

STRENGTHENING READING AND NUMERACY IN THE EARLY AND INTERMEDIATE GRADES

by:

Rodeliza R. Bautista

Teacher I, Happy Valley Elementary School

In every elementary classroom in the Philippines, teachers know that two skills can shape a child's future more than any other: the ability to read with understanding and the capacity to work with numbers. These are not just academic goals but essential life skills. Yet, despite the dedication of educators, many pupils in the early and intermediate grades still struggle with reading fluency and basic mathematics. Closing this gap is one of the most urgent tasks facing the country's education system today.

A child who can read confidently gains access to stories, information, and new ideas. Unfortunately, many Filipino learners enter upper elementary levels without full mastery of reading. Teachers have seen Grade 4 pupils who still read at the pace of beginners. To address this, many schools organize remedial sessions, peer reading activities, and storytelling programs. The Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy also supports literacy by introducing reading first in the learner's native language before progressing to Filipino and English, making lessons both familiar and meaningful.

Numeracy presents a similar challenge. Children may begin counting easily in the early grades, but as they move to multiplication, fractions, and problem-solving, the difficulty grows. Teachers often notice that pupils with weak number sense in Grades 1 and 2 face serious struggles by the time they reach intermediate levels. To make math more engaging and practical, educators use examples from daily Filipino life: computing change in sari-sari stores, measuring rice for cooking, or using traditional games to

explain patterns. These approaches show children that math is not just about numbers on a page but about skills they can apply every day.

The Department of Education has launched several initiatives to address these gaps. The Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs Initiative) promotes reading in all grade levels, encouraging teachers, parents, and even community volunteers to work together so no child is left behind. Meanwhile, the MATATAG Curriculum streamlines learning competencies, giving teachers more space to focus on essential skills like reading comprehension and numerical fluency. These reforms signal that the government recognizes literacy and numeracy as cornerstones of education.

Technology, when available, also provides new opportunities. Digital storybooks, math apps, and AI-based practice tools allow pupils to learn at their own pace. However, access to these resources remains uneven. In many rural schools, teachers still rely on simple but effective strategies such as reading corners, flashcards, and group practice sessions. What matters most is consistency the daily reinforcement of skills that gradually builds children's confidence in both reading and math.

Ultimately, strengthening reading and numeracy is about equity. Every Filipino child deserves the chance to master these foundations, regardless of where they live or what resources their families have. When schools, families, and communities work together, learners not only catch up with lessons but also discover the joy of learning. A confident reader and a capable problem-solver are better prepared to face future challenges, pursue opportunities, and contribute positively to society. Literacy and numeracy, therefore, are not just subjects in school; they are stepping stones to a brighter future for every child.

References:

Department of Education. (2019). Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP): Bawat Bata Bumabasa Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.deped.gov.ph>

Department of Education. (2023). MATATAG K to 10 Curriculum Guide. Retrieved from <https://www.deped.gov.ph>

Philippine Institute for Development Studies. (2022). Addressing Learning Gaps in Literacy and Numeracy in the Philippines. Retrieved from <https://pids.gov.ph>

United Nations Children's Fund. (2021). Philippine Education: Situational Analysis. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/philippines>

World Bank. (2022). The State of Learning Poverty in the Philippines. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org>