

## WHY MATH MAKES LEARNERS FREEZE

by:

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Many children feel their hearts race and minds go blank when a math problem appears. This strong fear, called math anxiety, starts young and stops kids from doing their best in numbers. Recent reports from PISA 2022 show that Filipino students have some of the highest levels of math anxiety among many countries, along with low math scores (OECD, 2023). We need schools where children feel safe to try, learn from wrong answers, and see math as fun through games and daily life.

Math anxiety is a growing worry in many classrooms. Studies find that elementary pupils often feel worried or tense in math time. A large review proves that more anxiety means lower math marks, right from early grades (Barroso et al., 2021). New research in 2024 shows this link in middle school too, with anxiety hurting performance (Cuder et al., 2024). In the Philippines, high math anxiety in PISA helps explain our low scores and shows we must act early (BusinessWorld, 2024).

This fear is serious because it blocks clear thinking. Scared children use energy on worry, not solving. This leads to bad results and hating math later (Szczygieł et al., 2024). It makes a bad circle: low scores make more fear, and fear makes lower scores. Pressure from tests or adults who fear math make it worse.

There are strong ways to fight back. Math games and group activities turn fear into fun (Ma, 2025). Teaching that brains grow with practice builds hope and reduces anxiety (Jamaludin et al., 2024). Simple tricks like writing worries before tests help calm nerves. Teachers help most by praising effort and trying, not only right answers.

We can win over math anxiety with kind and smart steps. Talk about fears, play with numbers, and celebrate every small step. Like helping a scared child become brave, gentle care helps children love math. Parents and teachers can show calm faces, use fun activities, and connect math to real joy.

When we melt away the freeze of math fear, we give every child the power to think strong and dream big for tomorrow.

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