

## TESTING THE SYSTEM: ARE ONLINE EXAMS HELPING OR HURTING PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND LEARNERS?

*by:*

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The push for digitalized learning, accelerated by the challenges of blended learning modalities, has led to the adoption of platforms like XEPTO for online examinations in public schools, notably within the Department of Education (DepEd) Schools Division of Bataan. While this technological shift promises efficiency – such as streamlined grading and immediate feedback – its implementation often encounters a stark reality. For teachers, the system adds a new layer of technical demands to an already burdened profession. They must master the exam creation tools, troubleshoot student login and connectivity issues in real-time, and constantly guard against academic dishonesty, which is amplified in an unproctored digital environment. As noted in a Division Memorandum from the SDO Bataan in relation to the PISA Readiness Plan, integrating digital platforms like XEPTO is encouraged to enhance digital skills, yet this directive can inadvertently transform educators into IT support staff, diverting time and energy away from pedagogical responses and student-centered teaching.

The primary casualties of this digital divide are often the learners themselves. The efficacy of an online exam tool like XEPTO is heavily dependent on factors beyond the student's control, particularly the unstable internet connectivity and lack of access to personal gadgets that plague many public-school students in the Philippines. Research from the field confirms that students frequently face technical problems like sudden logouts, slow speeds, and poor signal, which inevitably compromise their performance and lead to frustration and anxiety. An exam that is supposed to measure mastery of a subject instead becomes a test of who has the fastest Wi-Fi or the most reliable

smartphone. This reality runs counter to the DepEd's goal of ensuring academic ease and fair assessment, turning the digital platform into an unintentional barrier to academic success for the most marginalized students.

Ultimately, the question of whether online exams are helping or hurting is less about the technology and more about the context of its deployment. In the Division of Bataan, as elsewhere, the potential benefits of XEPTO – such as data-driven assessment and digital literacy enhancement – are currently overshadowed by structural inequalities. For the system to truly help, not hurt, there needs to be a significant, coordinated effort to address the foundational challenges: ensuring reliable internet infrastructure across all municipalities, providing adequate and standardized devices to every learner, and offering comprehensive, hands-on technical support and training for teachers. Without these systemic interventions, the reliance on digital assessment tools risks exacerbating the existing educational gap, prioritizing administrative convenience over equitable and meaningful evaluation of public school learners.

The Official Website of DepED Division of Bataan

*References:*

Division Memorandum from the SDO Bataan in relation to the PISA Readiness Plan  
XEPTO (Digital Examination Platform)

Division of Bataan (DepEd Schools Division of Bataan)