

**FRANCISCO F. BENITEZ**  
(1887-1951)

Educator

Francisco F. Benitez was born in Pagsanjan, Laguna on June 4, 1887. His parents were Higinio Benitez, one of the signers of the Malolos Constitution, and Soledad Francia.

As a young boy, Benitez experienced the tense political situation his father was involved with, being a member of the revolutionary congress. He was with his father when the later was intercepted and detained by Americans. Fortunately, they were freed with the intervention of Cayetano Arellano. When peace was restored, Benitez pursued higher education at the newly established Philippine Normal School. He was one of its first graduates in 1904.

In 1905, Francisco, after a short teaching career in Pagsanjan, was sent as a government *pensionado* to the United States. Three years after, he returned to the Philippines bringing with him the certificate he received from the Western Illinois State Normal School and a degree in Education, which he obtained from the Teacher's College of Columbia. In 1909, Benitez was appointed assistant supervising teacher in Bacoor, Cavite. A year later, he was named principal of Paquil Elementary School in Laguna. He served this position until 1912.

Benitez served as instructor at the Philippine Normal School (1912-1913) and at the University of the Philippines (1913-1914) before he was sent to take his Master's Degree at Columbia University in the United States. When he returned in 1915, he was named director of the University of the Philippines School of Education. When the School of Education became the College of Education on July 1918, Benitez was appointed its Dean. The development of the UP College of Education was credited to Benitez' untiring efforts and wise leadership. In 1929, he was one of those who received the "University Medal" from the Columbia University during its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

In 1935, President Quezon created Educational Survey Committee tasked to review the educational system in the country and named Benitez as one of its members and chairperson of its subcommittee on teacher training. A few years later, all the activities in the country were disrupted by another war, this time against the Japanese. Nothing much was known about Benitez's activities during the Japanese occupation. Soon after the liberation in 1945 and the Philippine government placed under the leadership of President Osmeña, the National Council of Education was revived and he was named its chairman. The President also appointed him Secretary of Instruction, which he served until May 1946. Soon after, he returned to his post as dean of the UP College of Education.

All his life as educator, he was not only confined in the school premises and in serving brief appointments in the government. He had worked in the following: as honorary correspondent for the Philippines in the International Bureau of Education in Geneva, president of the Philippine National Federation of Teachers. He served as the World Federation of Education Associations, Institute of the Pacific Relations, Philippine-China Society, and the Japan-Philippine Society.

The educator also contributed educational articles here and abroad among them were the "Educational Progress in the Philippines" and "Stories of Great Filipinos." It was at the start of his deanship at UP that the *Philippine Journal of Education*, which he himself edited, came into being and further elevated his reputation in the field of education.

Benitez believed that education plays an important role in developing a child to his full potentials. He was an advocate of an educational system that should be responsive to the needs of people, even the need of teachers for salary increases not only as incentives but also to build up their morale. A patriot by heart, he advocated that the students should develop the spirit of nationalism and love for national language.

The Columbia University in the United States accorded Dean Benitez honors for his distinguished service to education in 1929. In the same year, he received the Doctor of Laws from the University of Manila. In December 1950, the Alumni Association of the University of the Philippines College of Education voted him Teacher of the Year. In 1951, the National University conferred on him a doctorate degree, *honoris causa*. President Elpidio Quirino had also recognized his service in the field of education in the country by giving him a citation of merit.

This kind, amiable, and courteous educator, father of four and husband to Paz Marquez died on June 30, 1951 while walking along the Carriedo Street in Quiapo, Manila.

#### References:

Cornejo, Miguel. Commonwealth Dictionary of the Philippines. Pasay City, 1939.

Manuel, E. Arsenio. Dictionary of Philippine Biography Volume 4. Quezon City: Filipiniana, 1995.