

Senate to probe declining English proficiency

By PAOLO ROMERO

The Senate is set to conduct an inquiry into the reported declining English proficiency of Filipino students that is expected to pose problems in the country's labor force in competing in global markets.

The inquiry, to be conducted by the Senate committee on education, was prompted by Resolution 622 filed by Sen. Grace Poe who expressed alarm over the weakening English proficiency of Filipino college graduates.

"Amid the dismal performance of Filipino university

graduates in the English proficiency metrics, the government is encouraged to adopt global English standards to improve citizens' communication skills," Poe said in her resolution.

"The academe should review current curricula to improve the teaching and learning of English, while the private sector, including non-government organizations, must step up efforts to improve the competitiveness of the Filipino labor pool," she added.

The Philippines is regarded as one of the friendliest countries to English speakers and a favorite destination of those who want to learn the global language, such as Koreans and Chinese.

The tremendous growth

of the Philippines' business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, considered the country's "economic lifeline," is mainly because English is the preferred medium of communication in the workplace and medium of instruction in schools. This makes the country the top destination of call centers in the world.

BPO workers are expected to have a score of 850 in TOEIC, the senator said.

The wide use of English and an excellent command of spoken English continue to be the country's biggest advantage, but recent studies showed the edge is narrowing, Poe said.

Citing a two-year study of Hopkins International Partners, she said Filipino graduates aver-

aged 630 on English proficiency based on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), an outcome lower than the competency requirement for taxi drivers in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Filipino graduates also averaged a Common European Framework of Reference of Language grade of B1, lower than the CEFR B2 proficiency target set for high school graduates in Thailand and Vietnam, Poe also said.

The same report indicated that Filipino university graduates' median score was comparable to the proficiency of grades five and six students in native English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom.