**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH**
2025, Vol. 6, No. 10, 5025 – 5031
http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.10.14

**Research Article**

# Future-Proofing Philippine Higher Education Toward 2050: Filipino Educators' Roles

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*Article history*:
Submission 17 September 2025
Revised 30 September 2025
Accepted 23 October 2025

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the futures of Philippine higher education toward 2050. Using a qualitative–exploratory foresight approach, it employed STEEP analysis and Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) with data drawn from secondary sources such as policy papers, international reports, and scholarly works. The findings highlight artificial intelligence (AI) and modular learning as key opportunities for personalized and inclusive education. However, challenges persist in digital inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and limited faculty readiness. Sustainability integration is emerging but remains underdeveloped. The study recommends strengthening digital infrastructure, enhancing faculty capacity, adopting inclusive AI tools, and embedding sustainability in curricula. Public–private partnerships and anticipatory policies are essential to ensure a future-ready higher education system that equips Filipino learners for evolving societal and labor-market demands.

***Keywords****: Philippine Higher Education, Artificial Intelligence, Modular Learning, Foresight, Sustainability*

## Introduction

Higher education worldwide is experiencing profound transformation, shaped by technological innovation, shifting labor-market demands, and global crises (ADB, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). The rise of artificial intelligence (AI), digital learning platforms, and sustainability imperatives is challenging universities to prepare graduates not only with technical skills but also with adaptability, creativity, and resilience (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2021). Reports from UNESCO and the World Economic Forum consistently highlight that by 2030, nearly 40% of existing skills will be transformed, with AI literacy, digital competence, and lifelong learning emerging as critical priorities (UNESCO, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020).

For the Philippines, these global shifts intersect with long-standing challenges—digital inequality, underdeveloped infrastructure, and uneven faculty capacity (World Bank, 2021; CHED, 2020). Rural–urban gaps in internet access and digital literacy further hinder

*How to cite:*
David, R. M. T. & Maroma, A. P. (2025). Future-Proofing Philippine Higher Education Toward 2050: Filipino Educators' Roles. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. *6*(10), 5025 – 5031. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.06.10.14

equitable access to higher education (World Bank, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). While the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has initiated reforms on flexible learning, and TESDA has emphasized reskilling programs, few studies have explored how long-term foresight can guide Philippine higher education to anticipate and adapt to emerging futures.

This underscores the urgency of applying futures thinking. Unlike short-term policy planning, foresight methodologies—such as Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political (STEEP) analysis and Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)—enable the exploration of multiple plausible futures and their implications for education systems (Inayatullah, 2004, 2008; Sardar, 2010). By envisioning scenarios for 2050, this study positions foresight as a strategic tool to help Filipino educators reimagine their roles, strengthen institutional resilience, and align higher education with sustainability and inclusivity goals.

To this end, the study addresses three guiding questions:

1. What global and local forces are reshaping higher education?
2. How must educators' roles evolve to support inclusivity, sustainability, and lifelong learning?
3. What strategic innovations and partnerships can enable Philippine higher education to remain future-ready?

By situating Philippine higher education within both global trends and local realities, this research highlights a critical gap: while international discourse on AI, modular learning, and sustainability is robust, foresight applications in Philippine higher education remain limited. Addressing this gap, the study seeks to provide evidence-based insights that can inform policies and practices for a resilient, equitable, and future-proof higher education system.

## Methodology

### *Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative–exploratory foresight design to examine plausible futures of Philippine higher education by 2050. Foresight is a structured, evidence-based approach that scans drivers of change and develops multiple scenarios rather than predicting a single trajectory (Inayatullah, 2004, 2021; UNESCO, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020). Such a design is particularly suitable for policy-oriented inquiries where emerging trends and systemic drivers are the primary focus (UNESCO, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2025).

### *Frameworks*

Two complementary frameworks guided the analysis. The Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political (STEEP) framework was used to conduct a macro-level scan of drivers affecting higher education (UNESCO, 2021). In parallel, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) provided a deeper exploration of assumptions, worldviews, and cultural metaphors shaping educational futures (Inayatullah, 2004, 2008). Together, these frameworks offered both breadth and depth, capturing surface trends through STEEP and uncovering systemic and cultural dynamics (UNESCO, 2021; Inayatullah, 2004, 2008; Sardar, 2010).

### *Data Sources*

All data were drawn from secondary sources. These included policy documents and statistics from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2020) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA, 2021). International reports from UNESCO (2021), the World Bank (2022, 2024, 2025), and the World Economic Forum (2020, 2025) were also incorporated. In addition, peer-reviewed journal articles and reputable think-tank publications focusing on artificial intelligence, modular learning, sustainability, and higher education reforms were analyzed (Caparas, 2023; Reyes & Santos, 2024; Garcia & Mendoza, 2024). Only materials from recognized agencies or indexed journals were included to ensure credibility.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Between January and March 2025, relevant documents were systematically retrieved from government portals, international agency websites, and academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Sources

were included if they focused on higher education, were published between 2019 and 2024, and demonstrated relevance to at least one of the STEEP dimensions. Opinion pieces, blogs, and non-indexed sources were excluded to maintain rigor.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were coded manually in a two-stage process. First, the STEEP framework was applied to identify major social, technological, economic, environmental, and political drivers shaping higher education. Second, Causal Layered Analysis mapped these drivers across four levels: litany (surface issues), systemic causes, worldviews, and myths/metaphors (Inayatullah, 2004, 2008). This process revealed both observable trends and deeper cultural and institutional dynamics. To strengthen reliability, intercoder validation was undertaken through peer debriefing with a co-researcher, ensuring consistency in the interpretation of themes.

### *Limitations*

The study relied exclusively on secondary sources and did not collect primary data such as interviews or surveys. While this allowed a broad scan of available evidence, it limited the depth of context-specific insights and may reflect institutional biases in published reports. Triangulation across government documents, international reports, and peer-reviewed literature was used to mitigate these limitations.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Since the study relied only on publicly available data, formal ethics clearance was not required. All materials were cited appropriately following APA 7th edition guidelines to ensure transparency, accountability, and intellectual honesty.

## Results and Discussion

### *Artificial Intelligence in Philippine Higher Education*

Globally, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has improved personalization, reduced operational costs, and enhanced student outcomes (UNESCO, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020). Adaptive platforms such as DreamBox and Knewton allow individualized learning, while tools like Grammarly and Duolingo address linguistic diversity (Tan & Lim, 2023; Jala et al., 2025). In Southeast Asia, Singapore demonstrates advanced adoption: Nanyang Technological University (NTU) developed Professor Leodar, a generative AI chatbot designed in "Singlish," with 97.1% of students reporting positive experiences (Lim et al., 2024). Such initiatives show how AI can be localized for cultural and linguistic contexts.

By contrast, Philippine adoption remains limited. Only a minority of higher education institutions (HEIs) reported access to AI-related tools, with rural HEIs particularly disadvantaged (World Bank, 2022; Cruz & Navarro, 2023). This disparity underscores the risk of deepening the digital divide. Without investments in digital infrastructure, faculty training, and public–private partnerships, AI may reinforce inequities rather than foster inclusion (Garcia & Mendoza, 2024; Villarino, 2025). Lessons from Singapore suggest that the Philippines must not only acquire AI but adapt it to local contexts, balancing innovation with academic integrity and governance (GovInsider Asia, 2024; Reuters, 2024).

### *Modular and Inclusive Learning*

Micro-credentialing and modular learning are expanding worldwide in response to labor-market shifts (TESDA, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020). Platforms such as Coursera, edX, and FutureLearn demonstrate the effectiveness of modular delivery for improving retention (Caparas, 2023; Reyes & Santos, 2024). In the Philippines, TESDA has reported strong enrollment in modular programs, reflecting high demand for flexible learning pathways (TESDA, 2021). However, inclusivity remains constrained by unequal digital access: only about half of households report reliable internet connections, with rural areas most affected (World Bank, 2022, 2024).

Regionally, Malaysia provides an instructive contrast. Over 70% of Malaysians have engaged in online education, supported by digital literacy policies like DELIMa and 1BestariNet, which improved baseline connectivity and resource access (DigitalDefynd, 2024; Modern Diplomacy, 2024). Indonesia, despite geographical challenges, has invested in platforms like

Rumah Pendidikan and the Merdeka Belajar reform to expand access in remote islands (UNESCO, 2021; Modern Diplomacy, 2024). Compared with these neighbors, the Philippines must strengthen infrastructure and design offline-compatible, AI-powered modules to ensure equitable access by 2050 (Garcia & Mendoza, 2024).

### *Environmental Sustainability in Teaching*

Hybrid learning models can reduce carbon footprints by decreasing reliance on physical infrastructure (UNESCO, 2021). Yet in the Philippines, sustainability integration remains limited, with gaps in both curricula and faculty training (CHED, 2020; Armas, 2024). This underlines the need for systemic policy support, such as CHED incentives for green campuses and integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into higher education strategies.

Regionally, Singapore and Malaysia illustrate stronger sustainability trajectories. Singapore embeds green campus initiatives into its national education roadmap, while Malaysian universities align modular programs with low-resource delivery models that support both industry needs and ecological goals (Emerald, 2023). For the Philippines, embedding sustainability into pedagogy and campus planning is both an ecological necessity and a global competitiveness strategy.

### *Foresight Implications: A Causal Layered Perspective*

Viewed through Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), these findings reveal the following dynamics (Inayatullah, 2004, 2009):

- *Litany (surface level):* AI pilots, modular programs, and hybrid models represent visible innovations.
- *Systemic causes:* Persistent structural inequities (digital divide, rural–urban gaps, policy fragmentation) limit full adoption.
- *Worldview:* Philippine higher education remains largely reactive, viewing technology as a "catch-up" mechanism, whereas regional peers frame it as a proactive driver of competitiveness and equity.
- *Myth/Metaphor:* The dominant narrative remains that of education as survival—coping with constraints—rather than education as innovation ecosystem.

By 2050, a shift in narratives is needed: reimagining Philippine HEIs not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as catalysts of inclusive innovation. This requires systemic reforms that integrate AI ethically, expand modular pathways inclusively, and institutionalize sustainability. Only through this transformation can higher education become a resilient driver of equity, development, and ecological stewardship.

## Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in Philippine higher education offers transformative opportunities but continues to face structural, infrastructural, and socio-economic challenges (UNESCO, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020). While AI and modular learning can enhance personalization, improve learning outcomes, and increase institutional efficiency, their benefits are constrained by unequal access to technology, particularly in rural and under-resourced institutions (World Bank, 2022, 2024; Reyes & Santos, 2024).

To maximize the potential of these innovations, coordinated action is required. Investment in digital infrastructure, faculty capacity-building, and the development of inclusive, offline-compatible AI tools are crucial (CHED, 2020; Caparas, 2023). Furthermore, embedding sustainability into curricula and operations can ensure that technological advances align with social and ecological goals, contributing to the Philippines' pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2021; Villarino, 2025; Dizon & Reyes, 2022).

Ultimately, future-proofing higher education requires a proactive and foresight-driven approach. By combining technological innovation, systemic reforms, and sustainability practices, Philippine higher education institutions can evolve into dynamic, inclusive, and resilient ecosystems that prepare learners for future labor markets and societal transformations (Inayatullah, 2021; UNESCO, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020).

## Recommendation

| *Pillar* | *Recommended Action* | *Expected Outcome by 2050* | *Key References* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Infrastructure and Access* | Expand high-speed internet connectivity and provide affordable digital devices, prioritizing rural and underserved areas through government–private sector partnerships. | Reduced digital divide; equitable access to AI and modular learning platforms. | World Bank (2022, 2024) |
| *Faculty Development and Pedagogy* | Implement continuous professional development programs on AI literacy, digital pedagogy, and sustainable teaching practices (workshops, certifications, mentoring). | Digitally competent and sustainability-oriented educators; improved teaching quality. | Tan & Lim (2023); Caparas (2023) |
| *Inclusive AI and Modular Learning Tools* | Co-develop culturally relevant, adaptive, and offline-compatible AI tools that support modular, competency-based learning. | Increased accessibility for disadvantaged learners; enhanced inclusivity and flexibility. | Villarino (2025); Armas (2024) |
| *Sustainability and Policy Reforms* | Embed environmental sustainability into curricula and operations (green campuses, hybrid learning, SDG integration). Strengthen CHED-led policies with incentives for AI and modular learning adoption. | Alignment of higher education with SDGs; stronger institutional resilience and ecological responsibility. | UNESCO (2021); Villarino (2025); CHED (2020); Inayatullah (2021) |
| *Research, Monitoring, and Partnerships* | Conduct ongoing research and monitoring to assess adoption, accessibility, and effectiveness of AI and modular learning. Foster strong public–private partnerships for innovation and financing. | Evidence-based policymaking; sustainable innovation ecosystem; expanded public–private collaboration. | Reyes & Santos (2024); Garcia & Mendoza (2024); WEF (2025); Caparas (2023) |

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