and all are unanimous together. All

> mass culture under monopoly is identical, and the contours of its skeleton, the conceptual armature fabricated by monopoly, are beginning to stand out. Those in charge no longer take much trouble to conceal the structure, the power of which increases the more bluntly its existence is admitted. The truth that they are nothing, but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the crash they intentionally produce. They call themselves industries, and the published figures for their directors' incomes quell any doubts about the social necessity of their finished products

Building on the ideas of Horkheimer and Adorno (1944), one could infer that some higher education institutions are perpetually creating the Culture Industry where knowledge and education are considered commodified products. This constant development of neoliberalism transforms educational institutions into entities that prioritize profit over pedagogical values, reflecting the instrumental mechanism of the Culture Industry, where culture is produced and consumed in a standardized way. In this context, knowledge and education are increasingly viewed and reduced as commodities. Higher education perpetuates an instrumental reason that is primarily motivated only by economic gain, constantly providing standardized systems and manipulative methods and metrics such as enrollment numbers and financial performance, rather than providing a space where critical thinking is being cultivated and developed. Just as Adorno posited that mass culture under monopoly results in sameness and conformity, neoliberal policies contribute to a homogenization of educational experiences. Curricula become standardized, emphasizing skills that are deemed marketable rather than cultivating a holistic understanding of knowledge.

IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ACCESS TO QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The two articles, *Pedagogical Innovations* and *Leonardo N. Mercado (1935)*, both present substantial critiques of neoliberalism, characterizing it as a significant barrier to achieving genuine inclusivity in the classroom. Camiring-Picpical and colleagues argue that the dominant university system in the Philippines remains deeply shaped by Western-directed epistemologies and pedagogies, which often marginalize or devalue local knowledge traditions and the lived cultural experiences of Filipino learners (Camiring-Picpical et al. 2025, 2). Their critique underscores how neoliberal educational structures privilege standardized, market-driven models of learning that fail to recognize cultural diversity and contextual realities. This analysis provides a crucial foundation for understanding why Filipino scholars increasingly call for a re-examination of the philosophical assumptions embedded in Philippine education.

Building on this critique of Western epistemic dominance, De Leon's (2018) discussion of Leonardo Mercado's work deepens the conversation by situating the issue within the broader history of colonial influence on Filipino thought. In the section titled *Pilosopikong Layunin ni Mercado: Deskolonisasyon ng Isipan*, De Leon explains that Mercado does not view colonization as a historical event that ended with political independence; rather, he argues that colonial influence has become embedded

in the Filipino psyche (De Leon 2018, 64). Mercado's use of the phrase *tuta sa isip* illustrates the extent to which Western frameworks continue to shape Filipino modes of thinking, often unconsciously. This perspective complements the earlier pedagogical critique by showing that the problem is not merely institutional but deeply philosophical—rooted in how Filipinos have been conditioned to understand themselves and their world.

Transitioning from Mercado's philosophical diagnosis, Demetrio III (2014) expands the discussion by examining how this internalized colonial mindset affects the development of Filipino philosophy itself. He argues that Filipino thinking remains undermined, undervalued, and underdeveloped, largely because Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are structurally marginalized in favor of dominant Western intellectual traditions. According to Demetrio III, contemporary Filipino thought often becomes a reiteration of Western ideas rather than an authentic expression of Filipino intellectual heritage (Demetrio 2014, 25). This critique not only echoes Mercado's concerns but also identifies specific areas where Filipino philosophy remains insufficiently explored.

Demetrio III identifies several key domains requiring deeper engagement: Filipino philosophy as the appropriation of folk spirit; the study of presuppositions and implications of the Filipino worldview; the examination of Filipino philosophical luminaries; research on Filipino ethics and values; and the development of Filipino philosophy articulated in the Filipino language (Demetrio 2014, 26–28). These areas, he argues, remain underdeveloped precisely because Filipino scholars continue to operate within Western frameworks that function as a modern form of colonization. By outlining these gaps, Demetrio III reinforces the broader argument shared by Camiring Picpical et al. and Mercado: that decolonizing Philippine education and philosophy requires not only critiquing neoliberal structures but also reclaiming and revitalizing indigenous modes of knowing. This philosophical call for decolonization necessarily extends into the realm of educational policy, where the State is obligated to uphold and protect Indigenous Peoples' epistemic traditions. As Blanco emphasizes, the State must respect, facilitate, and safeguard Indigenous communities' right to quality education aligned with their cultural methods of teaching and learning (2024, 533). This obligation is further affirmed in Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which states that "indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning" (Blanco 2024, 533).

Recent trends in education also show that higher education institutions are now incorporating the development of indigenous studies in the curriculum to promote a better understanding of the richness of the indigenous community within the academic sphere. Some scholars argue that this effort will provide for the indigenous community by ensuring their voices are heard and recognized in academic circles. However, this paper aims to expose how these efforts also serve as stepping stones where marketization, exploitation, and commodification of knowledge and education persist. To supplement this contention, Mignolo (1995) and Alatas (2000) both observed that the academic circles are primarily Western, which is also affirmed by Stamatopoulou (2013), who added:

> Indigenous Peoples had been, for centuries, the object of study by researchers who applied positivistic theories, based on Western tradition that reflected dominant and colonial paradigms and power structures… Anthropology that made its own discipline via studying and describing Indigenous Peoples had, for a long time, studied Indigenous Peoples without taking into account and allowing agency for their own voices and views about themselves for their knowledge systems, without returning the results of research to the communities so they would benefit or without weighing the negative effects of their presence among Indigenous Peoples (256).

As pointed out by Blanco (2024), "many indigenous students continue to be deprived of access to quality, inclusive, and culturally appropriate education (534)." Indigenous people experience discrimination within the universities by conforming to institutional policies that are completely insensitive to their social-cultural background. The leading obstacles to achieving the right to education of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and access to indigenous education are the social, economic, and political exclusion and marginalization faced by the indigenous communities (534).[3] These obstacles become inevitable precisely because Indigenous Peoples are marginalized, which results in a situation where education is treated as a privilege rather than a right that should be enjoyed and accessible for all (535).

In the Philippines, for example, some students who belong to the Indigenous Community and are enrolled in universities find themselves being compelled to purchase uniforms and shoes that are considered expensive only to comply with the university's strict uniform protocols. These requirements impose financial burdens and reinforce exclusionary practices, thereby proving inconsiderate, unaccommodating, and insensitive to the socio-economic realities of Indigenous learners (Bongco 2019, 41-57). This situation experienced by the Indigenous Peoples within the academic sphere has the potential to refocus thinking. As Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) once said, "[c]ulture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself, and all are unanimous together. Even the aesthetic manifestations of political opposites proclaim the same inflexible rhythm (94.)" In the Philippines, strict institutional protocols such as mandatory uniforms and other requirements can unintentionally create financial and social pressures for Indigenous students, contributing to experiences of exclusion and discrimination within the university context (Supan & Mendoza 2023, 12) Thus, some opted to withdraw from their studies. This strict emphasis on following university protocols and uniformity shows the mainstream educational system's failure to meet the needs of the Indigenous community, which has deprived them of fair and inclusive treatment in access to education. Families living below the poverty threshold experience significant challenges in providing education for their children. Thus, the only option for many parents is to let their children work in agricultural activities instead of sending them to school (Blanco 2025, 535).

As higher education institutions develop rapidly within the influence of neoliberal approach, education is considered only as a form of privilege, making equal

access to education for the Indigenous Peoples more problematic. This gap can be observed when Indigenous students are being stereotyped as slow learners due to their difficulty adapting to the common standard, especially in oral communication. Moreover, this gap can perpetuate environments where Indigenous Peoples are subjected to entrenched stereotypes, often characterized by perceptions of being *madumi* (dirty), *walang alam* (uninformed), *mahirap* (poor), *tamad* (lazy), and *namumulubi* (beggars). Such prejudices reflect broader structural biases within educational institutions rather than isolated acts of discrimination. It is precisely because these stereotypes and prejudices against Indigenous Peoples exist at the individual level that the inferiority of IPs is legitimized in theory and practice (Blanco 2025, 537). This prejudice stems from the idea that the "indigenous are uncivilized has been ingrained in our belief systems and norms into the larger culture, leading to attitudes that devalue, dehumanize, and subordinate IP populations (537)."

Higher education institutions function like "brands" showcasing knowledge and education as commodities to enhance their competitive qualities and world-class standing in the global market. To this effect, learning and education are reduced to mere commodities instead of public goods (Natale and Doran 2011, 539). Some higher education institutions fail to adopt and provide an inclusive environment tailored to the needs of the Indigenous People. Schools use curricula that "are generally designed for urban students and thus have little relevance to indigenous environments (Blanco 2025, 539)." The Indigenous Peoples are included in the mainstream institutions where the curriculum and knowledge they learn and acquire only align with and are entirely equivalent to the mainstream type of learning. The universities aim for constant branding and rebranding through "World Rankings" accreditations to meet the standard of international requirements, often neglecting the promotion and establishment of genuine inclusion and transformation of the needs of the Indigenous People in the curriculum. Sison reminds us that "in universities, courses or subjects on Philippine history, Filipino language and literature, and on Philippine government and constitution have been trimmed down (Santilan 2018, 123-124)." Thus, the claim to inclusion and transformation of the curriculum only represents the superficial level to meet the requirements for internationalization. These pressing issues that are currently observed fail to address the educational gap, limiting access to education for the privileged.

Again, this perpetual impact of neoliberalism and culture industry within higher education institutions coincides with Jose Marie Sison's argument when he said:

> The imperialist powers keep on tightening their grip on education on a global scale. They use the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to treat education as a commodity for profit-making in the so-called free market and to push the privatization of public schools at all levels. The purpose, content, and conduct of teaching and research are made to serve the interests of the imperialist powers and local reactionaries. These factors of mis-education design and produce the curricula, study materials, education and research programs, and institutional structures. They use the combination of schools, mass media, and other means of information and education as tools of imperialist

> domination in the cultural field as well as in the socio-economic and political fields (Santilan 1944, 125).[4]

Another manifestation of the increasing influence of neoliberalism, marketization of education, and commodification of knowledge in the Philippines is the growing fanaticism of various universities to publish research in Scopus-indexed journal publications. "Higher education institutions are increasingly becoming hubs for commodifying knowledge in the form of research papers. Universities, particularly in neoliberal economies, prioritize profit, efficiency, and competition (Strhan 2010, 230-250)." The goal of publishing in a Scopus-indexed journal encourages teachers, researchers, and scholars to aim for academic promotion. This purpose in turn becomes an impediment to the attainment of inclusive education, which also allows commodification and exploitation of Indigenous knowledge (Sanda et al. 2025, 162). These requirements, supposedly designed to promote and encourage knowledge generation and enhance academic quality, have become the educational landscape's new breed of 'culture industry,' echoing Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of mass-produced culture (1944, 94–137) and reflected in neoliberal restructuring and quasi-marketization in Philippine higher education (Sannadan & Lang-ay 2021, 128; Miraña 2023, 4). Knowledge generation is valued solely because of its marketability while sacrificing and undermining cultural diversity and contextual relevance for international recognition (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944, 94-137; Sannadan and Lang-ay 2021, 125-132; Mirana 2023). Many scholars have raised concerns about promoting publication in Scopus-indexed journals, particularly highlighting the university's "publish or perish" policy, which is perceived as both exploitative and abusive. In some state universities in the Philippines, conforming to these requirements or policies forces researchers to engage in research activities without sufficient training on how to conduct research. Worst, ethical considerations are likewise being overlooked in some instances, undermining local knowledge production in various contexts (Hayward et al. 2021, 405; Morisano et al. 2024, 3). This trend in higher education institutions is particularly worrying, as it continuously marginalizes indigenous knowledge systems, leading to a loss of cultural diversity and local relevance (Hayward et al, 2021, 403-417; Morisano et al. 2024).

The growing fanaticism of the universities to publish research in the Scopus-indexed publication re-echoes Adorno's and Horkheimer's (1944) notion of "mass deception," wherein they strongly pointed out the following contentions:

> Interested parties like to explain the culture industry in technological terms. Its millions of participants, they argue, demand reproduction processes which inevitably lead to the use of standard products to meet the same needs at countless locations. The technical antithesis between few production centers and widely dispersed reception necessitates organization and planning by those in control. The standardized forms, it is claimed, were originally derived from the needs of the consumers: that is why they are accepted with so little resistance. In reality, a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly (95).

THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Expressing his discontent with the current state of Philippine education, Bolaños (2021) emphatically highlights in his article the indispensable value of philosophy, particularly in this critical juncture when its essential features are most urgently required. He stresses that philosophy should fulfill its emancipatory role, invoking Theodor Adorno's assertion that "philosophy must remain ruthlessly critical of the existing order and open to utopian possibilities (p. 98)." The author further contends that under the prevailing neoliberal framework in the Philippines—where Outcome-Based Education is being implemented—"education is increasingly reduced to quantifiable skills and measurable performance (Bolaños 2021, 98)." In this paradigm, the so-called "ethics of skills," encompassing the cultivation of autonomy, responsibility, and the capacity to resist tyranny, is systematically undermined, thereby allowing the commodification of knowledge to flourish. Bolaños further insisted that education should not merely serve the market, but should cultivate ethical citizens capable of imagining and enacting a more just society. Thus, Bolaños' text, as cited in Garcia (2025), stands as a philosophical antidote to the neoliberal-OBE paradigm, reminding us that education's true value lies in emancipation, not efficiency (Garcia, 2025, p. 98).

Jove Jim S. Aguas and Fleurdeliz R. Altez-Albela both underscore the indispensable role of philosophy in Philippine education. Aguas emphasizes that although philosophy has a comparatively limited voice in the public sphere when measured against other disciplines, its influence remains vital within the academic domain (Aguas 2023, 173). He insists that philosophy must extend beyond classrooms and scholarly publications to shape critical consciousness in an era marked by misinformation, political corruption, and historical distortion (Aguas 2023, 174). Philosophy, he argues, equips students with the capacity to discern falsehoods, resist colonial mentalities, and actively participate in nation-building, making its role profoundly practical in preparing citizens to uphold truth and justice (Aguas 2023, 176–179).

Altez-Albela complements this view by stressing that the pedagogy of philosophy centers on the development of conscious thought (Altez-Albela 2024, 273). Yet she warns that pedagogical and legal frameworks in the Philippines have marginalized philosophy, confining its influence largely to basic education and professional ethics in higher education, where it is often treated as rational but ironically religious (Altez-Albela 2024, 274–275). This marginalization, she argues, strips philosophy of its most vital importance. For Filipino students to transcend ignorance, resist passivity, and empower themselves socio-politically in nation-building, philosophy must be given greater significance within the curriculum (Altez-Albela 2024, 276). Collectively, these perspectives express an overarching consensus that philosophy is neither an ornament of pedagogy nor an afterthought in the educational system, but rather the very essence driving pedagogy toward discipline and the critical instrument for re-engineering the identity of the Filipino and his collective destiny.

Emerita Quito (1983) asserts, "all academic philosophers agree that philosophy's contribution is essential, and that the benefits derived from philosophy

are incalculable (39)." Quito underscores that the advantages of philosophy may not give immediate satisfaction or be readily apparent or felt compared to other marketable professional disciplines such as law, engineering, medicine, accounting, and other science-related programs. However, philosophy empowers individuals to recognize and be aware of their rights, dignity, and humanity; thus, it provides an opportunity for the cultivation of the self to become a better person.

The essential task of philosophy is always to examine the machineries and mechanisms through which neoliberalism and the culture industry perpetually create and expand their own empire and exercise control within the public and academic sphere. Given that it is a well-established fact that the Philippines suffers from neoliberal influences and elite politics, Sison strongly urges:

> It is of urgent necessity that the teachers and researchers put forward a critique of imperialist ideology. Such a critique is essential for defining the targets and tasks in the struggle for a radical transformation of society. We must be able to confront imperialist globalization and its terrorist complement of state repression and wars of aggression. In this regard, we must be able to build ever more decisive the solidarity of the people of the world and advance their struggle to defend their rights and welfare, including the people's right to education, and advance in stages the struggle for a new and better world of greater freedom, justice, development, and peace (Santilan 2018, 126).

Philosophy aims to cultivate a more effective approach to support the Indigenous communities, one that can actively facilitate the transformation of the education system through a dedicated commitment to diversity and inclusion (Rudolph 2011, 67). By recognizing and welcoming different perspectives through discourse and critical thinking, such an approach will generate a meaningful change that will empower the Indigenous voices in the academic landscape.

CONCLUSION

The current educational landscape, defined by neoliberal rationality and the commodification of knowledge, reveals a disconcerting paradox: institutions tasked with fostering human flourishing have come to be driven by imperatives of profit-making, standardization, and market efficiency. In this context, education is in danger of being reduced to an apparatus for exporting labor and corporate competition, rather than a practice of transformative freedom. As Adorno and Horkheimer cautioned, the culture industry permeates education with a deadly sameness that kills its emancipatory potential and reduces learners to consumers of commodified knowledge. In disrupting the domination of Western epistemologies, it demands that Indigenous voices, knowledge systems, and cultural practices be considered integral alternatives to exploitative neoliberal logic. Education, when acquired as a right rather than a privilege, becomes a space for resistance. In this place, critical understanding can be

nurtured, where the excluded other gains voice and agency, and knowledge enables collective fate.

Therefore, the philosophical task is apparent: not to capitulate to the commodification of education, to assert its ethical and emancipatory purposefulness, and to reconceive it as an educational practice committed to justice. In the process, education can overcome its instrumentalist underpinning and recover its sense as a sacred responsibility—one that enables human beings not just to survive economically but to participate reflectively in the pursuit of truth, dignity, and social change.

NOTES

1. See Rosalyn Eder and Centre for Global Higher Education, "Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education: Between nationalism and co-optation," *In Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper Series* (Report Working paper no. 103), Centre for Global Higher Education, Department of Education, (University of Oxford: 2023): 16. https://www.researchcghe.org/wp-content/uploads/migrate/wp103.pdf

2. See Gina Cosentino, Indigenous Peoples Have a Right to Quality Education. But So Far, We've Failed Them, WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (Aug. 6, 2016), https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/08/indigenous-people-have-a-right-toquality-education-but-so-far-we-ve-failed-them/ (explaining that although there is a legal and moral right to education, education policies and systems have been used to discriminate against indigenous peoples).

3. See United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues, Education and Indigenous Peoples: Priorities for Inclusive Education, UNITED NATIONS 5 (Jun. 2014). https://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/indigenous/pdf/IASG%20Thematic%20Paper_Participation%20-%20rev1.pdf Please note that the barriers to education that negatively impact indigenous peoples have not been adequately tackled.

4. See Jose Maria Sison, Keynote Address to the International Conference on Education, Imperialism, and Resistance (Delivered in Shih Hsin University, Taipei, Taiwan on 10 August 2009); available from https://josemariasison.org/keynote-address-to-the-international-conferenceon-education-imperialism-and-resistance/; 17 February 2018.

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