



HON. JESLI A. LAPUS

Philippine Digital Literacy Program to Train and Certify Public School Teachers

Philippine Department of Education seeks to empower Filipinos to compete in the Digital Age through ICT enhancement programs such as Certiport IC³

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As the Philippine government launches a massive digital literacy program to develop and validate public school teachers' information and communications technology (ICT) skills using Certiport® Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC³®), the man behind the initiative understands clearly the importance of ICT competency. Department of Education Secretary Jesli Lapus, who is tasked with preparing the country's next generation of globally competitive workers, said technology is no longer a luxury; it is now a standard. And, he continued, digital literacy is a vital component of the Philippine Department of Education's literacy requirements.



"As information and knowledge are churned out through a variety of electronic media, the task of knowing them well enough is proving to be greater with each passing day," Secretary Lapus said. "Obviously, those with unlimited access to information and the inclination toward acquiring new knowledge will flourish in this era of the Internet. But the rest of us—the greater majority of Filipinos—who don't have the time, money or mental capacity to acquire this infinite amount of knowledge, are at a disadvantage in this information age. Our failure to see these realities will make us unable to compete in the high-tech global economy."

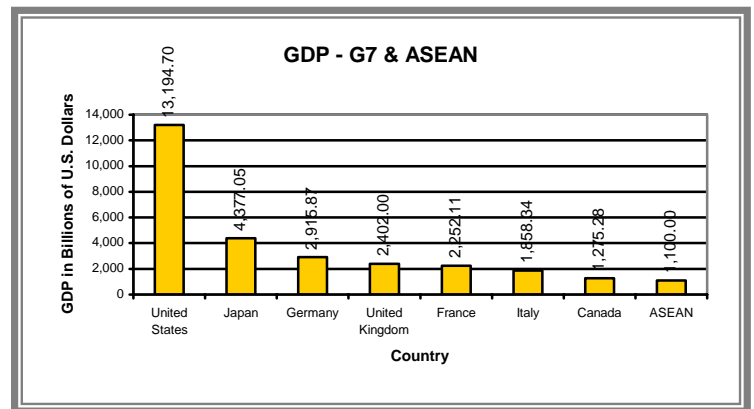
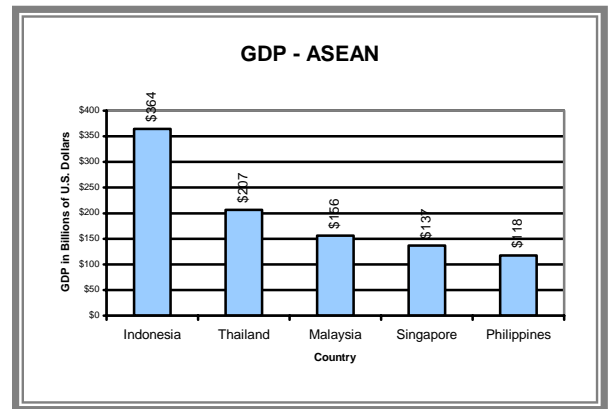
In surveying the global economy, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Philippines ranks fifth compared to the original five member countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Compared to the world's seven major advanced economies, the emerging and developing ASEAN nations, which share a combined GDP of almost US\$1.1 billion, clearly have room to grow¹.

To ensure his country's international competitiveness, Secretary Lapus has mandated Philippine public school teachers participate in ICT training and certification programs, an integral part of the department's overall education agenda. "We must equip both our teachers and our students with 21st century skills that can empower all Filipinos to become competitive in this Digital Age," he said.

In 2007, more than 300 technical and vocational public school teachers were trained and certified with IC³. The current year will see an additional 500 certify.

To date, more than one-fifth of the Philippines' more than 500,000 teachers have received some form of ICT training by private-sector partners. Secretary Lapus said teachers' responses to these ICT initiatives have been very positive. "Many teachers have expressed their desires to participate in ICT trainings as well as to be able to benchmark their ICT knowledge through various kinds of globally recognized certification





programs like IC³," he said.

The training and certification have also enabled the Department of Education to classify teachers into levels, facilitating additional training programs according to skills. In addition, digital literacy training and certification have been implemented at all levels of the Philippine educational system:

- o The Bureau of Elementary Education has partnered with Intel to implement the Classmate PC program, which provides personal computers to all elementary school students.
- o The Bureau of Secondary Education is working to create computer laboratories in 100 percent of the country's high schools.
- o The Bureau Alternative Learning System is digitizing its modules so mobile teachers have easier access to instruction materials to better meet the needs of learners outside the formal school system.
- o The technical-vocational curriculum has been strengthened with ICT to give thousands of skilled workers the necessary skills to be considered digitally literate.



Secretary Lapus said Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyoroyal understands the importance of digital literacy, and it is included as a tool for the acquisition of life skills in the country's development plans. "The Philippine government recognizes that demand for technology-savvy workers has increased and that this poses a challenge to educational institutions," Secretary Lapus said. "We recognize ICT's role officially in broadening access to basic education, improving the quality of learning, improving the quality of teaching and improving educational planning and management."

As he looks to the future, Secretary Lapus has considered carefully the challenges that lie in the path to digital literacy. "The challenge has more to do with people's resentment or suspicion of change than with our limited resources," he said. "I believe the main obstacle to our ability to take full advantage of technology in the Philippines is our natural fear of change. It debilitates us and prevents us from moving forward."

To combat these fears, Secretary Lapus hopes short-term reforms will demonstrate to Filipinos that technology is here to stay, and, with it, the country's competitiveness in the global marketplace will increase. "My goal, as secretary, is to increase the competitiveness of our students and the caliber of our teachers," he said. "We cannot do away with technology. No one should be left behind in our hopes to achieve overall digital literacy. The key to democratizing access to education is ICT."



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¹ International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook Database, April 2008 Edition.